

# TOWARDS AL-RĀNĪRĪ'S TECHNICAL TERMS: AN OBSERVATION ON AL-RĀNĪRĪ'S CONCEPT OF ARABIC-MALAY TRANSLATION "

By:

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## Abstrak

*Penterjemahan memainkan peranan yang penting dalam proses penyebaran dan perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan di antara tamadun dan budaya. Penterjemahan yang baik akan menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang jelas dan tepat, dan sebaliknya kecelaruan dalam penterjemahan akan mengundang kekeliruan. Al-Rānīrī dalam usahanya menyebarkan ilmu Islam telah mengemukakan suatu konsep yang jelas bagi kaedah penterjemahan Arab-Melayu. Pemahaman terhadap keunikan konsep penterjemahan ini*

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*mampu menjawab banyak persoalan dan tohmahan berkaitan nilai bahasa Melayu Kitab Jawi atau Sastera Kitab.*

## **An Introduction**

This brief survey is an attempt to demonstrate al-Rānirī's concept on Arabic-Malay translation and formulation of the Malay Islamic terminologies, that is, the Malay words or terms proposed as translation of the Arabic words and terms concerning Islam. The aim of this survey is to comprehend al-Rānirī's philosophy in choosing certain Malay words for certain Arabic words and terms to express the idea of the Arabic text in Malay, especially that related to Islam. This aspect is important to focus on because without any 'philosophy' or perception, especially while choosing words and expressions in the translation process, a translator will not be able to express the idea of the original language clearly and accurately. This explains why there are differences between translators, or between translations, especially in terms of the quality of understanding the original text and the way its meaning is expressed.

The focus on Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī in this survey is not to claim that he is the only Malay scholar who realizes this philosophy or perception on the translation of Arabic-Malay-Islamic terms. In fact, it is observed that most Malay scholars who dealt and wrote in Islamic teaching and literatures in that particular period, i.e. between 17th to 19th century or earlier, have the same approach in understanding the Arabic sources and expressing them

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*Pembentukan dan Penterjemahan Istilah Melayu-Islam* (Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī Approach in Formulation and Translation Malay-Islamic Terminology), with some clarification, and presented at Seminar Kebangsaan Bahasa dan Pemikiran Melayu (National Seminar on Malay Language and Thought), organised by the Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, on Jun 18-19, 2002. This article is the latest edition of the study where, on the basis of the Malay edition, some addition has been made. The writer would like to thank Dr. Muhammad Zainiy Uthman for his support, suggestion and guidance on this study.

in Malay. It is considered as a standard way of understanding and expressing the idea, a standard which is not perceived clearly and appreciated properly by the modern Malay linguists, among the Malays themselves as well as among the orientalist who studied Malay language and culture. The above standard language and expressions are now classified as a 'Malay Kitab' or 'Kitab Jawi' or 'Kitab Kuning' which normally implies negative connotation such as 'out of date', irrelevant, not understandable and an 'atrocious' language.<sup>1</sup> All these accusation, to some extent, has succeed in labelling this kind of literature as second class sources and rarely we find a modern Malay mind who realises the value of this literature and, therefore, put them in their right and proper places. This article is not going to analyse all these phenomena and answer all the misunderstanding, but rather to demonstrate the positive aspects which is still there in this kind of literature and therefore, hopefully, the readers will re-evaluate their perception towards the Malay Kitab.

Al-Rānīrī, as mentioned above, is not the only scholar who realizes the existence of the philosophy of transformation the Malay-Islamic terms in the Malay World. He is among the well known Malay Muslim scholars who have devoted their lives for the sake of Islamic teaching and intellectualism, and had left a great and invaluable works in major fields of Islamic studies.<sup>2</sup> His

<sup>1</sup> See for example Peter G. Riddell (2002), "Literal Translation, Sacred Scripture and Kitab Malay," in *Studia Islamika* (Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies), vol. 9. No. 1, 2002, p. 5-6 and p. 22-23. Compare for an objective evaluation and study on this matter, especially in terms of the reality of Malay language in Malay Kitab, for instance, Asmah Hj. Omar (1991), *Bahasa Melayu Abad ke-16: Satu Analisis Berdasarkan Teks Melayu 'Aqā'id al-Nasafī*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, and Ab. Razak Ab. Karim (2002), *Aspek Penggunaan Bahasa Dalam Warkah-warkah Melayu Lama: Satu Kajian*, Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya.

<sup>2</sup> Among the important studies on al-Rānīrī and his contributions are Niewwenhuijze, C.A.O. van. (1945), "Nur al-Din al-Raniri als Bestrijder der Wudjudiya," in *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI)*, 104: 337-414; Voorhoeve, P. (1951), Van en Over Nuruddin ar-Raniri, in

work is taken as a sample for this study in order to demonstrate one of the impacts of the process of Islamization in the intellectual development and scholarly works in the Malay World, that is, the establishment of a standard philosophy and perception on the translation of Arabic-Malay Islamic terms. Hopefully, this preliminary survey would raise the interest of our modern Malay scholars to do a thorough and serious studies concerning the aspect and apply it to the other samples by another Malay scholars from that particular period of history in order to prove the validity of the above statement.

### 1. Translation and Its Role in Transforming Knowledge

To translate something is normally understood as to express sense

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*BKI* 107: 353-368; *Idem.* (1855), *Lijst der Geschriften van Raniri*, in *BKI* 111; *Idem.* (1955), *Twee Maleise Geschriften van Nuruddin ar-Raniri*, Leiden: E. J. Brill; *Idem.* (1958), *Nuruddin al-Raniri*, in *BKI* 115: 90-91; G. W. J. Drewes (1955), *De Herkomst van Nuruddin ar-Raniri*, in *BKI* 111, p. 137-51; *Idem.* (1974), *Nur al-Din al-Raniri Hujjat al-Siddiq li-Daf al-Zindiq: Re-Examined*, in *JMBRASS*, 47: 83-104; Tudjimah (1961), *"Asrar al-Insan fi Ma'rifat al-Ruh wa 'l-Rahman"*, Ph.D thesis, Djakarta: Universitas Indonesia; S. M. N al-Attas (1966), *"Rānirī and the Wujūdiah of the 17th Century Aceh"*, Monograph *JMBRAS* III; *Idem.* (1975), *Comments on the Re-Examination of al-Rānirī's Ḥujjatu'l Siddiq: A Refutation*, Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara; *Idem.* (1986), *A Commentary of the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nūr al-Din al-Rānirī*, Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture; Fakultas Sastra dan Kebudayaan, Universitas Gadjah Mada (1982), *Memahami Karya-karya Nuruddin Arraniri*, Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pembangunan Bahasa, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan; Ahmad Daudy (1983), *Allah dan Manusia Dalam Konsepsi Syekh Nuruddin ar-Raniri*, Jakarta: Rajawali; Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (1997), *Rānirī's Latā'if al-Asrār li Ahl Allāh al-Atyār: An Annotated Transliteration Together with a Translation and an Introduction of his Esposiition on the Fundamental Aspects of Sufi Doctrines* (in two volume), Ph.D. thesis at International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur and Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani (2003), *An Annotated Translation and Transliteration of Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī*, M.A. dissertation at ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur.

or meaning of words or language in another language or in other words or another form of representation. It also means to infer or declare or convey the significance of something. The translation plays the role of clarifying, explaining, simplifying, transferring and paraphrasing meanings, informations and facts from a language to another language or in other words within the same language.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there are two sorts of translations; translation from one language to another language, and translation within the same language where certain idea is represented in the same language by using clearer way of expression and accurate choice of words.

The above mentioned roles of translation is no doubt very important in the educational process because it is impossible for all students and learners to know and master all major languages by which various fields of knowledge is written. This is particularly concerned with the first category of translation. On the other hand, even though some students do master certain foreign language, it does not necessarily mean that they would understand and grasp all the meanings, informations and discussions expressed. This is because every field of knowledge has its own way of expression and terminologies. Thus, any inaccuracy in stating any statement on certain idea or any misunderstanding of any related expression will lead to a serious confusion and unjust opinion of that particular knowledge and field.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See for example *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2nd. Edition, N. York: Simon and Schuster, 1979 and Julia Swannell (ed.), *The Little Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, reprinted of sixth edition.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, we can observe that many misunderstanding and debates on various issues through out a long history of Islamic thought have connection, in a way or another, with the problems of expression and terminologies. In Kalam and philosophy for example, the debates between the mutakallimun and Muslim philosophers, as well as the debates between the philosophers themselves, were to some extent due to this problem. Therefore, we find al-Ījī in his *al-Mawāqif* always justify every meaning or concept as it is defined and understood by both the philosophers and

Therefore, to know language as a language, without any background on any particular subject, is not sufficient to understand the subject. This is based on the fact that the 'meaning' of things, with an exception of Divine truth and realities which is taught and revealed directly from God to any of His chosen one, is perceived by our mind not in a specific language. Man is equipped with potentiality to express things in language and they are fully responsible with their expression or their chosen words when they describe the 'meaning' perceived in their mind. The differences in expression will not effect the process of transformation of the meaning as long as all of them grasp and perceive the same meaning. However, the way they translate the meaning into words and expressions will determine whether or not the receiver of the expression will successfully identify the meaning of the words and expressions precisely in the same manner as expressed in the original idea stated. This is what people meant when they say that they 'understand' or 'misunderstand' the words and the ideas. Therefore, to translate the 'meaning' into the accurate words and expressions, and to identify the meaning of words with its ideas are the key for the above phenomenon. All the above facts explain why some people are unable to express what they believed and perceived in their own language, whereas the others are difficult to perceive and identify the 'meaning' of certain expression stated in their own language. Thus, another form of translation is needed here in order to restate and reclarify the meaning in a simpler and understandable way, that is to translate, simplify and paraphrase the 'meaning' accurately by using the same language and this is the role of the second type of translation mentioned before. Thus, the important of translation is to transform the knowledge either in the form of expression and

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the mutakallimun before he discuss the concept furthermore, see *al-Mawāqif fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, Cairo: Maktabah al-Mutanabbī, n.d., p. 106 ff., p. 145 ff., p. 162 ff., p. 167 ff. and p. 179 ff. The same idea is stressed before by al-Ghazālī (1987) in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, ed. S. Duniyā, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 7th. Edition, p. 79-80 and by Ibn Rushd (1968) in his *Faṣḥ al-Maqāl*, in *Falsafah Ibn Rushd*, ed. Mustafā A.J. 'Imrān, Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Mahmūdiyyah al-Tijāriyyah, 3rd. Edition, p. 20 ff.

translation the idea into another language or in the form of explanation the meaning in a simpler and clearer way within the same language.

Translation, in both forms, plays an important and remarkable role in the process of knowledge transformation among people and civilizations. In Islamic history, the above mentioned role of translation could be observed from the very early period of time especially in the form of oral translation. One of the Companion of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), Zayd b. Thābit for instance, who knows and masters Hebrew, served as a translator for the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) when he deals with the Jews in Medina. Since then, this tradition and movement was developed until it came to the establishment of *Bayt al-Hikmah* by al-Ma'mūn as a center for scientific research and translation.<sup>5</sup> Later on, in the history of Spain (Andalus), we know that there is an intense movement of translation, where many major and great works by Muslim scholars were translated into European languages, especially into Latin.<sup>6</sup>

Translation also plays a tremendous role in transforming Islamic religion and teaching into the Malay World, as well as in the process of islamization of the Malay thought and culture. Many great Islamic-Arabic works in various fields of Islamic studies had

<sup>5</sup> The center provides a proper residence for translators who serve there. They were paid for their contribution and enjoyed better position as the center is put under the caliph's patronage. Various materials and manuscripts written in different languages such as Hebrew, Persian, Syriac and Greek were collected and preserved there. And among the activities organised in the center were translating (into Arabic), comparing and editing text, see Ḥāmid Ṭāhir, *al-Tarjamah wa Dawruhā fī al-Fikr al-'Arabī*, in *Dirāsāt 'Arabiyyah wa Islāmiyyah*, vol. 8, Cairo: Maktabah al-Anglo al-Miṣriyyah, 1989, p. 83. Cf. H.A.R. Gibb *et. al.*, (Ed.), (1986), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), Leiden: E.J. Brill, c.v. 'Bayt al-Hikma', v. 1: p. 1141a.

<sup>6</sup> For the historical survey on the translation movement in Islam, see for example Ḥāmid Ṭāhir, *Ibid.*, 81-91 and Edward Craig (Ed.) (1998), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, London and N. York: Routledge, c.v. 'Translators', v. 9: pp. 455-7.

been translated into Malay. These translations, in general, could be categorized into two categories; first, a complete translation or an annotated translation of certain text or work,<sup>7</sup> and second, which we are focussing on here is a translation of certain Arabic phrases or quotations including the Quranic verses, the Tradition of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), as well as the sayings of the Sufis or Muslim scholars quoted in their Malay writing.<sup>8</sup> Both categories play very important part in performing, transforming and spreading knowledge and understanding related to the religion of Islam, provided that the chosen text is an authentic (*mu'tabar*) one and it is translated and re-expressed comprehensively into Malay so that the complete meaning of the original text is accurately transmitted.

But, how about the quality of their translation? Does the unconfused understanding on Islamic religion among the Malay scholars in the past prove that they possessed a comprehensive materials on Islam, as well as an accurate translation of major Islamic works? And on the contrary, is it possible to assume that our

<sup>7</sup> For instance the translation of al-Nasafis *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyyah* by one of the students of Muḥammad al-Ḥāmid, see S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: a 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Publication, 1988), hereinafter cited as *'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī*, the translation of al-Baydawīs *Tafsīr al-Baydawī*, (Cairo: Ḥalabī & sons, n.d.) by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Singkel, the translation of al-Ghazālīs *Lubāb Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Sheikh 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Falimbānī entitled: "Siyar al-Sālikīn fi Ṭarīq al-Sadat al-Sufiyyah", (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), the translation *Sharḥ Kitāb al-Ḥikām* of Ibn 'Atā' Allāh by Tok Pulau Manis, (Pulau Pinang: Percetakan al-Ma'ārif, n.d.) and al-Zarnūjīs *Kitāb Ta'lim Muta'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum* by Muḥammad Syafe'i b. Abdullah Rengkul Fatani under the title: "*Kitāb Pelita Penuntut*", Pulau Pinang: Percetakan al-Ma'ārif; n.d.

<sup>8</sup> The example of this category can be observed in many Jawi works (the Malay Kitab) written by Malay scholars especially those which concerned with various subjects of Islamic studies. The writers normally quote the original quotation in Arabic and then propose their translation of the text before explain it in context.



confusion and misconception on Islam today, especially among the modern Malay Muslim mind, is because of the same account, that is they do not have a comprehensive original reading material on Islam, as well as because of the lack of good translation of the great relevance Islamic works of the past? The later cause, i.e. the translation, is our major focus here in this discussion. The Malay-Muslim who ignore the valuable contributions and experiences of the Muslim scholars of the past which are accessible through an accurate and comprehensive translation, and therefore do not appreciate them properly, will loss in their modern westernized way of life. Instead of re-evaluating their intellectual legacies and experiences of the past, in order to benefit from it in their daily life and to develop further an unended progresses done by their scholars, they close their eyes and souls on them and direct their life to the West, thinking that the West are everything and try their best to gain their recognition, even in their own expertises and fields of studies like Malay studies, including language and culture, and Islamic studies.

These are among the major issues raised when we talk about the role of translation in transforming knowledge and understanding, particularly that related to Islam. Although there are many other related questions here in this context, i.e. in explaining the confusion and misunderstanding on Islam among Muslims, especially among the Malays, it is undeniable that translation plays a significant role in transforming knowledge and information in the history of Malay-Islamic intellectual development. An accurate and comprehensive translation will certainly play an effective role and vice versa. Moreover, the accurate and comprehensive translation is not concerned merely with its language and literal sense as such, but it is also related to the context and concept of translation which have great influence in transforming and clarifying proper meaning. This paper will try to answer some of the questions mentioned and at the same time, to evaluate the accuracy of al-Rānīrī's Arabic-Malay translation, based on our observation.

## 2. Al-Rānirī's Method and Concept of Arabic-Malay Translation

This article is not a thorough observation on al-Rānirī's concept of translation but it is rather a preliminary consideration on the subject. This is because such a serious and careful surveillance had to be made in order to bring out the entire al-Rānirī's concept and approach in translation. To reach this state we had to observe all al-Rānirī's works which some of them are yet unedited and unpublished.<sup>9</sup>

This preliminary observation attempts to examine al-Rānirī's method and concept of Arabic-Malay translation. It demonstrates the way he understood Arabic and his approach in expressing his understanding in Malay language. It also discusses how and why al-Rānirī chooses certain Malay word as a translation of an Arabic term and Islamic concept. The primary source of this article is the text from al-Rānirī's *Latā'if al-Asrār li Ahl Allāh al-Atyār*.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Rānirī's, at the very beginning of his *Latā'if*, mentions his method of translation:

“Maka apabila kau lihat akan terjemahnya bersalahan dengan lafaz ‘arabiyyahnya atau terdahulu atau terkemu-

<sup>9</sup> See the list of al-Rānirī's work in Ahmad Daudy (1983), *Allah dan Manusia Dalam Konsepsi Sheikh Nuruddin ar-Raniri*, Jakarta: Rajawali and S. M. N al-Attas (1986), *A Commentary of the Hujjat al-Şiddiq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī*, Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture. Also Hashim Musa (1999), *A Brief Survey on the Study of the Malay Sastera Kitab on Malay-Islamic Thought*, Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya, p. 10, p. 18-9 and p. 72-3.

<sup>10</sup> The manuscript was edited by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Zainiy Uthman in his Ph.D thesis entitled *Rānirī's Latā'if al-Asrār li Ahl Allāh al-Atyār: An Annotated Transliteration Together with a Translation and an Introduction of his Esposition on the Fundamental Aspects of Sufi Doctrines* (in two volume), International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, 1997. The Malay text of *Latā'if* and its English translation mentioned in this article are from Dr. Zainiy's edition and it is cited as *Latā'if* for the Malay text and *Spiritual Subtleties* for the English translation.

dian atau terbuang maka jangan mengsyak-kan dikau [...] maka bahwasanya ku jadikan akan dia karena munasabatnya atau karena tiada berkehendak terjemah lafaz 'arabiyahnya atau karena sukar masuk dalam faham."<sup>11</sup>

"Should you find the translation to be different from [what is conveyed in] the Arabic words or terms, or should it come before or after the Arabic terms or deleted entirely, do not let this cause doubt in you [...] I have [purposely] done so either for reasons of appropriateness or I do not find any need in translating the Arabic terms or [sometimes by translating the terms] the concept becomes difficult to grasp."<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from this introduction that al-Rānīrī precisely describes his concept and method of translation in his *Laṭā'if*, and by observing the text, especially his translation of the Arabic phrases and quotations, we can easily affirm his consistency in following the method. On the other hand, we however could draw, out of this introduction, al-Rānīrī's concept and method of translation as follows:

1. His translation, particularly in his *Laṭā'if*, is a sort of free translation in terms of word arrangement, although in terms of meaning, his translation has a significant way and concept as we will see below.
2. The reason why al-Rānīrī prefers this method, as indicated in the introduction, is because of three basic points:
  - a. For the reasons of appropriateness
  - b. For it has no need to translate the Arabic terms
  - c. To avoid the difficulty in understanding the translation

These are some aspects of al-Rānīrī's concept and method of Arabic-Malay translation as literally stated by him. It is remarked that this concept and system of Arabic-Malay translation, espe-

<sup>11</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Spiritual Subtleties*, 162.

cially that which is related to the usage of the Arabic word in Malay translation, is phenomenal in early Malay Islamic literature in general and in al-Rānirī's works in particular. Al-Attas, for instance, in his observation on the Arabic words in the Malay translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī by al-Rānirī, emphasizes that there are three classes of the Arabic terms in the Malay translation of the 'Aqā'id:

- (1) Arabic words in the text that are left untranslated and taken over as such in the Malay translation. These may again be of two classes: (a) those that were not known and were difficult to translate into Malay or into Arabic equivalents that were known; (b) those that were already generally known at the time of writing
- (2) Arabic words known only among the educated.
- (3) Arabic words that were already assimilated into the general vocabulary of the Malay language, which include (1), (b) above, and words that were understood to be Arabic equivalents of those found in the text, which include (2) above."<sup>13</sup>

In addition, from our personal observation on his translation of Arabic quotation mentioned in his *Latā'if*, we remark some other significant points related to his concept and method. This concept, which is in a manner gives an explanation on the above system of Arabic-Malay translation, can be categorized as follows:

#### a) Translate the Meaning in Context

Al-Rānirī was always aware about the meaning and the context of the word. Instead of translating the text synonymously and then explains its meaning in context, he prefers to translate the meaning directly in the context and gives a direct explanation at once. For instance, the expression *min haith huwa huwa* in the text below:<sup>14</sup>

اعلم أن الوجود الحق تعالى عند الصوفية رضي الله عنهم من حيث

<sup>13</sup> S.M.N al-Attas, 'Aqā'id al-Nasafī, p. 78. See further, *Ibid.*, chapter iv, v and vi.

<sup>14</sup> *Latā'if*, 9.

هو هو الذات المطلق

was translated as: "with respect to existence" (*daripada pihak wujud itu*). It could be translated literally as "as it is" or "in itself" (*sebagaimana ia*) and the reader will understand it in context as referring to the word *al-wujūd*. But, instead of translate it that way, he rather gives its explanation directly and states its meaning at once so the reader will understand it clearly.

The other example is the translation of *rūh*. The word *rūh* was sometimes translated into *nyawa* (life) and sometime translated into *roh* (spirit) according to the context.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the text:

"Kata Ghawth al-A'zam qaddasallāhu-sirrahu:

جسم الإنسان ونفسه وقلبه وروحه وسمعه...

Bahawa sanya jisim insan dan dirinya dan hatinya dan nyawanya dan penengarnya ..."

"A man's body, his soul, his heart, his spirit, his ears..."<sup>16</sup>

And the text:

قال بعض العارفين رضي الله عنه: إن المعرفة على ثلاثة أوجه: معرفة القلب ومعرفة الروح ومعرفة السر

Kata setengah 'ārif bahawa sanya ma'rifah itu atas tiga

<sup>15</sup> See the meaning of 'Rūh' in Arabic, Ibn Manzūr (1990), *Lisān al-'Arab*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1st. Edition (15 vols.), v. 2, pp. 462-64 and al-Tāhanawī (1972), *Kashshaf Istilāḥāt al-Funūn*, ed. Luṭfī 'Abd al-Badī', Cairo: al-Hai'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kitāb, v. 3: pp 18-28. And the meaning of the word in Malay, *Kamus Dewan*, (Edisi Ketiga), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1998, c.v. 'Ruh', and Zainal Abidin Safarwan (1995), *Kamus Besar Bahasa Melayu Utusan*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication and Distributors Sdn. Bhd., c.v. 'Ruh'.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 179.

perkara: pertama, ma'rifah dengan hati, kedua, ma'rifah dengan ruh, ketiga, ma'rifah dengan rahasia..."

"One of the knowers says that there are three kinds of illuminative knowledge: Firstly, illuminative knowledge of heart (*ma'rifah hati*), secondly; illuminative knowledge of the spirit (*ma'rifah ruh*), and thirdly, illuminative knowledge of the innermost ground of being (*ma'rifah rahasia*)"<sup>17</sup>

### b) Translate the Concept of Word

Al-Rānirī in his translation of the Arabic text tries to demonstrate not only the meaning of the text, but the most important of all are the concept and the philosophical or spiritual realities expressed and understood in its original usage and context.

For examples, the word *wahid* in Arabic literally means "one" or "single" (*satu* or *tunggal*). The oneness or the singleness of something is normally understood as something that is not two or more, but not necessarily that there is absolutely no "two" or "more" of it. But, although this meaning and translation is acceptable in terms of the material entity, it is inaccurate theologically and spiritually to use it to describe the oneness of God for the reality of the Oneness of God is completely different from the oneness of thing. Therefore, the word *wahid*, when referring to God as in the phrase: *وهو واحد متحقق* is translated by al-Rānirī as *esa*,<sup>18</sup> which gives a special and absolute meaning of oneness.<sup>19</sup> The word *esa* as a translation of the Arabic *wāhid*, which refers to the one-

<sup>17</sup> *Latā'if*, 32 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Latā'if*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, he explains:

"Bahawa sanya Wujūd itu tiada dapat disangkakan dalamnya dengan yang menduai dia dan tiada berbilang. Hanya sesungguhnya dii'tibarkan dalamnya *ta'ayyun* dan *taqayyud* jua maka tiap-tiap barang yang dimushahadahkan atau dichita-chitakan dan di'aqalkan daripada segala yang berbilang maka ia itu wujud yang khasṣ atau wujud yang idāfi jua, bukan wujud yang mutlaq dari karena lawan wujud yang mutlak itu 'adam, ya'itu tiada sesuatu. Maka bahawa sanya ada bagi wujud Ḥaqq Subḥānahu wa Ta'ālā itu keesaan, tiada bertambah-tambah atas DhatNya; iaitu pada

ness of God, is used by al-Rānīrī as the only Malay technical term to describe the oneness of God.

The other example is the word *ya'bud in li ya'budūn* in the Qur'an (Surah al-Dhāriyāt, 51: 56) was translated as *mengenal* (to know)<sup>20</sup> and not as *menyembah* (to worship). This basically refers to the concept that the worship (*'ibādah*) in Islam is based on the knowledge of God which is actually the ultimate goal of the Muslim.<sup>21</sup> In relation to this, al-Rānīrī mentioned in other place of his *Laṭā'if*:

“Ditanyai orang akan Shaykh Ruwaym: Daripada pertama fardu yang difardukan Allah Ta'ala atas segala makhluk apa ia? Maka jawabnya: ia itu ma'rifah Allah karena firmanNya Yang Maha Besar SebutNya: Tiada Ku jadikan Jin dan Manusia melainkan mengenal Daku.”

Shaykh Ruwaym was asked: ‘Among the first obligation which God Most Exalted put on all creatures, what is it?’ He answered: ‘It is knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*), because of His saying, Exalted be His Mention, ‘I created the Jinn and Mankind but to know Me.’”<sup>22</sup>

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i'tibar daripada pihak wujud itu, wujud bukan sifat bagi yang Esa dengan i'tibar ini, tetapi adalah keesaan itu 'ayn dhatNya”, (*Laṭā'if*, 10)

“However, existence cannot be thought of as having duality in it nor plurality. In reality individuation (*ta'ayyun*) and limitation (*taqayyud*) is attributed to it only in the mind. Thus every thing that is contemplated or imagined and intellectuated upon in the realm of plurality is particular existence (*wujūd khaṣṣ*) or relative existence (*wujūd idqāfi*) and not absolute existence because the contrary of Absolute Existence (*Wujūd Muṭlaq*) is non-existence (*'adam*) which is nothing (*tiada sesuatu*). There is in the Existence of the Truth Most Exalted oneness which is not superadded to His Essence – that is, with respect to existence, existence is not a predicate of the One in this regard, rather Oneness is His very Essence”, (*Spiritual Subtleties*, 163)

<sup>20</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 15 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 168.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S.M.N al-Attas (1992), *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*, KL: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 11-2.

<sup>22</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 22 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 173.

### c) Introduce and Use the Original Arabic Word

In this category, al-Rānirī uses the Arabic word in its original form together with its meaning and concept in Malay. The reason is because the words or terms are familiar among the Malays and in the Malay language, or perhaps because he purposely tries to accustom the word and its usage in Malay society and literature, especially in the field of religious sciences such as theology, philosophy, tasawwuf, fiqh, etc. The latter possibility seems, in my opinion, to be more reasonable in order to explain why al-Rānirī used an untranslated Arabic word in his translation. This method and approach, apart from not confusing the readers with an inaccurate translation of terms and concepts, will also affirm a continuous relationship between the Muslims and their sources. On the other hand, it shows that many Islamic terms and concepts could not be precisely translated or expressed in other languages except in Arabic and, therefore, it is necessary for those who really want to understand Islam to know Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

This phenomenon, i.e. the usage of the Arabic word in Malay literature, should not be judged as something negative or something that is considered as a bad element in the development of a language. On the contrary, it is something natural in the development of any language that words or terms are adopted from other languages in order to enrich its vocabulary, particularly those which concern with new technical terms where the existing language can not replace them in an accurate way. Moreover, this process happens to most living and dynamic languages such as English and French. However, some people did judge and discribe this phenomenon in un-objective manner; when the influence of Arabic to the Malay-Islamic literature (Kitab Jawi) is labelled as 'atrocious', the influence of English to the modern Malay and

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<sup>23</sup> By the Arabic, we mean the "Islamic" or "Quranic" Arabic, that is the Arabic which is rooted to the original and eloquence tongue and not the modern Arabic usage and language which to some extent was influenced by the modern interpretation and meaning.



Dutch to the modern Indonesian is called 'standard'.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in his answer to the question related to the issue, stressed that the influences of English to the modern Malay and Indonesian had made the language 'atrocious'. The English influences, he added, are considered as foreign elements in Malay compared to the Arabic-Islamic influences.<sup>25</sup>

Among the example of this category is al-Rānīrī's translation of the word *qā'im*. He translates the phrase:

قائم بذاته ومقوم لما عداه

as "Ialah yang *qā'im* dengan dhatNya dan menjadikan bagi lainNya -- He is self-subsisting in virtue of His Essence and is the creative agent of what is other than He."<sup>26</sup> The word *qā'im* which means literally *standing* or *getting up* could be translated as *berdiri* (to stand). But in the matter of transcendental reality like God, to translate the fact that He is *Qā'im bi Dhātihi* into "berdiri dengan DhatNya" is not theologically accurate because it will lead to confusion. This is because the word *berdiri* in Malay refers generally to the meaning related to the physical and material reality.<sup>27</sup> This differs from the Arabic word *qā'im* which gives, among its meanings, the expression of an absolute being, independent, and the One who manages the creation (*al-Qayyūm*).<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, this explains why al-Rānīrī did not translate and replace the word with the

<sup>24</sup> See some critics on Malays religious text by some modern Southeast Asian writers, Riddell (2002), *Literal Translation*, p. 22-3.

<sup>25</sup> A lecture on The Religion of Islam on 13 August 2003 at The Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Pesiaran Duta, Kuala Lumpur

<sup>26</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 9 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 163.

<sup>27</sup> *Kamus Dewan* refers the word *diri* and *berdiri* as: 1) tegak di atas kaki, tidak berbaring, bangkit dan tegas, 2) (telah) diadakan atau ditubuhkan, telah ada, 3) berdasarkan (berasaskan, bergantung, bersandar) kepada 4) berasal (bermula, terbitnya, terjadi) daripada, *Kamus Dewan*, (Kuala Lumpur, DBP, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> See for example Ibn Manzūr (1990), *Lisān al-'Arab*, v. 12 and *al-Mu'jam al-'Arabi al-Asāsī* by al-Munazzamah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Tarbiyah wa al-Thaqāfah wa al-'Ulūm.

Malay equivalent but rather uses it in its original form “*qā'im dengan dhatNya*.”<sup>29</sup>

But, on the contrary, when it comes to the word *muqawwim* (pl. *muqawwimāt*) which means literally *basic factors* or *fundamentals*, al-Rānirī translated it as *menjadikan* (to create) which explains the meaning of the word in context. This is clear because something without its basic factor or fundamental could not stand or exist. Therefore, this basic factor or cause that establishes the existence of the effect actually creates it and brings it into being. Thus, it is conceivable why the word *muqawwim* is translated as *menjadikan* (to create).

On the other hand, the most important point to be stressed here is why al-Rānirī takes different decision when dealing with these two words, that is the word *qā'im* and *muqawwim*, although they derive from the same root or category? According to my humble observation, this perhaps is related to the subject matter of the words used. Since the word *qā'im* deals with the essential attribute of God, he prefers to use the Arabic word to avoid misinterpretation of it. Whereas the word *muqawwim* which describes God's action, the possibility of being misconception is not as serious as the former case, although there are actually problems related to how God creates the creation in the history of Islamic thought.<sup>30</sup>

#### d) Use the Malay Equivalents

Al-Rānirī in this category tries to find the most equivalent word in Malay to express the meaning and concept of the Arabic word. It is remarkable that although that some of the chosen Malay words used by al-Rānirī are quite in-eloquent in the Malay language usage, precisely in the modern Malay 'standard' and point of view, but in terms of meaning and concept, they give accurate explana-

<sup>29</sup> *Latā'if*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> See the works by Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Alūsī (1968), *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought*, Baghdad: Baghdad University and *Idem*. (1986), *Hīwār bayna al-Falāsifah wa al-Mutakallimīn*, Baghdad: Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfah al-'Ammah.

tion of the Arabic words and terms. This demonstrates the great intensity of our earlier Malay scholars in order to transform the true meaning and concept to the Malay reader. On the other hand, this also shows their awareness and deep understanding of the Arabic and Malay language and literature.

The problem of an 'in-eloquent' Malay chosen word is not an issue here since the focus of translation is more on meaning and concept which is actually the most important aspect in the transformation process of knowledge. Moreover, the 'standard' that most of us use in our evaluation of the language is normally our modern 'standard'; a standard that has been developed under various kinds of influences which change by the changing of time. Here raised an important question, that is, is it accurate to evaluate the language of the past with our contemporary standard and, based on this evaluation, we judge that the language is 'in-eloquent'?

On the other hand, if we take the languages and words proposed by al-Rānīrī as terminologies or technical terms, which are considered as special terms for a specific field of knowledge, then there is nothing called as an 'in-eloquent' language because that it is how new technical terms develop and become part of the new language.

Among the examples of this category are:

1. The translation of the term *uṣūl al-Dīn* into *pohon agama* (the tree of religion).<sup>31</sup> The word *uṣūl* in Arabic shows that it is the base of something, which normally has branches (*furū'*) derived from the base and its root.<sup>32</sup> This is similar to the word *pohon*, which even in its physical sense indicates the same concept as it is in the Arabic word *uṣūl*. *Pohon* in Malay means a tree with all the branches and roots. It also means the base (*pangkal* or *asal mula*) where

<sup>31</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> See Ibn Manẓūr (1990), *Lisān al-'Arab*, v. 11 and *al-Mu'jam al-'Arabi al-Asāsī*.

all the branches depend on it.<sup>33</sup>

2. The translation of *al-kayfiyyah* in *sifat al-kayfiyyah* as *sifat yang kebetapaan*.<sup>34</sup> The term *kayfiyyah* in Arabic derived from *kayfū* (how), usually translated as quality, mode, character and nature,<sup>35</sup> which generally show the “howness” of thing. The word *betapa* in Malay means *bagaimana* (how) and therefore the word *kebetapaan* implies the meaning of “howness”.<sup>36</sup>
3. The other examples are the translation of word *ḥaddahū* as *menghinggakan Dia* (has limited Him),<sup>37</sup> *al-‘alā’iq* as *sangkutan* (preoccupation),<sup>38</sup> *min baynā* as *daripada antara* (between),<sup>39</sup> *ayna mā* as *barang ke mana* (wherever),<sup>40</sup> *ka*

<sup>33</sup> See *Kamus Dewan*.

<sup>34</sup> *Laṭā’if*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> See Robi Baalbaki, *al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary*, (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1992, 4th edition).

<sup>36</sup> See *Kamus Dewan*.

<sup>37</sup> “Kata ‘Alī radiya Allāh ‘anhu wa karrama Allāh wajhahu:

أول الديانة معرفة الله وكمال معرفة توحيده وكمال توحيده نفي صفاته الكيفية عنه  
ومن وصف الله تعالى بالكيفية فقد حده ومن حده فقد عده

Pertama-tama Dīn itu ma‘rifah Allāh, dan kesempurnaannya ma‘rifah itu mentawhidkan Dia, dan kesempurnaan mentawhidkan Dia itu menafikan segala sifat yang kebetapaan daripadaNya; dan barang siapa mensifatkan Allāh Ta‘ālā dengan kebetapaan maka bahawa sanya ialah menghinggakan Dia, maka barang siapa menghinggakan Dia maka sanya ialah membilangkan Dia” (*Laṭā’if*, 19-20).

“Thus, ‘Ali (may God be pleased with him and illuminate his countenance) says: The first requirement of religion is knowledge (*ma‘rifah*) of God, and the perfection of knowledge [of God] (*ma‘rifah*) is to affirm His Unity (*Tawḥīd*), and the perfection of affirming His unity is to deny Him attributes of quality (*kebetapaan*); for whoever describes God Most Exalted with qualities he had limited (*menghinggakan*) Him; and whoever puts limits to God, he has numbered (*membilang*) Him”, *Spiritual Subtleties*, 172.

<sup>38</sup> *Laṭā’if*, 31-2 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 180.

<sup>39</sup> *Laṭā’if*, 31-2 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 180.

<sup>40</sup> *Laṭā’if*, 152 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 272.

*mithliḥī* as *sebagainya* (likeness),<sup>41</sup> *kufwan* as *sebangsa* (like),<sup>42</sup> *kullamā* as *barang-kala* (then per chance),<sup>43</sup> *wa kullu mā tusawwiru fi wahmika* as *tiap-tiap barang yang terchita dalam chitamu* (whatever that is conceived (*terchita*) in your imagination (*chitamu*),<sup>44</sup> *lā tuzāhimuhū* as *tiada lagi memijakkan dia*<sup>45</sup> and *wa man ra'ā annahū qarībūn* as *dan barang siapa pada bicharanya bahawa ia damping...*(whoever thinks that he is near...).<sup>46</sup>

### e) Consider the Politeness in Translation

This concept of translation is interconnected to the first two methods above where the context of text is put into consideration in the translation. However, in this concept, the aspects of politeness and respectfulness are significant especially when the text is related to God or to any respectable figure.

For instance, in relation to God, the verse of Qur'an; *Tāhā*, (20: 114):

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

was translated as:

"Kata olehmu ya Muhammad: "Tuhanku, tambah *kiranya* akan daku ilmu."

Thus, His command to Prophet Muhammad (May God Shower His blessings and peace upon him), "Say, O Muhammad: "O my Lord, advance me in knowledge"<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 156 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 275.

<sup>42</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 157-8 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 276.

<sup>43</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 159 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 277.

<sup>44</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 163 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 280.

<sup>45</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 165.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 170 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 286.

<sup>47</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 18 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 170.

It is observed that the word *kiranya* (hopefully)<sup>48</sup> was added to show the respectfulness and the politeness (*adab*) with Allāh Ta‘ālā. The translation literally could be made without the addition and it will not diminish the meaning, However, because of his consideration on the politeness in translation, this addition is made. This kind of addition in the translation surely does not misinterpret the verse but rather makes it clearer and at the same time the reader will realize the *adab* toward Allāh Ta‘ālā.

The same concept also applied when the translation is concerned with a respectable figure as in the quotation below:

وقيل للشبلي رضي الله عنه: اخبر عن التوحيد بالعبارة الجرد بلسان  
حق مفرد...

Ditanyai orang akan Shaykh Shiblī: Tuan cheriterai *kiranya* hamba daripada tawhīd dengan sepatah kata yang sebenarnya...

Shaykh Shiblī was asked: “Master, tell us what affirmation of Divine Unity is in one phrase...”<sup>49</sup>

The other example is the addition of the affirmation word like *jua* to the translation for example:

قال أبو الحسن النوري رضي الله عنه: المعرفة أن تعرف الله تعالى  
بالوحدانية وتعلم أنه أول كل شيء وبه يقوم كل شيء وإليه المصير  
كل شيء وعليه رزق كل شيء

<sup>48</sup> In *Kamus Dewan*, among the meaning of *kiranya* is *hendaknya, semoga, mudah-mudahan* and it is used to show the hopefulness of the Merciful of God; “...barang dilanjutkan Allāh Ta‘ālā *kiranya* umur Duli Yang di-Pertuan.”

<sup>49</sup> *Latā‘if*, 169-70 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 285.

Kata Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī: Yang ma'rifah itu bahawa kau kenal akan Allāh Ta'ālā dengan keesaanNya, dan kau ketahui bahawa sanya Ia jua yang awwal daripada segala suatu, dan dengan Dia *jua* qā'im segala sesuatu, dan kepadaNya *jua* kembali segala sesuatu, dan daripadaNya *jua* rizqi segala sesuatu

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī<sup>50</sup> (May God be pleased with him) says: Knowledge [of God] (ma'rifah) is that you recognize God Most Exalted in His Unity and you know that only He is the First before everything, and everything subsists through Him, and to Him is their return, and from Him is their sustenance."<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

Translation is no doubt had played a significant role in the process of transformation of knowledge among civilizations and cultures. The quality of the transformation, however, depends on the quality of translation. A good and an accurate translation serves as an effective channel towards spreading a clear and accurate meaning and information to the readers and *vice versa*; a misleading translation creates confusion and misunderstanding. Al-Rānīrī, in his effort to transform an Islamic teaching in a truthful manner, had suggested a masterly and skilful concept of Arabic-Malay translation, which is not objectively perceived and evaluated by many of our modern Malay linguists. As a result, the effort is not properly acknowledged and appreciated, yet it is labeled with an unjust description. The attitude of looking down at the heritage of our earlier scholars and supporting everything promoted by the West without re-evaluating them properly has, to some extent, contributed to this stand. The presentation of al-Rānīrī's concept of Arabic-Malay translation in this article is intended to be a starting

<sup>50</sup> In the translation the name was mentioned as "Abū al-Ḥusayn".

<sup>51</sup> *Laṭā'if*, 23-4 and *Spiritual Subtleties*, 174.

point for more indepth studies of its kind. This is in order to prove that there are still many undiscovered values in our heritage to look for before we could reach to an exact evaluation of it.