



Review of “Speak Standard Malay: A Beginner’s Guide”

Title	Speak Standard Malay: A Beginner’s Guide (Revised Edition)
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Reviewed by Jyh Wee Sew

1 Introduction

“Speak Standard Malay” was first published in 1993. This first revised edition has included a section of basic information on Malay culture at the bottom of selected pages and updated dialogues with two previous conversation segments replaced (p. xii). The addition of cultural information enhances the comprehension of Malay speech styles. The presentation of the Malay dialogues follows a predictable format in all chapters suggesting that the book is written for a self-study purpose. In the *Preface*, the author mentions that “Speak Standard Malay” is written as a companion volume to his other book “*Standard Malay Made Simple*” (Liaw, 1988) and foreigners are the target audience (p. xi).

2 Major components of the book

Following the *Preface*, two sets of grammar notes precede the twenty chapters (p. xiii–xx). The note on pronunciation outlines the phonetics of Standard Malay, i.e. vowels, diphthongs, and consonants. Apart from twenty-five consonants, five vowels with one vocalic variant, and three diphthongs are identified in Standard Malay. English words with identical phonetics are provided to illustrate the corresponding phonetic segments in Malay.

There are 20 chapters of standard Malay conversations organized in dialogue format around many topics deemed relevant to foreign visitors in the Malay-speaking world. These topics include *Greetings and Taking Leave*, *Hobbies and Leisure*, *Food and Restaurants*, *Accommodation*, *On the Telephone*, *Shopping*, among others. Chapter One on *Greetings and Taking Leave*, for example, contains 22 sets of conversations in basic social settings involving friends, customers and service providers. Each conversation cluster consists of 4 to 11 turns of verbal exchanges between two interlocutors. Most of the interlocutors are named while a few are labeled as A and B. At the bottom of many pages annotations on selected Malay terms found in a conversation cluster are provided. The annotations provide basic explanations for specific Malay terms. Unfortunately, no exercises or language tasks are provided in the entire book.

Constructed patterns of simple standard Malay expression are readily available in the book. The application of the conversation routines is intended to improve beginners’ pronunciation of Malay words. The note on word formation offers a rudimentary grasp of Malay morphology to

readers. Beginners will find some of the cultural annotations from the revised section useful in detailing Malay as a medium of language-cum-culture in a daily setting.

3 Standard versus colloquial Malay in review

Any comparison between colloquial and standard variants remains limited from the beginning as each chapter is entirely on standard Malay conversation followed by the English translation. The note on colloquial Malay grammar should not be categorically contrasted with standard Malay grammar and a closer look is called for. The comparative review of standard and colloquial grammar begins with the original grammar points with the original translations found on p. xvii–xviii tabled below with italics added:

Non-colloquial or common terms	Colloquialism
Bagi (for)	<i>Untuk</i>
Ia (he, she, it)	<i>Dia</i>
Lihat (see)	<i>Tengok</i>
Seperti (like resembling)	<i>Macam</i>
Silakan (please)	<i>Jemput or cuba or tolong</i>

Table 1: Standard vs. colloquial Malay terms

3.1 The use of *untuk*

Malay conjunctions are difficult clusters in foreign language acquisition compared to nouns and verbs, which are more basic in terms of denotation. As a conjunction, *untuk* (for) does not come across as a colloquial expression as suggested by the author. In terms of corpus, the polysemous *untuk* is a robust grammar word registering three counts on the first page of a secondary three Malay workbook as indicated in Table 2 (all the translations are mine in the following tables). In fact, the author himself uses the so-called colloquial *untuk* in the standard Malay conversations represented by examples 4 to 6 in Table 2¹:

1. <i>...berusaha meningkatkan diri masing-masing untuk menghadapi...</i>
... each tries to improve oneself to face...
2. <i>...dan ketekunan untuk terus belajar...</i>
...and the diligence for continual learning...
3. <i>...pemandu teksi seperti aku untuk menimba kemahiran...</i>
...taxi drivers like myself to acquire skills...
4. <i>Dia akan pergi ke Pulau Bali untuk berbulan madu.</i>
He will be going to Bali Island for his honeymoon. (p. 166)
5. <i>Baiklah saya akan kembalikan buku-buku itu untuk awak.</i>
Ok, I'll return the books for you. (p. 191)
6. <i>Saya suka makanan pedas tetapi makanan malam tadi terlalu pedas untuk saya.</i>
I like spicy food but the food last night was too spicy for me. (p. 194)

Table 2: Examples of *untuk* in standard Malay

The data above not only indicate that *untuk* is part of standard Malay. *Untuk* is an indispensable conjunction that plays versatile roles in either written or oral Malay discourse.

3.2 The use of *dia*

Contrary to the author's claim, the third person pronoun *dia* is actually a standard form. Evidently in the Malay work book mentioned above, *dia* appears thrice in place of Ali, Azizul and

independently at the beginning of a sentence². Moreover, *dia* as the topic-subject of the sentence has adequately ascribed it with a full pronoun status in standard Malay as indicated in Table 3:

7. <i>Dia tidak pernah lupa akan segala _____ neneknya.</i>
S/he never forgets any of his/her grandmother's _____.

Table 3: An example of *dia* in standard Malay

3.3 Verbs of sight: *tengok* and *lihat*

A main difference between the verbs of sight *tengok* and *lihat* is distinguished by the intention to seek visual information. In other words, *lihat* denotes seeing and *tengok* denotes viewing. The function of watching a performance or movie is only attributed to *tengok* but not *lihat* in the authoritative Malay dictionary³. Instances that require *tengok* which presumes an intention of viewing are shown in Table 4 (*lihat* is marked with asterisk to indicate ungrammaticality in comparison to *tengok*):

8. Saya menengok/menonton/*melihat filem seram.
I view/watch/*see a horror film.
9. “Anda nak tengok/*lihat wayang ini?”, tanya Ali.
“Do you want to watch/*see this show?”, asked Ali.

Table 4: Examples of *tengok* in Standard Malay

3.4 The use of *seperti* versus *macam*

Although it is considered as a colloquial counterpart to *seperti* (“resembling”), *macam* remains a part of many existing Malay idioms, e.g. *macam betung seruas* (“too honest”). More than ten Malay proverbs begin with *macam*⁴. *Macam mana* is relegated to the colloquial equivalent of *bagaimana* (“how”, p. xvii, 121). The rhetorical question lamenting limited time, “*Nak buat macam mana?*” (“How do I continue?”), however, is a common speech act in the verbal art of public communication by academicians.

3.5 The use of *sila* versus *tolong*

While the use of *sila* conjures up an invitation in a Malay expression, *tolong* is a discourse marker normally applied to perform a verbal request. If a speaker would like somebody to bring durian from the market, *tolong* rather than *sila* is used in the request as illustrated in Table 5:

10. <i>Tolong/*Sila belikan durian dari pasar.</i> [as request]
Please buy durian from the market ⁵ .

Table 5: *Tolong* as request marker in Standard Malay

A Malay speaker performs a verbal solicitation sans directive power with *sila*. Such speech act is usually initiated by extremely polite fruit sellers at the market. The following example is a marked expression, which is rather uncommon in daily verbal exchange at the market. Compared to *sila* as exemplified in Table 6, the example of *tolong* in Table 5 is inherent with a directive illocutionary force.

11. <i>Sila beli durian kebun ini.</i> [solicitation]
Please buy these orchard grown durians.

Table 6: *Sila* marks an offer in Standard Malay

4 Malay morphology

In a question-and-answer format, the conversation clusters in each chapter provide basic ways of asking for relevant information. Practical speech styles with relevant cultural explanation are inserted accordingly. This book provides additional clarification on polysemous Malay morphemes, e.g. *tahan* to endure (p. 151), synonyms, e.g. *pendingin hawa* and *penyaman udara* (“air-conditioner”, p. 136); although *pendingin udara* is the prescribed Malay compound⁶.

Malay time line is clearly delineated in the chapter on Greetings and Taking Leave: *Selamat pagi* (“Good morning”) up to 11:59 a.m., *Selamat tengah hari* (“Good noon”) from 12 noon to 1.59 p.m., *Selamat petang* (“Good afternoon”) from 2.00 p.m. to 6.59 p.m. and *Selamat malam* (“Good evening/night”) from 7.00 p.m. onwards (p. 7). These temporal frames are relevant for answering queries from foreign students of basic Malay. Other cultural-specific areas include the 99 attributes of Allah exploited in Malay naming, resulting in the common usage of personal names, e.g. Aziz (“powerful”), *Hamid* (“praiseworthy”), *Latif* (“benevolent”) etc. (p. 244).

Under the topic Learning Malay, arithmetic is glossed as *ilmu kira-kira* and regarded as synonymous with *ilmu hisab* (p. 114). That currently everybody learns *matematiks*, the standard Malay equivalent for arithmetic, seems to escape the scope of this chapter. It is informed that students using *bilang* (“count”) as *kata* (“say”) are punished (p. xix). Unfortunately, little effort is made to rectify the confusion of Indonesian *bilang* with the Malay homonym when the miscorrelation re-emerges in Chapter 16. Again, *bilang* (“to count”) is reported as a synonym frequently used for *katakan* (“to say”) (p. 213).

5 Discrepancies

Part of the responsibility of a reviewer is to identify the errors in the book to the publisher for future remedy. Furthermore, beginners of Malay would refer to the content of a Malay language textbook very closely and these first timers may not be able to discriminate the errors in this book. The following incongruities in Table 7 may serve as a guiding aid for the language instructors to use the book effectively with the beginners.

Error	Page	Suggestion
<i>rupapensyarah</i>	49	politik
<i>Saudarakah</i>	61	rupa pensyarah
Politik	68	saudarakah
<i>garbled sentence</i>	90	spacing between words
masihada	123	masih ada
<i>garbled sentence</i>	139	spacing between words
<i>garbled sentence</i>	172	spacing between words
<i>satikkah</i>	182	sakitkah
<i>lanpan</i>	197	lapan
<i>passport</i>	198	pasport
<i>Ibubapanya lagi muda</i>	199	Ibu bapanya muda lagi
<i>dibernarkan</i>	201	dibenarkan
<i>Anda</i>	218	anda
<i>warktu</i>	245	waktu
<i>keramaham</i>	259	keramahan
<i>Tiba tiba</i>	260	Tiba-tiba
<i>pickpocket</i>	264	thief
<i>Sadahkah</i>	271	Sudahkah
<i>sapal terbang</i>	274	kapal terbang

Table 7: Incongruent forms and follow-up suggestions

The content of „Speak Standard Malay” displays certain irregularities against standard Malay grammar. The negating verb *bukan* is said to always negate nouns (p. 20). The first example of a negative construction for *bukan* in *Kamus Dewan*, however, is a negation of an adjective, i.e. *anak itu bukan bodoh tetapi malas* (“that child is not stupid but lazy”).

The topic on oneself in Chapter 2 contains the expression *Bilakah awak diperanakan?* (“When were you born?”, p. 25). This phrase is anything but a common Malay question. The term *diperanakan* is not documented in *Kamus Dewan* and the use of the term in the conversation is odd. Malay speakers who are interested in seeking the date of birth would generally ask in this way, “*Bila kamu dilahirkan?*”.

The term for date-of-birth is *tarikh lahir* in standard Malay. The expression for giving birth is *lahir* (usually affixed with *me-* and suffixed with *-kan*). Following the original passive construction of the Malay conversation, the passive form for *lahir* was invoked with the prefix *di-* in the example above.

The author uses *lantai* (“floor”) in a query to locate the restaurant: *Apakah di lantai enam itu semuanya restoran?* (“Are all restaurants on the sixth floor?”, p. 99). *Lantai* is not the common word to identify a particular level of a building. The Malay term is *tingkat* or *aras* (level). The author mentions this point in an appended note at the bottom of the page. To a Malay, the use of *lantai* creates the impression that the speaker is trying to converse in Indonesian rather than Malay.

Although the notes preceding the chapters regards *mari* as the colloquial form for *datang sini* (“come here”, p. xvii), *mari* in *Kalau begitu, marilah kita pergi ke pusat membeli-belah* (“In that case, let’s go to the shopping centre”, p. 224) is not interchangeable with *datang sini*. In a Malay speech act, *mari* has an inherent deictic function. This could be the reason *mari* does not affix with the volitional prefix *me-*, e.g. **memari* nor the causative suffix *-kan* **memarikan*. As mentioned in section 2 of this review, *mari* is a standard form for commissioning an action and this word is commonly found within the face-to-face speech acts of Malay dyads⁷.

6 Concluding remarks

“Speak Standard Malay” has little variation in terms of learning development and there are no language exercises or tasks to complement the many standard texts in each chapter. Communicative components could be incorporated into the material of “Speak Standard Malay”. The communicative scenarios in the book are limited to printed texts of dialogues. There are no stimuli to encourage question-and-answer opportunities amongst the users; and between the instructors and the users. This book seems to support the drill-cum-translation method for Malay acquisition, which is fast becoming obsolete. In terms of pedagogy, this book is a blueprint for more elaborate interactive methodology in language learning.

In terms of production, the book carries clear print on high quality paper and the font size reads comfortably. The book could be carried around easily enough to be read conveniently while running errands with gaps of waiting time. Beginners should be made aware of the shortcomings in the book, especially the incongruities listed. After the amendment, this book might be a basic reference as the conversation sampling could satisfy elementary needs in learning Malay.

Notes:

¹ *Jendela Bahasa* (2004). This Malay workbook is based on the prescriptive version of Standard Malay endorsed by Malay Language and Literary Planning Committee of the Ministry of Education.

² *Jendela Bahasa* (2004, p. 25)

³ *Kamus Dewan* (1997)

⁴ Abdullah Hussain, *Kamus Istimewa Peribahasa Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991, p. 126-127)

⁵ Example 10 concerns the use of request word *sila*, of which the conjunction *dari* is translated exactly as from to denote a request for buying durian from the market. A foreign speaker would assume *dari* to be translated as at, which erroneously turns a request into a statement.

⁶ *Kamus Dewan* (1997, p. 306)

⁷ See the discussion on the phrase *come on* in *Malay Phrasebook* by Susan Keeney in Sew (2006).

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