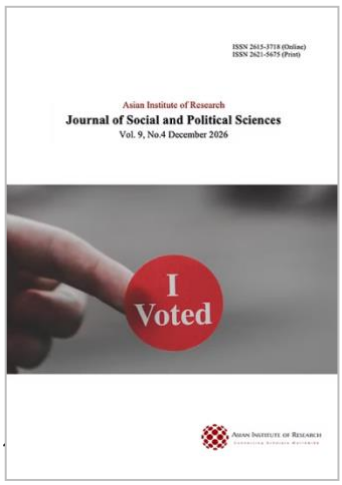


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Tracing Arabic Influence in Meranaw: A Study of Loanwords and Phonological Nativization

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Abstract
This study looks at how Arabic has influenced Meranaw through loanwords and changes in pronunciation. Meranaw has been in contact with Arabic for a long time due to Islam, religious education, and historical trade in Mindanao, Philippines. Despite evidence of more than 600 Arabic-root words in Meranaw (Racman & Lulu, 2021), there is little research on how Meranaw speakers pronounce these words. This study fills this gap by identifying Arabic-derived words in Meranaw and explaining how they fit into the Meranaw sound system. Researchers studied how the Meranaw language uses words from Arabic. Using a descriptive qualitative design, she looked at 10 Meranaw from Lanao del Sur, aged 33 to 73. The researcher used books, dictionaries and recordings to figure out how Meranaw speakers say Arabic words. The findings reveal that 25 Arabic loanwords are systematically nativized through four main processes: sound substitution (48% of words), vowel insertion/ epenthesis (24%), sound deletion (12%), and syllable restructuring (12%). Additionally, 20% of words undergo minimal change, demonstrating that not all Arabic loanwords require extensive adaptation. Specific examples include Arabic Dhikr (ذكر) Meranaw Dikir (religious canticle), Arabic ‘Omrah (عمرة) → Omra (Performing a religious act at Mecca), and Arabic Masjid (مسجد) → Masgit. Sound substitution is the most dominant process, occurring in 12 out of 25 words, occurs when Arabic sounds do not present in Meranaw (e.g. /th/, /s/, /q/, /j/) are replaced with the closest Meranaw equivalents (/s/, /k/, /g/). Sound deletion removes Arabic emphatic consonants and glottal stops. Vowel insertion adds vowels to make Arabic words easier to pronounce, while syllable restructuring reshapes words to fit Meranaw phonotactic patterns. The study concludes that Arabic influence in Meranaw is not only lexical but also phonological, as borrowed words are actively reshaped according to local sound rules while preserving their original meanings. This study is important because it looks at how Arabic loanwords are pronounced in Meranaw, which is a Philippine language. Until now, no one has really studied this topic using speaker pronunciation data and audio recordings. By doing this research, we can learn more about how Meranaw speakers adapt Arabic words into their own language. The findings contribute to language documentation, cultural heritage preservation, and understanding of Arabic-Meranaw language contact in Muslim Philippine communities.

Keywords: Arabic Loanwords, Meranaw, Phonological Nativization, Sound Substitution, Vowel Insertion, Language Contact, Loanword Phonology

1. Introduction

When people who speak different languages interact with each other regularly, they start to influence each other’s languages. This is called language. Over time, words from one language can become part of another language’s

vocabulary. We call this borrowing. It's more likely to happen when communities have things in common, like shared religion, trade, education, or politics. In the case of Meranaw, a major Muslim language spoken in Lanao del Sur and nearly areas in Mindanao, Philippines, Arabic has been a significant source language because of the spread of Islam in the southern Philippines. Meranaw is strongly connected to Muslim identity and Islamic tradition. Because of this history, Arabic has had a powerful influence on Meranaw vocabulary. (Racman & Lulu, 2021).

2. Research Gap

There's a big gap in research on how Arabic loanwords are pronounced in Meranaw, even though we know that Meranaw has over 600 Arabic root words. This is surprising, given that previous studies like Racman & Lulu (2021) have already shown the significant influence of Arabic on the Meranaw language. To address this gap, our study looks at how Meranaw speakers actually pronounce these loanwords, using a combination of dictionary sources and audio recordings from 10 native speakers. By examining the pronunciation data from these speakers, as well as existing research by Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez (2021), we can gain a better understanding of how Arabic loanwords have been adapted into the Meranaw language. This study is important because it can help us learn more about the complex history and evolution of the Meranaw language and how it has been shaped by its contact with other languages like Arabic.

3. Statement of the Problem (SOP)

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What Arabic loanwords are commonly used in Meranaw?
2. How do Meranaw speakers pronounce these Arabic loanwords in actual speech?
3. What phonological processes are involved in the adaptation of Arabic loanwords in Meranaw?

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three theoretical frameworks:

1. Loanword Phonology Theory (Kang, 2024): This theory explains how borrowed words are adapted to fit the sound structure of the receiving language. It posits that borrowed words undergo systematic repairs—including substitution, deletion, insertion, and syllable restructuring—to match the phonotactic preferences of the recipient language.

2. Phonology vs. Phonetics in Loanword Adaptation (Peperkamp, 2015): This framework explains why actual pronunciation may differ from the source language form, emphasizing the role of perceptual processing and phonological constraints in shaping borrowed words.

3. Language Contact Theory (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988): This theory explains why Arabic words entered Meranaw in the first place, connecting the borrowing process to Islam, religious education, cultural exchange, and long-term interaction between speech communities.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons:

- **Language Preservation:** This is important because it helps keep languages alive by saving the unique words and stories of a culture for the people who come after us.
- **Understanding Culture:** This helps us see how Arabic and Meranaw languages interact in a simpler way. It shows how Meranaw keeps the meaning of Arabic words, but changes the way they sound.
- **Linguistic Documentation**: It helps document the phonology and vocabulary of Meranaw, it offers proof based on real speaker pronunciation data.
- **Empirical Evidence**: Using audio recordings and interviews with 10 native speakers, it offers proof based on real speaker pronunciation data.
- **Practical Applications**: Linguists, educators, language documenters, and Islamic studies researchers studying Muslim Philippine languages can all benefit from the data it offers.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Arabic Loanwords in Meranaw

The most important study on Arabic loanwords in Meranaw is by Racman and Lulu (2021), titled "Identifying and Categorizing Meranaw Words with Arabic Roots: A Case Study of the Meranaw Language Spoken in the Philippines." This study identified more than 600 Meranaw terms with Arabic roots and classified them according to semantic domains such Islamic Practices economic terms, status and professional terms and legal terms. Writers confirmed the words with local Meranaw and Arab speakers and used a Meranaw lexicon (McKaughan & Macaraya, 1967). Their research demonstrated the widespread Arabic influence in Meranaw, which is strongly linked to Islam and past interactions with Arab traders and residents. However, this study focused on **lexical identification**, not on phonological adaptation (Racman & Lulu, 2021).

5.2. Meranaw Phonological System

Lobel and Riwarung (2011) provided a detailed description of the Meranaw phological system in their study "Meranaw: A Preliminary Phonological Sketch with Supporting Audio. This study detailed Meranaw's unique characteristics, phonotactic patterns, and sound inventory. The study is crucial to comprehending the arrangement for Meranaw sounds and reasons behind the substitution or modification of specific Arabic sounds in borrowed words. Meranaw has a relatively simple consonant inventory and prefers CV (consonant-vowel) and CVC syllable patterns. However, this study did not examine Arabic loanwords directly (Lobel & Riwarung, 2011).

5.3. Arabic Loanwords in Maguindanaon

The closest related study to the present research is **Menson-Makalingkang and Echavez** (2021), titled *"Phonological Adaptation of Arabic Loanwords in Maguindanaon."* This research examined how Arabic loanwords are phonologically adapted in Maguindanaon, a neighboring Philippine Muslim language. The study used a descriptive qualitative design with interviews and audio recordings of **12 native Maguindanaon speakers** and found that Maguindanaon phonology systematically reshapes Arabic loanwords through processes such as substitution, deletion, vowel insertion, and syllable restructuring. The study also examined morphological and semantic adaptation. While this study is very similar in topic and methodology, it focused on **Maguindanaon, not Meranaw**, which means its findings cannot be directly generalized to Meranaw (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021).

5.4. Arabic Loanwords in Tagalog

A 2025 study on *"Phonological Adaptation of Arabic Loanwords in Tagalog"* examined phonological adaptation processes in Tagalog, showing that Arabic loanwords in Tagalog are also nativized through systematic sound changes. This confirms that phonological adaptation is a common phenomenon across Philippine languages, but it does not address Meranaw specifically (Phonological adaptation of Arabic loanwords in Tagalog: An analysis, 2025).

5.5. Loanword Phonology Theory

Broader studies on loanword phonology explain that borrowed words are often repaired to match the phonotactic structure of the receiving language. These repairs may include substitution, insertion, deletion, and syllable simplification. This theory supports the idea that Arabic loanwords in Meranaw are systematic adaptations rather than random changes. The theory also explains why borrowed words follow the internal rules of the receiving language (Kang, 2024; Peperkamp, 2015).

6. Methods

6.1. Research Design

This study used a **descriptive qualitative design** to examine the phonological nativization of Arabic loanwords in Meranaw. The goal of the method was to describe how borrowed Arabic words are pronounced by Meranaw speakers and how these words are adjusted to fit the Meranaw sound system. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study focused on pronunciation, sound change, and word adaptation rather than numerical measurement (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021).

6.2. Participants

The participants were 10 selected Meranaw speakers from Lanao del Sur. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

Participant Profile	Description
Number of Participants	10 native Meranaw speakers
Age	33 – 73 years old
Gender	4 males, 6 females
Education Level	2 with elementary education, 4 with high school, 4 with college/university
Religious Background	All Muslims, 8 with Islamic school education, 3 with public school education
Location	Lanao del Sur, Philippines
Language Fluency	All fluent in Meranaw, 9 also fluent in Filipino/Tagalog; 2 have basic Arabic knowledge from religious education

The participants represented different levels of religious education, which helped ensure that the pronunciation data reflected general Meranaw speech patterns (Racman & Lulu, 2021).

6.3. Instruments

The study used the following instruments for data collection:

1. **Interview Script**: A structured list of 25 Arabic-derived words commonly used in Meranaw, with space for recording pronunciations.
2. **Digital Audio Recorder**: Samsung Galaxy A54 smartphone for recording speaker pronunciations.
3. **Meranaw Dictionary**: McKaughan and Macaraya's *A Meranaw Dictionary* (1967) for verifying word forms and meanings.
4. **Arabic Dictionary**: Hans Wehr's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* for verifying Arabic source forms.
5. **Consent Forms**: Written informed consent forms in English and Meranaw language.

6.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection involved the following steps:

1. **Selection of 25 Arabic-derived words** commonly used in Meranaw from published studies (Racman & Lulu, 2021) and dictionaries (McKaughan & Macaraya, 1967)
2. **Documentation of Arabic source forms** with Arabic script and Romanized transliteration
3. **Preparation of an interview script** with the selected words
4. **Recruitment of 10 Meranaw speakers** through purposive sampling based on fluency and religious background
5. **Obtaining informed consent** from all participants before data collection
6. **In-person interviews** conducted in Meranaw or Filipino/Tagalog, asking participants to pronounce the selected words
7. **Audio recording** of all pronunciations using a digital recorder

8. **Verification** of the Arabic source forms using dictionaries and published studies
9. **Comparison** of Arabic source forms with recorded Meranaw forms to identify phonological changes

6.5. Data Analysis

The study was done by comparing the sounds of Arabic words to their Meranaw equivalents. The researcher looked at the original Arabic forms, recorded Meranaw forms, and found some interesting ways that the Meranaw language adapted the Arabic words of the following adaptation process:
1. Sound substitution (replacing Arabic sounds with Meranaw sounds)
2. Sound deletion (removing Arabic sounds not present in Meranaw)
3. Vowel insertion/epenthesis (adding vowels to break consonant clusters)
4. Syllable restructuring (reshaping words to fit Meranaw syllable patters)
The researchers took the adapted forms and grouped them into categories to better understand how they fit into the Meranaw language. They made tables to show the original Arabic words, the Meranaw versions, meanings, and how the sounds changed when they were adapted. This was based on the work of Menson-Makalingkang and Echavez from 2021.

7. Results/Findings

7.1. Research Question 1: What Arabic Loanwords Are Commonly Used in Meranaw?

The study identified **25 Arabic loanwords** commonly used in Meranaw across three semantic fields:

- **Islamic Practices** (10 words): *Dikir* (Religious canticle), *Witir* (Prayer during fast month), *'Omra* (Performing a religious act at Mecca), *Naikadi* (Pilgrimage to Mecca), *Sodiod* (Prostration in Prayer), *Khotba* (Prayer sermon), *Masgit* (Mosque), *Salam* (Peace), *Sabar* (Patience), *Dowaa* (supplication).
- **Economic terms**: (5 words): *Badal* (Repay), *Diakat* (Alms), *Mahar* (Dowry from the groom), *Wakap* (Gift/Donation), *Riski* (Luck, fortune).
- **Status & Professional terms**: (5 words): *Alim* (Expert), *Imam* (Priest), *Kadi/Kali* (Judge), *Mopti* (Moral saint), *Solotan* (Sultan/King).
- **Legal Terms**: *Amanat* (Testament), *Kitas* (Revenge killing), *Wakil* (Attorney), *Sorot* (Agreement), *Talak* (Divorce).

All 25 words are actively used in Meranaw speech and are recognized by all 10 participants.

Research Question 2: How Do Meranaw Speakers Pronounce These Arabic Loanwords?

When we listened to the audio recordings from 10 Meranaw speakers, we found out that they pronounce Arabic loanwords in a unique way, different from the original Arabic sounds. It seems that Meranaw speakers tend to adjust Arabic sounds to fit their own language's sound system. To get a better understanding of this, we put together a table that shows all 25 Arabic loanwords and how they are pronounced in Meranaw.

Table 1 : Corpus of 25 Arabic Loanwords in Meranaw with Phonological Changes

Arabic Word	*Meranaw Word*	*Meaning*	*Phonological Changes*	*Phonological Process*
1) ذكر Dikr	*Dikir*	*Religious canticle*	*Arabic /dh/ to Maranao /d/; insertion of /i/ vowel between k and r.*	*Sound substitution + vowel insertion*
2) وتر Witr	*Witir*	*Prayer during fast month*	*insertion of /i/ vowel between t and r.*	*Vowel insertion*
3) عمرة 'Omrah	*Omra*	*Performing religious act at*	*pharyngeal /ʿ/ deleted, deletion of final -h.*	*Sound deletion*

		Mecca for Muslims		
4) حاج Haj	*Naikadi*	*Pilgrimage to Mecca*	*Syllable repair*	*Syllable restructuring*
5) سجود Sojoud	*Sodiod*	*Prostration in prayer*	*Syllable repair*	*Syllable restructuring*
6) خطبة Khotbah	*Kotba*	*Prayer sermon*	*Arabic /kh/ become /k/; Arabic /ṭ/ become /t/.*	*Sound substitution*
7) مسجد Masjid	*Masgit*	*Mosque*	*Arabic /j/ become /g/; Arabic /d/ become /t/*	*Sound substitution*
8) سلام Salām	*Salam*	*Peace*	*Vowel shortening only, minimal change*	*Nativized pronunciation*
9) صبر Ṣabr	*Sabar*	*Patience*	*Arabic /ṣ/ become /s/; insertion of /a/ between b and r*	*Sound substitution + vowel insertion*
10) دعاء Duā'	*Dowaa*	*Supplication*	*Loss of Arabic glottal stop; pharyngeal /ʿ/ deleted; vowel inserted*	*Sound deletion + insertion*
11) بدل Badal	*Badal*	*Repay*	*No changes*	*Nativized pronunciation*
12) زكاة Zakah	*Diakat*	*Alms*	*Syllable repair*	*Syllable restructuring*
13) مهر Mahr	*Mahar*	*Dowry from the groom*	*Arabic /h/ deleted and change to /h/; insertion of /a/vowel between h & r.*	*Sound deletion + vowel insertion*
14) وقف Waqaf	*Wakap*	*Gift/Donation*	*Arabic /q/ become /k/; Aeabic /f/ become /p/.*	*Sound Substitution*
15) رزق Rizq	*Riski*	*Luck, fortune*	*Arabic /z/ become /s/; Arabic /q/ become /k/.*	*Sound substitution*
16) طلاق Ṭalāq	*Talak*	*Divorce*	*Arabic /ṭ/ become /t/; Arabic /q/ become /k/; vowel shortening*	*Sound substitution*
17) إمام Imām	*Imam*	*Priest*	*Vowel shortening only; minimal change*	*Nativized pronunciation*
18) قاضي Qāḍiy	*Kadi/Kali*	*Judge*	*Arabic /q/ become /k/; Arabic /ḍ/ become /d/; vowel shortening*	*Sound Substitution*
19) مفتي Mufti	*Mopti*	*Moral Saint*	*Arabic /f/ become /p/; Vowel shortening*	*Sound Substitution*
20) عالم Ā'lim	*Alim*	*Religious scholar*	*pharyngeal /ʿ/ deleted; vowel shortening*	*Sound deletion*
21) سلطان Sulṭān	*Solotan*	*Sultan, King*	*Arabic /ṭ/ become /t/; insertion of vowel /o/ between l and t; vowel shortening*	*Sound substitution + vowel insertion*
22) أمانة Amānat	*Amanat*	*Testament*	*Vowel shortening, minimal change*	*Nativized Pronunciation*
23) قصاص Qiṣaṣ	*Kitas*	*Revenge killing*	*Arabic /q/ become /k/; Arabic /ṣ/ become /t/;*	*Sound substitution*
24) وكيل Wakeel	*Wakil*	*Attorney*	*Vowel shortening, minimal change*	*Nativized Pronunciation*

25) شروط Shorouṭ	*Sorot*	*Agreement*	*Arabic /sh/ become /s/; Arabic /ṭ/ become /t/; vowel shortening*	*Sound substitution*

Note. Table shows 25 Arabic loanwords adapted into Meranaw with phonological changes and adaptation processes. Arabic script provided for all source words.

Research Question 3: What Phonological Processes Are Involved in the Adaptation of Arabic Loanwords in Meranaw?

The analysis revealed **four main phonological processes** involved in Arabic loanword adaptation in Meranaw.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Phonological Nativization Processes in 25 Arabic Loanwords

Phonological Adaptation Process	Number of Words	Percentage
Sound Substitution (alone or combined)	**12 out of 25**	**48%**
Vowel Insertion (Epenthesis) (combined with other processes)	**6 out of 25**	**24%**
Sound Deletion (alone or combined)	**3 out of 25**	**12%**
Syllable Restructuring	**3 out of 25**	**12%**
Minimal Change	**5 out of 25**	**20%**

Note. Percentage exceed 100% because some words undergo multiple processes simultaneously (e.g., Sulṭān → Solotan undergoes both sound substitution and vowel insertion). Minimal change is not a phonological process but a category of adaptation intensity.
The frequency distribution shows that sound substitution is the dominant phonological process (48%) in Arabic loanword adaptation in Meranaw, followed by vowel insertion (24%), sound deletion (12%), and syllable restructuring (12%). Additionally, 20% of words undergo minimal change demonstrating that not all Arabic loanwords require extensive adaptation. These findings confirm that Meranaw actively reshapes Arabic vocabulary according to local phonological rules while preserving original meanings.

8. Discussion

This study shows that Arabic has deeply influenced Meranaw through loanwords, but these loanwords are adapted to fit the Meranaw sound system. The main phonological processes involved are:

Sound Substitution. One of the most common processes observed is sound substitution, where an Arabic sound is replaced by a Meranaw sound that is easier to pronounce. For example, Arabic *thalātha* becomes *Salasa*. The Arabic /th/ sound is replaced by /s/, which is more natural in Meranaw pronunciation. Meranaw does not have the Arabic interdental fricative /th/, so it uses /s/ as the closest equivalent. (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021; Lobel & Riwarung, 2011)

Sound Deletion. Another common process is sound deletion, where Arabic sounds that are not present in Meranaw are removed. Arabic has sounds like /ʿ/ and /ḥ/, which do not exist in the Meranaw sound system. When these sounds appear in borrowed words, they are often deleted. For example, Arabic *duʿāʾ* becomes *duwaa* in Meranaw, with the /ʿ/ sound removed. (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021; Racman & Lulu, 2021)

Vowel Insertion (Epenthesis). The study also found vowel insertion, also called epenthesis. This happens when a vowel is added to break up difficult consonant clusters or to make pronunciation easier. When an Arabic loanword has a structure that does not fit Meranaw phonotactics, a vowel may be inserted. This helps the borrowed word sound smoother and more natural in local speech. (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021; Lobel & Riwarung, 2011)

Syllable Restructuring. A fourth process is syllable restructuring, which means the shape of the whole word is changed so it matches the preferred sound patterns of Meranaw. The borrowed word may lose some of its original Arabic structure, but it keeps its meaning and becomes fully usable in Meranaw communication. Arabic words with complex syllable structures are often simplified to fit Meranaw's preference for CV and CVC syllable patterns. (Menson-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021; Lobel & Riwarung, 2011).

Certain Arabic loanwords in Meranaw go through **minimal phonological change nativization**, which means that in order for them to suit the Meranaw sound system, very few or no phonological changes are needed. These words need little modification because they already closely resemble Meranaw phonogical patterns. This is a category or adaption intensity rather than a distinct phonological process that happens when the phonological structure of the Arabic source word closely matches Meranaw phonotactics.

These processes make borrowed forms more natural in Meranaw speech and show that the language actively reshapes external influence. The corpus of 25 Arabic loanwords provides concrete evidence of how Meranaw speakers systematically nativize Arabic vocabulary (Racman & Lulu, 2021).

9. Directions for Future Research

1. Expand the corpus to include **100+ Arabic loanwords** in Meranaw.
2. Compare Meranaw with **other Muslim Philippine languages** (Maguindanaon, Tausug, Yakan) to identify cross-linguistic patterns.
3. Examine **morphological and semantic adaptation** in addition to phonological adaptation.

10. Conclusion

This research shows that Arabic has an impact on the Meranaw language in two main ways: through words and sounds. When Arabic words are borrowed into Meranaw, they often undergo changes to make them easier to say. These changes can include substituting sounds, adding vowels, removing sounds, making small changes or rearranging syllables. By making these changes, Meranaw speakers can use Arabic words in a way that feels natural to them, while still keeping the original meaning of the words. This study highlights how Meranaw speakers actively adapt external influences to fit their own language rules, which helps them maintain their unique linguistic identity while still incorporating Arabic vocabulary. This work is important because it fills a gap in our understanding of how loanwords are used in Philippine languages and helps to document and preserve the Meranaw language. The results of this study have implications for several fields, including linguistics, language contact studies, Islamic studies, and the documentation of Philippine languages. Overall, this research demonstrates the complex and dynamic nature of language contact and change in the Meranaw language. (Racman & Lulu, 2021; Lobel & Riwarung, 2011; Mension-Makalingkang & Echavez, 2021).

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