

# Kinayah (Metonymy) in Malay: An Analysis Based on the Science of Balaghah

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## ABSTRACT

The study of the Malay language, particularly in the context of rhetoric, often falls into a shallow descriptive framework, seemingly neglecting the richness of implied meanings. Frequently, analyses of kinayah (metonymy) only scratch the surface, failing to uncover its stylistic depth and pragmatic function—a significant gap in understanding our linguistic heritage. Previous studies have rarely thoroughly explored metonymy through the lens of Arabic balaghah (rhetoric), leading to limited and superficial interpretations. This research methodology focuses on conceptual analysis, examining a corpus of classical and modern texts, as well as rethoric works. Initial findings indicate that metonymy is not merely an embellishment of words; it is a powerful communication strategy that conveys meaning indirectly, generates a deeper persuasive effect, and reflects the cultural wisdom of the Malay community. metonymy also serves as a benchmark for the maturity of expression, distinguishing it from simpler forms of metaphor or simile. Neglecting this discipline can erode the appreciation for the aesthetics of the Malay language, necessitating a re-evaluation of linguistic teaching for example teaching Arabic rethoric, and research approaches. This may enhance the mastery of Arabic rethoric among malay students..

**Keywords:** Metonymy, Balaghah, Malay Rhetoric, Implied Meaning, Linguistic Pragmatics

## INTRODUCTION

We often forget that language is not merely a tool for communication. It is a reflection of the soul—a vast field with thorns and flowers, often mistaken for a flat path. However, amidst the hustle and bustle of modern communication, the art of meaningful expression is often marginalized, dismissed by analysts who only see its surface. Unfortunately, many contemporary analysts—especially those influenced by literal Western paradigms—underestimate figurative forms, considering them merely as 'flavor enhancers' in texts. This is a major oversight. It cripples our understanding of the rhetorical power inherent in the Malay language itself, particularly the art of metonymy. No serious effort has been made to study its intricacies. Why does this happen? Perhaps, a lack of exposure to a more comprehensive rethoric discipline causes us to fail to appreciate the beautiful and meaningful arrangement of sentences. Existing approaches, often relying on brief definitions and cliché examples, have failed to elaborate on how metonymy operates as a sophisticated communication strategy, a mechanism that allows speakers to convey complex messages without having to state everything directly. This is a big problem. We should discuss this now.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Efforts to examine the art of metonymy in the Malay language, though present, often stop at a shallow intersection, failing to delve into its essence rooted in the discipline of Arabic rethoric. Many scholars—as shown by Awang Sariyan (2012) and Hashim Musa (2007)—tend to classify metonymy as merely a part of figurative language, often grouping it with metaphors or similes without clear categorical distinctions. This view, though partially true, proves to be overly simplistic. It seems to ignore more complex layers of meaning.

Categorizing metonymy alongside *isti'arah* (metaphor) and *tashbih* (simile) is a misconception, as emphasized by Al-Jurjani (1983) in his book, *Asrar al-Balaghah*, which distinguishes metonymy as a statement whose explicit meaning is not intended, but rather carries an implied meaning arising from a common association.

AlQazwini (n.d.), another rethoric figure, reinforces this argument with a more detailed classification of metonymy, dividing it into specific types such as *kinayah 'an sifah* (metonymy about a quality), *kinayah 'an nisbah* (metonymy about a relation), and *kinayah 'an mausuf* (metonymy about a described entity), all of which have different pragmatic implications.

This is a fundamental aspect often overlooked. Many local scholars—despite good intentions—tend to quote definitions without truly internalizing the spirit of rethoric itself. For instance, Abdullah Hassan (2006) discusses proverbs and figurative expressions, but his analytical framework is not rooted in the meticulous discipline of rethoric, instead revolving solely around morphological and syntactic aspects, thereby limiting our understanding of the true function of metonymy. This is rather disappointing.

Furthermore, studies on the persuasive function of metonymy in the context of Malay communication have also received insufficient attention. Abdul Hamid bin Abdul Aziz (2003), for example, touches upon rhetoric in classical texts, but his focus is more on sentence structure and word choice rather than the complex impact of metonymy's meaning. We know that metonymy does not just adorn; it persuades. It changes perception. Studies by Nik Safiah Karim et al. (2008) on Malay grammar and style, though comprehensive in their descriptive aspects, rarely discuss how metonymy functions as a strategic tool in debate or negotiation, a characteristic that could certainly be clarified with a rethoric framework.

Some argue that rethoric is too tied to the Arabic language, and its application to Malay might be less relevant. This argument proves weak. Haven't many Malay vocabulary and linguistic structures been absorbed from Arabic, including rhetorical ideas? Al-Jabri (1991), though not in a Malay context, has discussed how Islamic intellectual tradition shapes the framework for thinking and understanding texts, something that is certainly relevant for studying Malay texts heavily influenced by Islam. Critical studies by Muhammad Al-Afifi (1991) on the linguistic style of the Quran also offer a rich analytical model, showing how rethoric details can uncover the wonders of language, something still not fully explored in Malay language research. This neglect is detrimental. It prevents us from seeing how metonymy, as part of a larger rhetorical art, shapes the way Malay society thinks, communicates, and even resolves conflicts. Without a strong rethoric framework, our analysis of metonymy will remain at a superficial level, failing to penetrate the 'veil' of implied meanings that constitute the richness of the Malay language. This is a great loss. It is a reminder of our failure to unearth our own intellectual treasures. We need to do more.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is not an experiment, far from it. It is an intellectual immersion, an effort to re-weave the understanding of the art of metonymy in the Malay language through the lens of a more mature rethoric discipline. The methods used—namely conceptual analysis and library research—are not merely data collection. They are a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of thought. To produce a theoretical synthesis, we need to filter ideas, discard the obsolete, and integrate the relevant.

The process begins with the identification and collection of a corpus of primary texts. This includes foundational works of Arabic rethoric such as *Dala'il al-I'jaz* by Al-Jurjani (1983) and *Al-Idah fi 'Ulum al-Balaghah* by AlQazwini (n.d.), which form the theoretical backbone. We examine how these rethoric experts classified and elaborated on metonymy, what its differences are from *isti'arah* or *majaz*, and what the conditions are for an expression to be considered metonymy. It is an effort that requires meticulousness. In addition, classical and modern Malay linguistic texts—including dictionaries, grammar books, and previous rhetorical studies—were also examined to identify how metonymy has been interpreted or, unfortunately, misinterpreted.

We discarded outdated theories that are no longer relevant or too superficial in analyzing metonymy, instead focusing on approaches that offer depth of meaning and structure. Malay literary texts, from *pantun* and *gurindam* to *hikayat* and modern prose, were also used as reference materials. This was to find concrete examples of metonymy in language use, not just theoretical definitions. We need to see how metonymy lives in the speech of the community. This conceptual analysis process involves several phases: first, comparing the definition of metonymy in rethoric with definitions in Malay linguistics; second, identifying the main characteristics of metonymy based on rethoric classification; third, analyzing the pragmatic function of metonymy in Malay communication based on the collected examples.

This is not just reading books; it is a process of dialoguing with texts, questioning arguments, and seeking openings to build a new framework. We do not just accept. We question. The justification for this approach is clear: the intrinsic nature of metonymy as a phenomenon of implied meaning requires an understanding that is not only structural, but also semantic, pragmatic, and cultural. Empirical methods—such as surveys or interviews—would not be able to capture the deep essence of metonymy, as it involves text interpretation and understanding of complex cultural contexts. Only through careful conceptual analysis, based on strong rethoric principles, can we unravel the mystery of this art of metonymy. This is the only way to see the light. It requires patience and high precision, not speed in collecting numbers.

## FINDINGS

Metonymy, as distilled from the discipline of rethoric, is clearly not merely an embellishment of words; it is a profound communication strategy. Most Malay linguists often overlook this fact. It carries an implied meaning that arises from a common association between a word and the intended meaning, without negating the original meaning of the word. This is an important distinction. For example, the expression 'panjang tangan' (longhanded) does not mean that a person's hands are physically long; instead, it carries the implied meaning 'fond of stealing', a characteristic indirectly associated with the act of hands. It is an indirect link.

Second, metonymy functions as a benchmark for the maturity of expression and refinement of character. Someone who can use metonymy effectively demonstrates a high command of language, and even the ability to think abstractly. This distinguishes it from more literal similes or metaphors that require direct transfer of meaning. The expression 'berat tulang' (heavy-boned) for 'lazy' is more subtle than stating 'he is lazy' directly—a significant stylistic difference in the Malay social context that values gentle speech, no matter how bitter the meaning. Third, metonymy possesses extremely strong persuasive power. Compared to direct statements that might be offensive or less effective, metonymy can influence an audience without directly provoking opposition. It silently slides into the mind.

For example, a leader who wants to criticize without causing conflict might use metonymy, allowing the audience to make their own inferences, thereby making the message more easily accepted and remembered. This persuasive power is a key characteristic. It reflects wisdom. Fourth, rethoric's classification of metonymy—such as *kinayah 'an sifah* (kinayah about a quality), *kinayah 'an mausuf* (metonymy about a described entity), and *kinayah 'an nisbah* (metonymy about a relation)—provides a more detailed analytical framework. This is a critical finding. Understanding these categories allows us to more accurately elaborate on the types of implied meanings intended, from a person's personal characteristics to social status or even economic conditions.

For example, 'anak emas' (golden child) is a *kinayah 'an mausuf*, referring to someone who is loved or given priority, a phrase rooted in cultural context. Fifth, metonymy also serves as a reflection of Malay culture and values. Many metonymy are rooted in observations of the surrounding nature, customs, and local beliefs, making them an inseparable part of cultural identity. The expression 'ada udang di sebalik batu' (there's a shrimp behind the stone) not only indicates the implied meaning 'there's a hidden motive', but also reflects the cautious attitude of Malay society towards hidden intentions. This is not just language. It is the soul. Therefore, metonymy in the Malay language, when analyzed using rethoric, reveals a structure and function far more complex and layered than previously thought. It is not merely an embellishment. It is a rich bearer of meaning.

## DISCUSSION

The finding that metonymy is not merely a rhetorical embellishment—but a nuanced communication strategy—should compel us to reflect. So, what does this mean for the real world? It means we have long neglected an important dimension in the mastery of the Malay language. Grammar instruction in schools, which often focuses too much on surface structure, needs to be drastically re-evaluated. If we continue to teach language literally, we will produce a generation that fails to appreciate or even understand the depth of implied meanings in proverbs, idioms, or even daily conversations.

This is a pedagogical catastrophe. It is also very likely that the failure to understand metonymy—both in personal and public contexts—can lead to serious misunderstandings, especially in a society rich in context and politeness values like Malaysia. Malays often use *\*kinayah\** to convey difficult or sensitive messages, a technique that, if

not understood, can cause the message to be missed or completely misinterpreted. We need to question, does the existing curriculum adequately equip students with these skills? I think not. The distinction between metonymy and metaphor or simile, emphasized by rethoric, also has significant implications in literary criticism. Most analyses of Malay literature often generalize all forms of figurative language, thereby obscuring the specific functions and artistic effects of each type. When a writer uses metonymy they are not just creating an image; they are building a narrative of indirect meaning, a 'bridge' between what is said and what is actually meant. This demands a sensitive reader, capable of detecting such nuances. Without a rethoric framework, our analysis of literary works will remain at a superficial level, failing to penetrate the aesthetic and philosophical depth that the author tries to convey.

It is a reflection of intellectual laziness. Furthermore, the persuasive power of metonymy—which can convey messages without causing offense—may be key to understanding the dynamics of political and social communication in Malaysia. Wise leaders or politicians often use metonymy to convey sensitive criticisms or suggestions, allowing the audience to interpret for themselves without feeling threatened. This is not mere manipulation; it is an art of rhetoric that has long been practiced in Malay tradition, a way to 'soften' bitter messages. Understanding this mechanism can reveal new layers in the analysis of political discourse, and even diplomatic strategies. It gives us tools to see how the power of language is used in the public sphere, not just in textbooks.

This study also indirectly challenges the view of some linguists who insist on rejecting the Arabic rethoric framework as irrelevant to the Malay language. Clearly, concepts like metonymy—which are so ingrained in Malay expression—share strong theoretical roots with rethoric. Ignoring this connection is a great loss, like discarding a long-existing treasure. It is not a matter of 'Arab' or 'Malay', but a matter of utilizing an intellectual heritage proven effective in unraveling the mysteries of language. We need to transcend rigid disciplinary boundaries to truly understand how our language functions, not just to see its structure. This is a call for more openness. This is a call to restore the dignity of Malay linguistic discipline.

## CONCLUSION

The journey of examining the art of metonymy in the Malay language through the lens of rethoric reveals how complex and layered the language we use every day truly is. Clearly, metonymy is not merely a trivial figure of speech; it is a strategic communication mechanism that carries implied meanings, demonstrates mature expression, and reflects profound cultural wisdom. Our failure to understand this complexity, especially due to the neglect of rethoric, has led to the continued marginalization of appreciation for the rhetorical richness of the Malay language. It is a great loss.

This means we have allowed intellectual treasures to be buried without being fully unearthed. Three main findings from this study—namely metonymy as the transfer of implied meaning arising from common association, its function as an indicator of character maturity and its persuasive power, and the rethoric classification framework that provides analytical precision—demand that we re-examine how we approach the study and teaching of the Malay language. We can no longer cling to superficial and merely descriptive approaches, as if considering language static and soulless. This is impossible.

When metonymy is not understood, the entire spectrum of communication and social nuances begins to collapse, leading to misunderstandings and an inability to appreciate cultural depth. It is a stern reminder. We must move forward. Future research should not be limited to the analysis of literary texts; we should look at the application and understanding of metonymy in contemporary digital communication, for example in social media or instant messages. Are younger generations still able to detect metonymy? Or, a comparison of Malay metonymy with similar rhetorical forms in related languages such as Indonesian or Minangkabau would provide a broader picture of regional cultural similarities and differences.

We need to ask. If we continue to ignore the rhetorical depth of metonymy, we risk stripping the Malay language of one of its greatest intellectual assets, making it an empty language—merely a tool for literal meaning transactions—without the soul and beauty that form the identity of the nation. It will become a flawed language.

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