MALAY LEXICALIZED ITEMS
IN PENANG PERANAKAN HOKKIEN

Lim Beng Soon  
Regional Language Centre (RELC) Singapore  
<Beng_Soon_Lim@relic.org.sg>

Teoh Boon Seong  
Singapore Management University  
<bsteoh@smu.edu.sg>

1 Introduction
This paper aims to document instances of lexical items in Penang Peranakan Hokkien (henceforth PPH) which are Malay loanwords. There has been some research into Peranakan (Baba) Malay, namely that of Shellabear (1913), Vaughan (1879) and more recently Clamer (1980) and Khoo (1996). However, not surprisingly, most academic work so far on Peranakan Chinese (viz. Baba Malay) has been restricted to that of the Malacca or Singapore varieties because of their similarities to Malay superficially.

PPH on the other hand is, for all intents and purposes, a Chinese dialect. Nevertheless, this dialect in question contains numerous Malay lexical items even though its syntax is underlyingly Hokkien. A brief description offered by Khoo (1996) in differentiating PPH from its other cousins is illuminating.

The Baba Hokkien in Penang is closer to this Tang Min (a type of Min dialect) than is the type of Hokkien spoken by the Sinkhek (recently arrived immigrants), who use the Standard Amoy variety. PPH is even less closely related to Standard Amoy because of the Malay words it has assimilated. It is different from other variations of Hokkien spoken on the Mainland or in Malacca and Singapore. (Khoo 1996:112)

The Malay words assimilated in PPH appear in various linguistic levels, including morphemes, words, phrases and clauses. Evidence of the assimilation of Malay in those linguistic levels is copious, for example, the prolific use of the Malay particles 'lah' and 'pun'. The assimilation in the level of morphemes is, however, less evident but nevertheless present, typically in the prolific use of 'nya' in PPH, which is a contracted form of, and semantically similar to, the original Malay term 'hanya', meaning 'only'.

2 Historical Background
This paper does not purport to provide a definitive or authoritative historical overview of the Peranakan Community in Penang; however, we believe that a short introduction to the origins of the Peranakan community in Penang might be helpful. The genesis of the Peranakan community in Penang can be traced back to the establishment of Penang as a

---

1 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the 8th Annual Meeting of the South East Asian Linguistics Society, 20-22 July 1998, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We would like to thank the State Chinese Association of Penang and the State Museum Board of Penang for their financial support and encouragement that has made the writing of this paper possible.


© Lim Beng Soong & Teoh Boon Seong
British colony in 1786. In the early years after it was made a British outpost, trade flourished and there was much commercial activity and regional trade with the North Malaysian states of Kedah, Perak, the Sumatran Kingdoms and Southern Thailand.

Penang as a focal point of commerce in this part of the Malay Archipelago attracted an influx of Chinese businessmen to the colony, particularly from Southern Thailand and North Sumatra. The Peranakan Chinese in Penang were thought to have been "descendants of Chinese males marrying or cohabiting with Malays or Siamese or Burmese; the last mentioned, however, appear to be rather rare" (Khoo 1998:6). It must be stressed that the Peranakans of Penang still have extensive familial ties with both these regions.

PPH is spoken to greater or lesser degree by many of Penang's Hokkien community, but the prevalence of Malay lexicalized items in PPH is found among older members of the erstwhile Straits Chinese community. Typically, this group of speakers is above the age of 50 and many are English-educated. Although their speech is liberally peppered with lexical items of Malay origin, this does not predispose them to understanding standard Malay, which has gained currency among the younger generation. In fact, many PPH speakers above the age of 50 have never had formal instruction in standard Malay; they are hence unable to understand formal Malay even though bazaar Malay is easily understood by all. Most of the respondents in this study were initially unaware that they had been using words of Malay origin in their everyday use of PPH.

3 Procedure
This study was conducted through observation of naturally occurring speech in a PPH family for a period of two months, from May to June 1998. Some samples have been transcribed for ease of presentation. We also collected some taped conversations of spontaneous speech in the said Peranakan family.

The focus of this paper is to analyze the features of Malay lexical items in PPH to see if they are loanwords; exhibit phonological diversity; are different from Malay lexically and semantically; and finally, whether there are loan translations above the level of individual lexicon. We are therefore of the opinion that it is unnecessary to describe longer stretches of speech.

4 Framework of Analysis and Discussion of Findings
As an initial study into PPH, we will discuss the individual occurrences of Malay words in PPH. This paper also hopes to shed light on the patterns of code-switching that occur in PPH which might in turn stimulate further investigation into why certain linguistic categories are code-switched more often than the others.

The current paucity of studies undertaken on PPH is regrettable; nevertheless, studies done on other Peranakan Chinese communities in the region provide an outline for relevant areas of investigation. Among the earliest studies into Baba Malay is that of Shellabear (1913); he provides a description of Baba Malay in terms of its distinctive aspects as compared to "...the spoken language of the pure Malays" (Shellabear 1913:50). These aspects include a description of the evolution of Baba Malay; Baba Malay words of Chinese origin; Malay words which are unknown to the Babas; Malay words which are mispronounced by the Babas; and finally, the claim that the Baba idiom is Chinese rather than Malay.

In terms of language use and identity, we find that this issue is particularly relevant to the Peranakan Chinese. This is due to their ability to express their solidarity with both
the indigenous community and the Chinese by their emphasis of either the Malay or Chinese elements of their language. This was not only prevalent among the Peranakan Communities in Peninsular Malaysia but also amongst the Peranakan Chinese in Java and Sumatra. Tan (1979, 1980) did extensive studies into the Babas of Malacca and remarked that the relation between the Baba Malay language and identity was significant. The Babas could manipulate their use of Baba Malay to associate themselves with the Malays, or conversely emphasize the non-Malay elements of Baba Malay to stress their solidarity with the Chinese (Tan, 1979:125-127). Writing on the Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan, Teo (1996) extends the scope of borrowings from the Malays not only in the domain of language but also other cultural borrowings (e.g. attire) from the Malays by the Peranakan in Kelantan. Teo (1996) suggests that for the urban Peranakan, cultural borrowings of attire and cuisine remain back stage, where their manifestation is restricted to the confines of the household. We concur with this, as the Penang Peranakan who are wholly urbanized have similar tendencies. In the case of the rural Kelantan Peranakan Chinese, cultural borrowings are not only back stage but front stage as well. This is entirely plausible, though an equivalent example in Penang is unobtainable.

In terms of a framework of analysis, Tan (1979) has formulated a framework for the comparison of Baba Malay and Standard Malay. He maintains that there are five main patterns of diversity, namely the use of loanwords (including loan-translations), phonological differences, lexical differences, semantic differences and syntactic differences (Tan, 1979:267).

Among the studies elaborated above, we will discuss the observations of Shellabear (1913) and Tan (1979). It must be emphasized that PPH is different from Baba Malay in that it is essentially a Hokkien dialect with a significant number of Malay lexicalized items in use. Some remarks of Shellabear (1913) merit attention. He mentions that the then Baba Malay of the Straits Settlements was different from colloquial Malay in terms of the following:

1. Words introduced which are of Chinese origin; which for PPH is the inverse: where words introduced in the Hokkien dialect are Malay.
2. Babas were unacquainted with a large number of Malay words which are in common use among the Malays. We find that this holds true for speakers of PPH.
3. Babas mispronounce or reconstruct phonologically many Malay words and in some cases have altered the pronunciation so much that the word is almost unrecognizable. This is particularly true of many of the Malay lexicalized items in PPH.
4. To a great extent the Peranakans use the Chinese idiom rather than the Malay in putting their sentences together. This results in the Babas producing Baba Malay at the sentential level which is quite different from the colloquial language of the Malays.
Although Shellabear’s observations above are noteworthy, we believe that the framework of analysis provided by Tan (1979) is more productive for the focus of this paper. Hence we discuss how the four main patterns of diversity (i.e. the use of loanwords (including loan-translations), phonological differences, lexical differences and semantic differences (Tan, 1979:267)) between the Malay lexicalized items found in PPH contrast with their original functions and roles in standard Malay. This study, however, excludes the analysis of syntactic differences between Malay in PPH and standard Malay because PPH is basically a Chinese dialect with superimposed Malay lexical items. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the potential analysis of code-mixing and code-switching of Malay in PPH. In this paper, the operational framework of Tan (1979) is used with adaptations to analyze the functions and roles in PPH.

5 Loanwords
The Malay lexicalized items defined as loanwords in PPH are words that have been retained in their entirety in terms of semantic content, phonology (excepting the superimposition of tones to the words pronounced) and formal classes. Examples of these words generally include nouns like the names of certain flora and fauna (e.g. Bunga Melor, Katak Puru, Pacat, etc.). Some loanwords are restricted in their functions as grammatical categories. For example, ‘tarik’ in PPH is used to describe actions related to one afflicted with convulsions, which has the imagery of one's muscle pulling and jerking. Although this is also used by the Malays in a similar situation, it does not have the significance of the commonly used meaning by the Malays, which is ‘pull’, except in a limited sense of one inhaling cigarette smoke. The above peculiarity of loanwords not functioning in the whole spectrum of classes as they would in the source language is common among Creole languages. This tendency is not restricted to verbs and nouns alone but is also common among the other formal classes, such as adverbs and adjectives.

Sometimes loanwords borrowed from Malay function in the whole spectrum of classes as they would in Malay. For example, the root word ‘buah’, which as a noun means ‘fruit’, with proper affixation it also functions as an adjective. This is the same in PPH, although the use of the proper affixes is dispensed with. Another word which undergoes the same class shifts without any use of affixation is ‘kerabu’, which as a noun means ‘salad’ and as a verb means ‘to make something into salad’.

Tan (1979) included another category of loanwords which he labeled loan-translations. These are direct translations into Baba Malay from Chinese: for example, ‘hari satu’ which corresponds to the Chinese ‘Day One’ instead of the Malay equivalent of ‘Insin’ (Tan, 1979:275). For this study, loan-translations would be Malay concepts directly translated into PPH. The speech samples collected for this study do support the presence of loan-translation from Malay into Hokkien. However, we are unable to produce a comprehensive elaboration of these manifestations, primarily because this study is not aimed solely at such an objective. Secondly and more importantly, it is only through a comprehensive comparative study of PPH with the other Min dialects that one could ascertain if loan translation from Malay has taken place.

Possible candidates for loan translations would be culturally loaded terms describing actions that are common among the Malays that have been borrowed by the Peranakans in Penang. For example, the expression 'I’ll stuff your mouth with chilies for uttering obscenities', which when used in PPH has the verb 'cabi' which means 'to put or stuff chilies into...', a common form of punishment for Malay children due to the same