

Language contact as reflected in Baba Malay forms of address and reference

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1. Introduction¹

The nineteenth century Baba Malay system of address and reference includes pronouns, titles, kinship terms, ethnic names, personal names, and terms reflecting ways of earning a living. Some of the terms are of Chinese origin, others are of Malay origin, a few come from English. The diversity of origins reflects the history of the Babas, their Chinese origin, their acculturation to Malay society, and the strong British influence in nineteenth century Malaya. The study shows that the Malay system of personal pronouns has been reduced in Baba Malay. However, this reduction in the overall number of Malay pronouns is accompanied by the incorporation of Hokkien pronouns and other Hokkien terms into the Baba Malay system along with some English terms. The Hokkien terms of address and reference are usually used to mark Baba ethnicity.

The Baba Malay system of address and reference shows variation in its use, some socially conditioned, some conditioned by the degree of linguistic sophistication of the user. The socially conditioned variation is largely determined by how socially equal the speakers are but also in a small part by the speakers' ethnicity. Still other variation in use reflects the degree of linguistic knowledge of individual Baba Malay speakers. Some of them knew not only Baba Malay, but also formal Malay, and could switch to it under the appropriate conditions; others were much more limited in their command of both variants. The Baba Malay system of address and reference uses communicative strategies (Ochs 1990:289) which are part of "a set of norms, preferences, and expectations relating language to context, which speaker-hearer draw on and modify in producing and making sense out of language in context". Understanding how the Baba Malay system of address and reference functioned gives us significant insights into the social structure of the Baba Malay community, that is, the norms, the preferences, and expectations that are the underlying bases for the use of these terms.

This study first looks at the descriptions of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century Malay terms of address and reference found in Marsden (1812), Crawford (1852), Swettenham (1889), and Winstedt (1927). The presentation constitutes the basis for making a comparison between the nineteenth century Malay terms of address and reference and the nineteenth century Baba Malay terms. The analysis of Baba Malay terms is based on the data found in Lim's *A manual of the Malay colloquial such as is spoken by all nationalities in the Colonies of the Straits Settlements, and designed for domestic and business purposes* and on the Baba Malay newspaper *Bintang Timor*. The major difference between the two sources is that the data found in Lim (1887) in a certain sense represents the language of the author, a single speaker, while the data found in *Bintang Timor* represents the language of many speakers. The other difference is that the language found in Lim (1887) is less formal and less influenced by written Malay than the language of *Bintang Timor*. Thus, the two sources complement each other in providing an extended sample of both the colloquial and the formal uses of the Baba Malay terms of address and reference. This study joins other studies of no longer spoken languages. Like the studies of address systems found in the ancient Greek (Dickey 1997) or in Shakespeare's English (Brown and Gilman 1989) the data base for this study is entirely text-based.

2. Terms of address and reference in nineteenth century Malay

Malay has a rich system of personal pronouns, a system which codes various differences between the speaker and the addressee. In the literature on Malay grammar, the most prominent difference coded by the pronouns is the difference in the relative status of the speaker and the addressee. In order to use Malay pronouns in a conversation both of the interlocutors have to know their respective statuses, i.e. they have to know whether they are of equal or non-equal status and, if they are unequal, just how unequal they are. If the speaker is of a lower status than the addressee, one pronoun is used; if the speaker is of a higher status than the addressee, a different address pronoun is used; and, if the speakers are of equal status, still another choice is made.

Marsden (1812), Crawford (1852) and Swettenham (1889) provide descriptions of the usages of the nineteenth century Malay pronouns. According to Marsden (1812), the pronoun system of nineteenth century Malay is as follows:

First person (singular): *aku, hamba, beta, saya, patek, kita, kami*

Second person (singular): *angkau (kau), kamu (mu)*

Third person (singular or plural): *dia*

First person (plural): *kita (orang)* [incl.], *kami (orang)* [excl.]

Second person (plural): *angkau*

Third person (plural): *dia-orang, marik itu* (or *marika itu*)

Table 1. 19th century Malay pronoun system (after Marsden 1812)

For the first person singular, the pronoun *aku* is a first person pronoun inherited from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) **aku* (Blust, personal communication), Proto Malayic **aku* (Adelaar 1992:124). The remaining forms, most borrowed from Sanskrit, are primarily nouns that originally meant either 'servant': *hamba, beta*, or 'slave': *saya, patek*. Marsden (1812:43) explains the difference between the old pronoun *aku* and the newer terms such as *saya, hamba, beta*, and *patek* by referring to the relative status of the interlocutors. He says that *aku* is generally used by superiors talking to inferiors. He also mentions that it is sometimes used between equals, but does not elaborate. What differentiates *aku* from other terms of reference is that *aku* never originated as a form with the meaning of 'slave' or 'servant'.

In his description of Malay pronouns, Marsden (1812:44) explains what it meant in nineteenth century Malay to designate oneself as a slave or a servant. He emphasizes that the person calling himself a 'slave' or 'servant' does not "necessarily regard himself as the slave, or even as the inferior of the him to whom he addresses himself, but only that it is his intention, by an affection of humility, to show his politeness." According to Marsden (1812:44-45), there is a 'humility' continuum that various first person pronouns code. Marsden (1812) mentions that *patek* implies more 'humility' than *saya*, while *saya* implies more 'humility' than *hamba* and *beta*. Understanding what degree of 'humility' was appropriate to use in nineteenth century Malay society would require an analysis of the actual language use by different interlocutors in various contexts, and is beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, on the basis of Marsden's description of the usages of address terms it is clear that these displays of humility are directly related to the relative status of the interlocutors. Marsden (1812:45) also reports that the two pronouns for the first person plural, the inclusive *kita* and the exclusive *kami*, may be "used for the singular by royal personages".

For the second person singular, Marsden (1812) gives three forms: *angkau* (sometimes shortened to *kau*), *kamu* (sometimes shortened to *mu*), and *tuan*. He says that *angkau* “appears to be indifferently used both in the singular and the plural, by superiors and inferiors” (Marsden 1812:46). However, he observes that “when abbreviated to *kau* it is generally employed in a tone of overweening authority, approaching to contempt [...]”. He gives the following example of *kau* being used contemptuously:

- (1) tiada kau kanal
not 2s know
‘Art thou not aware?’

In contrast to *angkau*, which occurs in various contexts, *kamu* and its shortened form *mu* are only used by the superior talking to the inferior. Marsden (1812:47) illustrates with the following example the use of *kamu* being used by a superior referring to an inferior:

- (2) tiada kami mau ber-dami-an dengan kamu
not 1p want make peace with 2s
‘we do not choose to make peace with you’

Besides the two pronouns: *angkau* and *kamu*, Marsden (1812:47) also discusses the term *tuan*, and says that “[it] is employed as a pronoun personal in addresses from inferior, and politely, amongst equals”; for example:

- (3) apa tuan mau makan?
what tuan want eat
‘What do you choose to eat?’

As for the third person forms, according to Marsden (1812:49) there is basically one pronoun *dia*, which “has no positive character of superiority or inferiority.” The pronoun *dia* is used to mark a singular as well as plural referent. However, as with some first person forms, if needed, plurality may be overtly marked by adding *orang*. Marsden (1812:49) mentions yet another third person plural pronoun, namely *marik itu* or *marika itu*, where *marik* or *marika* stands for ‘person’. He says that “in sense it is nearly synonymous with *dia orang*, but much less common in conversation.” Here we see *mereka*, the formal third person plural of modern Malay.