

Malay Language Interference in the Teaching of Arabic Rhetoric

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Abstract: The teaching of Arabic Balaghah to learners with a Malay language background faces challenges due to the influence of their first language, which affects not only linguistic form but also the process of rhetorical interpretation. Previous research has generally examined interference in aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, or language skills, whilst studies on interference in the interpretation of meaning and rhetorical understanding of Balaghah remain limited. This study aims to analyse the forms, causal factors, and effects of Malay language interference in the learning of Arabic Balaghah. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of Arabic learners with a Malay language background as well as Balaghah teachers. Data analysis utilises the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The results of the study reveal four forms of interference: semantic, rhetorical, conceptual and pedagogical. These are influenced by the dominance of the first language, differences in linguistic typology, limited Arabic language proficiency, and a translational approach to learning. This study contributes to expanding the study of interference as a process of meaning construction and offers a contrastive pedagogical approach based on meaning analysis in the teaching of Balaghah.

Keywords: language interference, Arabic rhetoric, Malay, meaning construction, Arabic language learning.

Introduction

Arabic holds a unique position in the Malay-speaking world, as it is studied not only as a foreign language but also as the language of scholarship, religion and intellectual tradition, which has been intertwined with the development of Malay societies since the process of Islamisation in South-East Asia. In this context, Arabic occupies a distinct space compared to other foreign languages, as its functions extend beyond everyday communication to encompass the formation of knowledge, religious identity, and cultural transmission. (S. B. C. Haron et al., 2025). Historically, the relationship between Malay societies and the Arabic language developed alongside the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara region through networks of trade, missionary work, and education. Arabic subsequently became the primary medium for the study of the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, and various disciplines of Islamic scholarship taught through traditional institutions such as suraus, pesantrens and pondoks. In subsequent developments, this influence gave rise to a Malay-Islamic literary tradition that utilised the Arabic-Malay script (Jawi) as a means of transmitting knowledge and shaping the scholarly identity of Malay society. (S. C. Haron et al., 2010)

In the context of contemporary education, the position of the Arabic language in Malay-speaking regions remains strong despite undergoing a transformation in its functions and teaching methods. Arabic is currently taught at various levels of formal and non-formal education in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, parts of Southern Thailand, and within Muslim communities in Singapore and the Philippines. The learning of Arabic is no longer limited to a religious orientation but is increasingly directed towards academic competence, global communication, and access to Arabic-language scholarly resources. (Rivera et al., 2025)

Nevertheless, the nature of Arabic language learning in the Malay-speaking region exhibits distinctive characteristics, as it takes place in an environment dominated by Malay or languages belonging to the Malay language family. This situation results in intensive interaction between learners' first language and Arabic as the target language. Linguistically, this creates opportunities for language transfer, both positive and negative. Positive transfer can help learners understand loanwords and certain concepts that have long been present in Malay. Conversely, negative transfer can lead to interference in aspects of structure, meaning and linguistic interpretation. (Sulistyaningsih & Syamsiyah, 2025)

Several studies on Malay learners indicate that mastery of Arabic often faces challenges in both productive and interpretative aspects. Learners who have been studying Arabic for a long time do not necessarily possess the ability to use and understand the language in depth, as the learning process is often still oriented towards memorisation, translation and mastery of formal structures. This situation demonstrates that the historical proximity between Malay societies and the Arabic language does not automatically result in optimal linguistic competence without an appropriate pedagogical approach. (Hakim, 2019)

In the study of Balaghah, the role of the Arabic language becomes more complex. Balaghah demands not only an understanding of linguistic structure, but also the ability to grasp the meaning, context, rhetorical purpose, and aesthetic value contained within Arabic texts. Learners with a Malay language background often carry over interpretative patterns from their first language when understanding concepts such as majaz, tasybih, kinayah, and

various forms of *uslub* in Arabic. Differences in the rhetorical systems between Malay and Arabic can lead to a simplification of meaning or a shift in interpretation of the intended linguistic message in Arabic texts. (Abdullah & Omar, 2016)

In addition to linguistic factors, developments in Arabic language education in South-East Asia also indicate a shift in approach from traditional models towards communicative, multicultural and technology-based approaches. The integration of learning technologies and more contextual approaches is beginning to be utilised to enhance learner engagement and broaden access to authentic language resources. This transformation demonstrates that the status of Arabic in the Malay-speaking region continues to evolve from a language of religious transmission towards a language of learning with broader academic and social dimensions.

Consequently, Arabic in the Malay-speaking region can be understood as a language of learning with a multidimensional character: as a religious language, an academic language, and simultaneously a foreign language studied within a multilingual environment. This position means that the learning of Arabic—particularly *Balaghah*—cannot be separated from the influence of learners' linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, research into Malay language interference is essential to understanding how the processes of Arabic acquisition and interpretation take place within the learning context of this region. (Ibrahim & Rouyan, 2025)

Studies on interference in Arabic language learning have so far focused primarily on phonology, morphology, syntax, speaking skills (*mahārah kalām*), writing skills (*mahārah kitābah*), and translation. A number of studies have also examined the influence of the first language on Arabic language acquisition among non-native Arabic learners, including in the context of learning in the Malay-speaking region. However, these studies generally still treat interference as a matter of linguistic error and have not yet extensively examined how interference affects the process of interpreting meaning and rhetorical understanding in the study of *balaghah*. On the other hand, research on *balaghah* tends to focus on curriculum development, teaching methods, or the normative analysis of *balaghah* concepts, meaning that the relationship between learners' linguistic background and the process of understanding *balaghah* remains relatively under-explored.

The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of Malay language interference in the learning of Arabic *balaghah* as an interpretative and rhetorical phenomenon, rather than merely a structural linguistic phenomenon. This study demonstrates that the influence of the first language affects not only the use of linguistic forms, but also the way learners understand the relationship between structure, meaning, context and rhetorical function in Arabic *balaghah*. Consequently, this study broadens the scope of interference research from the realm of language errors to the study of meaning-construction processes in the learning of *balaghah*, whilst offering pedagogical implications based on a contrastive approach and a more appropriate analysis of meaning for learners with a Malay language background.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a descriptive-qualitative research design. The research was conducted at an educational institution offering *Balaghah* courses in Arabic to learners with a Malay language background. The research subjects were Arabic learners whose first language was Malay and who were currently enrolled in *Balaghah* courses, supported by additional informants comprising *Balaghah* teachers. The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interaction with the research subjects in the form of observations, interviews and documentation of the learning process. This data includes learners' utterances, their interpretations of *Balaghah* material, and their responses to the use of Arabic rhetorical concepts. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from supporting documents such as *Balaghah* teaching materials, assignment results, learning evaluation notes, and academic literature relating to language interference and Arabic language learning. (Moleong, 2017)

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. Observation was used to identify forms of interference that arose during the learning process, particularly when learners were understanding and explaining *Balaghah* concepts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore learners' experiences, difficulties and strategies in understanding *Balaghah* material, which were influenced by their first language background. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of learning notes, assessment results, and other relevant academic documents.

Data analysis utilised the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. During the data reduction stage, data were selected and focused on findings relating to the forms and effects of Malay language interference. The data presentation stage involved categorisation and the identification of thematic patterns to enable a systematic understanding of the relationships between findings. The final stage involved interpreting the emerging patterns and conducting verification to arrive at credible conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Four forms of Malay language interference were identified in the study of Arabic Balaghah: semantic interference, rhetorical interference, conceptual interference in understanding the relationship between lafaz and maqam, and pedagogical interference. The factors causing the emergence of interference are, firstly, the dominance of the first language (L1) linguistic system; secondly, differences in linguistic typology between Malay and Arabic; thirdly, limited Arabic language competence and reliance on learning strategies; and fourthly, a learning approach that remains structurally and translation-oriented. The effects of interference on the understanding of Balaghah are, firstly, the reduction of rhetorical meaning to literal meaning; secondly, a weakening of the ability to understand the relationship between structure and semantic effect; thirdly, the formation of conceptual transfer in the process of rhetorical thinking; and fourthly, a decline in the ability to appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of the Arabic language.

The study of interference has become particularly urgent in the study of Balaghah, as Balaghah requires not only a command of Arabic linguistic structure, but also the ability to understand the relationship between meaning, context, communicative intent, and the rhetorical effect of an expression. Unlike the study of Nahwu or Sharaf, which is more oriented towards linguistic accuracy, Balaghah demands a high level of interpretative ability, meaning that the process of meaning-making is highly susceptible to being influenced by the learner's first language system. In the context of second language acquisition, learners tend to draw on their existing conceptual frameworks and linguistic experiences to understand the target language. When this process occurs in the study of Balaghah, interference no longer manifests merely as grammatical errors, but can influence the way learners understand rhetorical value and the functions of meaning in Arabic.

This urgency is all the more apparent given that Balaghah is a discipline founded on the principle of *munāsabah al-ma'nā li al-maqām* (the appropriateness of meaning to context). Consequently, success in learning Balaghah is determined not merely by the ability to translate vocabulary or recognise sentence structures, but also by the ability to grasp the rhetorical intent behind linguistic choices. Contemporary studies on the teaching of Balaghah to non-native Arabic learners indicate that many learning difficulties arise not because of a lack of basic linguistic ability, but because learners interpret Arabic rhetorical concepts through the meaning system of their first language. Consequently, concepts such as *tasybīh*, *majāz*, *kināyah*, and stylistic variations are often understood literally or simplified in accordance with the patterns of the learners' native language.

In the context of learning Arabic as a foreign language, this phenomenon becomes all the more significant because Balaghah is the field that most distinctly embodies the epistemological characteristics of the Arabic language. A comparative study of Aristotelian rhetoric and Arabic Balaghah reveals that Balaghah is founded on an orientation towards meaning and the interconnection of language with context, rather than merely formal techniques of persuasion. Consequently, when learners bring interpretative patterns from their first language, they not only make linguistic errors but also risk a shift in their understanding of the logic of Arabic rhetoric itself. This explains why the study of Balaghah is often perceived as difficult by non-Arab learners, even though they possess adequate proficiency in Nahwu and Sharaf. (Syaifullah et al., 2026)

Furthermore, the analysis of interference in the learning of Balaghah holds strategic pedagogical value as it enables teachers to identify how learners' first-language background influences their interpretative processes. Findings regarding patterns of interference can form the basis for developing more adaptive learning strategies, such as a contrastive approach, contextual interpretation exercises, and the enhancement of cross-linguistic awareness. Thus, the study of interference in Balaghah learning serves not only to map learners' errors but also as a tool for understanding the process of meaning construction and enhancing the effectiveness of Arabic language teaching at a deeper, more interpretative level.

1. A Study of Interference

First language interference (L1 interference) is one of the most fundamental phenomena in the study of second language acquisition (SLA). This phenomenon refers to the intrusion of elements from a previously acquired language into the process of understanding, producing or learning a new language. Over time, interference has come to be understood not merely as a form of linguistic error, but as a natural consequence of the interaction between linguistic systems within the learner's mind. Recent research indicates that second language learning occurs through the mechanism of cross-linguistic influence, namely the process whereby knowledge of the first language serves as a reference point in constructing the target language system. From a historical perspective, interference theory evolved from the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which posited that differences between the first and second languages were the primary cause of learning errors. This early approach viewed language transfer as a predominantly negative process, as it resulted in deviations from the norms of the target language. However, developments in applied linguistics and cognitive science have shown that language transfer does not always hinder learning. The first language can serve as a source of prior knowledge that helps

learners construct representations of the second language through processes of analogy, categorisation and the activation of previous linguistic experiences. Consequently, interference is now understood as part of the cognitive adaptation process in language acquisition, rather than merely an indicator of learning failure. (Hasanah et al., 2024)

Conceptually, interference occurs when learners apply phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic or pragmatic patterns from their first language to their second language. At the phonological level, learners tend to pronounce the sounds of the target language in accordance with the sound system of their first language. At the syntactic level, sentence structures from the first language are often transferred directly into the second language. Meanwhile, at the semantic and pragmatic levels, interference occurs when learners interpret meaning, relationships between expressions, or communicative purposes based on the logic of the language they have already mastered. This process occurs because the previously acquired language system serves as the initial framework for processing new linguistic information.

In contemporary second language acquisition research, interference is understood as part of the phenomenon of cross-linguistic influence (CLI). This perspective broadens the traditional concept of transfer by demonstrating that interlingual relationships are dynamic and can operate in both directions. The first language influences second language learning, but second language learning can also influence how a person uses the language they have previously learnt. Recent research indicates that cross-linguistic influence does not only occur in immersion situations, but also takes place within formal and structured learning environments. Factors such as the typological proximity of languages, structural complexity, intensity of language use, and the type of learning task also determine the degree of interference that occurs.

The phenomenon of interference is also influenced by cognitive and psycholinguistic factors. Recent research shows that learners do not process each language separately, but rather activate various linguistic systems simultaneously during both language production and comprehension. When the target language is not yet sufficiently established, the first language system tends to play a dominant role in linguistic decision-making. Consequently, learners often engage in mental translation, opt for more familiar structures, or adjust meaning based on prior linguistic experience. This process explains why learners with lower proficiency levels tend to exhibit higher levels of interference compared to those who have reached an advanced level of proficiency.

In the context of Arabic language learning, the phenomenon of first-language interference becomes more complex because Arabic possesses linguistic characteristics that differ from those of many learners' languages, including Malay. Differences in morphological systems, sentence structure, semantic relationships and rhetorical features mean that learners often carry over patterns from their first language when comprehending Arabic texts. Interference arises not only in the use of grammar, but also in the way learners interpret meaning and understand the context of communication. In the study of *balaghah*, for example, the transfer of concepts of meaning from the first language can influence the interpretation of *majaz*, *tasybih*, *kinayah* and other rhetorical devices.

Although interference is often viewed as an obstacle, much recent research actually regards it as a valuable source of pedagogical information. Analysing the forms and patterns of interference enables educators to understand learners' thinking strategies and adapt teaching methods to their linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, contemporary approaches to second-language learning increasingly emphasise the importance of cross-linguistic awareness so that positive transfer can be harnessed and negative interference minimised.

2. Types of Malay Language Interference in the Study of Arabic Balaghah

Malay language interference in the study of Arabic *balaghah* arises when learners use linguistic patterns and interpretative approaches from their first language to understand concepts of Arabic rhetoric. In language learning generally, interference is often observed in aspects of phonology, morphology or syntax. However, in the study of *balaghah*, interference operates at a more complex level as it relates to the process of understanding meaning, context, communicative purpose and the aesthetic effect of an expression. *Balaghah* demands not only the ability to recognise linguistic forms, but also the ability to grasp the relationship between structure and rhetorical function in Arabic texts. Research on the teaching of *Balaghah* to non-native Arabic learners indicates that the main difficulty often lies not in memorising concepts, but in the process of interpreting meaning, which remains influenced by the learner's native language system. (Huda et al., 2025)

The first form is semantic interference (الدلالة). Learners with a Malay language background tend to interpret *balaghah* expressions based on the semantic relationships that apply in Malay. Consequently, expressions that are figurative in Arabic are often understood literally. For example, when encountering forms of *majāz* or *kināyah*, learners first seek the direct lexical meaning rather than exploring the rhetorical purpose the speaker intends to convey. In Malay, the relationship between literal and figurative meanings is often established more explicitly, whereas in Arabic this relationship is largely determined by context and rhetorical structure. This difference leads to a simplification of meaning and a loss of the aesthetic dimension of the Arabic language.

The second form is rhetorical interference (التداخل البلاغي), which is the tendency for learners to apply the rhetorical logic of the Malay language when interpreting Arabic style. Malay generally prioritises the direct and economical conveyance of meaning, whereas Arabic rhetoric (*Balaghah*) frequently employs the reinforcement

of meaning through repetition, structural expansion, and the interplay of semantic relationships. In this context, learners often regard forms such as *ta'kīd*, *tījāz*, or *ithnāb* as mere structural variations and fail to grasp their rhetorical functions. This interference leads learners to perceive Balaghah as a collection of theoretical terms rather than as a system of meaning-making. A study of the Balaghah curriculum in Malaysia indicates that one of the causes of the low effectiveness of Balaghah teaching is a lack of attention to the characteristics of non-Arab learners and the interpretative processes they employ when understanding texts.

The third form is conceptual interference in understanding the relationship between *lafaz* and *maqām*. Arabic *balaghah* is built on the principle of linguistic appropriateness to context (*munāsabah al-kalām li al-maqām*). Learners with a Malay language background often regard changes in sentence structure merely as variations in form, without considering the resulting changes in semantic effect. Consequently, learners find it difficult to distinguish why a particular expression uses a specific form in a given context. This difficulty is particularly evident in the understanding of *tasybīh*, *isti'ārah*, and variations in the *uslūb khabar-insyā'*. At this stage, the interference is no longer merely a linguistic error, but influences the way of thinking and constructing meaning in Arabic.

The fourth form, pedagogical interference, refers to the tendency of learners to employ learning strategies shaped by their previous educational experiences. Many Malay learners are accustomed to studying Arabic through translation and the memorisation of definitions; consequently, when they begin studying *balaghah*, they continue to rely on these strategies. However, *balaghah* requires interpretative practice, contextual analysis and a multi-layered reading of meaning. Consequently, the study of *balaghah* is often perceived as difficult not merely because of the complexity of the material, but due to a mismatch between the nature of the discipline of *balaghah* and the learning strategies employed by learners.

Thus, the nature of Malay language interference in the study of Arabic *balaghah* is not limited to the transfer of linguistic structures, but also encompasses semantic, rhetorical, conceptual and pedagogical interference. Such interference demonstrates that learners' first-language background influences the way they understand the relationship between meaning and rhetorical function in Arabic. Consequently, the teaching of Balaghah needs to be directed towards an approach that not only explains Balaghah theory but also fosters a contrastive awareness of the patterns of meaning in the Malay language and the rhetorical system of Arabic.

3. Factors of Malay Language Interference in the Teaching of Arabic Balaghah

The emergence of Malay interference in the study of Arabic Balaghah is influenced by the interaction between linguistic, cognitive and pedagogical factors. In second language acquisition studies, interference is understood as a process of cross-linguistic influence, whereby the language system already mastered by the learner is used as a basis for understanding the target language. In the study of Balaghah, this process becomes more complex because the subject matter encompasses not only linguistic structures but also the interpretation of meaning, context, and the rhetorical function of an expression. (Abdullah & Omar, 2016)

The first factor is first language (L1) dominance. Learners who use Malay as their primary language tend to activate patterns from that language when understanding concepts of Arabic *balaghah*. The internalised first language serves as the initial framework for processing new linguistic information, so learners often transfer patterns of meaning, linguistic logic, and relationships between expressions into Arabic. In Balaghah, this is evident when learners interpret *majāz*, *kināyah* or *tasybīh* based on literal patterns of meaning that are closer to their native language, rather than considering the rhetorical functions within Arabic.

The second factor is the difference in linguistic typology between Malay and Arabic. Arabic has more complex morphological and rhetorical characteristics, including a derivation system, contextual semantic relations, and structural variations designed to produce specific rhetorical effects. In contrast, Malay tends to have a more analytical structure and more explicit semantic relationships. These differences lead learners to simplify the concept of *balaghah* or to seek direct equivalents from their first language. Research on interference in Arabic language learning indicates that the greater the typological distance between languages, the greater the likelihood of negative transfer occurring.

The third factor is limited proficiency in Arabic and a reliance on translation strategies. When their command of the target language is not yet stable, learners tend to use their first language as a thinking aid. This process results in mental translation, which means that the interpretation of *balaghah* concepts is not built upon the Arabic rhetorical system, but rather through the conversion of meaning from Malay. Ultimately, learners understand *balaghah* theory in terms of terminology, but struggle to grasp the rhetorical and aesthetic aims of the Arabic language.

The fourth factor is a learning approach that remains structurally and translation-oriented. In many contexts of Arabic language learning, the learning process still emphasises the mastery of definitions, the memorisation of concepts, and the translation of texts. In fact, *balaghah* requires interpretative practice and contextual reading. When teaching fails to provide sufficient scope for analysing meaning and making cross-linguistic comparisons, learners tend to retain interpretative patterns from their first language. This situation reinforces the emergence of interference, as there is no reconstruction of thought processes in line with the rhetorical characteristics of the

Arabic language.

Consequently, interference in the learning of Arabic balaghah does not arise from a single factor, but is the result of an interaction between the dominance of the first language, the linguistic differences between Malay and Arabic, limitations in target language competence, and learning strategies that do not yet fully support rhetorical understanding. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing balaghah instruction that is more contextual and responsive to learners' linguistic backgrounds.

4. The Impact of Interference on the Understanding of Balaghah

Language interference in the study of Arabic balaghah has a direct impact on the way learners understand, interpret and construct meaning from an expression. Unlike language learning, which focuses on structural accuracy, balaghah places the relationship between wording, meaning, context and the purpose of communication at the heart of the learning process. Consequently, when learners bring patterns from their first language into the process of understanding Arabic, it is not only the linguistic form that is affected, but also the process of rhetorical interpretation that forms the basis of the science of balaghah. Recent studies on the teaching of balaghah indicate that balaghah is built upon the principle of the appropriateness of meaning to context (*munāsabah al-ma'nā li al-maqām*); consequently, an understanding that relies too heavily on the framework of the learner's first language can distort the rhetorical function of an expression. The first effect is evident in the reduction of rhetorical meaning to literal meaning. Learners from a Malay-speaking background tend to interpret Arabic texts through established semantic associations in their first language. Consequently, when encountering forms of balaghah such as *majāz*, *kināyah* or *isti'ārah*, learners first seek the lexical meaning rather than the rhetorical function intended within the context of the utterance. In Arabic balaghah, meaning is not always explicitly present, but is often shaped through the relationships between words, the communicative context, and the speaker's expressive intent. When the process of interpretation adheres strictly to the logic of the first language, learners risk missing the implicit and aesthetic dimensions of Arabic texts.

The second impact is evident in a weakened ability to understand the relationship between structure and semantic effect. Balaghah regards changes in linguistic form as strategies for producing specific communicative effects. Choices between *tjāz* (condensation), *ithnāb* (expansion), *taqdīm-ta'khīr*, and variations in the *uslūb khabar-insyā'* are not understood as ordinary grammatical variations, but as devices for constructing meaning. Interference causes learners to interpret structural changes merely as variations in form, without understanding the accompanying changes in rhetorical function. In this context, learners may recognise Balaghah terms in theory, but are not yet able to discern the rhetorical rationale behind the choice of linguistic structure. Studies on the teaching of balaghah to learners of Arabic as a foreign language indicate that a failure to understand the form–meaning relationship is one of the main causes of learners' poor interpretative skills.

The third influence is the formation of conceptual transfer in the process of rhetorical thinking. Bilingual psycholinguistic studies show that a previously acquired language remains active during the processing of a subsequent language and influences linguistic decision-making. This cross-linguistic activation causes learners to tend to use familiar conceptual patterns when interpreting new information. In the study of balaghah, this condition can lead learners to process Arabic texts using Malay rhetorical patterns, resulting in a simplification of the symbolic, metaphorical or contextual functions of the Arabic language. In other words, interference not only affects learning outcomes but also influences the way learners construct the logic of meaning. (Umam & Amrullah, 2025)

The fourth effect is a decline in the ability to appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of the Arabic language. One of the main objectives of balaghah is to develop '*dzauq lughawī*' (linguistic sensitivity), namely the ability to perceive beauty, expressive power, and precision in language choice. When learners rely too heavily on translation and the meaning patterns of their first language, this process of appreciation becomes limited. Language is understood as a collection of information, rather than as a system of expression possessing emotional, persuasive and contextual effects. Consequently, the study of balaghah is often perceived as difficult and theoretical because learners have not yet fully grasped the workings of Arabic rhetoric.

From a pedagogical perspective, the influence of interference suggests that successful learning of balaghah cannot be achieved solely through mastery of conceptual definitions and analysis of linguistic structures. Teaching needs to be directed towards the development of cross-linguistic awareness and a contrastive approach that helps learners compare how meaning functions in Malay and Arabic. Thus, interference is not viewed merely as a source of error, but as a starting point for understanding how learners construct meaning and how the teaching of balaghah can be adapted to their linguistic backgrounds.

5. Pedagogical Implications: A Contrastive Approach, Strengthening Meaning Analysis, and Context-Based Learning Strategies

The relationship between the structure of the Malay language and Arabic Balaghah is a key aspect in understanding the emergence of interference in the study of Balaghah. Although Malay and Arabic share a long historical connection through the process of Islamisation and the adoption of vocabulary, both languages have developed distinct linguistic and rhetorical systems. Arabic constructs meaning through a close relationship between structure, context and communicative purpose, whilst Malay tends to employ a more explicit and direct means of conveying meaning. This difference means that learners with a Malay language background often apply patterns of interpretation from their first language when understanding Arabic Balaghah concepts. Contrastive studies show that first-language experience always serves as the initial framework in second-language acquisition and can result in either positive transfer or negative interference, depending on the degree of structural and functional similarity between the two languages. (Zikriah, Zahrotun; Mauludiyah, 2024)

In Arabic balaghah, the relationship between form and meaning is a key element in the construction of a message. Changes in sentence order, concision (*tjāz*), elaboration (*ithnāb*), the use of metaphors (*isti'ārah*), and stylistic choices are not understood merely as structural variations, but as mechanisms for creating rhetorical effects. Meanwhile, in the Malay language, many rhetorical functions are conveyed through more explicit markers of meaning, so that learners often regard Arabic balaghah structures as complex forms that lack distinct semantic functions. Consequently, learners tend to understand balaghah in purely terminological terms and lose sight of its interpretative dimension. Studies on the teaching of balaghah in Malaysia indicate that one of the main challenges is the dominance of traditional approaches that emphasise the memorisation of definitions rather than the exploration of rhetorical functions within the context of language use. (Martunis et al., 2025)

Given these circumstances, the first pedagogical implication is the application of the contrastive approach. This approach involves a systematic comparison between Malay and Arabic as a learning strategy to help learners recognise the similarities and differences in the ways the two languages construct meaning. In the study of balaghah, the contrastive approach is not directed solely at finding equivalent forms, but at understanding how a message is constructed and understood in each language. For example, the concepts of *tasybīh* and *isti'ārah* can be explained through comparison with figurative expressions in Malay so that learners are able to see the differences in rhetorical function and the contexts in which they are used. Research into the development of balaghah teaching materials based on a contrastive approach shows that this strategy enhances students' understanding of balaghah concepts, as the materials are designed in accordance with the learners' linguistic characteristics.

The second implication is the strengthening of semantic and rhetorical meaning analysis. The teaching of balaghah needs to shift from a focus on identifying terms towards practising the interpretation of the relationships between structure, context and communicative purpose. In practice, teachers can guide learners to identify shifts in meaning that arise when sentence structure is altered or when an expression is used in a different context. Such interpretative exercises help learners reduce their reliance on literal translation and develop an awareness that meaning in balaghah is not always explicit. Contemporary research on the teaching of balaghah as a foreign language confirms that learning success is determined more by the ability to interpret rhetorical functions than by the ability to memorise balaghah classifications. (Rosyidi et al., 2023)

The third implication is the implementation of context-based learning strategies. Balaghah is essentially the study of language use in specific communicative situations; consequently, learning that focuses solely on definitions and isolated examples often results in a superficial understanding. Context-based strategies can be implemented through the analysis of authentic texts, the use of verses from the Qur'an, case studies of stylistic usage in communication, and discussions regarding the rhetorical reasons behind the choice of specific linguistic structures. This approach helps learners understand that meaning is not formed by words in isolation, but by the relationship between the text, the situation, and the communicative purpose. Consequently, the study of balaghah becomes more closely aligned with real-life language experience and is better able to mitigate the influence of first-language interference.

Overall, the relationship between Malay language structure and Arabic balaghah demonstrates that interference is not merely a matter of differences in linguistic form, but also of differences in how meaning is constructed and interpreted. Consequently, the teaching of balaghah needs to be designed adaptively through a contrastive approach, a focus on meaning analysis, and context-based strategies so that learners can gain a deeper understanding of Arabic rhetoric and not rely entirely on patterns from their first language.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, Malay language interference in the learning of Arabic balaghah is a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon that arises as a consequence of the interaction between the first language and the target language during the learning process. This interference does not only occur at the level of linguistic structure, but also affects the process of interpreting meaning, understanding rhetorical functions, and the way

learners establish connections between language and context. In the study of balaghah, the influence of the first language is evident in learners' tendency to understand concepts such as majāz, kināyah, tasybīh, ijāz, and stylistic variations through the more explicit and direct semantic framework of the Malay language. Consequently, learners often reduce rhetorical meaning to literal meaning, struggle to understand the relationship between structure and semantic effect, and face limitations in developing sensitivity to the aesthetics and communicative functions of the Arabic language. These findings indicate that the study of balaghah is not merely a matter of mastering rhetorical theory, but also a process of reconstructing ways of thinking and understanding meaning within the Arabic language system.

Furthermore, this study confirms that the linguistic and rhetorical differences between Malay and Arabic necessitate a more adaptive pedagogical approach to learners' linguistic backgrounds. The interference that arises should not be viewed merely as a linguistic error, but can be utilised as a gateway to understanding learners' thinking strategies and designing more effective learning. Therefore, the teaching of Balaghah should be directed towards the application of a contrastive approach between Malay and Arabic, the strengthening of meaning analysis that emphasises the relationship between structure and rhetorical purpose, and context-based learning strategies that present authentic language use. It is hoped that this approach will help learners develop cross-linguistic awareness, deepen their understanding of the characteristics of Arabic Balaghah, and enhance their interpretative skills in comprehending Arabic texts more comprehensively.

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