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# Teaching of Syntax in Foreign Language from Educators Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

It was well known that syntax is a part of language which must be absorbed by the learners. By that way they can use the language in the proper manner. However, the teaching of syntax is not really meeting the objective of learning since it leads the teachers to give detail explanation of the language and create negative perception of the language learning itself. Thus this article will discuss the educator's perspective on teaching of syntax in foreign language. To obtain a data of the study, researchers have constructed a set of structured questions for interview purpose. Eight respondents were agreeing to participate and to be interviewed. Findings demonstrated that syntax is very crucial for teaching and learning of foreign language. In the other hand, learners cannot avoid this part of language and in the same time, teachers must know how to gradually help learners in their learning process.

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## Introduction

Recent years have seen that teaching of foreign languages become a spread phenomenon in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Many courses offered foreign language as a third language in the faculty. In many Asian countries, English is not foreign language anymore but has been becoming a second language. Languages like Arabic, Germany, France and others are categorized as a foreign language. Thus, the issue of teaching and learning of foreign language have drawn attention from studies carried out to understand and provide resources to improve the level of education.

Arabic language, however in Malaysia context is not fully considered as a foreign language. Some scholars refuse to accept it as a foreign language because of its religious and cultural values among Muslims all over the world. The old schools like "Pondok" have taught Arabic language in the classes for many years since the arrival of Muslims preachers from Middle East. Because of this, Arabic language becomes known by the Muslims and compulsorily used in their rituals and Quran recitation.

To date, many students are pursuing their study in Islamic courses and Arabic in the country and overseas. They are supposed to be the next generation of leaders and educators continuity. To achieve this goal, proper education system in teaching and learning of Arabic must be given a special attention.

## Problem statement

Even though Arabic language is not really alien to most Muslims in Malaysia, but most of them are not good in Arabic. Learners of Arabic in Malaysia are expected to master the language when they are graduated from schools or universities. Many researches on the area show that students are not doing well in their Arabic subject. Researchers like Ghazali et al. (2010), Mohd Kamarul Shukri et al. (2010) have several findings that support the notion why student are not perform in the subject in different perspectives. Azman and Goh (2010; Azani et al. 2012) have mentioned that syntax is among the elements of Arabic language which the Malay student will consider as an obstacle in their study.

## Objective

This study has determined two objectives to be achieved;

1. Does syntax is the major problem for Arabic learners of Malays?
2. What is the most suggested approach to teach syntax to Malay learners?

## Definition of Manṣūbāt

Arabic language is an inflection language, where changes at the end of the word will affect the meaning of the sentence. Verbal and nominal sentence have a great deals with the inflection. Some scholars in rhetoric (ʿilm al-balāghah) affirm that inflection in Arabic is not merely for the meaning purpose; moreover it can make the construction of sentence and texts more beautiful in term of pronunciation and rhythm. There are four signs of inflection in Arabic language named as *rafʿ* (nominative), *jar* (genitive), *naṣb* (accusative) and *jazm* (jussative). All these signs in detail will derive into several patterns in according to grammarian's description.

## Attribute of Manṣūbāt

The term manṣūbāt is used by grammarian to classify the word constitution in the sentence that will be inflected as accusative. To specify, only verb and noun are categorized into this sign. Basically, the sign of inflection derived from fathah. In this study, seven manṣūbāt were selected for its significant in meaning and function in the sentence, namely mafaʿil (five items), ḥāl and tamyīz. These examples were demonstrated as follow:

Mafaʿil:

- i. Mafaʿul mutlaq: ضربه ضربة

The word ضربه appears in accusative functioning to describe action of ضربه (I hit him). According to grammarian, mafaʿul mutlaq is derived from root word. In this regard, the meaning of ضربة may deeply explain the level of hitting in performance.

- ii. Mafaʿul bih: أكلت الأرز

The word الأرز is accusative and used to answer the question of the transitive verb أكل. In English, this is called an "object" and in Malay it is known as "objek penyambut." This style is not complicated to be understood since it has similarity to English or Malay.

## iii. Maḥ'ul li ajlih:

جئت اكر اماً لك

This style of syntax has a special function, namely “to explain” the reason of action. The sentence above intends to give more detail why the action “come” on purpose. In this style “reason” of action is given to clarify and justify the action done.

## iv. Maḥ'ul fih:

راجعت الدرس يوم الخميس

To mention “time” in the sentence, this style is used. However, reader or listener will soon understand the word as it lexically understood by it single. Some lexical items such as يوم – صباح – ظهر – ليل etc. just to name some.

## v. Maḥ'ul ma'ah:

وصلت الدريار وطلوع الفجر

The use of “و” in this structure is to mention “togetherness” between the action and the intended time of that action. However the function of “و” is in the most case used to indicate connectivity.

## 1. Hāl:

حضر محمد إلى الفصل ماثياً

The use of hāl is to answer the question using “how” (Maghālasah 1995). As the sentence above demonstrates “ماثياً” is intentionally to give the answer to the listener/reader when the information of “Mohammad came to the class” but “how” he comes? (does he drive?/does he come alone? or etc.). Therefore when hāl is used, extra information can be attached.

## 2. Tamyiz:

اشترت ثلاثة كتباً

The function of *tamyiz* is as general noun that describes a vague word, or detailing the general meaning of the sentence (al-Rājiḥī, 1988). The vague word can be numbers such as exemplified above “ثلاثة” following with “كتباً” functioning as *tamyiz* where it was not understood if the sentence does not followed with *tamyiz*. While the function to elaborate general meaning of the phrase can be demonstrated as follow: زاد محمد *علماً* where if we say زاد محمد alone, the listener may not be able to get the point what Mohammad really has in particular. Then the word “علماً” has directly specified what we mean by the phrase زاد محمد.

**Methodology**

To ensure the success of the study with limitation of time and expenses, qualitative approach was designed. By constructing a set of structured question (research protocol) which then used as instrument to collect the data of study. Then several educators who have an experience of teaching Arabic with different academic background from professor to teacher of the school were identified. Firstly they were contacted and asked whether they agree to participate in the interview. Once the decision is made, the date and time were set up. The interview takes about 30 minutes to one hour. The recorded interview result were then transcribed into essay and used as a data of study.

**Findings and Discussion**

This section discuss on findings of interviews with eight respondents from different institutions. The most related points will be highlighted regarding to these sub-sections as follows:

**Students Knowledge of Syntax**

Generally speaking, student's knowledge of syntax especially “manṣūbāt” can be categorized into three, weak, moderate and good (Mohammad Najib R7). And the highest number of students is categorized as moderate, and this view supported by Tg. Ghani (R5). Meanwhile other respondents believe that students know the manṣūbāt concept, however they do not really good to differentiate and use in their practice (Ab. Halim, R3), they do understand the meaning but do not sure the actual function of syntax (Mohammad Fauzi R4). According to Zakaria (R8), many students in Islamic school which around 60% to 70% can identify “manṣūbāt” but find difficulties to understand the use of it. The main category that students

obviously cannot adopt is “tamyiz” as mentioned by Tg. Ghani (R5) and Zakaria (R8). The reason is the ability to choose a proper lexical to be “tamyiz” in term of number, gender etc. Nordin (R1), however believed that students are not in need to learn syntax which has huge gap from their mother tongue. They should only be exposed to the syntax elements that have close familiarity to their own language such as *maḥ'ul bih*.

**Reason of Difficulty**

All respondents agree that “manṣūbāt” becomes difficult because of the concept is absent in Malay language. To avoid students' perception of this difficulty, Nordin (R1) suggests that any aspect of syntax that has similarity to student's language must be given a priority. Some students are not sure when to use this form of “manṣūbāt”, and they must at beginning to learn a basic sentence before they start to use “manṣūbāt” (Zaki, R2). Zakaria (R8) support the notion as he mentioned “manṣūbāt” concept can be acquired even its concepts are absent in Malay language. While Ab Halim (R3) asserted that knowing Arabic morphology is the critical where lexical derivation takes place. He stressed on students were misunderstanding of the exact meaning from each derivation of root word. This will lead to difficulties in determining the meaning and function of “manṣūbāt”. This stand also supported by T. Ghani (R5) who mentioned that student's problems back to their vocabulary insufficient. In the other hand some “manṣūbāt” concept is not frequently used in learning context, therefore it is no wonder why students cannot understand the concept of “hāl” and “tamyiz” for example (Muhammad Fauzi, R4). Mohammad Najib (R7), however explained that “manṣūbāt” concept is not really difficult if students were given an enough exposure and students in the most times are confused to differentiate among “manṣūbāt” concept even they can understand the context. This situation needs some time and effort to improve with helps of teachers (Alwi R6).

**Possibility to Translate into Malay Language**

In term of translation, most of respondents believe that manṣūbāt can be rendered into Malay even the difficulties are remained. The complexity of manṣūbāt concept may need additional explanation when translating a related sentence (Ab Halim, R3; Muhammad Fauzi, R4; Tg. Ghani, R5). More ever the actual meaning of source text could be missing in translation process (Nordin, R1; Zaki, R2; Alwi, R6). Therefore it is vital to learn carefully Arabic syntax before embarking on translation of Arabic text and etc.

**Suggestion to Learn Syntax**

The respondents look into syntax from different perspective, but in the end they strongly agree that syntax is purely important to understand Arabic. However different approaches must be applied accordingly to different group of students. One of the respondents (Nordin, R1) suggests it should be better to teach syntax that has a similarity to the students tongue. In the other hand, gaining an enough vocabulary (Muhammad Fauzi, R4; Tg. Ghani, R5; Mohammad Najib, R7) will help student to learn syntax. By that way, students can easily understand the concept and function of the subject.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, understanding of syntax in Arabic classes is really important. Teaching of syntax to non-speaker of Arabic needs a great attention especially when the concept is rare to the target students. It also crucial to provide the content of Arabic course depending on the level of the learners and their objectives of learning. Moreover, increasing student's

vocabulary will enhance their language skills and accommodate their acquiring of syntax.

For translation purpose, *manṣūbāt* as part of syntax is possible to translate into Malay. Therefore it is worth giving a special treatment to *manṣūbāt* in text translation especially if there is not word to word equivalence. It is possible to make some modification in the Malay's sentence structure as long as it may bear the exact meaning from Arabic text.

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