

"Psycho-Collocations" in Malay: A Southeast Asian Areal Feature*

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Though mainland and insular Southeast Asia may be thought of in many ways as constituting a single regional entity — unified by common geographical conditions and by centuries of commercial and cultural contact¹ — the languages of these two adjacent areas would appear, on the face of it, to have very little in common with each other. Indeed, typologically, they could hardly be more different — the languages of "Indochina"² being predominantly (though not exclusively) isolating, monosyllabic (or tending to monosyllabicity) and tonal, whereas those of the "Malay Archipelago"³ are polysyllabic, agglutinating and non-tonal. On this basis alone, it has always been assumed that they belong to entirely distinct stocks, with only marginal regional overlap.⁴

Modern comparative research has borne out the fact that these are indeed separate linguistic domains, but it nevertheless seems increasingly evident that the division is not quite so absolute as was once thought. This is to say that the Austronesian languages of the islands do in fact have certain affinities with some, if not all, of the major linguistic groupings of the Indochinese mainland — though it is less clear precisely how these are to be explained.⁵ These affinities include not only a common "areal vocabulary" found throughout the region, but also a number of parallel grammatical and "conceptual" features — notably the use of numeric classifiers, of honorific pronouns and forms of address, and of strikingly similar verb morphology in

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¹ For an illuminating discussion of these cultural and historical commonalities from a global Southeast Asian perspective, see Reid 1988.

² A term that seems to have fallen into disfavor these days within the English-speaking world, but which I use here to refer to the areas of present-day Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Thailand, and Burma.

³ I use this term here in the older (and broader) sense, as comprising modern-day Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines — locus of the major Western Malayo-Polynesian (WMP) subgroup of the Austronesian (AN) language family.

⁴ E.g. the presence of several Austronesian-speaking groups on the mainland, notably the Chams and closely-related highland tribes such as the Jarai and Rhade of southern Vietnam.

⁵ Most intriguing in this respect have been the pioneering efforts of Paul Benedict (1975) to link the Austronesian phylum genetically with the Tai-Kadai and Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) languages of the mainland, while at the same time postulating a 'sub-stratum' relationship between AN and the Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer) group, and also demonstrating a good deal of interaction between AN and Old Chinese.

some cases.⁶ Certain of these commonalities are found not only throughout Southeast Asia but across much of East Asia as well, and seem not to be the result of any clearly-defined borrowing in the traditional sense (e.g. lexical or phonological borrowing), but rather seem to flow from a common areal conceptualization and compartmentalization of the world, a point to which we shall return later.

One such Southeast Asian areal feature, described for a number of mainland Southeast Asian languages by Matisoff (1986), is the explicit reference within polymorphemic expressions concerning psychological phenomena to certain key body parts or organs where such phenomena are thought to "reside" or "transpire" — expressions which he terms "psycho-collocations" (also "psi-collocations" or simply "psi's" for short). As Matisoff has pointed out (1986:45-6), such expressions are in fact part of a universal metaphorical tendency — closely related to expressions in English of the sort "hard-hearted," "hot-blooded" and "big-mouthed" — yet there seems to be a qualitative difference in the extremes to which Southeast Asian languages carry this tendency. Indeed, traditionally it has often been difficult in these languages to express any sort of mental activity, emotion or personality trait without a specific somatic reference.

The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate the existence in Malay, a major Austronesian language of western Indonesia and Malaysia, of numerous expressions that are strikingly parallel to those cited by Matisoff for the languages of mainland Southeast Asia. Indeed, most western Indonesian languages regularly employ such expressions, constructed primarily around the term for "liver/heart," but involving additionally the "mind," "head," "blood," "mouth," "hands," "face" or other body constituents. A few examples from Malay/Indonesian will be cited below, following a brief discussion of the general nature, structure and classification of psi-collocations in this language.

"To Think in the Liver"

In Malay, much of what is regarded as conscious mental activity is thought to take place not in the brain, but in the heart or liver. The Malay word most commonly used to refer to such activity is *hati*, literally meaning "liver" (as in *sate hati kambing* = "skewered, grilled goat's liver") but also frequently denoting "heart" (as in *berdebar-debar hati*; lit: "with a palpitating heart" = "to be nervous, fearful, excited, or in love"). In older texts, *hati* also can refer to the liver, heart, gall-bladder, and "viscera"

⁶ The best examples of the latter phenomenon are the presence in many Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages of a causative prefix *pa-* as well as an infix *-um-* which acts as a nominalizer (in Austroasiatic languages) or marks an actor-focus (in Austronesian languages).

collectively. Figuratively, as in English, it refers also to the "center" or "core" of things.⁷

Psycho-collocations with *hati* are extremely common. For example, "to think" is often expressed as "to think in the liver" (*pikir dalam hati*); "to feel" is "to feel in the liver" (*merasa dalam hati*); "to say to oneself" is "to say in the liver" (*berkata dalam hati*); "to read to oneself" is "to read in the liver" (*membaca dalam hati*); "to be concerned about, to take a keen interest in" is "to place in the liver" (*menaruh dalam hati*); and "to have unexpressed or deep-seated feelings [about something or someone]" can be expressed as "to store in the liver" (*simpan dalam hati*). Similarly, "to be careful, cautious or attentive" is literally "to have liver-liver" (*berhati-hati* — often used imperatively, as in "*Hati-hati!*" = "Be careful!"). A variety of other psychological terms and expressions are also derived from *hati* through the addition of affixes, as in *perhatian* ("interest, attention") and *memperhatikan* ("to give one's attention or consideration to something"), and newer forms are still being coined from this root, as for example *bersehati* (lit: "of one liver") = "unanimous" and *pemerhati* ("one who pays attention") = "[political] observer."

Concerning the frequent use of the word *hati* with reference to psychological phenomena, philologists have traditionally remarked only that it comes about because the Malays believe this to be the "seat of the emotions" as well as the primary "organ of intellection." Wilkinson (1932), quotes the following final couplets from two traditional Malay *pantun*⁸ as examples of this (the rather literal translations are my own):

<i>Antara hati dengan jantung</i>	Between my liver and my heart
<i>Di situ adik abang tinggalkan.</i>	There, younger brother, I place thee
<i>Kami menangis di dalam hati</i>	I shed tears in my liver
<i>Seorang manusia tiada tahu.</i>	Not a soul knows it

We may note here that such expressions of psychological phenomena employing *hati* are both exceedingly "transparent" and also physically immediate — situating the emotion or mental process in question in a particular spot lying at the very core of one's physical being. To a degree, the concrete "objectification" and physical "localization" of emotions and thought processes is perhaps related to the relative absence in traditional Malay of terms for generalized and abstract concepts. Indeed, the vast majority of such terms now found in Malay/Indonesian are either loans from

⁷ To refer to the heart specifically, there are a number of other terms in Malay, most of them loans, which are not metaphorically extended in Malay in the same way as *hati*, for example *jantung*, *kalbu* (< Arabic *qalb*), *fuad* (< Arabic *fuʿa:d*), *nala* (< Minang).

⁸ Popular rhyming quatrains (ABAB), often aphoristic in nature.

Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch or English, or have been derived from Austronesian roots during the past few decades through affixation, largely under the influence of Dutch and English. And conversely, as the lexicon has become increasingly abstract in recent years, it seems that collocations employing *hati* have fallen somewhat out of favor. Today one is more likely in everyday conversation to simply employ the verbs "to think" (*pikir*), "to feel" (*meras*), etc., without the addition of *hati*, and the inclusion of the latter (most commonly found in poetry, songs and prose literature) now has a certain archaic and literary flavor to it, and is reserved for situations in which very strong emotions are being expressed.

"Primary" vs. "Secondary" Psycho-Nouns

In fact, *hati* is not the only "psycho-noun"⁹ used in Malay — there are a number of others, such as: *kepala* "head" (< Sanskrit *kapala* = "skull"); *akal* "mind" (< Arabic *ʿaql*); *muka* "face" (< Sanskrit *mukha*); *tangan* "hands"; etc. For example, a clever person is *panjang akal* ("long-minded") or *terang akal* ("clear-minded"), while a numskull is referred to as a *kepala udang* ("prawn-head"). When one becomes angry, one's "blood rises" (*naik darah*), while a calm and patient person is, as in English, "cool-headed" (*dingin kepala*). A talkative, amiable person is *ringan mulut* ("light-mouthed") — while a blabber-mouth is "itchy-mouthed" (*gatal mulut*).

Matisoff (1986:2) has pointed out that such expressions form a number of overtly-marked classes (or "phenotypes" in Whorfian terms), each of which is defined by the use of a single somatic noun (their Whorfian "reactance").¹⁰ Expressions in English of the type (x + y)-ed where 'y' is a "psycho-noun" and 'x' an adjective ("hard-hearted", etc.) may be said to form overt classes analogous to Southeast Asian psycho-phenotypes, but they by no means cover as broad a spectrum of psychological phenomena as do the Southeast Asian psi's.

By Whorf's definition, there thus appear to be several "psycho-phenotypes" or classes of psi-collocations in Malay, defined in terms of the various psycho-nouns mentioned above. Nevertheless, *hati* is clearly pre-eminent among them, not only because it is far and away the most productive, but also because the usage of the other psycho-nouns appears, on

⁹ This term has been coined by Matisoff (1986:4) to designate the morpheme within a psi-collocation referring to the body part or organ with which the psychological phenomenon is associated. His definition of a 'psycho-noun' should perhaps be amended slightly, however, as the Malay psycho-noun by itself need not (and most often does not) have "explicit psychological reference." Its salient feature is rather that it is somatic (i.e. a body part or constituent, such as the head, heart, liver, hands, blood, bodily excretions, etc.) and is also employed in psycho-collocations.

¹⁰ See "A linguistic consideration of thinking in primitive communities" in Whorf 1956:70-71.