

LEXICAL CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC CONCEPTS IN EARLY MALAY-ENGLISH DICTIONARIES BY THOMAS BOWREY AND WILLIAM MARSDEN

(Cabaran Perbendaharaan Kata Konsep Islam dalam Kamus Melayu-Inggeris Awal oleh Thomas Bowrey dan William Marsden)

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Abstract

Islamic lexicon played an important role in shaping the early Malay-English dictionaries compiled by Western scholars such as Thomas Bowrey (1659–1713) and William Marsden (1754–1836). This paper explores how these early lexicographers integrated Islamic terminology into their bilingual dictionaries, revealing Islam’s profound cultural and intellectual influence on the Malay language from the 17th to 19th century. Through a comparative analysis, this study delves into Bowrey and Marsden’s choices when documenting the following Arabic-derived terms and Islamic concepts: Allah, haram, nabi, and neraka. This method allows for an in-depth look at how these dictionaries balanced the accurate representation of native meanings with Western interpretations influenced by the colonial context. The study finds that while these dictionaries functioned as valuable linguistic bridges that facilitated communication and understanding between cultures, they also reflected

the biases and limitations of their time. This research highlights the challenges of accurately documenting Islamic knowledge and its lasting impact on understanding and preserving the Malay language and its religious heritage.

Keywords: Early Malay dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, Islamic lexicon, translation, cultural imperialism, colonial scholarship

Abstrak

Perbendaharaan kata Islam memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk kamus awal bahasa Melayu yang disusun oleh sarjana Barat seperti Thomas Bowrey (1659–1713) dan William Marsden (1754–1836). Makalah ini mengkaji cara ahli leksikografi awal ini menggabungkan istilah-istilah Islam ke dalam kamus dwibahasa mereka, yang mendedahkan pengaruh budaya dan intelektual Islam yang mendalam terhadap bahasa Melayu dari abad ke-17 hingga ke-19. Melalui analisis perbandingan, kajian ini menyelami pilihan yang dibuat oleh Bowrey dan Marsden ketika mencatatkan istilah yang berasal dari bahasa Arab dan konsep Islam: Allah, haram, nabi dan neraka. Kaedah ini membolehkan tinjauan mendalam terhadap bagaimana kamus-kamus ini mengimbangi perwakilan makna asli yang tepat dengan tafsiran Barat yang dipengaruhi oleh kerangka kolonial. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa walaupun kamus-kamus ini berfungsi sebagai jambatan linguistik yang berharga yang memudahkan komunikasi dan pemahaman antara budaya, ia juga mencerminkan prasangka dan keterbatasan zaman tersebut. Penyelidikan ini menyoroti cabaran dalam mencatatkan pengetahuan Islam dengan tepat dan kesannya yang berkekalan terhadap pemahaman serta pemeliharaan bahasa Melayu dan warisan agamanya.

Kata kunci: Kamus awal bahasa Melayu, kamus dwibahasa, perbendaharaan kata Islam, terjemahan, imperialisme budaya, kajian kolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Bowrey (1659–1713) and William Marsden (1754–1836) were two prominent figures in the history of Malay-English lexicography, whose pioneering works laid the foundation for understanding the linguistic and cultural landscape of the Malay Archipelago from the 17th to 19th century. As English merchants and administrators entered this vibrant and strategically significant region, they encountered bustling port cities governed under Islamic rule, where trade and social interactions were deeply intertwined with Islamic customs and law. Recognising the necessity of

bridging linguistic gaps for successful commerce and governance, both Bowrey and Marsden devoted significant efforts to documenting the Malay language.

Thomas Bowrey, an independent merchant who spent nearly two decades navigating the Malay Archipelago, published *A Dictionary of English and Malayo, Malayo and English* in 1701. Although he could neither read nor write in the Jawi script used for the Malay language, he achieved a high level of fluency in spoken Malay. He compiled a substantial vocabulary list, encompassing key everyday terms and phrases vital for trade and communication. His dictionary reflects a practical understanding of the language, influenced by his commercial experiences and interactions with local communities. On the other hand, William Marsden acquired his comprehensive knowledge of Malay culture and language through his various roles with the British East India Company (EIC). His time in the region gave him a scholarly perspective that culminated in the publication of *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language* in 1812. Marsden's work, primarily academic in nature, focused on studying and preserving the Malay language. It documented Malay words, etymologies, phonetic nuances, and cultural contexts, reflecting his interest in language as a scientific discipline. His preface emphasises the importance of Malay cultural and intellectual history (Marsden, 1812: ii). His other works include *The History of Sumatra* (1783), a comprehensive ethnographic and geographic study. He also explored ancient Eastern monetary systems in *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata* (1823) and translated *Memoirs of a Malayan Family* (1830), which offered an insight into Malay narratives. Additionally, his 1825 paper, *On the Era of the Mahometans, called the Hejera*, examined the Islamic calendar system, demonstrating his diverse scholarly interests.

Both Bowrey and Marsden understood the centrality of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, and their dictionaries included a significant amount of Islamic lexicon. They documented terms related to Islamic law, rituals, and daily practices, reflecting the influence of Islam on trade, governance, and social interactions. By incorporating these Islamic terms, Bowrey and Marsden acknowledged the necessity for English speakers to understand the region's language and religious and cultural contexts, ensuring smoother interactions with local and foreign merchants, port officials, and royal courts. Their works remain valuable historical records that provide insights into the linguistic and cultural complexities of the Malay Archipelago during a time of dynamic global exchange.

Both dictionaries served various important functions during the colonial period. They were vital tools for English traders, providing the necessary vocabulary and expressions to negotiate, communicate, and build trade relationships with Malay-speaking merchants and local communities (Mohd Tarmizi, 2010; Mashudi, 2009). The dictionaries were also instrumental in conducting governance and administrative

tasks. By providing translations of important terms and phrases, they enabled more transparent communication with local leaders and facilitated the implementation of policies and regulations (Muller, 2020). The EIC employed early Malay dictionaries as strategic tools to establish a competitive edge in the Malay world, as Winterbottom's (2010: 54–81) analysis of these dictionaries demonstrates. This utilitarian method of language acquisition may have prioritised colonial control and dominance over genuine cultural understanding. Although this effectively expanded diplomatic and political influence, there persists ethical concerns regarding the potential misrepresentation and oversimplification of local languages. The dictionaries, influenced by colonial agendas, posed a threat to cultural knowledge by distorting it and perpetuating stereotypes. This underscored the power dynamics and exploitation that are inherent in the use of language for colonial purposes.

The inclusion of translations and explanations of cultural and religious terms in these early dictionaries had a dual impact. On the one hand, they facilitated more culturally informed and respectful interactions between English speakers and the Malay population, thereby bridging communication gaps in a region that is rich in Islamic traditions (Richards, 2021: 66). This aspect of the dictionaries had the potential to foster mutual understanding and more harmonious relationships. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Christian petitions and Biblical passages also indicates a subtextual colonial and missionary agenda. These translations were not merely linguistic instruments, but may have been deliberately incorporated to promote the spread of Christianity and facilitate religious conversion. Parallels can be drawn between the circumstances in the Philippines and the Malay Peninsula, where elements of colonial influence can be detected in lexicographical works by Western scholars. Vicente Rafael's (1988) study on Tagalog literature in the Philippine colonial society between the 16th and 18th century reveals the significant role translation played in spreading Christianity and legitimising commerce to consolidate religion with colonial power. He traces the conversion of Christian devotional manuals into local vernaculars through missionary-compiled grammars and dictionaries, revealing a close relationship between translation and colonialism. This raises serious concerns regarding the potential undermining of local spiritual practices and the imposition of foreign religious beliefs. The dictionaries contributed to a form of cultural imperialism that sought to reshape the religious landscape of the region under the pretext of cross-cultural engagement by using language as a vehicle for religious influence. The legacy of these dictionaries is complicated by their dual purpose, which reflects their practical utility and role in advancing colonial religious objectives.

The prevailing, though overly simplistic, view holds that dictionaries are impartial tools created solely for the benefit of a language and its speakers. Overall, these dictionaries were more than just linguistic tools; they were multifaceted resources that supported trade, administration, cultural exchange, missionary work, and the strategic interests of colonial powers. Bernard S. Cohn (2016) explores this dual role of dictionaries, emphasising their function as both practical tools and instruments of colonial power. He highlights how they facilitated trade, administration, and missionary work by standardising local languages and providing translations for colonial needs. However, Cohn critiques their Eurocentric biases, noting that they often distorted or selectively documented indigenous lexicons to align with colonial priorities. Colonial scholars used dictionaries to adapt local languages for Christian teachings, sometimes undermining indigenous traditions. Furthermore, Cohn emphasises that dictionaries were part of the broader colonial strategy of knowledge production, enabling control over linguistic and cultural narratives. Through this lens, Cohn reveals how language, codified in dictionaries, became a means of asserting colonial dominance.

While there are studies on the intersection of the Malay language and Islam, the depth of this influence on lexicographical works remains underexplored. Key studies in this area include Blagden's (1917: 97–100) examination of Arabic influence on Malay vocabulary, Hunt's (1989: 35–56) research on Bible translation into Malay, Adelaar et al.'s (2011: 89–91) work on Islamic literary traditions in Malay literature, and Izzati Mohd Yusop's (2014: 47–49) analysis of the Arabic impact on the Malay language. Laffan (2003) outlines a situation similar to this study, which investigates how European colonial authorities and Muslim populations collaborated strategically on Islamic scholarship. It indicates that efforts such as the Dutch-sponsored Balai Poestaka dictionary encouraged specific interpretations of Islamic terminology to cultivate a docile citizenry. Laffan asserts that to prevent potential resistance, colonial dictionaries frequently excluded politically contentious phrases and local scholars were engaged to supply neutral interpretations of problematic Islamic concepts to fit with colonial goals while avoiding unrest.

Early Malay wordlists and dictionaries, dating back to Antonio Pigafetta's (1521) glossary and Frederick de Houtman's (1603) *Spraeck en de Woord-boek*, were crucial for European traders, missionaries, and colonial administrators in the Malay Archipelago. Compared to later Arabic-Jawi glossaries, these works reflect a continuity of linguistic efforts shaped by colonial motivations. Both dictionaries aimed to mediate communication while embedding colonial power structures. These studies point to significant Islamic contributions to Malay language and literature,

yet there is still a need for comprehensive research on Islamic terms and concepts within early Malay dictionaries.

The inclusion of select Islamic lexicon related to theology will be analysed to demonstrate how these dictionaries reflected and shaped the linguistic landscape of the Malay-speaking world. The analysis focuses on four frequently occurring lexicons—*Allah*, *haram*, *nabi*, and *neraka*—chosen for their central roles in Islamic theological discourse and their prominence in the lexicon of the period. This paper defines “Islamic lexicon” as words rooted in Islamic teachings, practices, or beliefs, specifically those with significant cultural and societal implications in the Malay-speaking context. The selection process emphasised terms with high relevance to colonial-era linguistic codifications. Zgusta (1971: 13–15) argues that perfect lexical equivalence, especially with the culture-bound lexicon, is rarely achieved, a challenge evident in Bowrey and Marsden’s treatment of Islamic terms. Similarly, Tomaszczyk (1986: 121–123) notes that the under-representation of cultural elements results in dictionaries that fail to fully capture the linguistic state of a specific period. Dazdarevic et al. (2016: 145–147) further highlight that successful translation of religious terms requires deep proficiency in source and target languages. In this area, early lexicographers may have struggled due to their limited understanding of Islamic culture. The analysis will investigate whether the deficiencies in representing Islamic terms stem from the lexicographers’ lack of cultural knowledge or deliberate choices aimed at catering to European audiences. It assesses this by analysing evidence such as historical context, dictionary examples, and supporting secondary sources to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of the claims. This will help clarify the extent to which early dictionaries served as accurate records of the Malay language and Islamic knowledge from the 17th to 19th century.

This study explores the lexical challenges presented by Islamic concepts in early Malay-English dictionaries, focusing specifically on how Thomas Bowrey and William Marsden approached the translation and explanation of key religious terms. By analysing how Islamic lexicon was adapted and presented for an English-speaking audience, this study aims to shed light on the broader implications for cross-cultural understanding and the preservation of religious concepts. The central research questions guiding this study are:

- (1) How did Bowrey and Marsden’s interpretations of Islamic vocabulary reflect their cultural and linguistic biases?

- (2) What impact did these translations have on understanding Islam in the colonial context?
- (3) How can these historical challenges inform contemporary approaches to the translation of religious terms?

In addressing these questions, the article contributes to ongoing debates in linguistic and cultural studies, particularly in the context of colonial influence on language documentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamisation of the Malay Language

According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1993: 169–183), the Islamisation of the Malay Archipelago commenced with the metamorphosis of the Malay language, which facilitated the seamless integration of Islamic values and beliefs into the daily lives of the local population. This process integrated Islamic concepts with local traditions, establishing them as an essential component of Malay culture. Nevertheless, the narrative of this linguistic and cultural Islamisation, particularly from the 17th to 19th century, remains unexamined mainly within the context of lexicographical developments. The use of Islamic lexicon experienced a substantial increase during this period, particularly among local and foreign traders in the Malay Archipelago.

The Qur'an underscores the significance of learning and exhibiting reverence for the languages that Allah has created as a method of communicating divine revelations (Surah Ar-Rum, 30:22). The language of divine revelation, Arabic, was instrumental in the unification of Muslims worldwide, including the Malay world. The Islamisation of language describes the transfer of Arabic terminologies and concepts into the local lexicon due to the influence of Islam on a local language. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1993: 169–183) contends that the Islamisation of language shapes the way people think and reason, embedding Islamic principles into their worldview rather than a secular one. The Islamisation of language influences thought and reasoning by embedding Islamic principles. Arabic holds a unique and timeless status because it was chosen for the divine revelation of the Qur'an. Unlike other languages that evolve with social changes, the core Islamic vocabulary of Arabic remains preserved, serving as a constant and elevated standard of linguistic excellence throughout history.

Eventually, with the advent of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, Arabic emerged as the principal language of Islamic study (Muhammad Kurnia and Rahmat Hidayat, 2022: 134–135). With the spread of Islam, language often becomes the first indicator

of its influence, reflecting cultural and ideological changes, shaping thought and worldview, and embedding core concepts through Arabic terms. This transformation is essential for a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, culture, and civilisation. The incorporation of Arabic terminologies directly influenced the meanings of existing Malay terms, as Malay lacked appropriate translational equivalence. According to Mabrurroh Mabrurroh and Rosyidatul Khoiriyah (2019: 44–46), the Islamisation of language was the catalyst for the Islamisation of knowledge in the region. The Jawi script was employed to translate Arabic concepts into Malay during the early stages of Islamic education. Malay scholars were generating a plethora of religious texts in Jawi by the 16th century, which firmly established Malay as the medium for disseminating Islamic knowledge throughout the Archipelago. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1993: 169–183) further asserts that the incorporation of Islamic terminologies into the Malay vocabulary was facilitated by the fact that Malay had firmly established itself as the preferred language of instruction among scholars by the 17th century. Ening Herniti (2017: 102–105) identifies four primary components of Islamisation that influenced Malay vocabulary: adopting the Islamic Hijrah calendar for trade, political terms associated with the rise of the Malay Muslim Sultanate, economic terms, and religious terms. One component featured in Bowrey's 1701 dictionary, *The Manner of Calculation of Time*, indicated that the Hijrah calendar was the standard for trade during the 17th century.

The substantial contributions of scholars such as Hamzah Fansuri, who assimilated over 2,000 Arabic words into the Malay language, were highlighted by Supriono (2015: 186). A significant number of these words are still in use today. This linguistic integration is illustrated by the words *ahl* (expert), *maut* (death), and *amal* (charity). Raja Ali Haji's 19th-century *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* formalised Malay grammar, reinforcing its Islamic roots (Alimuddin Hasan Palawa, 2017). Similarly, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (Munshi Abdullah) and Tuan Guru Syekh Daud al-Fatani enriched Malay linguistic and religious texts, using Jawi script as a medium for Islamic education (Ening Herniti, 2017). Scholars such as Nuruddin al-Raniri also infused Arabic-Islamic terminology into Malay literature, as seen in his *Bustan al-Salatin* (Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, 1993). Munshi Abdullah, often called the father of modern Malay literature, bridged traditional and colonial contexts in works such as *Hikayat Abdullah* (Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, 2006). These scholars preserved and expanded the Malay lexicon, ensuring its cultural and religious identity while addressing colonial linguistic influences (Richards, 2021).

The Arabic language, as the medium of the Qur'an, and the fundamental Islamic belief system became intricately integrated into the Malay lexicon, influencing both oral and written discourse. The extensive adoption of Jawi script, an Arabic-derived writing system, further reinforced this linguistic transition. A multitude of Arabic-derived phrases, particularly those about religion (e.g. *Allah*, *shariah*,

imam), legal ideas (e.g. *zakat*, *hudud*), and science (e.g. *bintang ootara*), have become essential components of Malay lexicon (Ening Herniti, 2017: 83–85; Nazilah Mohamad and Nor Hasimah Ismail, 2017: 1070). Nevertheless, most early European lexicographers, including Bowrey and Marsden, examined the Malay language primarily through the perspectives of commerce, governance, and colonial engagement, frequently neglecting its profound Islamic underpinnings. Bowrey and Marsden’s dictionaries include several references to Islamic notions, yet there has been scant critical examination of the presentation and comprehension of these terms by the lexicographers.

Furthermore, the connection between Malay and the original Arabic sources was diminished by the introduction of transliterations and bilingual translations of Islamic terms. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1993: 169–183) characterises this as the inception of de-Islamisation, a process by which foreign concepts were introduced into the minds of Muslims, subsequently affecting their thought processes and reasoning. The secularising influence of Western colonial powers further accelerated the process of Malay’s separation from its Islamic roots, as the transition from Jawi to the Roman script in governance, education, and trade occurred. Salina Ahmad (2013: 88–89) observes that distortion of Islamic terms facilitated the progressive de-Islamisation of Malay through the Western worldview, which influenced the perceptions and comprehensions of the local population.

Islamic epistemology, encompassing knowledge acquisition, law, ethics, and science, significantly influenced Malay civilisation, yet remains generally neglected in lexicographical research. Terminology associated with Islamic law (*fiqh*), theology (*aqidah*), and cosmology (*ilm al-falak*) was prevalent in the Malay language, though it remains little examined in these early dictionaries. Marsden’s lexicon contains terms such as *bintang* (star), associated with Islamic astronomy. However, it fails to provide a comprehensive explanation of the Islamic scholastic tradition from whence these terms derive (Marsden, 1812: 25–28). Hoogervorst’s (2024) analysis of early Malay lexicography developed by the Dutch East India Company through European figures such as Jacob Cornelisz van Neck, Frederik de Houtman, and Justus Heurnius, indicates fundamental Western biases. While these dictionaries were useful for learning the Malay language, they presented a simplified and occasionally distorted view of Malay culture that ignores indigenous meanings and contexts. Additionally, European lexicographers, in their documentation of Islamic concepts, may have inadvertently corrupted the original meanings due to a superficial comprehension of the religion. Bowrey and Marsden’s efforts to interpret ideas such as *tawhid* (monotheism) and *fitrah* (innate inclination) frequently overlooked the intricate spiritual importance these terms have within the Malay-Islamic setting (Sneddon, 2003: 60–63).

Islamic Lexicon

The lexical elements in a bilingual dictionary provide a written snapshot of the commonly used words of a particular community at a given time, offering insight into the lives, societal norms, and beliefs of individuals in the Malay Archipelago before the 19th century. The accuracy and quality of such dictionaries relied heavily on the lexicographer's knowledge and experience. Moon (2014) cautions that lexicographers may unintentionally distort or misrepresent religious and cultural terms, often shaped by their Western viewpoints and values. These biases can influence how terms are translated or described, particularly in cross-cultural dictionaries.

Ismail Al-Faruqi (1986) highlights similar issues, specifically regarding the distortion of Islamic names and terms with deep religious significance. He advocates for the creation of Islamic English, a transliteration system designed to preserve the sacred meaning of Islamic terminology. Such measures would prevent the loss of the original context during the transliteration of Islamic terms, a challenge currently seen in the Romanisation of Malay from Jawi script. Md. Mahmudul Hasan (2014: 1–21) further supports this argument by noting that while Islamic theological terms have been borrowed into the Malay language, they often lose their original meaning due to incorrect spelling or usage when adapted into Western scripts.

An early example of this distortion can be seen in the work of Albert Corneliszoon Ruyl, who was the first to use the term *Allah* in Roman script in his Malay translation of the Gospel of Mark, published between 1629 and 1630. Ruyl's translation used Islamic terms such as *Allah* for God and *Radjat Allahi* for Godly Kingdom (De Vries, 2018). De Vries discusses how early Malay dictionaries and translations, such as Bowrey's work, used terms such as *Allah* in ways that distorted Islamic concepts to align with Christian teachings. By adapting Islamic vocabulary to explain Christian beliefs, these translations blurred religious distinctions and reflected a colonial agenda aimed at promoting Christianity. This practice, while intended to make Christian ideas more understandable to Malay Muslims, often misrepresented core Islamic theology and showed a lack of cultural and religious sensitivity. Furthermore, Amriah Buang (1990: 30) argues that *Allah* is a term with divine attributes and should not be casually replaced by or equated with the term "God." She criticises the use of compound words such as "godfather" or "godless," which trivialise the term's sacredness in Islamic theology. Such practices have lasting effects on interfaith understanding and influence religious discourse in the Malay world today.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology by combining content analysis and historical contextualisation to investigate how Islamic concepts were documented and interpreted in early Malay-English dictionaries. The primary sources analysed in this study include Thomas Bowrey's *A Dictionary of English and Malayo, Malayo and English* (1701) and William Marsden's *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language* (1812), both chosen for their historical importance and extensive inclusion of Islamic terminology. Bowrey, an independent merchant, compiled his dictionary based on practical fluency in spoken Malay acquired over two decades in the Malay Archipelago. His work, designed for trade and communication, reflects a pragmatic understanding of the language. In contrast, Marsden, a British East India Company official, approached his *Dictionary of the Malayan Language* with scholarly intent, documenting Malay etymologies, phonetics, and cultural contexts while emphasising the language's intellectual history. Marsden's broader contributions include *The History of Sumatra* (1783), *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata* (1823), *Memoirs of a Malayan Family* (1830), and *On the Era of the Mahometans* (1825), which collectively showcase his diverse academic pursuits and dedication to understanding Malay language and culture.

The lexicographic framework for this study was drawn from foundational works that address the challenges of bilingual dictionaries, especially in representing cultural and religious terms. Key references include Zgusta's (1971) principles on lexical equivalence, Tomaszczyk's (1986) exploration of cultural under-representation, and critiques by Ajmi and Otaibi (2006) on how Islamic terms are treated in dictionaries. Dazdarevic et al. (2016) further highlight the importance of preserving theological meanings during translation. Together, these references underpinned the study's analysis of how early Malay-English dictionaries managed Islamic lexicon within colonial and cultural contexts. The research involved a comparative lexical analysis of four key Islamic terms—*Allah*, *haram*, *nabi*, and *neraka*—examining their definitions, usage, and frequency across the two works. These terms were selected based on their high frequency of occurrence, reflecting their significance in the dictionaries and their relevance to the linguistic and cultural landscape of the period. A contextual analysis was conducted to explore the socio-political and cultural environments influencing the creation of these dictionaries, with a particular focus on the impact of colonial dynamics on the representation of the Islamic lexicon. Furthermore, the study evaluated whether the theological meanings of these terms were retained or altered under Western and Christian influences, identifying lexicographers' biases and methodological differences. Findings were validated through cross-referencing with scholarly literature on the Islamisation of the Malay language and colonial lexicography, as evidenced by references to key works such

as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' (1993) analysis of the integration of Islamic values into the Malay language, Laffan's (2003) examination of colonial dictionaries and their strategic influences, and Mabruroh and Khoiriyah's (2019) exploration of Islamic terminology in Malay. These sources provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in documenting Islamic concepts.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Bowrey's dictionary, which includes grammar rules, instructions, expressions, dialogues, and letters, was created to equip English traders with practical knowledge for engaging in trade throughout the Archipelago. However, his grasp of Islamic terminology was limited to what he learned from Malay speakers, as he could not read Jawi. Nor Azizah (2019) points out that when analysing Bowrey's dictionary, it is important to consider the influence of his native language, potential misinterpretations or memory lapses on his part, errors introduced by the printer, and mistakes that occurred during printing. Similarly, Ajmi and Otaibi (2006: 8) highlight deficiencies in contemporary English dictionaries' definitions of Islamic terms. They note that many dictionary compilers lack a deep understanding of Islamic traditions, which results in inaccurate or misleading definitions. They argue that such errors could be minimised by consulting original Islamic texts and collaborating with Muslim linguists. This aligns with the assertions of Dazdarevic et al. (2016) and ElShiekh and Saleh (2011), in which the treatment of Islamic lexicon through translation and transliteration can either facilitate or impede a user's comprehension, depending on the absence of cultural context. The challenge is to ensure that translated Arabic terminologies maintain their intended meanings and are not taken out of context, which can lead to distortion and corruption of the original meaning. However, Abdullah Khalel (2019) posits that understanding Islamic terminology is not affected by the translation or the disparity between the Islamic meaning and its linguistic definition. The variation in contexts determines correct meaning while avoiding confusion and misinterpretation.

Table 1 and 2 list four of the most frequently occurring Islamic terms from both dictionaries and their respective translational equivalents. The frequency of each term is included next to each entry.

The term *Allah* appears 177 times in Bowrey's dictionary, as shown in Table 1, highlighting its prominence in the lexicon Bowrey considered essential for communication in the Malay-speaking world. This frequency underscores the centrality of the concept of God in the socio-religious framework of the region, particularly given the deep integration of Islam into daily life. Similarly, the term *Haram* or its variant *Haramcan* appears 14 times, reflecting its

importance in describing actions and items prohibited under Islamic law—a concept relevant for understanding local trade and social interactions. The terms *Nabbee* and *Naraka* appear eight times each, indicating Bowrey’s recognition of their theological significance. *Nabbee* refers to prophets, or central figures in Islamic teachings, while *Naraka* denotes hell, a key component of Islamic eschatology.

Table 1 Four Islamic Terminologies in Bowrey’s Dictionary.

Malayo	English Equivalents
<i>Allah – 177</i> <i>Allah eang benar satoo saja</i> <i>Allah poonea alamaan</i> <i>Allahhee</i> <i>Dea oran Allahhee</i> <i>Allah taallah,</i> <i>Allah taallah dapat ampoondosa samoa</i>	God the True God is only one the way of God Godly He is a Godly Man Jehovah, Lord, Lord God The Lord can pardon all Sins
<i>Haram / Haramcan - 14</i> <i>Oran jahat de Haramcam Allah taallah</i> <i>soorga padanea daen de jaddicanneraka</i> <i>naraka tampat nea</i>	To charge God will Abominate Wicked men from heaven, and Hell is become their place.
<i>Nabbee - 8</i> <i>Nabbee Esa</i> <i>Nabbee nabbenee</i>	A prophet the Prophet Jesus Prophets
<i>Naraka – 8</i> <i>Segalla oran eang booat jahat de</i> <i>masooc can</i> <i>Allah dalam appee Neraka</i>	Hell All men that do evil, God will put them into Hellfire

Bowrey’s approach to translating these terms demonstrates his understanding of fundamental Islamic principles in his capacity as a trader. However, his choice of equivalents was basic, typically consisting of one or two-word translations paired with sample phrases. This limited scope suggests that Bowrey’s dictionary was intended as a practical tool, tailored to the immediate needs of English traders rather than as a comprehensive resource for theological study. His definitions prioritised functionality, offering just enough detail to facilitate interactions between English speakers and their Malay counterparts, particularly in trade and governance contexts.

In contrast, Table 2 highlights the entries for the same terms in Marsden's dictionary, which reflect a more detailed and nuanced approach. The term *Allah* appears 178 times, slightly more frequently than in Bowrey's dictionary. Marsden's definitions are more elaborate, incorporating phrases and examples that delve into theological concepts, such as "God, the most High," and referencing the universal grace attributed to Allah in Islamic teachings. The term *Haram* is listed 41 times in Marsden's work, significantly more frequently than in Bowrey's. Marsden's treatment includes broader contexts, such as lawful versus unlawful actions, and examples such as "it is forbidden to spit in the mosque," which reflect a deeper understanding of Islamic law.

Marsden lists 34 occurrences for the term *Nabi*, far surpassing Bowrey's eight entries. His descriptions include detailed references to various prophets and their roles and place in Islamic tradition, such as "Adam, the first prophet, and Muhammad, the last prophet." This indicates Marsden's intent to provide not only translations, but also cultural and religious insight. Similarly, *Naraka* appears 18 times in Marsden's dictionary, with entries offering detailed descriptions, including references to the "seven gradations of hellfire" and the metaphysical roles associated with Islamic eschatology.

The stark differences between Bowrey and Marsden's dictionaries highlight their varying purposes and audiences. While Bowrey's dictionary is practical and utilitarian, catering to traders' immediate linguistic needs, Marsden's dictionary reflects a scholarly endeavour aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of Malay language and culture. Marsden's detailed entries and contextual explanations underscore his commitment to documenting the richness of Islamic concepts, contrasting with Bowrey's functional and often simplified approach. Together, these dictionaries provide a valuable comparative perspective of how early lexicographers approached the task of interpreting and documenting the linguistic and cultural intricacies of the Malay world.

Bowrey's dictionary entries on Islamic terms (Table 1), when viewed alongside those by Marsden (Table 2), reflect both the linguistic and cultural landscapes of their time. They provide a glimpse into how early English lexicographers navigated the complex task of interpreting and documenting a foreign language and belief system for an English-speaking audience. Bowrey's approach to the term *Allah*, where he equates it to terms such as "Jehovah" and "Lord God," shows an effort to draw parallels with familiar Christian language. While this might have helped his English-speaking readers relate to the concept, it glosses over the unique attributes of Allah in Islamic theology.

In Islamic tradition, Allah is not merely a synonym for God in the generic sense, but embodies unique theological principles central to the faith. The concept of *Tawhid* (oneness of God) is a fundamental tenet of Islam, emphasising that Allah is singular, incomparable, and free from any anthropomorphic attributes

or associations. Unlike the Christian concept of God, which may involve the Trinity or incarnations, Allah is understood as utterly unique and indivisible. Additionally, Allah is believed to be eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, and merciful, with no partner, parent, or offspring. This distinction is further reinforced by the 99 names of Allah (*Asma'ul Husna*) in Islamic theology, each describing a specific attribute, such as *Ar-Rahman* (the Most Compassionate) and *Al-Aleem* (the All-Knowing), which convey a comprehensive understanding of divine qualities.

Table 2 Four Islamic Terminologies in Marsden's Dictionary

Malayan	English Equivalents
Allah – 178 الله	<i>allah</i> , God, the God. الله تعالى <i>allah-tāāla</i> God the most high, equivalent to our formulary expression of God Almighty. <i>Dangan tolong tuhan allah</i> by the assistance of the Lord God. <i>Allah tuhan iang menjadi-kan alum</i> God the Lord who created the world. <i>Ka-andak allah</i> the will of God. <i>Dangan nāma allah iang amat murah pada memri rezeki akan sakalian ambā-nia mumin dan kāfir dalam negri dunyā ini</i> in the name of God, who in his abundant grace bestows food on all his servants, both believers and infidels, throughout the countries of the earth. <i>Segala suatu iang kau-liat iya-itu allah</i> every thing, whatsoever thou seest, that is God. الله دم demi allah or والله wallahi by God; by the grace of God. ilahi O God! Divine. ياالهك if ilal-ku O my God! الله بسم bism' illahi in the name of God.
Haram – 41 حرام	harām and حرام haram, unlawful, forbidden, abominable, accursed. Sacred. <i>Halāl dan harām</i> things lawful and unlawful, clean and unclean. <i>Harām me-ludah dālam mesfid</i> it is forbidden to spit in the mosque. <i>Harām atas segala perampiaan iang tiāda berswāmi me-mêrah-kan pipi-nia</i> it is unlawful for any unmarried woman to put rouge on her cheeks. <i>Harām lillahi kalo amba tâu</i> may I be accursed if I know. <i>Menaröh-kan harām pada allah</i> to consecrate, devote, dedicate to God.
Nabi – 34 نبي	nabi, a prophet. Al-nabi the prophet. Awal-nia آدم adam akhir-nia محمد Muhammed. The first of them (the prophets) was Adam, the last of them Mahomet; (the intermediate prophets being شيث shith or Seth, ادريس idris or Enoch, ابراهيم ibrahīm or Abraham, موسي musa or Moses, دāwud or David, and عيسي isa or Jesus.) نبي محمد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم the prophet Mahomet, apostle of God, on whom be the blessing of God and peace. <i>Nabi allah iang tidda nabi kamadian-nia</i> the prophet of God, who is not to be succeeded by any other prophet.

Malayan	English Equivalents
Naraka – 18 نارک	naraka or narka, hell, the infernal regions. <i>Jalan iang ka-kanan itu jalan ka-dālam surga dan iang ka-kiri itu jalan ka-dalam naraka</i> that right-hand road is the road to heaven, and that to the left the road to hell. <i>Tujuh pangkat api naraka</i> the seven gradations of hell fire. <i>Narka lok</i> the damned. <i>Maleikat iang meniup api narka</i> the angel who blows the fire of hell.

By defining Allah as “the True God” or “Godly,” Bowrey’s entries reduce this nuanced theological understanding to a simplified equivalence with Christian terminology. This oversimplification fails to capture the deeply ingrained monotheistic worldview of Islam, where Allah is not only the Creator but also intimately involved in the governance of the universe, with attributes that are both transcendent and immanent. This limited depiction reflects the lens of a 17th-century Englishman trying to make Islamic concepts relatable to a Christian audience, often at the cost of theological precision. For non-Muslim readers, this reduction could lead to misconceptions about the Islamic understanding of divinity, potentially framing Allah as a counterpart to Christian interpretations of God, rather than as a distinct and singular concept within the Islamic faith. Expanding on these unique attributes of Allah helps illuminate the depth of Islamic theology and highlights the cultural and theological gaps in Bowrey’s dictionary. This context enriches the discussion by showing how the linguistic tools of the time, while useful for bridging cultural divides, often reflected the biases and limitations of their creators.

In contrast, Marsden’s entries show more depth and a clearer appreciation of the Islamic worldview. His descriptions that emphasise Allah’s universal grace—“who in his abundant grace bestows food on all his servants, both believers and infidels”—highlight a broader, more inclusive understanding of Islamic teachings, indicating a more respectful engagement with the religious beliefs of the time. Therefore, Marsden’s acknowledgment of the inadequacy of his definition of Allah in his dictionary is a striking example of humility and scholarly growth. By openly admitting that he had mistakenly equated Allah with *tuhan*, Marsden demonstrated a deeper awareness of the critical linguistic and theological distinctions in the Malay language and Islamic belief system. His reflection on this error underscores the unique significance of Allah as introduced through Arab influence, representing the singular, supreme God in Islam.

... I think it incumbent on me to remark that the name of God is improperly rendered by the word توهن *tuhan*. It is well known that these people who formerly worshipped the دیوات *dewata* deities or demi-gods, were indebted

to the Arabs for their belief in One Supreme Being, and that الله *allah* or (more usually with the Malays) الله تعالى *allah taala* God the most High, and هو *hua* (from the Hebrew) are the genuine Mahometan terms for God or Jehovah. The word توهن *tuhan*, it is true, is often figuratively (by metonymy) employed for God, but is precisely equivalent in its use to our expression of “The Lord, Dominus,” as in the phrase of توهن سكلين عالم *tuhan sakali-an alam* “The Lord of all worlds,” or in the compound مها توهن *maha-tuhan* “The mighty Lord,” and should not have been substituted, in a vocabulary, for the essential name of the Deity. (Marsden, 1812: 59)

This realisation showcases the layered challenges early lexicographers faced in a colonial context. Translating concepts steeped in cultural and religious nuances was not merely a linguistic exercise but a task laden with ideological and cultural implications. Marsden’s willingness to correct himself, as evident in his acknowledgment of errors in equating *Allah* with *tuhan*, reflects an effort to approach Islamic terminology with a degree of respect and scholarly rigour often absent among his contemporaries. By recognising his limitations and revisiting his work, Marsden demonstrated an awareness of the complexities involved in faithfully conveying the theological and cultural significance of Islamic terms.

In contrast, many of Marsden’s contemporaries simplified or misrepresented foreign terms to align with Western frameworks, often reflecting colonial attitudes rather than cultural accuracy. Figures such as Frederik de Houtman, who produced a Malay-Dutch wordlist in 1603, exemplify the trend of adapting foreign lexicons to fit European colonial agendas. Houtman’s *Spraeck ende Woord-Boek* often presented Malay terms through a utilitarian lens, emphasising their relevance for trade and governance while ignoring their cultural or religious significance. This practice mirrored broader colonial tendencies to instrumentalise language as a tool for control and assimilation, stripping away the indigenous meanings and contexts (Suratminto, 2011). Albert Corneliszoon Ruyl’s early 17th-century translation of the Gospel of Mark into Malay also illustrates this phenomenon. Ruyl adapted Islamic terms such as *Allah* to convey Christian theological ideas, blurring the distinctions between the two faiths. By doing so, he aimed to make Christian teachings more palatable to Malay-speaking Muslims. However, in the process, his translations misrepresented core Islamic beliefs and compromised the integrity of Islamic terminology (De Vries, 2018). Likewise, Justus Heurnius (1587–1651), a Dutch missionary, compiled Malay dictionaries and religious texts designed for Christian evangelism. His works often reinterpreted Islamic and indigenous Malay terms to fit Christian frameworks, simplifying their meanings to align with Western religious (Hoogervorst, 2024).

These examples highlight how many of Marsden’s contemporaries approached non-European lexicons with a Eurocentric mindset, prioritising accessibility for

Western audiences over fidelity to the original meanings. Marsden's self-correction and effort to avoid such superficial equivalences set him apart, reflecting a more conscientious approach to lexicography. His acknowledgment of the inadequacy of his initial definitions underscores the challenges of colonial scholarship and the importance of striving for accuracy and cultural sensitivity in representing foreign concepts. By situating Marsden's work within the broader context of his time, we gain a clearer understanding of both the limitations and the potential of early colonial lexicographical efforts.

Marsden's awareness contrasts with the era's typical approach, which frequently imposed Western perspectives on non-European languages, sacrificing accuracy for familiarity. However, Marsden's insight also highlights the inherent limitations and biases that marked colonial scholarship. Translators and lexicographers often worked under linguistic and cultural constraints, leading to interpretations shaped by their background and understanding. Even Marsden, with his attention to detail, could not entirely escape the challenges of fully grasping the intricacies of a different worldview. His candid reflection, therefore, is a reminder of the ongoing need for cultural sensitivity and a genuine effort to preserve the integrity of profound religious concepts in translation. This lesson resonates well beyond his time. This is consistent with the views of Ajmi and Otaibi (2006), in which the cultural and social environments of the lexicographers have the potential to perpetuate misconceptions about Islam. To ensure objective representation, dictionaries must incorporate more precise, culturally informed definitions that honour the original meanings as understood by native speakers. Lexicographers could employ corpus-based evidence from sources produced by local Malay speakers or scholars of Islam to provide more accurate definitions.

The entry for *Haram* in Bowrey's work, with phrases such as "God will abominate wicked men from heaven, and hell is become their place," underscores a strong moralistic tone. This reflects an interpretation shaped by Western perspectives that may have viewed Islamic laws as severe or rigid. The use of such definitive language to frame *Haram* solely in terms of punishment suggests a partial view that may not fully capture the balance between the sacred and the forbidden in Islamic tradition. Marsden's treatment of *Haram*, which mentions both "lawful and unlawful, clean and unclean," provides a more comprehensive view. His examples demonstrate an understanding that Islamic law is not merely about prohibition but encompasses a holistic approach to sacred conduct. This approach reflects a more empathetic effort to portray the term in its full complexity.

The treatment of *Nabi* by Bowrey is succinct, focusing on "the Prophet Jesus" and "Prophets," which may reflect an attempt to find common ground with Christian readers. While this could foster a sense of shared heritage, it risks reducing the significance of other prophets in Islam, particularly Muhammad

(peace be upon him), who holds a central position. Marsden provides a richer context by listing multiple prophets and explaining their roles, which offers readers a deeper understanding of the significance of prophecy in Islam. His definitions go beyond simple identification to highlight the importance of continuity in the prophetic tradition. It should be noted that both dictionaries referred to Jesus or Isa as prophets, reflecting local beliefs.

Bowrey's description of *Naraka* as "Hell" with the statement "All men that do evil, God will put them into Hellfire" portrays a vivid, fear-based image of the Islamic concept of hell. While accurate to an extent, this focus on punishment alone could evoke a one-dimensional view that paints Islam as primarily concerned with retribution. Marsden adds details such as the "seven gradations of hell fire" and mentions angels and metaphysical roles, giving a more layered representation that encompasses the spiritual beliefs associated with *Naraka*. This helps readers understand that Islamic teachings on the afterlife are not just about fear, but also reflect a structured and deeply moral worldview.

Bowrey's work, while pioneering for its time, shows the inherent challenges of translating concepts across cultures, especially from a dominant colonial perspective. His definitions reflect the era's inclination to interpret foreign ideas through the lens of English religious and moral values. This approach could inadvertently reinforce stereotypes of Islam as rigid or foreign to English norms. In contrast, Marsden's entries, with their richer context and more accurate representations, show an effort to move beyond simplifications and engage more genuinely with the material. His work suggests a greater degree of cultural sensitivity and an attempt to present Islamic beliefs in a manner that respects their complexity and integrity. These early lexicographical works are a reminder that translations are more than mere linguistic exercises; they are acts of interpretation influenced by the translators' cultural backgrounds. This relates to the second distortion identified by Al-Faruqi (1986: 11–15), which is distortion through translation, essentially a biased description that reflects the Western perspective on Islam. While Bowrey's dictionary served as a bridge for English traders to understand the Malay world, it was inevitably coloured by the biases and limitations of his time. Marsden's entries, meanwhile, hint at a more progressive approach that valued deeper cultural engagement. Both works, in their respective way, underscore the importance of striving for accuracy, empathy, and depth when documenting the beliefs and languages of other cultures.

CONCLUSION

The early dictionaries compiled by Thomas Bowrey and William Marsden, while recognised as invaluable linguistic tools for facilitating communication

between English speakers and the Malay-speaking population, were shaped by their time's socio-cultural and political contexts. Both lexicographers acted with genuine scholarly intent rather than with the explicit goal of misleading their readers. Their works, however, reveal inherent challenges and biases common in colonial-era scholarship. Bowrey's dictionary, based on his practical experience as a trader, often relied on his spoken proficiency in Malay and lacked depth in capturing Islamic theological nuances. His definitions reflect an attempt to relate unfamiliar concepts to Western equivalents, which, while useful for readers unfamiliar with the Malay world, sometimes resulted in oversimplifications and distortions. For instance, his equation of Islamic terms such as *Allah* with Christian notions such as "Jehovah" or "Lord God" misses the unique attributes of *Tawhid* central to Islamic theology.

Marsden's dictionary, by contrast, displays greater academic rigour and a more respectful engagement with Malay-Islamic concepts. He acknowledged the inadequacy of specific definitions, such as equating *Allah* with *tuhan*, and reflected on these limitations in his work. This self-correction illustrates his genuine effort to understand and convey Islamic terms' cultural and theological significance, despite being constrained by his own Western epistemology. Both lexicographers incorporated Islamic terminology, reflecting their recognition of Islam's central role in Malay life, yet the colonial context inevitably influenced their works. The cultural lens through which they worked sometimes reduced complex spiritual and social meanings into more utilitarian or missionary-oriented frameworks. The inclusion of Christian elements and moralistic views of Islamic law in their dictionaries reflected colonial efforts to align Malay culture with Western ideologies and support missionary goals.

Although Bowrey and Marsden did not intentionally mislead, their dictionaries served two purposes: linguistic tools and instruments of cultural interpretation shaped by Eurocentric paradigms. These works played a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Yet, they also reflected the colonial mindset of their era, which often introduced biases that simplified or misrepresented the complexities of Islamic concepts. This mindset of framing non-Western knowledge through a Eurocentric lens continues to influence contemporary perceptions of cultures and religions across media, academia, and public discourse. The analysis of Bowrey and Marsden's ambitious works underscores their attempts to bridge cultural divides, revealing the limitations they faced in fully capturing the depth of a foreign worldview.

An inclusive and culturally sensitive approach is needed to address the colonial perspective in representing non-Western knowledge, especially Islamic concepts. Definitions should reflect deeper meanings and cultural contexts, while academic works should be dynamic and updated with diverse feedback. The implications of this

study extend beyond historical linguistics. It serves as a reminder to contemporary scholars of the significance of cultural sensitivity and the necessity of collaborating with local experts to represent religious and cultural terminology accurately. Future research could build on these findings by exploring more indigenous Malay sources and examining how contemporary translations can learn from the past to provide more comprehensive and respectful interpretations. By addressing these historical limitations, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language and culture in a global context, fostering greater intercultural awareness and appreciation.

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