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'MELAYU BAHASA': SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE MALAY CREOLE OF SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

The Malays of Sri Lanka are proud of the fact that they still speak the 'Malay' language. It is widely used as a language of communication in their homes, among their relations, friends, peer groups and elders and children. Until recently Malay had been in use even in formal occasions such as public meetings and during sermons held in the so called Malay mosques.[1] Even now a regular weekly programme in the Malay language is broadcast through the Sri Lankan radio broadcasting corporation for the benefit of the Malay listeners. The continued use of Malay in Sri Lanka is both a cause and effect of the strong cultural identity of the community which the Malays are trying hard to maintain.

Until now little scholarly attention has been paid to analyse the Sri Lankan Malay language (SLM) which is spoken by a community of more than 50,000 strong at present.[2] By contrast it may be pointed out that several scholarly works have been carried out in other similar creole dialects such as Sri Lankan Portugese, (Ian Smith 1977) and the language of the Veddas which are spoken by only a few people in Sri Lanka (Dharmadasa 1974).

The present SLM, although perceived by the local Malays as 'Bahasa Melayu', is but a heavily creolised language and therefore widely divergent from the standard Malay spoken in the Malay Peninsula and the Archipelago: A speaker of Sri Lankan Malay may not understand the standard Malay and vice versa. The SLM had undergone a complete transformation in syntactic structure and grammatical categories. While the standard Malay (SM) belongs linguistically to the group of Austronesian languages, Sri Lankan Malay can be said to belong more to a Dravidian type of language as will be discussed in this essay. It betrays many characteristics of a South Asian creole, influenced by either Tamil, or Sinhalese or both viewed from context of Sri Lanka linguistic situation.

THE ORIGINS

Historically speaking, the Sri Lankan variety of Malay language is more than 350 years old (Hussainmiya 1986: 279-309). The early Malay settlers a majority of whom originated from the Indonesian Pasisir (coastal) areas, particularly the city-dwellers of Batavia who were recruited by the Dutch for service in Sri Lanka had formed a group identity among themselves through the medium of Malay language.[3] At the time Malay was spoken not only among the native people of the Archipelago, but also among the foreighers who happened to come into contact with the Malay speakers. This variety of spoken Malay had been commonly known

as 'Batavian Malay' (Omong Jakarta), 'low Malay' or 'Bazaar Malay' etc. and considered to be a pidgin language in its origin (Lance Castles 1967: 153-204). Since the foreigners had to be talked down to, the language underwent certain system of simplification by way of dropping elaborate inflexion of case and agreement markers. Thus the SLM itself can be said to have been pidginised at the time of its introduction to Sri Lanka. As time went on through a contact situation with the local languages, chiefly Tamil language, SLM underwent further transformation, and realignment.

There is a reason why the spoken SLM was able to survive for so long – there also flourished a strong written literary Malay tradition among the earlier generations when works of classical Malay were copied and written by the members of the community in Sri Lanka. (Hussainmiya 1984). [4] Samples of this literary Malay can be collected from not only the classical manuscripts copied locally, but also through Malay newspapers such as *Alamat Langkapuri* published in Sri Lanka as far back as 1869.[5] A Sri Lanka newspaper *Wajah Selong* was in circulation in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago in latter part of the 19th century.[6] The language of the newspapers, despite being marked with localisms, nonetheless remained as standard Malay to be sufficiently understood, read and appreciated by the foreign Malay readers. Even in their private correspondence the local Malays used a highly classicalised language as can be seen from few extant letters which have survived.[7] Thus it becomes clear that there was a diglossia situation which existed when written Malay was practised until the early part of the century. Until such time when the *Jawi* script was in wide and popular use the literary language could survive because of the availability of large number of texts written in the script. On the other hand those who did not learn *Jawi,* but still showed keenness in written Romanised Malay was not able to write 'good' Malay as the previous 'Jawi' educated generations. This was evident in the booklet of poetry published by C.H. Mantara in 1906 which carried the title of 'Panthong *Orang Mooda'*.[8] The samples of poetry contained in his booklet of **pantuns** betray the degeneration of Malay language in a written romanized text. Mantara's poetry, if it had any value, was to serve as a documentary proof to point out seepage of the creolised Malay in a published text.[9]

In the early part of the present century there were some attempts to keep up the teaching of Malay by some enthusiasts who published Malay instruction booklets. [10] The examples enumerated in the booklets too exhibit strong of crealization of the language. There seems to be an artificial attempt to inject a semblance of standard Malay into the local speech as can be seen from some of the following examples from this booklet:

Bolehkah engkau berbuat itu
(Can you do it)

Jangan benci kepada orang
(Don't hate people)

Anjing itu sudah gigit pada dia orang
(The dog bit them)

Ini rumah sapa punya
(Whose house is this)

Malay-Moor Relations

It is difficult to determine which local language, if it is Sinhala (spoken by more than 70% of the population) or Tamil, was largely responsible for structural changes which SLM underwent over the years in the past. Both languages are very much similar in syntax and grammar, and with a greater degree of inter-translatability (James Gair 1976). However, considering the historical background of the Malays, who were Muslims by religion, it is highly probable that it was a variety of Tamil spoken by the Sri Lankan Moor community, their religious counterparts, which was responsible for many of these changes.

The Malays had been living mostly in the neighbourhood of the Tamil-speaking Moors in the townships of Colombo, Kandy, Badulla and Hambantota. Living close to their religious compatriots was necessary because of common religious services performed by the Moor *Moulavis* and *Imams.* Moreover, the Malays were much conversant with the religious literature of the Moors which were all in Tamil. During important religious occasions such Tamil religious *kitabs* were recited by the Malays in their homes. Even those Malay literary savants like Baba Ounus Saldin considered it important to render certain religious works in Tamil into Malay for the benefit of Malay readership.[11] In his fortnightly newspaper, *Alamat Langkapuri* mentioned earlier, Ounus Saldin even devoted some pages for news and views in Tamil. This was partly possible, because both Malay and (Muslim) Tamil were written in Arabic script. Therefore, any Malay who could read Jawi (Malay written in Arabic script) can also read and even understand works written in [C]Arabu-Tamil.[12] Such was the close literary connection which existed among the members of the Malay and Moor communities in Sri Lanka. Above all, there was a considerable mixture of the Malays and the Moors through inter-marriages. The early Dutch Thombos (Head and land registers) document a number of such inter-marriages between these two communities.[12]

It is not surprising, therefore, to see most members of the Malay Community have been bilinguals in Malay and Tamil, while a considerable number could speak three and at times even four languages, inclusive of Sinhala and English. As members of the Muslim religion, Malays were often required to code-switching from Malay to Tamil in public dealings with the Moor-Muslims, and therefore, the Tamil spoken by the latter exercised a strong influence in the evolution of the original Malay speech introduced to the island.

It is a common knowledge II that language convergence takes place in proven cases of bilingualism. As Gumperz and Wilson (1971: 151-167) have stated that "studies of such diffusion processes during the last few decades have revealed some striking cases of grammatical borrowing among otherwise unrelated languages."

In the case of Sri Lankan Malay though originally belonging to an Austronesian linguistic group, it finally rested on a Dravidian structure, as happened to a number of similar creoles in the South Asian region. (Ian Smith 1978). The contact situation between Sri Lankan Moor-Tamil and SLM resulted not only in lexical borrowings, but also has pervaded all aspects of the latter's grammatical system. As Weinreich (1953:1) points out language contact can result in such far reaching changes that the affected language assumes a different structural type.

In what follows, I have attempted to show some extreme examples of such far reaching changes in Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) through the influence of Sri Lankan 'Moor Tamil'.

Unfortunately, even in the case of Sri Lankan 'Moor Tamil', hardly any research has been carried out for any documentary comparison with SLM. However, Ian Smith has compared a somewhat similar variant of a Sri Lankan colloquial Tamil, namely Batticaloa Tamil with Batticaloa Portugese for his doctoral research on Sri Lanka creole Portugese. The examples shown in his thesis are very helpful in comparing SLM with the Batticaloa Tamil colloquial; of course, unlike in the case of phonology, Batticaloa Tamil does not differ much with SLMT in aspects of grammar.

This exercise is not undertaken with any formal training in linguistic techniques – in the absence of any worthwhile study on the subject, the following description may be considered only as a bench – mark study on SLM. It is left for the trained linguists to carry out further field work to elucidate some of the conclusions arrived through the examples shown in the areas of phonology, morphology and syntax of SLM.

1/ ***Phonological Changes***

Some of these changes are common to other Malay creoles, such as Ambonese Malay, while certain changes are peculiar to SLM, influenced by local languages especially Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil.

a/ There is no ( ) pepet sound in SLM. Omission of pepet in initial position:-

SM / kepala	–	SLM / kpala,
SM / belajar	–	SLM / blajar
SM / keliling	–	SLM / kluling

In place of pepet, other vowels appear, a feature characteristic of vowel assimilation: / / → / *i* /

SM / lekas	–	SLM / likkas
SM / lebih	–	SLM / libbi

In other cases

/ /→ / *u* /

SM / penuh	–	SLM / punnu
SM / delapan	–	SLM / dulapan

SM / sebab – SLM / subbat
SM / sebelah – SLM / subla

b/ The deletion of / h / in word initial, medial, and final position is common in SLM.

Word initial:

SM / habis – SLM /abbis (finish)
SM / hangus – SLM /angus (burnt)

Word Medial:

SM / sahaja – SLM /sajja (only)
SM / lihat – SLM /liyyat (See)
SM / baharu – SLM / baru (new)

Word Final:

SM / seblah – SLM / subla (side)
SM / berkelahi – SLM / bukkulay (fight)
SM / sudah – SLM / suda, su (already)

c/ Absence of glottal stops:

SM / anak (glottal and) : SLM / anak (final voiceless stop) (child)
SM / pendek : SLM / pendek

d/ Where SM has m, n, and ng in final position, SLM has only ng (with few exceptions).

SM / simpan – SLM / simpang (keep)
SM / bukan – SLM / bukang (no, not)
SM / tahun – SLM / tawong (year)

e/ Where SM has mostly a syllabice structure of CVCVC, SLM can omit vowels between consozants resulting in consonantal clusters.

SM / belakang – SLM / blakang (rear, back)
SM / berlajar – SLM / blajar (study)
SM / kenapa – SLM / knapa (why)

(This can be seen as an influence of *Omong Jakarta*, a feature which has influenced Modern Indonesian as well) (Hardjad-ibrata 1976).

f/ Gemination occurs frequently in SLM

SM / keras – SLM / kirras (hard, stiff)
SM / semua – SLM / samma (all)
SM / sebab – SLM / subbat (because)

g/ Most words in present SLM are bi-syllabic, rarely one finds a word with three syllables, and words with four syllables are certainly absent.

This is obvious from examples shown above. Due to omission of vowels leading to consonantal clusters, omission of / h /, and gliding and so on, usual SM with words having more than two syllables have been reduced to two syllabic words.

2/ ***The Morphology and syntax of SLM***

SLM is totally at variance with SM in aspects of grammar. SLM has typical traces of a South Asian creole, in so far as the inflexional system is concerned. Whereas SM has a full complement of prefixes and suffixes in the formation of both nouns and verbal morphs, SLM has reduced it to a minimum; and several of these have been transformed into fixed and fossilised forms.

Also typical of Bazaar-Malay, SLM prefers to use simple verbal root in place of affixial forms. In fact, many of the SM inflexional forms for e.g., Men (Tr) Meng ... kan, (Tr) Meng... i; memper ... memper ... i do never occur in SLM speech.

Despite the Tamil influence, SLM does not adhere to the inflexional system of SLMT. SLMT verbal morphs are marked only with suffixes whereas ALM uses both prefixes and suffixes.

Below is a table to show some aspects of verb morphology of SLM. The verbal base, *Makan* is used as an imperative and used in the contexts of a second person – Dey (He) – SM Dia.

TABLE 1

CATEGORY	SLM	GLOSS.
Imperative	Makan	Eat
Present	Ere-Makan	Eating
Past	Su-Makan	Ate
Potential	Ati-Makan	Can eat etc.
	(past Su. Makan-Abbis)	Have eaten
Perfective	(potential: Ati-Makan)	(finished eating)
	(Abbis)	Would eat (and finish)
Permissive	Ber-Makan	Let him eat
Negative	Ta-Makan	Not eating
Volitive-Negative	Tuma-Makan	Won't eat, wouldn't eat
Negative-Imperative	Ta-Makan-Kalu	Don't eat
Conditional	Makan-Kalu	If eat
Infinitive	Me-Makan-na	To eat
Verbal Noun	Makan-an	'Eating'

The above inflexional system as practised in SLM can be understood only in relation to SLMT because of substantial correspondence between the system of semantic

structures of both languages. This will become further evident in the examples of syntax discussed below.

WORD ORDER:

The usual word order in SM is SVO, or in terms of clause structure NP + V + NP.

SM–Amat makan nasi (Amat eats rice)

But the word order in SLM is exactly like SLMT. In non-copulative sentences it follows SOV structure.

SLM. Amat nasi makan.
(Amat rice eat).

In fact, this aspect of word order is quite common among speakers of Indian origin in Malaysia, especially the Tamilians, and has a long tradition with Bazaar-Malay.

PP ORDER

SM has only prepositions whereas SLM has many variations of postpositions, typical of Dravidian languages.

SM : Dia tinggal di rumah
(He stays at home)
SLM : Dey ruma-ka ere tinggal (or duduk)

The question of postposition in SLM would become clear by an inventory of its case markings. It is done through a set of suffixes as given below:

TABLE 2

CASE ONFLEXION IN SLM

Nominative	–	(Morphologically & semantically unmarked)
Accusative	–	Na Eg. Dey amat – *na* pukul (He hit Amat)
Dative	– Na –	Eg. Dey amat-*na* kasi (He gives to Amat)
Genitive	– Pe –	Eg. Itu Amat – *pe* ruma
Locative	–	dekkat or ka Eg. Dey Amat – *ka* su pi (He went to Amat)
Associative	–	Samma Eg. Dey Amat-samma su-pi

(He went with Amat)

Instrumental – Dari
Eg. Dey Amat-dari kena pukul
(He got hit by Amat)

PLURAL MARKER

A peculiar characteristic of SLM is its plural marker indicated by particle (pada) – in place of SM – duplication, eg. orang-orang (people)

SLM – Orang-pada (peopel)
Negeri pada (countries)

THE POSSESSIVE IN SLM

In SM the noun that is qualified (possessed) precedes the possessor noun or pronoun.

SM : Rumah Amat = Amat's house
SLM : Amat-pei ruma (amat punya ruma)

This sort of possesive construction is common in other non-standard kind of Malay, especially Baba Malay. The possessor precedes the possessed with an intervening form 'punya' – a genitive particle (standard in chinese).

SLM – pei is derivated from this genitive particle punya.

TAG QUESTION MARKER

In SM, a question to which an answer is sought is indicated by intonation or sometimes by the question word particle/kah/,

Eg. SM / Laparkah? – Are you hungry.
SLM / Laparsi?

SLM the question particle /si/ may be postposed to any constituent to mark information the speaker expects the heater to agree to.

ADJECTIVE

SM adjective always follow the noun they modify.

Eg. SM – Rumah besar (a big house)
SLM it is the reverse situation – they always precede the noun they modify.
SLM – Besar rumah
(a big house)

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

SLM has a very restricted number of porsonal pronouns unlike SM. Further more SLM has borrowed most of the pronouns from Bazaar-Malay originating from Hokkien Baba Malay.

Some pronouns, for eg. – third person plural – Mereka is never used in SLM. So is Kami, 1st person plural (excluding the hearer).

TABLE 3

1st person	–	/ sei / – / go /		
2nd person	–	Singular lu –		
3rd person	–	Singular dei / dia		
1st person	–	plural	–	kitang
2nd person	–	plural	–	lorang, lorangpada / lu orang pada
3rd person	–	plural	–	derang, derangpada / dia orang pada

Possessive Pronouns (Singular)

1st person	–	Seppei / saya punya
2nd person	–	Luppei / lu punya
3rd person	–	deppei / dia punya

Possessive Pronouns (Plural)

1st person	–	Kitampei / kita punya
2nd person	–	Lorampei / lu orang punya
3rd person	–	derampei / dia orang punya

LINKING PAST PARTICIPLE

SLM bears a definitive trait of a South Asian creole in the grammatical category of conjunctive participle, also known as 'gerund'. It is used to conjoin verbs in a temporal sequence which share the same subject all but the last of the conjoined verbs as past participles.

SLM : Dey ruma-na su-pi apa su-datang.
(He went home and came)

SLMT. avan uttukku poyi-ttu vantan.

In both SLM and SLMT, the participle takes the perfective suffix SLM – apa / SLMT – (i) ttu – with little change in meaning. Thus the perfective past participle is a distinct form in both languages.

CONDITIONAL

SLM has suffix – Kalu (derived from Kalu – if) as conditional, equal to SLMT–al. In SM the conditional particle precedes verb.

e.g. Kalau pergi

SLM – Dey ruma-na pi kalu (If he goes home)
SLMT – avan uttukku ponal

Emphatic: SLM attaches – *Jo* – to any element of the sentence to give it emphasis. SLMT equivalent is – tan.

SLM – Dey Jo ere datang
SLMT – Avan-tan varan (He himself ia coming).

SLM, ley has several functions and could probably be treated as two or three homophonous Morphemes. It's SLMT equivalent is – un. SM uses *dan,* as one of the conjunctive participles, which is never used in SLM.

SLM – Amat ley Hasan ley ere duduk.
SLMT – Amatt-um Hasan – um ukkaruranga.
(Amat and Hasan are sitting).

Another interesting verbal particle in SLM is – *kangnang,* which marks information which the speaker attributes to someone else and the truth of which he takes no responsibility.

SLM – Dedang Mara – kangnang
SLMT – avan-ukku kovam-am.
(He is angry, it seems).

Conclusion

SLM is different from any known Malay creoles, such as Amboinese Malay (Collins 1980) or Pasar Malay spoken by the descendants of Indians in the peninsula (Kanagaratnam 1971). Perhaps it is only one of its kind to have undergone complete change along with other South Asian creoles, such as Batticaloa Portugese studied in depth by Ian R. Smith.

These appears to be two main stages in the evolution of the present day SLM. It seems plausible that it grew out of a 'Malay pidgin' which arose in the coastal areas of Java since 16th century when European colonial powers became very active in the region. The history of the Sri Lankan Malays further confirms this notion. The original Malay settlers, since the beginning of the Dutch rule in Sri Lanka were drawn from many East Indian nationalities domiciled in and around the Dutch port city of then Batavia (now Jakarta). Poedjosoe darmo (1970) traces the origin of the Omong Djakarta dialect to this early Malay pidgin.

It took different forms in different lands to which it was introduced. For e.g. in Amboina, it had its own form of development as documented in J. T. Collin's thesis. In Sri Lanka, a Malay Pidgin, a contact vernacular, (not a native language

of its many non-Malay National speakers), and marked by a limited vocabulary, elimination of many grammatical devices such as inflexions etc., as well as a drastic reduction of redundant features transformed into a creole when it became a native language of a specific group, namely the Sri Lankan Malays.

Creolization means in the first instance – the nativization of pidgin – but in the Sri Lankan context, the Malay creole, in a situation of an extended use began to expand and converge dictated by the grammatical, syntactic, and phonological structure of Sri Lanka 'Moor Tamil' with which it came into close contact. In the process, SLM diverged so much from its source language, Malay – that it took an entirely different shape – so much so it can even be described as a creole of Malay words with a syntactic surface structure of SLMT.

SLM, in other words, transformed itself from a typologically preposing language (characterised by SVO, prepositions, clause, etc.) to a typologically postposing language (characterised by a SOV, post-positions and case endings).

In this respect, therefore, SLM remains no more within the ambit of an Austroe nesian linguistic group. It is to be classified along with other South Asian languages, as a creole which realigned itself with the Dravidian grammatical forms.

NOTES

1/ The Malay Mosques came into existence in areas with a predominantly Malay population such as in the *Kampung Kertel* in Colombo, Kampung *Pensen,* (Pensioners' quarters) in Kandy and in Badulla and Hambantotte, where *Kutba* or Friday sermons and other public discourses could be made in the Malay language.

2/ The total population of Sri Lanka according to the census and statistics of 1981 stood at 14,850,001. The Malays constituted 0.29% of the population.

3/ Referring to the then Betavian Community (Vlekke 1945:174) points out that "Gradually this heterogeneous population developed into a New Indonesian national group, distinct from the Sundanese of the West and the Javanese of the East of Java and with a simplified Malay language the lingua franca of the Archipelago as their native tongue".

4/ Most varieties of traditional Malay *hikayats* such as Hikayat Amir Hamzah, Muhammad Hanafiah, Inderaputera, Si Miskin alias Marakarma and the religious kitabs of Syaikh Nur al-Din al Raniri, Syams al-Din al-Pasai, Syaikh Abd al-Rauf al Singkili and so on have been discovered in Sri Lanka.

5/ In fact, the Sri Lanka *'Alamat Langkapuri',* edited and published by Baba Ounus Saldin, a locally-born Malay (1838-1906) was the earliest Malay Newspaper to appear in the Jawi script, some 9 years before the *Jawi Peranakan* published in Singapore in 1876.

6/ The publisher of *'Waja Selong'* C1895-1899), Ounus Saldin had appointed special sales agents to distribute his news paper in Malacca, Penang and Sumatera, and Batavia.

7/ I have in my possession several samples of private Malay correspondence carried out even as late as 1940.

8/ The original booklet which carries the Sri Lankan National Archives book registration number 6886 has been unfortunately misplaced.

9/ See for example two verses which I had managed to copy down from the above booklet made available to me in 1975.

(37) Karang in bukan charita
pada Malayu dah mooda Java
pada sinang tempo keeta
Supaya panthong sandiri bahasa.

(38) Ada tersohor satu Charita
mahu bawakan orang Java
ditipukan belang pada diya
membeli gaja seduwit dua

10/ I have in my possesion some samples of lithographed Malay booklets of instructions datable to the early part of the present century. When compared with Ounus Saldin's efforts, these later booklets are of very poor printing quality.

11/ I have sighted Saldin's Malay translation of the Tamil *Gnanamani Malai,* which is new in the possession of Mrs Perlin Yahya Dole of Nawala, Sri Lanka.

12/ For eg. see Sri Lanka National Archives 1/3758 (Thombu) pp 63-71.

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