

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Alfikri Rausen Aditya^{[1]*}, Nur Afifah Hamzah^[2]

^[1] Alauddin State Islamic University, Makassar, Indonesia

^[2] Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

HISTORY ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to describe the History of the Development of Arabic in the Islamic World based on historical aspects, phonology and grammar, dialects and standard languages, the significance of religion to Arabic, and cultural influences. The type of research used is descriptive qualitative using a library research approach. The results of this study are: (a) The history of Arabic cannot be separated from the context of pre-Islamic Arabic (Jahili Arabic) where the word "Arab" in pre-Islamic times meant a nation living in the Arabian peninsula. (b) Phonology and Grammar: Arabic has a unique grammatical structure, it is able to express a problem very clearly and with very economical words, the formation of phrases, sentences and words is very careful. (c) Arabic dialects can be understood based on fundamental differences between dialects, religious adherents, and geographical locations. (d) Arabic has a close relationship to religion, especially Islam. (e) Arab society has a culture in the development of language and literature, especially poetry. In addition, they also have expertise in the field of trade. The findings of this study contribute to strengthening the argument that Islam plays a central role in the development of the Arabic language. However, at the same time, the evolution of Arabic is also influenced by the social and cultural dynamics of Arab society itself. The interaction between religious elements and social contexts positions Arabic not only as a means of communication but also as a symbol of Islamic civilization.

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*Corresponding author. Email: alfikri.rausen23@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the main language of Islamic civilization and has played a strategic role in the development of science, culture, and religion. Since its early emergence, Arabic has not only served as a means of communication for the Arab people but has also become an essential element in Islamic teachings (Pane, 2018). Arabic is highly important in the lives of Muslims because it serves as a cultural medium and a tool for actualizing Islamic values (Nasution & Lubis, 2021). Although not all Muslims are fluent in Arabic, many are able to read Arabic texts due to their familiarity with reading the Qur'an (Lestari et al., 2022; Fatimatuzzahrah et al., 2024). This proves that Arabic has deep spiritual power in religious practices. Thus, Arabic is not merely a linguistic instrument but also the primary medium for understanding and applying Islamic teachings in daily life (Ritonga et al., 2021).

The significant influence of Arabic in the spiritual and cultural life of Muslims has led to broader recognition of its strategic role at the global level. As a language that not only represents religious teachings but also serves as a medium for developing knowledge and culture, Arabic has experienced a significant expansion of function in various fields of modern life. This has made Arabic not only important to the Muslim community but also relevant in a global context that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Therefore, the recognition of Arabic as one of the official languages of the United Nations marks an important milestone in affirming its status as an international language rich in historical, intellectual, and spiritual values (Adriani, 2015; Nasution & Lubis, 2021).

The existence of Arabic within religious and cultural contexts was officially acknowledged by the international community when it was designated as one of the official languages of the United Nations (UN) on December 18, 1973 (Fatkhurrohman, 2027; Lintang, 2023). This recognition cannot be separated from the richness and complexity of the Arabic language itself. Linguistically, Arabic has distinctive features in phonology, morphology, and syntax. Particularly in vocabulary (mufradat), the richness of Arabic is striking. One Western linguist, De Hammer, noted that for terms related to "camel" (jamal) alone, there are approximately 5,644 words (Mualif, 2020). This fact shows the breadth and depth of Arabic's structure that supports its function as a global language.

This international recognition has also encouraged various efforts to preserve and develop Arabic through modern educational approaches. Studies on the development of Arabic throughout history have been widely conducted by scholars (Salim, 2017; Hasibuan et al., 2023). In today's digital era, technology is widely utilized to strengthen the position of Arabic in education (Abidin & Strianingsih, 2017). One form of technological utilization is the development of digital learning applications aimed at improving Arabic proficiency among foreign learners (Keshav et al., 2022; Rintonga et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2024). These innovations also include interactive game-based learning, which has been proven to enhance student motivation and participation (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Arkan, 2022; Saleh & Althaqafi, 2022; Hikmah et al., 2022). In addition, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are increasingly used as alternative tools for Arabic language learning outside the classroom (Ilmiani & Miolo, 2021; Aloraini & Cardoso, 2022; Siregar et al., 2023). Thus, technology becomes an effective solution to support the development and preservation of Arabic.

Arabic language education does not only focus on improving students' linguistic skills but also plays an important role in strengthening their understanding of Islamic teachings (Rintonga et al., 2021; Akzam et al., 2021; Ridwan, 2023). As the language of the Qur'an and Hadith, mastery of Arabic is crucial for a deeper understanding of religious

texts. This is emphasized by [Yahya et al. \(2021\)](#), who state that learning Arabic is not merely for communication purposes but also serves as a form of religious orientation for Muslims. Arabic is also regarded as a symbol of Islamic cultural identity and a unifying tool for Muslims around the world ([Umam, 2021](#); [al-Yamin, 2023](#)). However, in the era of globalization, Arabic faces serious challenges, particularly from the dominance of English. For example, several universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have adopted English as the medium of instruction, weakening the position of Arabic in higher education ([al-Bataineh, 2020](#)).

Based on the explanation above, this study examines how the position and role of Arabic can still be maintained and developed amid the challenges of globalization, such as the dominance of global languages especially English. Arabic faces pressure in various fields, including higher education, media, and international communication. However, these challenges can be addressed by reinforcing Arabic's status as the language of Islam, which holds high spiritual, historical, and cultural value for Muslims. By positioning Arabic as a symbol of religious identity, the language can remain resilient in the face of globalization. To explore this more deeply, this study examines the development of Arabic comprehensively through five main aspects: (1) the history and origin of the Arabic language in the context of Islamic civilization, (2) phonological structure and grammar, (3) dialect classification and the challenge of diglossia, (4) the religious significance of Arabic in Islam, and (5) the role of Arab culture in reinforcing and disseminating Islamic values.

This research is important as an academic effort to continue and enrich previous studies on the development of Arabic in the Islamic world. By utilizing recent references and an interdisciplinary approach, this study aims to present a more in-depth and contextual discussion. Furthermore, it is expected to provide a meaningful contribution in concretely explaining the dynamics of Arabic development from historical, religious, cultural, and global challenge perspectives. Thus, the results of this study are expected to add to the body of knowledge in Arabic language studies and serve as a valuable reference for academics, researchers, educators, and general readers interested in linguistic issues in the Islamic context. This research is reinforcing and enriching in nature, by confirming previous findings while also adding new perspectives that have not been widely addressed in earlier studies.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method using a library research approach. The data sources in this study are derived from a number of scholarly references considered relevant and capable of addressing the research questions. Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, academic exploration and searches through digital libraries were conducted. Second, sources of reading materials that have strong correlations with the issue of the development of the Arabic language in the Islamic world were identified and selected. Third, important information from the selected sources was recorded using reading and note-taking techniques. Fourth, the collected data were organized systematically for analysis. The data analysis process involved a thorough reading of the selected texts, assessing their relevance to the research focus. This stage aimed to identify ideas, arguments, and findings that could support the interpretation and discussion in this study regarding the status of the Arabic language as a symbol of religious identity.

RESULTS

History of Arabic Language

To trace the historical trajectory of Arabic as one of the world's major languages, a language kinship approach can be used. This approach classifies languages based on their historical and linguistic relationships (Buhori & Wahidah, 2017). According to this model, the world's languages are grouped into major families such as the Indo-European, Semitic-Hamitic, and, as later added by Max Muller and Brunesen, the Turanian language family (Mudjia & Kholil, 2008). Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family a group of languages that have played a significant role in ancient civilizations. The Semitic peoples spread widely across the Middle East and East Africa and contributed to major ancient civilizations such as Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenicia, and the Hebrew tradition. Semitic languages are further divided into two broad branches: Northern Semitic and Southern Semitic.

In the northern region, languages such as Akkadian, Aramaic, Syriac, and Biblical Hebrew developed. Aramaic itself split into two primary variants: the eastern variant, which gave rise to Syriac, and the western variant, which included Samaritan, Jewish Aramaic, and Palmyrene. In the southern region, languages such as Sabaic, Himyaritic, Minaean, and Geez (Classical Ethiopic) evolved, with Geez giving rise to languages like Tigre, Amharic, and Harari. This linguistic diversity illustrates the breadth and depth of the Semitic language family. Of all these languages, only Arabic remains actively used today, not only as a spoken language but also as a language of religion, literature, and science (Wargadinata et al., 2008).

The development of Arabic is inseparable from the socio-cultural context of the Arabian Peninsula during the pre-Islamic era. The region was inhabited by two main groups: urban communities in cities like Mecca, Yathrib (Medina), Yemen, and al-Hirah in southern Iraq, and Bedouin tribes who led nomadic lifestyles in the desert (Mudjia & Kholil, 2008). These two groups had different social systems and cultural traditions, including linguistic practices. As a result, numerous Arabic dialects emerged. However, as Mecca grew into a center of trade and intercultural interaction, a need arose for a more unified mode of communication. This need was addressed through cultural events known as al-Aswaq, which served not only as trade fairs but also as festivals for poetry competitions, orations, and literary performances. Much like how the Greeks expressed their artistic sensibilities through architecture and sculpture, the Arabs expressed theirs through poetry (Hitti, 2008). In these competitions, participants sought to impress audiences with eloquent speech, and the Quraysh dialect consistently stood out as the most refined and widely understood.

The dominance of the Quraysh dialect in cultural and literary gatherings laid the foundation for what later became Classical Arabic (Fusha). This standardized form of the language was widely adopted by poets, orators, and scholars. While people continued to use their local dialects in daily life, the use of Quraysh Arabic in formal and literary contexts was greatly valued. Over time, this dialect was refined and enriched by elements from other dialects, resulting in a standardized literary language that was widely accepted across the Arab world. This language became the primary medium for classical poetry, public discourse, and scholarly writing.

Phonology & Grammar

Arabic has a unique grammatical structure, it is able to express a problem very clearly and with very sparing words, the formation of phrases, sentences and words is very thorough. Its words are organized based on the concept of the base word, the ordinary verb is composed of three or four consonant letters for example K-T-B (kataba, he writes) (Ilham, 2023), this basic verb can be ditashrif (changed) like verbs in other languages, it can also be used with a number of tenses, modes and inflections that we do not find in other languages (Suharsono & Rahmat, 2023). The root word, etymology, original meaning, as well as coined words are the essence of the Arabic language, with all of which various concepts, objects and thoughts can be described with new words not necessarily borrowed from other languages, if experts are good at finding new words to enrich the Arabic language then all humans will be proficient in Arabic. Thus Arabic is very suitable for explaining various rules and concepts, especially because Arabic is not affected by the passage of time, this is where the importance of efforts to preserve Arabic among Muslims. Arabic has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from other languages. The following are some of the characteristics that also distinguish Arabic from other languages, including:

First, Arabic is different from Indonesian. In Arabic there is a distinction between male and female (mudzakar-muannats) or singular (mufrad), dual (mutsanna) and plural (jama'). Whereas in Indonesian this is not recognized in the sentence structure (Kamalia, 2019). But for Arabs, the pronunciation of consonant sounds /ng/, /ny/, /c/, /p/, /g/, as well as vowels /o/, /ó/, /e/, /ě/, is also considered very difficult because they do not have these consonants and vowels. However, in many cases, the structure and style of Arabic tends to be more varied, beautiful and full of meaning compared to other languages. Secondly, the Arabic declarative sentence structure does not require the presence of a means word that explains the relationship between subject and predicate. Arabic has always assumed that the existence of ideas in the mind is more important and more true than the ideas in the real world.

Arabic has several important characteristics. Thirdly, there is i'rab, which is a change in the endings of words that indicates grammatical conditions such as rafa', nashab, jazm, and jar, which applies to isim (nouns) and fi'il (verbs) (Ghofur & Islamiyah, 2023). Fourth, the difference between 'ammiyah and fushah language. 'Ammiyah language is used in everyday communication, such as in buying and selling or informal situations, while fush-ha is the official language used in literary works, Islamic books, and learning. Fifth, Arabic language strongly emphasizes meaning. Whatever form of words or sentences are used, the main goal is to convey the full meaning so that it can be understood by the listener or reader. Finally, there is tashrif, which is the process of changing word forms based on certain standardized patterns. This process allows the formation of various word forms from one basic root word to convey various meanings and functions (Gani & Arsyad, 2018).

Dialects and Standard Languages

The social review of language and speaking will not be separated from the aspects of geographical differences both demographically and culturally as mentioned above. This is due to the heterogeneity of mankind which is basically created with their own characteristics. These differences have led to differences in the language used in the social interaction of each community. Even differences also occur within one language family so

as to form a kind of language variants that differ from one another. These language variants are called dialects. Dialect in language is a form of diglossia of a language. When viewed in terms of sociolinguistics this is a form of assessment of the diversity of isolects and social selection related to language and language behavior (Kridalaksana, 2005). Dialect itself comes from the Greek *διάλεκτος*, *dialektos*, which means variants of the same language. Variants that have differences between one another, but still show many similarities between them so that they do not deserve to be called different languages. Usually, dialect classification is based on geography, in addition to other factors such as social factors. Dialect differences can be clarified based on vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (phonology, including prosody) (Muzaki, 2018).

Muhammad Ali Al-Kulli mentions dialect as a method or way used by humans to express their language and a way of speaking that is more indicative of the geographical location, group or culture of the speakers. Each dialect has characteristics that distinguish it from other dialects in terms of phonology, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Dialects will undergo changes based on geographical location, political circumstances, and also cultural developments so as to cause the emergence of an independent language (Al-Khulli, 1982). To understand the dialectological concept of Arabic, it needs to be classified into three concepts, namely: First, Arabic dialects based on the fundamental differences between dialects. The division of Arabic dialects based on this point of view distinguishes two main elements, namely speakers and the level of language originality which emphasizes the difference between Bedouin and Sedentary. This distinction is based on the phenomenon of the movement of Arabs to every conquered place during the expansion of Islam and also the existence of indigenous people living in conquered areas. Over time and the widespread spread of the Arab region led to the emergence of various language variants in Arabic.

This linguistic diversity is divided into two major groups based on sociolinguistic factors: the dialects of the Bedouin Arabs, who live in the deserts, and the Sedentary Arabs, who are nomadic but sometimes settle within specific communities and regions. Language mixing is more likely to occur in Sedentary areas, as native Arabs often come into contact with non-Arabs through social, economic, and other interactions. In contrast, the Bedouin communities rarely experience such mixing, allowing their language to remain more insulated from foreign influences. As a result, Bedouin dialects have preserved their original linguistic features more effectively and are often referred to as Classical Arabic (CA) or traditional Arabic. Secondly, Arabic dialects can also be viewed through the lens of religion. Religion serves as a sociolinguistic foundation in dialect studies, including Arabic, especially in relation to each religion's sacred texts, which generally share a common Semitic language ancestry. In this context, religion plays a crucial role in revisiting the historical formation of religious sects and specific tribes.

Thirdly, Arabic dialects can also be classified based on geographical location. This classification divides Arabic dialects into two main groups: Eastern dialects and Western dialects. The distinction is based on the geographical spread of dialects as a result of cultural diffusion. Eastern dialects include those spoken in the Arabian Peninsula such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates and extend into Mesopotamian regions like Iraq, as well as countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Israel, reaching as far west as Egypt and as far east as Afghanistan. On the other hand, Western dialects are spoken in regions west of Egypt, including Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. This geographical distribution highlights the broad spread and diversity of Arabic dialects across the Arab world, shaped by historical movements, settlement patterns, and cultural interactions unique to each region.

Religious Significance of the Arabic Language

Arabic has long been established as a cultural element within the language of life. It has been used and has functioned since the time of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him). Ibn Abbas narrated that:

إن ادم عليه السلام كانت لغته في الجنة العربية. فلما عصى سلبه الله العربية، فتكلم بالسريانية، فلما تاب رضى الله عليه العربية

The language of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) in paradise was Arabic; then when he committed a sin, Allah removed the Arabic language, and Prophet Adam spoke in Syriac; when he repented, Allah restored the Arabic language.

Anyone who deeply studies the Arabic language will find that it serves as a means to build noble morals and eliminate bad behavior. Ibn Taymiyyah said, "Know that paying attention to the Arabic language greatly influences one's intellectual, moral, and religious capacity with a strong and clear impact. It also positively affects the effort to emulate the early generations of this community, especially the companions and the tabi'in, which increases intelligence, religion, and ethics" (Fisyawi, 2002). Allah Ta'ala chose Arabic as the language of His Holy Book not only because the people among whom Prophet Muhammad was appointed as a messenger spoke Arabic (bi lisân qawmihi), but also because Arabic is considered adaptive, suitable, and expressive for conveying eternal and universal divine messages. Besides the divine protection guaranteeing the preservation of the Qur'an, the main factor is the religious motivation and determination of Muslims to understand the divine messages and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Moreover, Arabic is elegant, flexible, and highly literary, effectively transmitting Muslim intellectual works in texts and manuscripts, which continue to be valuable sources of Islamic thought and inspiration (Umam, 1975).

The original sources of Islamic teachings namely the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic sciences are written in Arabic. Therefore, it is very important for Muslims, especially scholars, to study, understand, and master the Arabic language. Without this, it becomes difficult to study Islam directly from its original sources written in Arabic. Hence, learning Arabic in Islamic education is crucial for several reasons: first, the primary sources of Islam the Qur'an and Hadith are written in Arabic; second, major scholarly works that shape Islamic thought, particularly in tafsir, hadith, fiqh, aqidah, and tasawwuf, are written in Arabic; third, Islamic studies gain more depth when based on Arabic references; and fourth, currently, among Muslim scholars especially in Indonesia there is a declining engagement with Islamic sciences that are rooted in Arabic language studies (Lintang, 2023).

Cultural Influence

Arab culture existed long before Greek culture. It emerged more than 2,000 years ago. Its people referred to themselves as Arabs, and others also used that name to refer to them. Its people called themselves Arabs, as did others who referred to them by that name. They lived in the Arabian Peninsula before migrating to surrounding areas (Ridlo, 2015). The Arabian people were well-known for their expertise in language and literature, especially poetry. Their language was rich, comparable to modern European languages. This linguistic and literary excellence was a significant contribution to the development and spread of Islam. Philip K. Hitti commented, "The success of Islam's spread was partly

supported by the power of the Arabic language, especially the language of the Qur'an." Their cultural progress in language and literature was marked not by Arab nationalism but by tribal spirit. Poets of the Jahiliyah period glorified their tribes, victories in battles, famous leaders, heroes, and ancestors. They also praised women and loved ones in their poetry (Wargadinata et al., 2008).

In addition to poetry, another long-standing tradition of the Arab people was trade. For commercial purposes, the Arabs established marketplaces near Mecca, such as 'Ukaz, Majanna, and Dhul-Majaz. These trading markets were often accompanied by literary markets (sūq al-adab), where Arab poets competed to showcase their poetic talents. Most poetic activities were preserved through memorization, as written records were rare. However, poems that won competitions at the 'Ukaz market were usually written down and hung on the walls of the Ka'bah, known as mu'allaqāt. Trading had become second nature for the Quraysh tribe and was later preserved in Islam with added guidelines promoting honesty and ethical business practices. Meanwhile, literary markets during the pre-Islamic era underwent a radical transformation during the Prophet's time, especially in terms of themes and content, which significantly shifted from those of the Jāhiliyyah period (Yunus, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The presentation of data and analysis above shows that the development of the Arabic language as an essential element in Islamic civilization has deep historical and cultural roots. The language did not merely grow naturally but developed through the social, cultural, and religious interactions of Arab society since the pre-Islamic era. This development was influenced by prominent tribes in Arab society at the time, particularly the dialect of the Quraysh tribe, which later became the standard for Classical Arabic (Mudjia & Kholil, 2008). Social factors, such as tribal gatherings in cultural forums like al-Aswaq, also contributed to the emergence of a standard Arabic language to be adopted by Arab society. These events became arenas for intertribal poetic competitions, which indirectly served as platforms for dialect unification and the formation of a standardized Arabic that could be accepted by all. The blending of dialects among various tribes shows that the Arabic language developed collectively and was agreed upon communally.

Arabic also developed within the context of culture and trade. The Arab people's love for poetry had a positive impact in preserving and spreading the Arabic language. Pre-Islamic Arab poets played a role in maintaining and preserving Arabic vocabulary and grammatical structure, which were later passed down in written form during the Islamic period (Wargadinata et al., 2008; Hitti, 2008). The significance of Arabic grew even stronger with the advent of Islam. Arabic became the language of the Qur'an and a medium for preaching and spreading Islamic teachings (Abdul Wahab, 2014). The position of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an affirms its existence as a spiritual symbol. Ibn Taymiyyah also argued that attention to the Arabic language can enhance one's intellectual, moral, and spiritual values (Fisyawi, 2002).

The findings of this study reinforce previous research by Rintonga et al. (2021), Akzam et al. (2021), and Ridwan (2023), which showed that learning Arabic not only improves students' foreign language skills but also plays a vital role in strengthening their understanding of Islamic teachings. This is in line with Yahya et al. (2021), who state that since the Qur'an and Hadith are written in Arabic, the language plays a key role in shaping

one's comprehension of Islamic concepts. Furthermore, Arabic is considered a symbol of Islamic cultural identity and a unifying tool for Muslims around the world (Umam, 2021; al-Yamin, 2023).

In line with previous studies, Arabic today faces global challenges, particularly the dominance of English, which threatens the preservation of the Arabic language. For instance, several universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have adopted English as the medium of instruction, which has weakened the position of Arabic in higher education (al-Bataineh, 2020). Efforts to preserve Arabic through formal education, technology, digital learning, and social media have become crucial strategies to maintain its presence as a religious symbol in the global era (Abidin & Strianingsih, 2017; Nasution et al., 2024). Thus, the development of Arabic is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also reflects the historical, social, and spiritual dynamics of Arab society and the Muslim community. Arabic has endured to this day because it is regarded as a symbol of religious identity, a language of knowledge, and a cultural heritage of the Arab people.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development of the Arabic language as a symbol of religion, a language of knowledge, and a cultural heritage of the Muslim community has persisted to this day due to its strategic position within Islamic civilization. Arabic has not only evolved naturally but has also developed through the social, cultural, and spiritual interactions of Arab society since the pre-Islamic era. In addition, the role of the Quraysh dialect as the standard for Arabic and the use of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an have further reinforced its status as a sacred language and an irreplaceable symbol of Islamic identity. The findings of this study contribute to enriching Arabic linguistic studies and provide a concrete picture of the resilience of Arabic as both a cultural and religious identity for Muslims. However, this study is limited by its library-based approach and does not include direct empirical data from the field. Therefore, this research recommends that future studies addressing this issue explore data based on fieldwork such as observations in educational settings or within Arabic-speaking communities in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the Arabic language, particularly within the context of Muslim societies.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author is responsible for designing the research, collecting and analyzing the data, and drafting the initial version of the article. Meanwhile, the second and third authors contribute by providing theoretical foundations, conducting critical reviews, and making substantial contributions to the development of the discussion and the refinement of the final manuscript.

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AUTHORS' SHORT BIODATA

Alfikri Rausen Aditya is a doctoral student in the Islamic Studies program with a concentration in Arabic Language and Literature at the State Islamic University of Alauddin. His research covers the field of Arabic language and literature studies. Email: alfikrirausenaditya23@gmail.com.

Nur Afifah Hamzah is a master's student in the Linguistics program at Gadjah Mada University. Her research covers the fields of Arabic linguistic, especially Discourse analysis in Arab mass media. Email: nurafifahhamzah@mail.ugm.ac.id