

# REFLECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IN ARABIC AND MALAY PROVERBS: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW ON THEIR ORIGINS

*(Pemaparan Persekitaran dalam Peribahasa Arab dan Melayu: Perbandingan Asal Usul Peribahasa)*

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## Abstract

Proverbs are literary arts that represent real-life facts and events. The study of the origins of Arabic proverbs in terms of their occasions and narratives is widely available. This is unlike their Malay counterparts, whose origins are often unknown. However, some details of proverbs can be discovered by understanding the meanings of environment-

related words within them. For example, a proverb may refer to the people who coined it, the place it came from, or the time it was said. Proverbs often contain narrative elements like prose literary texts, such as novels and stories. However, they differ in that the creators of those texts are specifically known, and their environment is often imaginary. Proverbs, on the other hand, are more akin to a collective product of an entire people, with their environment always rooted in reality, especially Malay proverbs when compared to Arabic ones. Hence, this study aims to investigate the environmental origins of Arabic and Malay proverbs, as well as to analyse the environmental words within both Arab and Malay proverbs through a descriptive comparative approach. The main finding of this study indicates that even if the stories and occasions behind the Malay proverbs are lost, their words indicate that they stay true to the nature of proverbs in general, and this makes their environment clearly authentic and unimaginary. Therefore, each environment has its own words that tell its stories and confirm its authenticity.

Keywords: Proverbs, Malay, Arabic, environment, significance, comparative

### ***Abstrak***

*Peribahasa ialah seni sastera yang mewakili fakta dan peristiwa sebenar. Kajian tentang asal usul peribahasa Arab dari segi peristiwa dan riwayatnya boleh didapati secara meluas. Hal ini berbeza dengan peribahasa Melayu, yang selalunya tidak diketahui asal usulnya. Walau bagaimanapun, beberapa perincian peribahasa boleh ditemukan dengan memahami makna perkataan yang berkaitan dengan alam sekitar. Sebagai contoh, peribahasa boleh merujuk orang yang memulakannya, tempat asalnya atau masa peribahasa itu disebut. Peribahasa selalunya mengandungi unsur naratif yang serupa dengan teks sastera prosa seperti novel dan cerita. Walau bagaimanapun, peribahasa dan teks sastera prosa berbeza kerana pencipta teks tersebut diketahui secara khusus, dan persekitaran mereka selalunya khayalan. Peribahasa pula lebih mirip kepada produk kolektif rakyat, dengan persekitarannya sentiasa berakar umbi, terutamanya peribahasa Melayu jika dibandingkan dengan peribahasa Arab. Oleh itu, kajian ini menganalisis perkataan tentang persekitaran dalam kedua-dua peribahasa Arab dan Melayu melalui pendekatan perbandingan deskriptif. Dapatan utama kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa walaupun cerita dan peristiwa di sebalik peribahasa Melayu hilang, kata-kata dalam peribahasa tersebut menunjukkan bahawa sifat peribahasa secara umum dikekalkan dan*

*perkara ini menjadikan persekitaran mereka jelas asli dan bukan khayalan/rekaan. Oleh itu, setiap persekitaran mempunyai kata-kata tersendiri yang menceritakan kisah dan mengesahkan keasliannya.*

*Kata kunci: Peribahasa, Melayu, Arab, persekitaran, kepentingan, perbandingan*

## INTRODUCTION

A proverb is a simple, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language (Agrawal, 2023; Upadhyay, 2023). Meanwhile, a proverbial phrase or a proverbial expression is a type of a conventional saying like proverbs and transmitted by oral tradition (Agrawal, 2023). The difference is that a proverb is a fixed expression, while a proverbial phrase permits alterations to fit the grammar of the context (Krikmann, 1994). Collectively, they form a genre of folklore (Dundes, 1980).

Some proverbs exist in more than one language because people borrow them from languages and cultures with which they are in contact with (Agrawal, 2023). In the East, proverbs are known for their immediate spontaneity; they have their own methods of expressing various meanings with few words, following structured rules in the representation of each proverb. These rules are based on the authentic environment of the proverb, distinguishing it from other literary texts such as poems, stories, novels, and plays, where the environment is often imagined by the writer and maintained as such during the creation of their literary work (Abu Ali, 1988). For example, the author of the famous novel *Harry Potter* had an environmental imagination in writing the novel.

The Arabs' interest in their proverbs reached a point where they documented their origins, appropriateness, and stories in proverbial literature. They were keen to understand the purpose behind the creation of each proverb, often focusing on its creator. Thus, the environment of their proverbs was authentic rather than imaginary. In contrast, the origins, appropriateness, and stories of Malay proverbs are often unknown, indicating that their environment may be imaginary, like other forms of literary art. However, this study argues that the authenticity of the environment of Malay proverbs can be confirmed by examining the environment-related words within them and analysing their meanings, comparing them with their Arabic counterparts, which are supported by their proverbial literature. To address this problem statement, the following objectives were established:

- (1) To define the concept of proverbs.
- (2) To explore the different types of Arabic and Malay proverbs.
- (3) To investigate the environmental origins of Arabic and Malay proverbs.
- (4) To analyse a selection of Arabic and Malay proverbs to identify environmental terms that reflect their respective Arab and Malay contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “environment” has become prominent in everyday life. The global, national, and local economies plan for an environmentally sustainable future. Many institutions, such as the United Nations, national and international trust funds, as well as regional and local nonprofit corporations, focus on environmental preservation, sustainable development, or wildlife conservation. In the next decade, there will undoubtedly be a heightened public awareness of the Earth’s peril, which includes endangered species, global warming, and other environmental disasters. Nevertheless, beyond the scope of ordinary language’s definitions of “environment,” it can be surmised that setbacks arise surrounding the meaning and usage of the term. The discipline of literary criticism illustrates these ambiguities, for the term is not defined with clarity and consistency. The use of the term “environment” in literature is superficial or of low literary quality, that its use in literary theory is rhetorical or metaphorical, and its use in interdisciplinary criticism is inconsistent.

Since prehistoric era, literature and the arts have been drawn to depictions of physical environments and human-environmental interactions. The modern environmentalist movement as it emerged first in the late 19th century and, in its more recent incarnation- in the 1960s, gave rise to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings concerned with humans’ changing relationship to the natural world. Only since the early 1990s, however, has the long-standing interest of literature studies in these matters generated the initiative most known as “ecocriticism,” an eclectic and loosely coordinated movement whose contributions, thus far, have been most visible within its home discipline of literature but whose interests and alliances extend across various art forms and media (Buell et al., 2011).

According to Buell (1995), who stands as ecocriticism’s leading theorist, environment and place are as much of social, cultural, and ideological entities as they are physical ones. Reconstructions of larger landscapes or immediate surroundings are always inevitably selective

and fragmentary, the world sieved through several filters: perceptual, ideological, and literary. Buell depicted that there is a tendency among American writers to represent the country as close to nature as it is, yet “the conception of represented nature as an ideological screen becomes unfruitful if it is used to portray the green world as nothing more than the projective fantasy or social allegory” (Buell, 1995:36). The fallacy of city-based post structural criticism to overread literature’s ideological symbolism and underestimate its experiential and referential aspects is one of the ways of making the natural environment subservient to human interests. While literature can reduce nature to a specific ideological or humanistic agenda, it can also represent an alternative kind of human-nature relationship facilitating green consciousness and place bonding and which side gets stressed depends on both the writer and the reader. Thus, our reported contacts with our surroundings are always culturally mediated, intersocially and intertextually constructed; but they also respond to nature, and environment is one of the variables that influences culture, text, and personality. These are troublesome dichotomies from which an ecocritic should begin (Manes, 2004).

Two early definitions by Buell suggest the outlines of the contested territories claimed by ecocriticism already in the final decade of the 20th century. Initially, Buell (1995:430) defines ecocriticism succinctly “as study of the relation between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis”. Buell’s subsequently defines ecocriticism as “a multiform inquiry extending to a variety of environmentally focused perspectives more expressive of concern to explore environmental issues searchingly than of fixed dogmas about political solutions” (Buell, 1995:430).

William Howarth (in Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996) stated that “ecocriticism observes in nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning. Ecology leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity”.

It is clear from these definitions that ecocriticism, to date, remains disproportionately nation focused, and disproportionately concentrated on Anglophone literatures. Thus, emphasis must be placed on analysis of affinities across cultures such as between Arabs and Malays. Also, ecocriticism should be emphasised to distribute attention comprehensively and proportionately across expressive forms within literature such as proverbs.

## The Concept of Proverbs

Lord John Russell (c. 1850) poetically remarked that a “proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many,” (Mieder, 1993; Agrawal, 2023). However, defining “proverb” in a way that meets theoretical needs has proven challenging. Scholars (Mieder, 2014; 2015; Honeck, 2013) frequently cite Archer Taylor’s view that creating a precise scientific “definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking... An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial” (Taylor, 1931). Despite this, many students of proverbs have attempted to itemise their essential characteristics (Agrawal, 2023).

More constructively, Mieder has proposed the following definition, “[a] proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder, 1993; Anderson & Heinrich, 2015). To distinguish proverbs from idioms and clichés among others, Norrick (1985) creates a table of distinctive features, an abstract tool originally developed for linguistics. Prahlad, on the other hand, distinguishes proverbs from some other, closely related types of sayings, “True proverbs must further be distinguished from other types of proverbial speech, e.g. proverbial phrases, Wellerisms, maxims, quotations, and proverbial comparisons” (Prahlad, 1996).

In other languages and cultures, the definition of “proverb” also differs from English (Atindogbe & Chibaka, 2016). Based on Persian proverbs, Zolfaghari and Ameri propose the following definition: “[a] proverb is a short sentence, which is well-known and at times rhythmic, including advice, sage themes, and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor, or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change” (Zolfaghari & Ameri, 2012). Among the Bini of Nigeria, there are three words that are used to translate “proverb”: *ere*, *ivbe*, and *itan*. The first relates to historical events, the second relates to current events, and the third was “linguistic ornamentation in formal discourse” (Ben-Amos, 1975). Among the Balochi of Pakistan and Afghanistan, there is a word *batal* for ordinary proverbs and *bassittuks* for “proverbs with background stories” (Badalkhan, 2000).

For Arabs, proverbs are the essence of their experiences and the product of their expertise. A proverb is a statement that indicate the achievement of the intended meaning and decisive affirmation; this is in terms of meaning.

As for the structure, a proverb is distinguished from other speech by its conciseness, figurative language, and eloquence. Proverbs are among the best forms of expression of knowledge, experience, and truth, and they distance themselves from illusion and imagination. Hence, proverbs stand out from poetry (al-Hanafi, 1962). The Arabs began collecting their proverbs since the dawn of Islam, and their first book on the subject was *The Proverbs of the Arabs [Amthal Al-Arab]* compiled by al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbī before his death in the year 168 AH/785 CE (al-Dabbī, 1983).

An important basic characteristic of the Malay proverb is its richness in content and beautiful in sound. Such rich thoughts and philosophy as well as beautiful language are rarely found in other idioms and rhythmic language in Malay, or in any other languages. Therefore, Malay proverbs are often used to enhance speeches, songs, poems, and writings as well as wedding ceremonies, seminars, and meetings (Ming, 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

According to Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998), the discipline of Comparative Literature is the most advantageous approach for the study of literature and culture as it is a priori discipline of cross-disciplinarity and of international dimensions. Therefore, the study involves a descriptive comparative analysis of Arabic and Malay proverbs focusing on environmental elements. The study highlights the origins of Malay proverbs; focusing on their environmental elements since the origins of the Malay proverbs seem obscure and remain relatively undocumented compared to Arab proverbs. Therefore, the authenticity of the Malay proverbs can be verified by examining the environment-related terms within them and analysing their contexts to identify their origins. This can be done by comparing them with Arabic proverbs, which are well-supported by documented proverbial literature with regards to their origins. For this purpose, the research process consist of the following steps:

- (1) A comprehensive selection of proverbs will be compiled from various sources such as literature for the Arabic proverbs and online database for the Malay proverbs.
- (2) The selected proverbs will be divided thematically according to the environmental factors (temporal, spatial, and social).
- (3) Proverbs will be translated into English language for analysis. The essence and cultural nuances of the proverbs are ensured to be preserved during translation.

- (4) Proverbs will be analysed to identify the environmental terms that reflect the Arab and Malay environments. A comparative analysis will be conducted to compare the use of proverbs in Arab and Malay cultures.
- (5) The study concludes the findings within the cultural influences of Arab and Malay environments on the use of proverbs in each culture.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

One way to classify proverbs is based on their origin. It is possible to determine the authenticity of proverbs by studying the environment in which they originated, including the events, stories, simile, poetry, and wisdom they encompass. Accordingly, Arabic proverbs can be divided into five types based on their origin based on Abu Ali (1988):

- (1) Proverbs arising from events, such as: (وَافَقَ شَنْ طَبَقَةً) *wafaqa Shannun Tabaqah* (Shann and Tabaqah are matching).
- (2) Proverbs arising from stories, such as: (لَمَسَةُ النَّبِيِّ) *lamsatu al-Nabi* (The touch of the Prophet).
- (3) Proverbs arising from analogies, such as: (أَجْوَدُ مِنْ حَاتِمٍ) *ajwadu min Hatim* (More generous than Hatim).
- (4) Proverbs arising from poetry, such as: (وَمَنْ شَابَهُ أَبُهُ فَمَا ظَلَمَ) *waman shabaha abahu fama dhalam* (He who resembles his father has done no oppress).
- (5) Proverbs arising from wisdom, such as: (مَنْ جَدَّ وَجَدَ) *man jadda wajada* (He who strives, finds).

The diversity of Malay proverbs, however, is something the authors do not find in Arabic proverbs. They have four forms, each with its distinguishing features, explained as follows by Tajuddin Hj. Abdul Rahman (2002):

- (1) Idiomatic expression (*Simpulan bahasa*): Consisting of two or three words indicating a meaning far from their literal sense, such as:
  - (a) *Ada angin*: Literally means “there is wind,” but it signifies someone with a fickle mood.
  - (b) *Anak buah*: Literally means “fruit’s child,” but it refers to nephews, ship’s crew, or team members.
- (2) Simile (*Perumpamaan*): Comparing people’s behavior to environmental situations, with more layers of meaning compared to the previous form, such as:



- (a) *Bagai melukut di tepi gantang* (like gathering on the edge of the bushel), indicating someone unable to benefit others, having no value or authority.
- (b) *Deras seperti anak panah* (fast as an arrow), used for something swift.
- (3) Wisdom (*Pepatah*): Simple words arranged into an easy phrase to express events related to daily social life, such as:
- (a) *Harimau mati meninggalkan belang, manusia mati meninggalkan nama* (the tiger dies leaving its stripes), used for someone who performs good deeds throughout life, leaving behind a good reputation.
- (b) *Berani kerana benar, takut kerana salah* (be courageous because it is right, be afraid because it is wrong), indicating the importance of courage in pursuing what is right and fear of wrongdoing.
- (4) Aphorism (*Bidalan*): It consists of attractive and easy words to discuss societal issues, conveying a single layer of meaning directly, such as:
- (a) *Biar lambat asalkan selamat* (better safe than sorry), conveying the idea of prioritising safety, so delay is not a problem.

### The Origins of the Environment in Arabic and Malay Proverbs

In *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.), the noun "environment" has six lexical meanings which three of them are related to the field of ecocriticism, i.e. to the context of this study. The first is a particular set of surroundings or conditions which something or someone exists in or interacts with, the second is the physical surroundings or conditions in which a person or other organism lives or develops, or in which a thing exists; the external conditions in general affecting the life, existence, or properties of an organism or object, and the third is social, political, or cultural circumstances in which a person lives, especially with respect to their effect on behaviour, attitudes, and others. These three lexical meanings are merged in the production of the proverb and other speech types in general. For Hussein (2016), proverb is a result of specific condition, and its usage would be influenced by external factors belonging to the environment in which it was produced. These factors include the elements of time, place, and society, which can be understood through the context of literature in general and proverbs in particular. Through these factors, an author's personality, ideas, beliefs, and emotions are shaped, thereby affecting literary production. These environmental factors can be categorised as follows:

- (1) Temporal environment: Each literary work depicts a specific era, with its characteristics reflecting the traits of a particular nation. As societies evolve intellectually and socially to keep pace with the times, the characteristics of nations in the pre-Islamic era significantly differ from those in post-Islamic times. This transition from one era to another, from one epoch to another, aligns with changes in societal behaviours religiously, intellectually, socially, economically, and so forth.
- (2) Spatial environment: It depicts the conditions in a specific location, which is the region where people live and settle or struggle within its boundaries. People's sensory and emotional lives are influenced by the nature and properties of this region. When literature expresses this life, it embodies its nature, social conditions, and their effects on individuals' psyches. An example is the spatial environment in Malaysia, characterised by mountains, seashores, lakes, forests, and rivers.
- (3) Social environment: It encompasses various aspects such as differences in races, religions, cultures, customs, traditions, laws, and systems. Under the umbrella of cultures, there are numerous branches, such as clothing styles, popular meals, eating habits, ways of speaking and conversing, respect for others, and modes of entertainment like singing, dancing, traditional or modern games, and everything that distinguishes a specific society. These characteristics manifest themselves in literary texts, whether poetry or prose, as the literature of a particular society is the most important element in expressing its characteristics (Hussein, 2016).

Thus, the environment depicted in literature can be either authentic or imaginary. Proverbs, as part of other literature, stand out for their inclusion of authentic environment. This necessity is imposed by examining the history of recording proverbs, and it is reinforced by analysing historical and social books.

There are authentic incidents from which Arabic proverbs originated since the pre-Islamic era, reflected in the vocabulary of the environment contained in those proverbs, such as the desert, camels, and milk among others. The interest in compiling books of proverbs dates to the early days of the Umayyad Caliphate, where it is said that Ibn Sharayah (67 AH) was one of the earliest to compile books of proverbs (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1970). The first author whose work has reached us is Al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbī with his book *The Proverbs of the Arabs* as previously discussed. Then came the book *The Proverbs* by al-Sadūsī (195 AH), which distinguished itself from its predecessors by citing its sources.

Following him, Ibn Sallām compiled a comprehensive, encyclopaedic, and precise book of proverbs, and many others followed in compiling proverbs (Abu Ali, 1988). The Arabs' interests in documenting the stories of proverbs and their contexts allow contemporary Arab generations to understand the origins of those proverbs, even if they may not know their authors. Proverbs are often attributed to people because they belong to everyone and are possessed by particular people. Hence, there are Algerian, Palestinian, and Syrian proverbs among others (Abu Ali, 1988).

However, Malay proverbs differ from Arabic ones in that their origins are unknown. They have retained their status as oral literature. The Malays did not focus on documenting their proverbs until recently. This documentation usually involves listing the proverbs and their meanings without knowing their stories or contexts. This lack of interest can be attributed to the Malays' Archipelago colonial history spanning approximately 450 years, during which it was colonised by Portugal, then the Netherlands, followed by Britain, and later Japan. The wars during these colonial periods contributed to the loss of traditional Malay texts. An example of this is the fire aboard the ship *Fame* in 1823, which carried over three hundred Malay manuscripts collected by T. S. Raffles, but only 80 manuscripts survived and are preserved in the Royal Asiatic Society Library in London (Denisova, 2008). As a result, the actual events that led to the creations of Malay proverbs did not appear within the cultural history of the country. However, the proverbs themselves were preserved by the Malay community as they were transmitted instantly and spontaneously, spreading as oral literature from generation to generation. Nonetheless, the metaphors or representations found in Malay proverbs based on natural environments or life circumstances of a previous generation may not be fully understood by the later generation.

Since the primary sources of Malay proverbs are unavailable as in the context of Arabic proverbs, only preliminary research into the origins of these Malay proverbs can be conducted from their literary heritage texts. According to Ding Choo Ming (2009), some of these texts include:

- (1) *Hikayat Hang Tuah (The Stories of Hang Tuah)*
- (2) *Syair Bidasari (The Poems of Bidasari)*
- (3) *Hikayat Abdullah (The Stories of Abdullah)*
- (4) *Sejarah Melayu (The History of Malay People)*
- (5) *Hikayat Dunia (The Stories of the World)*
- (6) *Mahkota Segala Raja-Raja (The Crown of the Kings)*

It is believed that the origin of Malay proverbs can be traced back to *pantun*, a refined literary art based on two important elements: the signifier (*pembayang*) and the signified (*makna*). There are three views on the origins of the *pantun* in Malay literature based on Harun Mat Piah (2001):

- (1) Winstedt suggests that the composition of the *pantun* began in the 15th century AD, during the time of Sultan Muhammad Shah who ruled Malacca between 1424–1444 AD.
- (2) Teuku Iskandar believes that *pantun* was known in Pasai before Malacca, based on verses found in the book *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* in 1326 AD.
- (3) Harun Mat Piah argue that *pantun* was the oldest Malay oral art form, appearing before or during the arrival of the Indians or even before Islam reached the Malay Archipelago.

Some of the Malay proverbs imported from the *pantun* include excerpts from to Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (n.d.):

*Alang-alang menjeruk asam,  
Biar lebih kurang jangan,  
Alang-alang menyeluk pekasam [emphasis added],  
Biar sampai ke pangkal lengan [emphasis added].*

*Dari Daik ke Kota Raja,  
Berhenti semalam di Tapanuli,  
Buat baik berpada-pada [emphasis added],  
Buat jahat jangan sekali [emphasis added].*

The words in bold in the *pantun* are extracted to be converted into Malay proverbs with the following meanings:

“*Alang-alang menyeluk pekasam, biar sampai ke pangkal lengan*” means “If you dip your hands to take preserved fish (in a jar), do it until the end of the arm.” In other words, if you embark on a task, ensure its completion.

“*Buat baik berpada-pada, buat jahat jangan sekali*” means “Do good up to a certain point, and never do evil even once.” This implies not to overdo kindness to others and to avoid doing any harm (Johari Yahya, 2015).

### ***Examples of Reflecting the Environment in Arabic Proverbs***

In this study, the most prominent words indicative of the environment in Arabic proverbs are extracted, noting that they reflect the Arab society in which they originated and circulated.

- (1) Desert: This environment is prevalent in most Arab countries, and among the proverbs that contain environmental references are:
  - (a) (أَخَذَهُ أَخَذَ الضَّبُّ وَلَدَهُ) *Akhazhahu akhzha al-dhabi waladah* (He took him as the desert lizard takes its offspring) meaning he took him with a severe grip intending to destroy him. This is because the desert lizard guards its eggs from predators. When its offspring hatch, it mistakes them for enemies and kills them one by one. Only the strongest survives. The desert lizard is one of the animals that inhabit the desert, resembling a crocodile in appearance (al-Mydani, 1955:1/27);
  - (b) (لَا نَاقَةَ لِي فِي هَذَا وَلَا جَمَلًا) *La naqata li fi hazha wala jamal* (I have no she-camel or camel in this matter); Camels are desert animals that can be found in Arab countries. The proverb is used for someone who refrains from involving themselves in a matter they see no benefit or harm in (al-Zamakhshari, 1987:2/267);
  - (c) (إِيَّاكَ وَصَحْرَاءَ الْإِهَالَةِ) *Iyaka wa sahra' al-ihala* (Beware of the desert of al-Ihala); The origin of this is that *Khusrau Shapur II* led an army to the tribe of Iyad and took with him Laqit al-Iyādī to guide them. In the desert of al-Ihāla, they were all killed. This proverb is used as a warning (al-Mydani, 1955:1/76).
- (2) The four climate seasons: Arab lands experience four seasons - winter, summer, spring, and autumn. Among the proverbs which contain words related to these seasons are:
  - (a) (تَمَامُ الرَّبِيعِ الصَّيْفُ) *Tamam al-rabei al-syf* (The completion of spring is summer); meaning the signs of spring appear in summer, with summer following spring (al-Zamakhshari, 1987:2/32);
  - (b) (الْخَزَابِزُ أَكْثَبُ) *Al-khazabaz akhsab* (The flies are more fertile); in the spring season, flowers bloom, and the earth becomes filled with vegetation everywhere, and insects such as flies (khazabaz) appear, indicating the fertility of the year (al-Mydani, 1955:1/248);

- (c) (الصَّيْفَ ضَيَّعْتَ اللَّيْنَ) *Al-syf dhya'ti al-laban* (You wasted the milk in summer); this illustrates the summer season in Arab lands and is used for anyone who disregards the good they have and squanders the blessings they live in, then regrets it (al-Zamakhshari, 1987:1/329).
- (3) The noun (dog): This noun is frequently used in Arabic proverbs, referring to the cultural practice of using dogs for guarding in a society where pastoralism is one of the main economic resources. Among the proverbs that consist of this word are:
- (a) (أَجْوَعُ مِنْ كَلْبَةٍ حَوْمَلٍ) *Ajwa' min kalbat Hawmal* (Hungrier than the Hawmal's dog); there was a woman named Hawmal among the Arabs who would starve her dog, which guarded her. She tied it up at night for protection, and in the day, she would drive it away saying, "Seek for yourself, let nothing seek for you". One night, seeing the moon shining, the dog barked at it, thinking it was bread, but in her extreme hunger, the dog ended up eating her own tail (al-Askari, 1988:1/331);
- (b) (الْكِلَابَ عَلَى الْبَقَرِ) *Al-kilab ala al-baqar* (Send the dogs for the caws) meaning to send the dogs against the caws, used when instigating trouble among people without caring, implying "let them be" (al-Mydani, 1955: 2/142);
- (c) (لَعَبَ بِهِ ذَنْبُ الْكَلْبَةِ) *La'iba bihi zhanab al-kalbah* (Played with the dog's tail) used as a metaphor for a man who cannot stick to an opinion or commit to anything, as a dog's tail is always moving and never still or steadfast (al-Askari, 1988:1/173).
- (4) Treatment of women: Arabic proverbs reflect the status of women in Arab society, particularly as bearers of honor and dignity. At times, they refrain from mentioning women or speaking about them, fearing that their mention might lead to disgrace. Some proverbs that illustrate this include:
- (a) (كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَهَّءٌ مَا خَلَا النِّسَاءَ وَذَكَرَهُنَّ) *Kulu shy'in mahahun ma khala al-nisa' wa zikrahun* (Everything is easy-going except for women and their mention); meaning men can tolerate everything except when their wives or women are mentioned, which displeases them greatly (al-Zamakhshari, 1987:2/227);

- (b) (أَضَلُّ مِنْ مَوْءُودَةٍ) *Adhallu min maw'oudah* (More misguided than a buried infant girl); buried infant girls were a common practice in pre-Islamic Arab society and was later prohibited in Islam. This proverb reflects the social environment and the time it originated from (al-Askari, 1988:2/10).
- (5) Culture of armament: In ancient times, Arabs armed themselves with swords, spears, bows, and arrows, which are no longer commonly used today. Some proverbs related to weapons include:
- (a) (دَرَدَبَ لَمَّا عَصَهُ النَّقَافُ) *Dardaba lamma 'adhahu al-thiqaf* (He surrendered when he saw the spear); used for someone who refuses what is demanded of them but then submits and yields (al-Mydani, 1955:1/264);
- (b) (سَبَقَ السَّيْفُ الْعِذْلَ) *Sabaqa al-syf al-'azhal* (The sword preceded the reproach); used when regretting past actions that cannot be undone, emphasising the need to think before making decisions (al-Askari, 1988: 1/377);
- (c) (لَيْتَ الْقِسِيِّ كُلُّهَا أَرْجُلًا) *Lyta al-qisiya kulluha arjula* (I wish the bows were all legs); used by someone wishing for something impossible (al-Zamakhshari, 1987: 2/302).
- (6) Modes of transportation: The most famous means of transportation in the Arab environment in ancient times were camels and horses. Some proverbs containing them include:
- (a) (الْقَشَّةُ الَّتِي قَصَمَتْ ظَهَرَ الْبَعِيرِ) *Al-qashah al-lati qasamat dhahr al-ba'ir* (The straw that broke the camel's back); used for a camel that is burdened with carrying heavy loads until it becomes weak and breaks its back, unable to carry anything else (Sini, 1992:28);
- (b) (إِبْلِي لَمْ أَيْعُ وَلَمْ أَهَبْ) *Ibili lam abi' wa lam ahab* (My camels were neither sold nor given as gifts); used when someone unjustly claims something that does not belong to them (al-Mydani, 1955:1/56);
- (c) (أَحَقُّ الْخَيْلِ بِالرَّكْضِ الْمُعَارُ) *Ahaqu al-khyl birrakdh almu'ar* (The borrowed horse is more deserving to be raced); meaning do not show mercy towards what you borrowed, as it is not yours (al-Zamakhshari, 1987:1/69).

There are many more words in Arabic proverbs that reflect the Arab environment, affirming their authenticity and roots in the Arab culture, beyond what has been discussed in proverbial literature regarding stories and occasions.

### *Examples of Environmental References in Malay Proverbs*

In this study, the most prominent words indicative of the environment in Malay proverbs are extracted, noting that they reflect the Malay society in which they originated and circulated.

- (1) Fertile land: Malay proverbs frequently use words that indicate their fertile environment, such as bamboo, river, rice, swamp, and lake. According to Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (n.d.), some proverbs that contain these words are:
  - (a) *Bagai aur dengan tebing* (like bamboo and the riverbank); referring to the strong connection between them; the riverbank remains stable due to the bamboo that grows abundantly because of the water, so each benefits the other.
  - (b) *Ikutlah resmi padi, semakin berisi semakin tunduk* (adopt the example of rice, the riper the rice, the more it bends); said as an advice, indicating that the more knowledgeable a person becomes, the humbler they should be.
  - (c) *Tebu ditanam, tak akan peria yang tumbuh?* (sugar cane is planted, but it is impossible that bitter gourd grows?); sugar cane symbolises goodness and kindness, while bitter gourd symbolises hatred and evil; used for someone who responds to kindness with kindness, not with harm.
  - (d) *Siapa makan cili dialah rasa pedasnya* (whoever eats chili will feel its heat); Malays use the hot chilli abundantly in their food, so the meaning of the proverb is that whoever makes a mistake must be prepared for the consequences.
  - (e) *Supaya tahu akan pedas lada, supaya tahu akan masin garam* (to know the heat of pepper, and to know the saltiness of salt); used for someone who needs to understand the extent of life's difficulties.
  - (f) *Di mana bunga kembang, di situ kumbang banyak* (where there are blooming flowers, there are many bees); in Malay proverbs, flowers symbolise beautiful women, hence wherever there are beautiful young women, young men gather.



- (2) Tropical climate: Malay proverbs often use words related to their tropical environment, such as rain, heat, and humidity, indicating the presence of two seasons: hot and wet throughout the year. The rainy season extends from September to October, while the monsoon season peaks from November to March (Malaysian Meteorological Department, 2024). According to Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (n.d.), some proverbs that contain words reflecting the tropical climate are:
- (a) *Seperti hujan jatuh ke pasir* (like rain falling on sand); used for someone who does something for someone who does not appreciate it or for advice that has no effect on the listener.
  - (b) *Sediakan payung sebelum hujan* (prepare the umbrella before it rains); used to emphasise the importance of being prepared for problems before they occur.
  - (c) *Hujan emas di negeri orang, hujan batu di negeri sendiri* (gold rain in other countries, hailstones in our own); used to express the preference for one's homeland, even with its hardships, over prosperity abroad.
  - (d) *Ada hujan ada panas, ada hari boleh balas* (there is rain, there is heat, there will be a day to repay); signifies that every action will be rewarded or punished eventually.
  - (e) *Tak lapuk di hujan, tak lekang di panas* (not rotten in the rain, not faded in the heat); denotes something enduring and unchanging.
  - (f) *Mendengar guruh di langit, air di tempayan dicurahkan* (hearing thunder in the sky, water is poured from the jug); used for someone who spends all their belongings in anticipation of uncertain profit.
- (3) Forest animals and agricultural environment: Malay proverbs also comprise of words related to forest animals and the agricultural environment, such as leopard, monkey, tiger, sheep, buffalo, and catfish, in many proverbs, including the following (Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, n.d.):
- (a) *Jangan diajar anak harimau makan daging* (do not teach the cub to eat meat); advice to not encouraging those in power to oppress, as it will lead to negative consequences.
  - (b) *Seperti monyet mendapat bunga* (do not give flowers to a monkey); used for a fool who remains ignorant despite attempts to educate them.
  - (c) *Malu anak harimau menjadi anak kambing* (it is shameful for a tiger cub to become a sheep); emphasises that clever children

- should not become foolish, and brave children should not turn cowardly.
- (d) *Mana kerbau yang bencikan kubangnya?* (which buffalo hates its own mudhole?); used for a bad person who cannot leave the place where they do wrong deeds.
- (e) *Seperti keli dalam lubang* (like a catfish in a hole); used for people who are always complaining but don't know what they are complaining about.
- (4) Culture of armament: Malay proverbs include mentions of various types of weapons such as the *keris*, spear, and cannon, with the *keris* being a distinct symbol of Malay heritage and civilisation. According to Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (n.d.), some proverbs reflecting this cultural aspect are:
- (a) *Jangan menghulurkan hulu keris di tangan orang* (do not hand over the hilt of the keris to others); advice against relinquishing our authority or power to others, as it will lead to their dominance over us and our destruction.
- (b) *Keris tersisip dinding, pedang tajam dalam sarungnya* (a dagger stuck in the wall; sharp sword in its sheath); used to suggest that it is foolish to start working without first preparing and checking the equipment to ensure they are in good condition.
- (c) *Setajam-tajam tombak, lebih tajam lagi lidah manusia* (as sharp as a spear may be, the human tongue is sharper); used to illustrate how words can have a profound impact, either healing or hurting others.
- (d) *Kalau tak bermeriam, baiklah diam* (if you do not have a cannon, it is better to remain silent); suggests that the poor and powerless should not dream of or demand too much, and it is better for them to accept their fate.
- (5) Modes of transportation: Malay proverbs also contain words related to modes of transportation such as ship, raft, and boat; depicting how the Malays moved from one place to another in ancient times. According to Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (n.d.), some proverbs featuring these words are:
- (a) *Sepuluh jong masuk kual, anjing tetap bercawat ekor* (even if ten ships enter the estuary, the dog keeps its tail between its legs); used for someone with narrow thinking who refuses to progress.

- (b) *Berakit-berakit ke hulu, berenang-renang ke tepian, bersakit-sakit dahulu, bersenang-senang kemudian* (rafting upstream, swim to the bank, experience hardship first, then enjoy the rewards later); advises against despairing quickly, as hardship is often followed by ease.
- (c) *Pengayuh sayang dibasahkan, sampan tak akan sampai ke seberang* (if the oarsman is reluctant to get wet, the boat will never reach the other side); suggests that if we are hesitant to engage in good deeds, we would not achieve success.

There are more words in Malay proverbs that reflect the Malay environment, affirming their authenticity and roots in the Malay culture, beyond what has been discussed in proverbial literature regarding stories and occasions.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study indicates that proverbs are based on real environment, reflecting the experiences of the culture that created them. Even if the stories and occasions behind Malay proverbs are lost, their words indicate that they stay true to the nature of proverbs in general. Through the examples provided - intended for comparative purposes between Arab and Malay proverbs – it is observed that the Arabic proverbs are well-documented, including their origins and the situations they describe. This makes their environment clearly authentic. On the other hand, Malay proverbs lack such documentation, hence their environment might seem imaginary. However, this study indicates the authenticity of the Malay proverbs' environment by analysing the environmental words within Malay proverbs and comparing them to the documented Arabic proverbs. This was proven in the environmental vocabulary in both the Arab and Malay proverbs. Therefore, each environment has its own words that tell its stories and confirm its authenticity. Accordingly, Arabic proverbs are categorized based on what they had arisen from, into events, stories, analogies, poetry, and wisdom. Meanwhile, Malay proverbs are categorised based on their structure and meaning, into idiomatic expressions, similes, wisdom, and preaching. Thus, Arabic proverbs focus on the origin of the idea, while Malay proverbs focus on the form and how they convey the message.

Also, this study points out that the literary criticism does not have a clear and consistent definition for “environment.” Its use can be superficial,

metaphorical, or inconsistent. Therefore, the field of ecocriticism has emerged in the 1990s, focusing on the relationship between literature and the environment. It argues that our experiences of nature are not only shaped by culture and society, but also influence us. Thus, the environment's impact extends to all literary arts, whether poetry or prose. Those who create literary texts are themselves part of the environment, and since birth, humans cannot escape their temporal, spatial, and social surroundings. It is these surroundings that shape them intellectually and morally, hence the effect of the environment is manifested in the literary texts.

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Adham Muhammad Ali Hamawiya: Conceptualization and design of the study, research writing, preparation of the final manuscript, and revisions; Farah Hanim Mohd Esa: Study conceptualization, collection of examples and data from Malay sources, and translation of Malay texts; Rahmah Ahmad H. Osman: Study conceptualization, revisions, submission of the final manuscript, and correspondence.

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