

## The Miracle of Arabic Language: From Pre-Islamic To Islamization

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### Abstrak

Bahasa berkontribusi besar bagi peradaban manusia. Di antara bahasa utama dunia yang digunakan umat manusia adalah bahasa Arab. Bahasa Arab mempengaruhi banyak aspek kehidupan, seperti musik, puisi bahkan peradaban Romawi di berbagai aspek. Bahasa Arab jahiliyah hanya berfungsi sebagai bahasa kesusasteraan. Akan tetapi, tatkala Islam hadir, bahasa Arab mengalami kemajuan yang sangat signifikan, menjadi bahasa ilmu pengetahuan. Inilah yang dimaksud dengan adanya proses islamisasi. Riset ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh Islam terhadap bahasa Arab. Oleh sebab itu, melalui artikel ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa walaupun terdapat beberapa lafaz dalam bahasa Arab jahiliyah sama dengan yang digunakan ketika Islam hadir, namun hakikatnya memiliki makna dan penekanan yang berbeda. Islam datang memberikan pencerahan dan pengaruh terhadap bahasa Arab, seperti mempengaruhi bahasa-bahasa bangsa, mempermudah pengucapan istilah-istilah bahasa Arab yang sebelumnya rumit atau bahkan mendatangkan kosa kata yang baru yang tidak dikenal di masa jahiliyah.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Arab Jahiliyyah; Islamisasi

### Abstract

Language contributes greatly to human civilization. Among the world's major languages spoken by mankind is Arabic. Arabic influences many aspects of life, such as Roman civilization in many fields, even music and poetry. Jahiliyyah Arabic only serves as a literary language. But when Islam came, Arabic underwent a very significant development, becoming the language of science. This is what is meant by the process of Islamization. This study aims to explain the influence of Islam on Arabic. Therefore, through this paper it can be concluded that even though there are several Arabic terms that are the same as those used during the Jahiliyyah and the advent of Islam, basically they have different meanings and emphasis. Islam came to have an influence in facilitating the pronunciation of Arabic terms which were previously complicated or even providing new Arabic vocabulary that was not known during the Jahiliyya period.

**Keywords:** Pre-Islamic Arabic; Islamization.

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a form of totality between sub-systems that function to identify, analyze and communicate between human beings. As part of culture, language will always accompany human life, whenever and wherever they are. Thus, language is a symbol convention in social activity and has a large role in the history of civilization and human thought. One of the major languages in the world that is widely used by mankind is Arabic. A tradition that developed until Islam came, every season of pilgrimage for the Arab tribes who went to Mecca, apart from worshipping and trading, each tribe brought their poets to participate in a competition for literary works of art which was witnessed by many people. Also present in their midst were the critics who determined the fate of the poets to obtain high marks. The victorious poets became the pride of their tribe. The poems were written in gold ink and then hung on the Kaaba mosquito nets so that they are known as *al-mu'llaqāt al-sab'* (which are hung and there are seven of them).<sup>1</sup> Through these poems, the poets perpetuate various treasures, such as moral values, behavior, and descriptions of the social environment of Arab society. Therefore, before Islam came, Arabic had a role through the triumphant literary works at that time.

The arrival of Islam gave a new nuance in the development of the Arabic language. Islam came along with the revelation of the Qur'an. The Qur'an exerted a strong influence on the development of the Arabic language and its beauty shattered the literary excellence that the Arabs had once known. such as making it easier to pronounce Arabic terms, providing new meanings and language styles that were not owned by the previous Arabic language. Every verse of the Qur'an fulfills all the norms of literary beauty that they know and even surpasses them. Therefore, the Qur'an was able to influence the Arabic language of Pre-islamic when it was presented.<sup>2</sup> That is why the Arabs regard the Qur'an as a miracle so that they

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<sup>1</sup> Awaliyah Musgamy, *Pengaruh al-Qur'an dan Hadits Terhadap Bahasa Arab*, Journal of Al Hikmah, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2014, 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> Ida Latifatul Umroh, *Keindahan Bahasa Al-Qur'an dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Bahasa dan Sastra Arab Jahily*, 51.

acknowledge the origins of its birth and submit to its orders. And at that time the Arabic language of Pre-Islamic was *Islamized*.

### The Position of Pre-Islamic Arabic

During its development, when Mecca became the center of activity and the gathering place for the Kabilahs, that's where they began to feel a need to be able to understand each other, including the dialect and language they used. So, al-Aswaq was held which became a center for trade as well as culture, then in it various competitions and discussions were held about literary works, both poetry and speeches.<sup>3</sup> In the competition called al-Aswaq, each participant is required to keep trying to captivate the audience with the aim that the language they use can be understood and understood by all those present at the event. In every competition, it was the Quraysh dialect that always dominated and was considered better than other dialects.

Poetry or poems won in a competition there, for example, will be exhibited in public by hanging them on the walls of the Kaaba. These poems later became known as “*mu'allaqāt*”.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, under the leadership of the Quraysh tribe,

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<sup>3</sup> Mudjia Raharjo dan Kholil R, *Sosiolinguistik Qur'ani* (Malang: UIN Malang Press, 2008), 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Mu'allaqāt* is a nickname for a collection of poems that were popular in the Jahiliyya era. The word *mu'allaqāt* reaps many different views, both in terms of its name and number. In terms of naming, there are those who call it *mu'allaqāt*, *al-qaṣā'id al-sab'* (seven verses), *al-sab' al-ṭiwāl* (seven long poems), *al-mudhahhabāt* (golden), and *al-sumūt* (necklace). In terms of numbers, there are those who argue that there are seven poems or kasidah as said by al-Zauzanī, Ibn Rasyīq and Ibn Khaldūn. An-Naḥḥās is of the view, he numbered nine, while al-Tibrīzī said ten, see Abī 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusain ibn Aḥmad al-Zauzanī (d. 486 H), *Syarḥ al-Mu'allaqāt al-Sab'* (Beirut : Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2004), 9. It is called *al-qaṣā'id al-sab'* because these verses hang on the Ka'bah as many as seven pieces, all of which are the result of the works of seven poets (Umrū' al-Qays, Zahīr, 'Antarah, Labīd, Ṭarfah, 'Amru bin Kalthūm, Ḥārith ibn Ḥalzah). With regard to the biographies of the seven poets and besides them, *al-Syi'r wa al-Syu'arā'* by Ibn Qutaibah al-Dainūrī (d. 276 H/889 AD). *Mu'allaqāt* is also called the seven long verses (*al-sab' al-ṭiwāl*), due to the long arrangement of the verses, which, according to historians' records, number over one hundred verses. Besides that, there are also those who call *mu'allaqāt* with *al-mudhahhabāt* , namely gold, because good poetry is written in gold ink first before it is hung on the wall of the Ka'ba as an appreciation for the poet. There are also those who call it *al-sumūt* (necklace), because the shape of the poem that is hung on the Kaaba seems to resemble a necklace hanging on a woman's neck. From this it can be understood that what is hung is something special and something of value. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration if we assume something valuable is likened to a man hanging a necklace around a woman's neck, let see 'Alī al-Jundiyy, *Fī Tārīkh al-Adab al-Jāhiliyy*, (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1991).

Arabic was made the main language and had a noble position in the midst of people's lives.

Arabic is one of the main languages of the Semitic language group and is the oldest historical language. Therefore this language has several cognate languages. Other Semitic languages, such as Syriac, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Arabic, Mahri-Scottish and Ethiopic, generally share the following characteristics:

1. The three root consonants are related;
2. Having similarities in the formation of nominal and verbal root words;
3. Having great similarity in the forms of pronouns and their use in verbal inflections;
4. Has two main periods;
5. Have conformity in the composition and guidance of important verses.

From the above characteristics of the Semitic languages, the entire description of the Semitic languages that has been preserved correctly is all in Arabic.<sup>5</sup> Arabic is the most widely spread language, even today.

Pre-Islamic Arabic has indeed reached the highest level among the languages of the human race and in the history of various languages among the Arab peoples. This language has undergone renewal and reached an essential perfection that is not experienced by other languages. Todorof, who is a linguistic theorist from France, as quoted by Wan Mohd Nor, stated that language is closely related to society. It is not impossible if it is society that determines the language. Semantic change is closely related to historical and social developments as well as to the relative and subjective interpretation of linguistic symbols. Semantic changes indicate socio-cultural changes. In general, the language is very open to semantic changes that are influenced by historical and social changes. Such language does not guarantee the accuracy of its meaning, especially in the sense that reflects absolute and objective truth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wand Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 337.

<sup>6</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice.....*, 335.

The language that is affected by historical and socio-cultural changes basically does not occur in Arabic. The characteristics of the Arabic language are not the same as other languages in its semantic structure. This is caused by several factors:

The language that is affected by historical and socio-cultural changes basically does not occur in Arabic. The characteristics of the Arabic language are not the same as other languages in its semantic structure. This is caused by several factors:

1. The linguistic structure of the Arabic language is built on a strong root system. Therefore, in this case al-Attas stated, the root content of words contained in Arabic is like a solid tree, its roots stabbing into the ground. Every root that is embedded in the soil is related to one another so that it affects stems, branches, branches, twigs, leaves and others. Likewise, every understanding contained in the root of the word is interconnected so that it can influence even bigger meanings and understandings. The root word cannot be changed and can be replaced by another.<sup>7</sup>
2. The semantic structure is governed by a clear system of semantic fields, which has a major influence on the conceptual structure inherent in the vocabulary;
3. The words, meanings, grammar and poetry knowledge are recorded scientifically and are well-established so that they can maintain the semantic permanence.<sup>8</sup>

With the height of language among the languages of the human nation and in the history of various languages among the Arab nation, this is what makes Arab society very proud of its literature. Therefore, the authority of the poets at that time was equal to that of philosophers. The content of the poetry they created is considered equivalent to theology (divinity), so they are also believed to have authority in the religious field. The poems made by poets are considered as

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<sup>7</sup> S.M.N. Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 105.

<sup>8</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice.....*, 337.

inspiration, like God's revelation. That's why they are cult and considered to be able to know things that are unseen.<sup>9</sup>

### **Islam Came Along with the Descendment of the Qur'an**

It was in the midst of a society that cults poets that the Qur'an was revealed. The Qur'an was revealed using perfect Arabic (*fuṣḥā*), with beautiful rhetoric and depth of meaning, and contains high linguistic variations.<sup>10</sup> That is why Arabic is used as the medium for the language of the Revelation of the Qur'an. The beauty of the language of the Qur'an is highly admired, not only for believers, but also for unbelievers. Various narrations state that leaders of the polytheists often secretly try to listen to the verses of the Koran read by Muslims. Therefore, besides admiring the beauty of the language of the Qur'an, Muslims also admire its content, and believe that the verses of the Qur'an are a guide to the happiness of the world and the hereafter.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the gradual revelation of the Qur'an was none other than to make it easier for the Prophet and Muslims to memorize and digest its meaning. The Qur'an was revealed to have dialogue with them, to comment on the circumstances and events they experienced, and even to answer their questions.

And as Islam came and the Koran was revealed, Arabic became a new entity. Although the editorial and narrative patterns are the same, the meaning contained in pre-Islamic Arabic is different from that of the Qur'an, the revealed Arabic language. The Arabic language of the Qur'an is able to occupy a very noble position in human speech and thought. Because the Qur'an is the last holy book that was revealed to mankind, the understandings contained in its basic terminology have attained an established truth value, which is no longer subject to change, even in the midst of changing times.

When Islam has spread to all human nations, then the first effect reflected from Islam is on the language of those nations. Language is a reflection of the Islamization of a nation. From the cultural side, Islamization of language is highly prioritized by Islam, because Islamization of language has implications for

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah* ....., 112.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an Surah. *Yūṣuf*: 2; Qur'an Surah *Al-Syu'arā'*: 192-195.

<sup>11</sup> M. Qurasih Shihab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 23.

Islamization of thought. And the thought of Islam is reflected in the basic terms of Islam through the Arabic language.<sup>12</sup> From this it is clear that we know that the Islamization of language is a key element in the understanding of Islam and Islamic culture and civilization as a whole.

But sometimes, language also causes problems in human thinking. If the basic terms of the language, the language of Muslims in particular, are confused and their meaning is disguised, then that meaning follows foreign sources and imposes their understandings, then it will have an impact on Islamizing a person's thinking and *understanding*. The basic terminology of his language became confused and made Muslims deny his conversion to Islam. The changes in understanding contained in the basic terms of a nation and its civilization, will affect the way of thinking, affect the mind and heart of people.<sup>13</sup> So it is not impossible if the Arabic language has been corrupted and influenced by foreign concepts that are contrary to Islam. So Muslims who are aware and concerned about this, try to repair the damage and restore its original purity, with the aim of maintaining the integrity of the Qur'an and the Prophet's Hadith.

As it is known that Rasulullah SAW as the recipient of Al-Quran revelation is an *ummi*, in the sense that he was not educated in formal or informal schools (*unschooled man*). The Prophet also could not write (*unlettered*), nor was he involved in the poetic community of poets, which was very popular at that time.<sup>14</sup> The background of the Prophet (PBUH) is awe-inspiring, how could an ordinary human being like Muhammad be able to come up with such a beautiful language? This proves that the style of the language of the Qur'an is very different from *the style of* the Arabic language in general. And this is what perhaps led Tufal to conclude that when the verses of the Qur'an were read to them, based on the 'literary' experiences of the ignorant Arabs at that time, they realized that the language style of the Qur'an was very perfect. The language of the Qur'an surpasses the beauty of

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah*....., 110.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah*....., 100.

<sup>14</sup> Asif Tufal, *The Miraculous Nature of The Qur'an*, (London: 1993), 15.

any man-made literature. The style of language he carries is not or has never been found in their works.<sup>15</sup>

If the language of the Qur'an is similar to Arabic in general, why did the Arabs revolt? We can see this at a glance from what happened to Saidina Umar ibn Khattab, when he read the letter *Ṭāha*. That is at least the origin of Saidina Umar's declaration of Islam.<sup>16</sup>

The revelation of the Qur'an in Arabic initiated the birth of a revolution in the function of language learning. After the revelation of the Qur'an, the urge to learn Arabic has increased, precisely because of religious factors, and not other factors such as economics or politics. It can even be said that the development of the Arabic language is directly proportional to the spread of Islam. On this basis, Al-Attas believes that Arabic has been liberated through the process of Islamization:

*Islamization is the liberation of man first from magical, mthological, animistic, national-cultural tradition opposed to Islam, and then from secular control over his reason and his language. The man of Islam is he whose reason and language are no longer controlled by magic, mythology, animism, his own national dan cultural traditions opposed to Islam, and secularism.*<sup>17</sup>

In fact, he continued, some Western Orientalist linguists also believe the same, namely that at the time the Qur'an was revealed in Arab lands, at that time the Arabic language (jahiliyyah) finally underwent a very drastic process of change.<sup>18</sup> So the Islamization of language was carried out when the Qur'an was first revealed. Al-Qur'an is able to maintain the authenticity of Arabic as the only surviving language from several ancient language families. It is the Qur'an that has preserved the Arabic language from changes so that it has survived to this day. Every meaning of the Arabic expression can be referred to in the semantic treasury of the Qur'an, and is not determined by social changes and cultural results.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Asif Tufal, *The Miraculous of.....*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Abū Nu'aim al-Aṣfahānī work, *Hilyat al-Auliya' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> S.M.N. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 44.

<sup>18</sup> S.M.N. Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999), 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 46; We can observe an example of the root system from the basic nature of the Arabic language which makes a big difference in understanding a case. Like the word قراءة which means 'reading', it basically comes from three root words namely ق - ر - أ. Every word derived from this root word must have a meaning related to قراءة, such as قارئ which means



### Arabic Language: From Pre-islamic to Islamization

Here you can see the difference between Arabic during the Pre-islamic era and after Islam came:

1. Protecting Arabic from extinction and guaranteeing the immortality of Arabic. The history of the world's languages bears witness that some languages have been able to survive and develop and some have become extinct. There are languages that still exist but have undergone changes that make it difficult for speakers of the same language to understand them on their own because of the time difference. For example, languages that once existed but no longer exist include the hieroglyphic languages spoken by the ancient Egyptians, the Sumerian language spoken in what is now Iraq, the Phonician language spoken by the ancient Lebanese and the Gallic language spoken in area that is now France.<sup>20</sup>
2. From the Qur'an, religious sciences developed, such as the science of interpretation, hadith, theology, fiqh, ushul fiqh, and others. Likewise, the science of language develops into the science of nahwu and sharf.<sup>21</sup>
3. The spread of Arabic throughout the world. Wherever Islam is found, Arabic will also be found. Thanks to the revelation of the Qur'an, the Arabic language has become more robust, its development has expanded, and its semantic permanence has been preserved.<sup>22</sup>
4. Faiz al-Math stated that the Qur'an had an influence on Arabic, trained their language and made it one language even though they lived far apart. By studying the structure of sentences in the Qur'an, in terms of their knowledge

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'one who reads', مقراً means 'place to read', اقرأ means 'read in command form'. If the root is reversed, it can also give other meanings, such as أ - ر - ق means 'difficulty sleeping, see Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, undated), J. 1 , 64. Difficulty sleeping may be caused by several factors (*illat*), among which are not reading, anxiety, confusion and others. And أ - ق - ر among them means 'pleasurable, acknowledge, know, realize, settle down and settle down', see Muhammad Abi Bakr al-Razi, *Mukhtar al-Sihah*, Mahmud Khatir (ed.) (Beirut: Maktabah Libnan, 1995), 560. All of these root systems have one unit so as to produce different meanings, but still cannot be separated from the basic root system. And there are many more similar examples that have the same connection as exemplified.

<sup>20</sup> Nurul Hadi, *Kontribusi Al-Qur'an Terhadap Perkembangan Bahasa Arab*, Jurnal El-Furqonia, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, 125.

<sup>21</sup> Ida Latifatul Umroh, *Keindahan Bahasa Al-Qur'an*, 61.

<sup>22</sup> Ali Abd al-Wahid Wafi, *Fiqh Lughah*, (Cairo: Lajnah Bayan al-Arabi, 1962), print. 5, 114.

of balaghah and bayan, the quality is higher and people like them even more, even enemies.<sup>23</sup>

5. Since the Qur'an was revealed, the Arabic's vocabulary has increased. The term hypocrite (*munafiq*), for example. In pre-Islamic times, the expression was not known at all. But after the coming of Islam, the word hypocrite brought a definition and became a keyword (*keyword*) of its own. So the term *munafiq* refers to a person who professes Islam, but his heart denies Allah SWT.<sup>24</sup>
6. The subcontinent in India, Pakistan among them, the Muslims do not use Sanskrit which is the language of the scriptures of Hinduism or the Pali language of Buddhism, but they are more likely to introduce the Persian language. They then developed the Urdu language which was mostly based on Persian and Arabic, although the grammar and structure were taken from Hindi.<sup>25</sup>
7. The historical experience of the State of Palestine and Syria is the same. These two countries used to be former Roman colonies, therefore the official language used is Latin. And it should be known that the Palestinian community before the arrival of Islam consisted of various races and nationalities. But after Islam came and its people embraced Islam, now Palestine and Syria are Islamic countries that speak Arabic. If seen from the point of view of the language and the language of the speaker. they have been categorized as Arabs and not foreigners (*'ajam*) anymore. Historical experiences like this did not happen only in Palestine and Syria, but also happened in other countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, Iran,

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<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Faiz Al-Math, *Min Mu'jizat al-Islam (Keistimewaan Islam)*, translated by Masykur Halim, (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995), print. 2, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Mohd Radzi Othman (ed.) et al, *Warisan al-Qur'an: Sosiobudaya*, (Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2009), 110.

<sup>25</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Masyarakat Islam Hadhari: Suatu Tinjauan Epistemologi dan Kependidikan ke Arah Penyatuan Pemikiran Bangsa* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2006), 89.

India, Pakistan and others. The entire Islamic world witnessed the transition and change of language from Pre-islamic Arabic to the Arabic of the Qur'an.<sup>26</sup>

8. The language of the Egyptian community has experienced letter changes many times, starting from the 5000 BC century. use hieroglyphs. They But after the 394th century AD, this writing was no longer used. In the period between the century 5000 BC to 394 AD the fate of Egyptian society changed. Although Egypt was once colonized by Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome, but after Islam spread in Egypt in 641 AD and within 6 centuries through the rule of the Mamluk and the Ottoman Dynasty and so on until now, the spoken and written language of Egyptian society is entirely Arabic. The Egyptian language, which was used before Islam, is now only used for religious affairs for Egyptian Christians. Now Egypt is known as an Arabic-speaking Muslim country, because its people have embraced language, religion and culture in an Islamic way.<sup>27</sup>

9. In Iran before Islam came, the language used Pahlavi. This language already exists and is the medium of the Zoroastrian Religion. But when Islam spread there and Arab Muslims entered Persia around 900 AD, they replaced the outdated Pahlavi script with Arabic script. Therefore Iran has been influenced by the religion and way of life of the Arabs. And sooner or later the influence of Arabic literature and conversation on the Persian language was very strong, especially in the written language so that there was not a single Arabic word that could not be woven into the Persian language well.<sup>28</sup> Now the Persian language is categorized as the modern language of the Persian community and this language remains until now.

## Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that language is an important element in the spread of Islam. Before Islam came or the revelation of

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<sup>26</sup> M. Zainiy Uthman, *Unsur-Unsur Utama Pemupukan Bangsa, Kebangsaan dan Patriotisme*, in *Bunga Rampai: Bangsa, Kebangsaan dan Patriotisme*, edited by M. Zainiy Uthman, (Kuala Lumpur: Casis-UTM, 2015), 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> M. Zainiy, *Unsur-Unsur Utama Pemupukan Bangsa.....*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Masyarakat Islam Hadhari.....*, 89.

the Qur'an, Arabic, which was previously limited to a literary language, has now undergone a very drastic change, namely it has become the language of science, scientific, intellect and rational. And along with the Islamization of the Arabic language, the conversion of the minds of its readers and the minds of the nation also took place. And it is not impossible if the Islamic language absorbs foreign elements, understandings, and terms. However, these foreign terms will not influence or confuse thinking, as long as Muslims live their Islam. Precisely these foreign understandings are harmonized with the spirit of Islamic teachings without changing the meaning of the basic terminology.

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