Benefits of English Vocabulary of Latin and Greek Origins for Learning Malay

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Abstract

Latin is the dominant donor language to most modern European languages, which were in turn influential donor languages to Malay due to colonization between the 16th and 20th centuries. This study conducted a vocabulary survey to assess the benefits of using word categories of frequently used English vocabulary of Latin and Greek origins and their Malay equivalents for learning Malay as a foreign language. The Oxford 3000 list served as the primary reference of high-frequency English words and their Malay equivalents. Latin or Greek loanwords constitute approximately 10.6% of the most frequently used 3,000 Malay words and more than a half of these loanwords can be used with a similar pronunciation in Japanese. Therefore, this study concluded that knowledge of high-frequency English vocabulary of Latin and Greek origins could assist speakers of English and/or Japanese in learning Malay.
Keywords: Latin; Greek; Malay; Japanese; loanword.

1. Introduction

1.1. Western Colonization and Language Loan

The Malay language belongs to the Austronesian language family (Crystal, 2010). It has borrowed many words of European origin as a consequence of the colonization of Malaya (a major part of present-day Malaysia) by Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. An example of a Malay word of Portuguese origin is *gereja* (church), whose exact pronunciation is similar to *greja*. This word stems from the Portuguese noun *igreja* (church) (Jones, 2007), and its ultimate origin is *ekklēsia* (church) in Classical Greek. Majority of Malayan inhabitants were not Christians; therefore, *gereja* (church) was introduced to Malay as a foreign religious term.

Dutch also significantly influenced Malay because Holland colonized a part of Malaya and also Indonesia as the Dutch East Indies. The Indonesian language is a variety of Malay, which was standardized as the official language of Indonesia (Robson, 2004). Malay and Indonesian borrowed thousands of words of European origin through Dutch. For example, *prestasi* ("performance" in Malay and Indonesian) remains similar to its Dutch form *prestatie* (achievement, performance). The Dutch suffix *-tie*, pronounced [si], corresponds to the English suffix *-tion*. Because the United Kingdom occupied and colonized Malaya under the Dutch rule, English became the primary Western donor language to Malay; however, Dutch was the first European donor language to Indonesian until 1942, which is when the Dutch colonization ended.

Although Malaya gained independence in 1957, English still remains the most influential Western donor language to Malay. Proof is that the Malay words *universiti* (university) and *fakulti* (faculty) retain their English forms. Many academic Malay words, such as *biologi* (biology), *fizik* (physics), and *matematik* (mathematics), are words of Greek origin borrowed through English or Dutch (Jones, 2007). This study does not aim to advocate European languages' contribution to Malay but suggests the possible benefits of the Malay loanwords of Latin and Greek origins in learning Malay as a foreign language. There are two primary reasons:

1. Latin and Greek loanwords have been borrowed by many Asian languages.
2. Latin and Greek loanwords share similar meanings among different languages and could assist Asian and European students in learning Malay as a foreign language.

According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), semantically similar foreign vocabulary with a partially different pronunciation requires explicit demonstration to learners (e.g., the English word *book* and *Buch* [bu:x], the German word for "book"), and students often are not conscious of the morphological or semantic similarities between their L1 and L2. Ellis and Beaton (1993) compared the difference in learnability of foreign words of the same etymology ("cognate words") and non-cognate words when teaching English as a foreign language. They found that the participants more easily learned cognates that were phonetically similar to their equivalents in their first language. Granger (1993) emphasized the benefits of cognates with almost identical meanings between English and other European languages, but also pointed out the possible disadvantages of using of cognates with partly different meanings when teaching foreign language vocabulary. Granger's study suggested that it was important to carefully selecting the cognates to be taught by verifying the degree of phonetic and semantic similarities between the learners' first language and the target language.

Nation and Webb (2011) suggest the benefits of grouping English words that share the same origin for teaching English vocabulary. They exemplify *visible*, *revise*, *visual*, and *vision*. These words originate from *videre* (to see) in Latin (Stevenson and Waite, 2011).

This study presents the following two research questions:
1. How many words of Latin or Greek origin are included in approximately 3,000 high-frequency Malay words?

2. What possible benefits do such loanwords have for learners of Malay as a foreign language?

In this study, Greek, Japanese, and Sanskrit words are transliterated in the Latin alphabet because some readers may be unfamiliar with those languages.

1.2. Loanwords in Japanese

Japanese has borrowed thousands of words from European languages. Until the 1940s, vocabulary of Western origin was mainly borrowed through loan translation or calque, for example, *densha* (train), which was coined from *den* (a component related to the concept of "electric" and "electricity") and *sha* (a component related to the concept of "car"). Loan translation has enabled Japanese speakers to understand the meaning of loanwords in depth without worried about the meaning of unfamiliar words of foreign origin. Such calques, which include innovative concepts, significantly accelerated Japanese modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries (Kamei *et al.*, 2007).

Notably, loanwords in the culinary field, such as *shefu* (chef) and *resutoran* (restaurant), were directly borrowed from French or English. The Malay and Indonesian word *restoran* (restaurant) remains semantically and phonetically similar to its Japanese equivalent (Steel, 2009). This similarity is not mere coincidence and implies that Japanese speakers can utilize their knowledge of vocabulary in their first language when learning Malay and Indonesian as foreign languages. Additionally, loanwords of Western origin could assist learners of Malay and Indonesian in enhancing their understanding of cultural and historical matters related to the vocabulary loan of these languages from European ones.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Avoidance of Loanwords in Icelandic

Language loan does not merely mean an adoption of foreign vocabulary because of necessity or cultural influence but is considered a deterioration of a language that affects the identity of its speakers. According to Ragnarsdóttir (1996), the Icelandic language continues excluding as much foreign origin vocabulary as possible. For example, *sjúkrahús* (hospital) is a compound from *sjúkur* (sick) and *hús* (house), and *orðabók* (dictionary) is a compound from the plural form of *orð* (word) and *bók* (book) (Helmisdóttir, 2017). Such a loan translation is not a unique phenomenon in Icelandic. German has similar examples of compounds, such as *Krankenhaus* (hospital), which includes *krank* (sick) and *Haus* (house), and *Wörterbuch* (dictionary), which includes *Wörter* (words) and *Buch* (book) (Clark and Thyen, 2013). Notably, the degree of foreign-vocabulary exclusion is exceptionally high in Icelandic.

Purism can be observed in *safn* (museum), which stems from the original Icelandic word *safna* (to collect); by contrast, its German equivalent is *Museum*, which originates from Classical Greek. Exceptions in Icelandic are *kaffi* (coffee) from Arabic *qahwah* and *skóli* (school) from Classical Greek *skholē* (Cowan, 1994; Stevenson and Waite, 2011). *Háskóli* (university) consists of *há* (high) and *skóli* (school), which is a mixture of an original Icelandic adjective and a noun of Greek origin. Iceland gained independence from Denmark in 1944, and its history as a sovereign country is much shorter than that of other European countries. In addition, the number of Icelandic speakers is limited as compared to those of other European languages. An estimated population of Iceland in 2017 was 339,747, and approximately 94% of the total inhabitants are Icelanders, who mostly speak Icelandic as their first language (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a). This high degree of purity in terms of vocabulary appears to symbolize the Icelanders' determination for linguistic independence from other European languages.

2.2. Loanwords in Modern Greek

Here, an overview of the current situation regarding loanwords in Modern Greek, which is spoken by 99% of the total population of Greece (10,768,477 as of 2017), is presented (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018b). In general, Modern Greek has not actively borrowed many words of Latin origin but has coined thousands of alternatives using original Greek vocabulary. For instance, the English words hotel and hospital ultimately stem from the Latin *hospitalis* (hospitable) (Stevenson and Waite, 2011). In Modern Greek, vocabulary of foreign origin is not used for these two words. Instead, *nosokomeio* (hospital) stems from *nosos* (disease), and *xenodokheio* (hotel) includes *xeno-* (foreign) and *dokheio* (container) (Harper-Collins, 2009). The Greek noun *aerolimenas* (airport) includes *aero-* (air) and *limenas* (harbor, port). Vocabulary associated with public places would be one of the primary targets of linguistic purists because the names of places are often indicated as part of proper nouns such as *Aerolimenas Athēnōn*, meaning the Athens Airport.

Nevertheless, Greek names of months and *porta* (door) were directly borrowed from Latin or Romance languages (Bulhosen *et al.*, 2010). The noun *thyra* is a Classical Greek word meaning "door" (Morwood and Taylor, 2002) but it is not frequently employed in Modern Greek. The Greek *treno* (train) originates from Italian. Moreover, the adjective of Latin origin *klasikos* (classic, classical) is included in the high-frequency vocabulary. Modern Greek includes a small number of loanwords of Arabic origin, for example, *tzami* [dzami] (mosque), originating from Arabic *jāmiʿ* (mosque) (Cowan, 1994). In summary, language loan in Modern Greek has been limited, but the degree of foreign vocabulary avoidance is observed to be far more moderate than the situation regarding Icelandic.

2.3. Loanwords in Hindi

India gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947. Hindi has borrowed thousands of English words, but they are partially replaced with words of Sanskrit origin. Being the origin of Hindi and many other Northern Indian languages, Sanskrit has played a critical role in the reconstruction of Northern Indian languages since India's

independence. The Sanskrit or Hindi word *viśvavidyālaya* (university) consists of *viśva* (universe) and *vidyālaya* (college) (Verma and Sahai, 2003), however, the English-based Hindi word *yunivarsitī* can also be used. The letter *ī* indicates the long [i] sound. Another example of a word of Sanskrit origin is *pustakālaya* (library), which includes *pustaka* (book) and another component indicating a place.

Alternative words of English and Arabic origins are more frequently used by Indian Muslims because many are unwilling to use words of Sanskrit origin, which are considered closely connected with Hinduism and Hindus. Northern India was ruled by a Muslim-dominant empire, and Indian languages borrowed thousands of words from Arabic and Persian (Richards, 1993). Thus, every word can be used as an opportunity to express the speaker's religious or cultural identity. The linguistic complexity in India's multiethnic society allows many inhabitants to be aware of various types of identities. This phenomenon is the reason why learners' awareness of loanwords in their first and second languages has crucial importance.

2.4. English-Based Loanwords in Japanese

As overviewed in the Introduction section, Japanese has borrowed thousands of words of Western origin. Daulton (2008) focused on utilizing Japanese English-based loanwords in teaching English as a foreign language. According to Daulton (2008) study, loanwords included in the most frequent 3,000 words in Japanese especially benefited Japanese learners of English. In Japanese, loanwords from Western languages are spelled with *Katakana*, a type of syllabics that is different from *Hiragana*, the other type of syllabics used to write Japanese. One of the significant findings of Daulton (2008) study is that it demonstrated that a positive transfer could occur between languages that belong to very different language families such as English and Japanese. In addition, it was proved that despite the difference in scripts, English-based loanwords could benefit Japanese English-language learners.

3. Materials and Methods

In this study, the primary reference for high-frequency English words was the Oxford 3000™, a list of approximately 3,000 basic words used to define entry words in the Oxford dictionary. The author of this study counted Malay words of European origin in scope of the Malay equivalents of the English word list+. The selected Malay words were then sorted according to their origins. The first category was vocabulary of Latin and Greek origins. The second was that of Germanic origin, which was excluded from the scope of this study.

4. Results

4.1. High-Frequency Malay Vocabulary of European Origin

The author observed 320 loanwords of European origin in the original database of a fundamental Malay vocabulary equivalent to the approximately 3,000 high-frequency English words.

This number of loanwords is almost equal to 10.6% of the total number of words in basic vocabulary. The selected 320 loanwords included 12 words of Germanic origin, such as *ais* (ice), *beg* (bag), *buku* (book), *filem* (film), *lif* (lift), and *staf* (staff).

4.2. Details of the Basic Malay Vocabulary of European Origin

Table 1 presents the numbers and proportions of each language category. The number of English word forms of European origin was 182 (56.9%). Dutch forms occupied 102 (31.9%). Vocabularies of Greek and Latin origins represent the majority of English and Dutch loanwords in Malay. Additionally, 19 words (5.9%) were Latin or Greek, despite slight spelling modifications, for example, *fakta* (fact), *frasa* (phrase), *kursus* (course), *media* (media), *status* (status), *tema* (theme), and *virus* (virus).

Table-1. Numbers and Proportions of Each Language Category

English	182	56.9%
Dutch	102	31.9%
Classical Latin or Greek	19	5.9%
Portuguese	12	3.7%
French	5	1.6%
Total	320	

The number and percentage of Portuguese words were 12 and 3.7%, for example, *keju* (cheese) originating from Portuguese *queijo*, *mentega* (butter) from *manteiga*, *bandera* (flag) from *bandeira*, *roda* (wheel) from *roda*, and *tempoh* (period) from *tempo*. In addition, the five French words observed in the selected Malay words were *butik* (boutique), *menu* (menu), *restoran* (restaurant), *sos* (sauce), and *sup* (soup). These may have been borrowed through another European language.

5. Discussion

5.1. Basic Malay Vocabulary from Latin and Greek

Table 2 exemplifies basic Malay words of Latin and Greek origins. The English *atmosphere* stems from Greek *atmosphaira*, and the Malay equivalent *atmosfera* (atmosphere) is more similar to its original form. *Biology* stems from Greek *biologia* and was introduced to Malay through Dutch (Jones, 2007). *Decade* and the Malay *dekad* both

maintain an association with the Greek numeral *deka* (ten). *Diary*, associated with the Latin *dies* (day), was loaned as *diari* with a minor spelling difference. Similarly, *economy* and *pharmacy* were loaned to Malay with the ending modified from *-y* to *-i*, which is also observed in Malay words *geografi* (geography), *industri* (industry), *kategori* (category), and *kualiti* (quality).

Table-2. Examples of Malay Words of Latin or Greek Origin

atmosfera (atmosphere)	*biologi* (biology)	*dekad* (decade)	*diari* (diary)
ekonomi (economy)	*farmasi* (pharmacy, drugstore)	*fizik* (physics)	*fungsi* (function)
generasi (generation)	*geografi* (geography)	*industri* (industry)	*kategori* (category)
kualiti (quality)	*muzium* (museum)	*politik* (political, politics)	*simpati* (sympathy)
strategi (strategy)	*teknologi* (technology)	*teori* (theory)	*tradisi* (tradition)

In addition, the suffix *-tion* was modified to *-si* in *fungsi* (function), *generasi* (generation), and *tradisi* (tradition) because their Dutch equivalents (*functie*; *generatie*; *traditie*) end with the [si] sound. *Museum*, which originates from the Greek *mouseion*, was spelled more phonetically as *muzium* in Malay. The Malay word *politik* (political, politics) functions as a noun and as an adjective, and the meaning depends on the context. *Sympathy*, *strategy*, *technology*, and *theory* are words of Greek origin and were introduced to Malay with regular phonetic simplification. Thus, foreign learners of Malay can be made aware of regular phonetic or spelling changes between English and Malay.

Table 3 presents examples of Malay words with the *-si* ending that corresponds to the English suffixes *-tion* and *-sion*. Learners of Malay who have knowledge of English vocabulary may be able to apply this rule to enrich their Malay proficiency. Although excluded from the Oxford 3000^{TM} list, *destinasi* (destination) and *inspirasi* (inspiration) are other examples with the *-si* ending.

Table-3. Examples of Malay Words with the -si Ending

edisi (edition)	*emosi* (emotion)	*imaginasi* (imagination)	*koleksi* (collection)
komunikasi (communication)	*misi* (mission)	*motivasi* (motivation)	*reaksi* (reaction)
reputasi (reputation)	*revolusi* (revolution)	*versi* (version)	*visi* (vision)

Other examples of Malay words sharing a common ending are those with the *-if* ending that corresponds to the English suffix *-ive*. As shown in Table 4, there are many examples in the fundamental English vocabulary. Although not included in the Oxford vocabulary list, the adjectives *creative* (*kreatif* in Malay) and *subjective* (*subjektif* in Malay) are other examples. This group of words could enable effective and systematic learning of other Malay words with the same suffix. The Malay spelling *ks* instead of *x* is also included in *ekspres* (express) and *eksport* (export).

Table-4. Examples of Malay Words with the -if Ending

aktif (active)	*eksekutif* (executive)	*inisiatif* (initiative)	*konservatif* (conservative)
negatif (negative)	*objektif* (objective)	*positif* (positive)	*sensitif* (sensitive)

Table 5 exemplifies Malay words including the *-or* ending. This suffix is observed in several basic Malay words of Latin origin; however, the frequency of this category in daily vocabulary is low, except for the following examples.

Table-5. Examples of Malay Words with the -or Ending

doktor (doctor)	*editor* (editor)	*profesor* (professor)	*faktor* (factor)	*motor* (motor)

As shown in Table 6, clusters [kt] and [pt] lose the final [t] sound in Malay. This phonetic rule applies regularly; however, one of the exceptions is *fakta* (fact), which originates from the Latin *facta* (facts), the plural of *factum* (fact). English speakers would be able to produce *arkitek* (architect) and *konteks* (context).

Table-6. Examples of Malay Words with Simplified Consonants

impak	*konflik*	*konsep*	*produk*	*projek*
(impact)	(conflict)	(concept)	(product)	(project)

To summarize the findings, many high-frequency English and Malay words retain semantic and phonetic similarities. Therefore, learners of Malay could use such correspondences between English and Malay to improve their proficiency of Malay.

5.2. Similar English, Malay, and Japanese Words

Table 7 exemplifies English, Malay, and Japanese words with almost identical meanings. The abbreviation "L." indicates English words that originate from Latin. "G." is a sign for words of Greek origin. The original Latin or Greek words are in parentheses. Most of the following Malay words can be used in Indonesian, except *fesyen* (fashion) and *siri* (series). The details are discussed subsequently.

Table-7. Semantically Similar English, Malay, and Japanese Words (1)

English Words and their Etymologies	Malay Equivalents	Japanese Equivalents (Romanized)
cheese (L. *caseus*)	*keju*	*chīzu*
data (L. *data*)	*data*	*dēta*
drama (G. *drama*)	*drama*	*dorama*
fashion (L. *factio*)	*fesyen*	*fasshon*
hotel (L. *hospitalis*)	*hotel*	*hoteru*
impact (L. *impactus*)	*impak*	*impakuto*
juice (L. *jus*)	*jus*	*jūsu*
series (L. *series*)	*siri*	*shirīzu*
system (G. *systēma*)	*sistem*	*shisutemu*
theme (G. *thema*)	*tema*	*tēma*
virus (L. *virus*)	*virus*	*uirusu*

The Malay *keju* (cheese) ultimately stems from the Latin *caseus* but was borrowed through Portuguese (Jones, 2007). The Japanese equivalent *chīzu* (cheese) retains the pronunciation of its English form. The Latin word *data* was loaned to English, Malay, and Japanese. English and Malay retain its original spelling, while the Japanese equivalent is based on the English pronunciation [deɪtə]. Similarly, the English and Malay *drama* are spelled the same, but its Japanese counterpart *dorama* includes an accentuated first syllable *do*, as the cluster [dr] does not exist in standard Japanese.

Fashion stems from the Latin *factio* (faction), a derivative from the Latin verb *facere* (to make, to do). As the [æ] sound is usually replaced with [e] in Malay, *fesyen* (fashion) includes the vowel [e]. The *sh* sound in its Japanese form (*fasshon*) is doubled. In Indonesian, *fesyen* is not used; the French loanword *mode* (fashion) is used instead. The spelling of *hotel* in English and Malay is identical; however, the final syllable of its Japanese equivalent *hoteru* is pronounced *ru* because [l] does not exist in Japanese. Additionally, no consonants except *n* appear in the final syllable, but an epenthesis of the [ɯ] or [o] sound usually occurs. The Japanese word *impakuto* (impact), with a pronunciation similar to [ímpakto], includes an additional [o] sound in the final syllable. By contrast, the cluster [kt] in the English *impact* was transformed into [k] in Malay.

The English word *juice* corresponds to the Malay *jus*, which coincidentally has the identical spelling to the original Latin word *jus* (juice). Its Japanese form *jūsu* contains a long [ɯ] and an additional [ɯ] sound in each syllable. *Series* was changed to *siri* in Malay and *seri* in Indonesian. It became *shirīzu* in Japanese because the [si] sound is usually replaced with *shi*. This phonetic change is observed in the Japanese word *shisutemu* (system); its Malay equivalent *sistem* (system) retains a greater phonetic similarity with the English *system*. The Greek word *thema* was borrowed to Malay through German (Jones, 2007). Coincidentally, German was also the source for the Japanese equivalent *tēma*. It is for this reason that the Malay *tema* and the Japanese *tēma* remain phonetically similar. The term *virus* was borrowed as *uirusu* in Japanese, by modifying the labiodental fricative [v] to [u]. The pronunciation of the loanword is based on the pronunciation of the original Latin term.

5.3. Other Similar Word Groups

Table 8 presents several other examples of similar word groups among English, Malay, and Japanese. Malay equivalents are identical or very similar to the listed English words.

Table-8. Semantically Similar English, Malay, and Japanese Words (2)

English Words and Their Etymologies	Malay Equivalents	Japanese Equivalents (Romanized)
idea (G. *idea*)	*idea*	*aidia*/*aidea*
identity (L. *identitas*)	*identiti*	*aidentitī*
media (L. *media*)	*media*	*media*
program (G. *programma*)	*program*	*puroguramu*
technique (G. *tekhnē*)	*teknik*	*tekunikku*
topic (G. *topika*)	*topik*	*topikku*

The pronunciation of the Japanese *aidia* (idea) and *aidentitī* (identity) is based on English. Moreover, the aforementioned additional [ɯ] sound is observed in *puroguramu* (program), *tekunikku* (technique), and *topikku* (topic). The ending *-ikku* is regularly included in Japanese words of European origin, such as *romantikku* (romantic), *doramatikku* (dramatic), and *kurashikku* (classical).

For Japanese speakers, learning the listed Malay loanwords is easy, and Malay-speaking learners of Japanese would also learn their Japanese counterparts with ease if they are familiar with the epenthesis of the [ɯ] sound. Thus, learners' awareness of these similar word groups would stimulate mutual language learning between Japanese and Malay speakers. Table 9 presents six examples of similar word groups in English, Malay, and Japanese. The Malay equivalents end with the suffix *-si*, and the Japanese equivalents have the ending *-ēshon*, based on the English pronunciation of *-ation*.

Table-9. Semantically Similar English, Malay, and Japanese Words (3)

English Words	Malay Equivalents	Japanese Equivalents (Romanized)
communication	*komunikasi*	*komyunikēshon*
demonstration	*demonstrasi*	*demonsutorēshon*
imagination	*imaginasi*	*imajinēshon*
innovation	*inovasi*	*inobēshon*
inspiration	*inspirasi*	*insupirēshon*
motivation	*motivasi*	*mochibēshon*

6. Conclusion

This study examined the benefits of basic Malay words of Latin and Greek origins, constructing an equivalent to the Oxford 3000[TM] list. As a result, 320 Malay words originating from Latin or Greek were observed in the approximately 3,000 high-frequency Malay words. The majority of the selected Malay words remain almost identical to their Indonesian equivalents. Additionally, many of those Malay words can be used with a similar pronunciation in English and Japanese (e.g., *data*, *drama*, *fashion*, *hotel*, *impact*, *system*). The English words *idea*, *identity*, *media*, *program*, *technique*, and *topic* also remain semantically and phonetically similar to their Malay and Japanese equivalents. This is one of the primary benefits of the shared loanwords. The finding indicates that the selected Malay loanwords could encourage English and Japanese speakers to learn high-frequency Malay and Indonesian vocabularies.

As discussed in the Literature Review section, language loan is closely associated with the identity of language speakers. Icelanders' significant endeavor for linguistic independence of Icelandic reminds other language speakers of the importance of the first language(s). If learners create a portfolio to record their learning of loanwords in foreign languages, it would help them enhance their awareness of the cultural and historical aspects that affected the language loan.

Future studies should develop a practical presentation method of Malay vocabulary for learners to increase their awareness of the benefits of their first-language knowledge of loanwords originating from Latin or Greek. In addition, as majority of the Malay and Indonesian vocabularies remain almost identical or very similar, such methods can be applied for learning Indonesian as a foreign language.

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