This book is an ethnolinguistic study of Malay settlers in Mecca, Madinah and Jeddah, based on a research undertaken by the authors in 2014. Narration from the people themselves of their background history and community life had resulted in a wealth of data depicting a historical landscape of maintenance and shift of language use and lifestyle of three generations of informants. Where there used to be a strong inclination to adopt and adapt to the Arab lifestyle inclusive of language use, there now appears to be a revitalisation among the younger generation in the use of Malay in preparation for their return to the Malay world, a situation motivated by a more stringent policy of the Saudi government in offering foreign settlers citizenship and permanent residence.
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**Preface**

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## 1

The Project: Subject Matter and Approach

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## 2

Mecca and Madinah: The Semiotics

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According to history, Malays became Muslims circa the 10th century C.E. However, there is no record as to when they first went to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam. Given the fact that Malays were known as sea-faring people and had the ability to build sailing ships that plied the oceans it would not be too far fetched to infer that their venture to the Holy Land could have taken place before the arrival of steam ships, in the way sailing ships of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English made their journey to the Malay world. This inference is supported by Sejarah Melayu (also known as The Malay Annals), written in the 17th century, which makes mention of people who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. If there ever was a possibility for pilgrims from the Malay Peninsula and the islands to sail to Jeddah, or even part of the way before continuing their journey on land to Mecca, the number for a single year would have been rather small.

The availability of the steam ship as a commercial form of transport in the latter half of the 19th century was undoubtedly a factor which gave an impetus not only to the flow of Malay pilgrims to Mecca but also to students in their pursuit of religious education there. Among pilgrims and students there were those who stayed back and made Mecca their home. Over time the community of Malay settlers in Mecca grew in size to become what it is today. This book is about this very community which had its beginning most probably in the second half of the 19th century. It is about the life of the people who call themselves Malays: the type of of life they lead, their reasons for staying there, their interaction among themselves and with those outside their group, the shift and maintenance that they undergo in terms their primordial language and culture, and expectations they have for the future. There have been publications in the form of articles in Malaysian
newspapers and magazines on Malays in Mecca. However, these are general
descriptions arising from interactions between writers and individuals living
in Mecca. To our knowledge there have not been any in-depth study of
settlers of Malay origin there.

This book, *Malays in the Holy Land: An Ethnolinguistic Study* is a result of
the research undertaken by a group of linguists of the Faculty of Languages
and Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. As an ethnolinguistic
study, collection of data is focused on almost every aspect of the community
life, and language is a most essential part of this life. From our interviews of
the informants, their narration of background history and community life,
as well as our observation of their activities, we had been able to collect a
wealth of data which have been turned into material for this book.

The idea of mounting the research project arose in a conversation
between Professor Dr. Azirah Hashim, Dean of the Humanities Research
Cluster, University of Malaya and myself in December 2011. Professor Azirah
asked me to design a project which could work towards a collaboration
between general linguists and those specialising in Arabic, and the project
should be of a comparative or a cross-nation studies. Forming a team for
such a project was not difficult as expertise required was already part of
one and the same institution, the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. A
team was formed consisting of two academics from the English Department
(Associate Professor Dr. Kamila Ghazali and Associate Professor Dr. Faridah
Noor Mohd. Noor), and two from the Arabic Language Department (Associate
Professor Dr. Mohammad Semon and Dr. Mat Taib Pa). Approval from the
university took some time due to several constraints. It was only in October
2013 that the green light was given and we were able to make the necessary
preparations to leave for Saudi Arabia.

Since fieldwork was to be carried out in Mecca and Madinah, preparation
for our entry into the Holy Land was similar to that of pilgrims going for the
minor Hajj, the Umrah. Our entry was through Madinah where we were able
to stay for four days (28 – 31 January 2014), a time span sufficient for us to
get whatever data we could get as there was no sizeable Malay community
domiciled in the city and the surrounding area. Mecca was the place where we
could meet the necessary informants. Leaving Madinah in the late afternoon
of Friday 31st January, we arrived in Mecca at 9.00 p.m. the same day.
We took the opportunity to perform the Umrah that very night ending at 3.00
a.m. the next day. That was the only Umrah possible for us as we were busy
everyday of the week starting from 9.00 a.m that same Saturday, going to
the field. Our days always ended at night, sometimes performing the Isha
prayers at the house of informants.

The one and a half days in Jeddah on our way home was made full
use of, as we were able to meet with a whole family (of three generations)
who were originally from Mecca, who had moved on to Jeddah. Progress in
their socioeconomic life and their standing in society had enabled them to
establish themselves in a well-to-do surrounding in Jeddah.

The fieldwork was a most enriching experience for us. We got to know
the informants and their families and have become close friends with them.
At almost every house we visited in Mecca, we were served with a complete
meal. There were times when we were persuaded to take two lunches or two
dinners. No doubt the terrain in Mecca on which their premises are built are
not friendly, as we had to climb steep rocky slopes, and then to continue with
going up four flights of stairs to be in their apartments. But all these were
neutralised by the hospitality received. With such forthcoming friendliness
from everyone we met our daily outing in search of data for our project was
fulfilled. There is no suitable expression to record our grateful thanks to all
our informants. Only that we pray that their life and that of their families
are always blessed by Allah *Subhānahu wa Ta’āla.* (See the full list of their
names in Appendix)

As said earlier, the project arose from Professor Azirah Hashim’s concern
for a collaboration of linguists, where one side had to be from those who
were familiar with the Arab-Islamic world. We are most grateful to her
not just for the idea which grew into the project undertaken, but also for
her support in acquiring for us the budget of RM90,250/- from the grant
UMRG(RP021-13HNE) to enable the five of us to make our journey to Saudi
Arabia and be in the chosen loci of research. In this connection we would
like to record our gratitude to the University of Malaya for approving the
grant of the sum stated above.

Various authorities in the institutions where we are attached to have
been most kind in approving our research leave for the purpose. We would
like to record our thanks in particular to Professor Datu’ Dr. Mohd. Amin
Jalaluddin, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Dr. Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation; Professor Datin Dr.
Norhanum Abdul Wahab, Dean of the Institute of Graduate Studies; Professor
Dr. Zuraih Mohd. Don, Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics;
Associate Professor Dr. Zahir Ahmad, Director of the Academy of Malay
Studies; Dr. Baljit Kaur a/p Surjit Singh, Head of the Department of English,
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics; and Dr. Salinah Jaafar, Head of the
Department of Malay Linguistics, Academy of Malay Studies.

In the course of our travel from Kuala Lumpur, specifically during our
transit in Riyadh, en route to Madinah, staff from the Malaysian Embassy
in Riyadh went out of their way to assist us through the immigration, such
that we were able to get the connecting flight in time. We are most grateful indeed to Encik Rosli Osman (Second Secretary of the Embassy), Encik Muhammad Jeffersen Liew (Executive Assistant to the Ambassador/Attaché), and Encik Mohd. Amin (general staff at the Embassy). We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency Dato' Dr. Syed Omar Alsagoff, the Ambassador who at that time had just returned to Malaysia at the end of his posting there. We were lucky to be able to contact him at his home in Perlis, and it was through his good services that the officers of the embassy were informed of our presence in Riyadh.

I am personally most indebted to those in the team - Dr. Kamila Gahazali, Dr. Faridah Noor Mohd. Noor, Dr. Mohammad Seman, and Dr. Mat Taib Pa, for their undivided support and co-operation throughout the time we were in the field, through trials and tribulations. We also had the advantage of the company of Che Zaulin Abdul Ghani who had rendered valuable assistance in the organisation of our daily routine, and to her goes our heartfelt thanks.

Above all we are grateful to Allah, the Most Kind and Merciful, for giving us the motivation, willpower and energy to carry out the project.

Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr. Asmah Haji Omar