

The Importance of Arabic Language in Malaysian Tourism Industry:

Trends during 1999-2004

L'IMPORTANCE DE LA LANGUE ARABE DANS L'INDUSTRIE DU TOURISME EN MALAISIE:

TENDANCES DE 1999 A 2004

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Abstract: The tourism industry in Malaysia has faced a new trend of Arab tourists' influx since year 2000. The Arabs spend the highest amount of expenses of RM 5,000.00 per trip. This has given a big benefit for the country's income. Unfortunately, Malaysia lacks psychological faculties, which is related to the language barriers to cater to Arab needs. The Deputy Tourism Minister has launched a programme to provide Arabic speaking students to serve in five star hotels in the city. This phenomenon clearly indicates a low concern of the tourism industry in providing skilful trainees in the tourism industry in Arabic language and at present there are no Arabic Language courses in tourism programmes to emphasize on the language skills at university level. This paper will try to share the importance of Arabic language skills in tourism industry and tourism program in HLI (Higher Learning Institution). In conclusion, it is hoped that the paper will give some insight to promote courses in Arabic Language Skills for government servants especially the police, customs and others in order to increase their levels of efficiency concerning the language.

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Résumé: L'industrie du tourisme en Malaisie a vu des afflux de touristes arabes depuis l'année 2000. Parmi les touristes étrangers, les Arabes dépensent le plus par voyage, soit un montant de 5,000.00 RM. Cela a donné un grand profit aux revenus du pays. Malheureusement, la Malaisie n'a pas de facultés psychologiques, ce qui est liée à la barrière de la langue pour répondre aux besoins des Arabes. Le vice-ministre du Tourisme, a lancé un programme visant à fournir aux élèves qui parlent l'arabe une opportunité de travailler dans les hôtels à cinq étoiles dans la ville. Ce phénomène indique clairement une faible préoccupation de l'industrie du tourisme dans l'offre des stagiaires compétents en langue arabe, et à l'heure actuelle, il n'y pas de cours de langue arabe dans le programme de formation du tourisme, donc il faut mettre l'accent sur les compétences linguistiques pour atteindre le niveau universitaire. Ce document va essayer d'étudier l'importance des compétences en langue arabe dans l'industrie du tourisme et dans le programme HLI (Higher Learning Institution). En conclusion, il est à espérer que le document donnera une idée de promouvoir des cours de langue arabe pour les fonctionnaires, en particulier la police, les douaniers et d'autres personnels afin d'accroître leur efficacité liée à cette langue.

Mots-Clés: tourisme; Arabe; langue arabe; touristes

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry plays a vital role in the Malaysian economic development. The rapid growth in the tourism activity has assisted the country in obtaining financial income as well as other economic benefits such as industrial activities, agriculture, petroleum and education. The government has established a specific ministry to monitor and develop the industry in Malaysia today and for the future. In recent years, the Asian region, especially Malaysia has become a tourist's attraction from the Middle East or Arabic countries. The influx to this region is now inevitably common. However, their presence is seen as 'a changing of the wind' following the September 11th 2001 tragedy.

2. ARAB TOURIST

Before the explosive terrorist attack to the United States in the morning of 11th September 2001, it was very rare to see Arabic tourists in the centre of Kuala Lumpur. If there are, they are students of higher learning institutions or transiting for business purposes. Obviously, the overwhelming arrival of Arab tourists to Malaysia happened rapidly in the beginning of 2001 and 2004. However, in year 2003, the number of Arab tourists was seen decreasing. This is shown by the Table 1 below.

Table 1. The trend of Arab tourist coming into Malaysia

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Arab Touristss	21,731	53,370	114,776	131,779	80,216

Whereas in 2004, statistics show that there were about 29,865 Arab tourists between January to May (Malaysia Immigrant Department). By the end of 2004, the number of the tourists has increased to 156,000. (Berita Minggu, 12th June 2005) . Based on this positive progress, the Malaysian Tourism

ministry has aimed this year projection of Arab tourists coming to Malaysia to be about 200,000. From the statistics shown, it lucidly shows that Malaysia nowadays receive a substantial number of Arab tourists. Usually the Arabs will travel every summer time in their country. It is expected around 50 percent of Arabs going for vacation.

According to an interview with Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Deputy Minister for Tourism in Berita Minggu (14 June 2005), the Arabs want an exclusive entertainment. They want MPV cars, and hotel need to be equipped with interconnected rooms for their family convenience, because they are usually travelling with family. Apart from that, he explained that various efforts had been done to attract Arab tourists. Among them are altering and suiting the hotel facilities such as Arab menu, meal schedule to commemorate them. With these efforts, the Arab tourists would be attracted to come and visit Malaysia in the future.

In addition, the Arab tourists would also visit shopping centre as a destination. Therefore, cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bharu, Penang, are among their attractions. The purchasing power of the Arabs are enormous compared to the foreign counterpart which is RM 5000 for each trip. Usually, the Arabs who visit Malaysia are those with income of almost RM 100,000.00 per month.

The time spent in Malaysia is around 3 months, which is the duration of school vacation in Arabs country. With the limited time, the effort to offer them the best service is needed. Therefore, what is reported about Tourism Ministry's preparation and effort to celebrate the Arabs tourists are considered noble. What is interesting is the report on Berita Harian dated 14 May 2005, which said over 700 local students from IIUM and UPM who are fluent in Arabic language will work part time in 18 five star hotels around KL for 3 months. Clearly, the Arabic language had been seen as important in communicating with Arab tourists.

3. ARABIC LANGUAGE

In Malaysia, the Arabic Language is not something foreign for the Malays. If we look from the school level education perspective, there are two education stream that is the national and religion stream. Since the early history of business in the country, that is during the Malacca Sultanate, the Arabic language had been the important language to the Muslims in religious activities and Islamic education. The Religious school, on the other hand serves as a place where the Islamic *Tawhid*, *Fiqh*, *Syaria'h*, *Ulum Al-Qur'an*, *hadith* been taught.

The religious school leavers are also having the equal opportunity to be the imam or bilal or the Islamic scholar. (Kamal Hasan et.al 1976, p.13) suit with compartment with having certificate in Islamic studies. If they are fortunate, or likes to go further, they will go to the Middle East to further studies at higher level.

As the approach, the Arabic language has been taught in religious stream school using the traditional approach- Audio-Lingual, Translation grammar and Situation. This arises because the objective of learning Arabic language is to learn and understand Holy Quran and the Islamic knowledge which is in Arabic language. However, the approach did not give the opportunity for the students to learn Arabic and communicating the language according to the situation and circumstances. (Husni Sarif 1999 in Zawawi et.al 2004, p.3).

Proudly, nowadays the Arabic language had been rich with new approach; communication. This approach bears an important objective, that is the students can learn to communicate in Arabic language. Thus, the Arabic language had been a subject that is not only taught merely in religious stream schools. It also had been thought in national stream schools. Not only in school, had the Arabic language also been a foreign language elective subject in modern language faculty in higher learning institution. However, the syllabus in Arabic communication is common. Thus, this paperwork is to look the importance of Arabic language in tourism industry, where the language stand, and what type of language is needed in

the industry.

4. ARABIC LANGUAGE AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

According to previous information, the Arabic language had played a vital role in the tourism industry. However, there are lots of poor seen in the language usage, especially writings.

For example, Abu Lehyah in his writing, "Translation to Arabic Language should be prompt", following the Arabic version, Brief On Malaysia which been published by the Malaysian Department of Information. The book contains many grammar mistakes and the bad language structure. (Lim & Har 2005, p. 47) The book which was published especially for the OIC delegation obviously can deter the Malaysia image amongst the member country.

Futhermore, Naimah and Norhayuza (2005, p. 367) said, the problems in Arabic language can affect many things. Among all are;

- 1) The country goodwill
- 2) The Tourists
- 3) The tourists attractions
- 4) Hotels and accommodation
- 5) The local Arabic language experts image

In addition, they also stated that the problems also occurred in translation of written materials such as brochures and sign board.

This is because most of the local Arabic experts and scholars focus on only educational and religious field. If there only a few involves in tourism sectors. This is proved by the existence of Arabic language programme at Bachelor degree level up to doctorate degree in IIUM, UPM, UM, UKM, KUIM (Mohd Alif Redzuan et.al, 2004, p.2).

5. NEED OF ARABIC LANGUAGE IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

The Arabic experts have divided the aims of Arabic learning into a few objectives and it is proved that the *Special Arabic* is learned for tourism purpose (Abdul Rahim, 1994) . For these reasons, there is a need for a proper syllabus that can be classified as Special Arabic.

As mentioned before, the Arabic language communication that is been taught nowadays has the common objective. If the tourism industry practice and Institution of higher learning that undergone course on tourism need Arabic language skill, there is a need for a special module. The purpose is that student or the individual can master the related aspect only. This will save their time.

Currently, there are a lot of Malaysian Arabic experts. They can contribute their expertise if given opportunity and a good return. Parties involved in tourism industry also need to take initiative to introduce Arabic language, and make it an important subject to students and employees.

This tremendous effort from both parties will lead to success. These create an opportunity especially to the indigenous especially the Malays who are very close to Arabic language. In one of his writings, Johan Jaafar (BM,21 JUNE, 2005) stated " The tourists from Singapore, China, and Taipei have been dominated by others. What about 39,000 visitors from Saudi Arabia, 25,000 from United Arab Emirates, 11,000 from Kuwait and 9000 from Qatar, when writing about the opportunities lies for F class contractor. Among others, he was suggesting the F class contractor to change their paradigm into tourism sector rather than focusing on construction sector.

Certainly, the important criteria to involve with the Arab tourists are the ability to speak their own language. The Arabic usage will provide a comfortable environment to the Arabs. The Arabic language

skills are not only needed by individual or tourism involving organisation. Police and Custom also plays an important role in assisting the Arabs tourists when dealing with their problems entering Malaysia or during their stays. They represent the government and thus have an enormous responsibility to guard the nation's images.

This matter had been highlighted. In Bernama report 9 Arabic edition in Internet, (13 July 2005) Kuala Lumpur Police Chief Officer, Abdullah had said the English language course had already been given to the police officers. However, looking at the increasing number of Middle East tourists, his department would consider giving Arabic course apart from other foreign language.

6. CONCLUSION

The Arabic language from the tourism perspective is relatively important. It needs a tremendous effort from all parties, who for along the time regard Arabic language merely as religious and academic. However, it is now proved that Arabic language is becoming commercial. If the parties involved in the tourism industry are not particularly serious about the importance of Arabic language, it is undeniable that the tourists would change their future destination.

The Arabic language can also serves as a relationship symbol between Malaysia and Arabs countries. A harmonious relationship, and understanding between each nation will create a continuous relationship. The country will not only benefit in economic sector, but also in diplomatic relationship.

As a conclusion, the usage of Arabic language among parties involved in Malaysian tourism sector should be increased. Cooperation among the Arabic language expertise in public sector, private and higher education institution is highly needed to ensure that issues pertaining to Malaysian image can be dissolved. Truly, as an OIC Chairman, Malaysia has the advantage and it needs a continuous effort for nation tourism success especially to attract more tourists from the Middle East.

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