Sri Lanka Malay – Past, Present and Future

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Project overview

Past

Present

Future
Dobes

- Documentation of Sri Lanka Malay
- funded by Dobes (Volkswagen Foundation, Germany)
  - More than 25 teams all over the world
  - Audio and Video
  - Transcription
  - Archiving for posterity
  - Web Access
- rationale
  - Languages are disappearing at an alarming rate
  - Few “big” languages are replacing smaller languages
Project members

- Dr Umberto Ansaldo (University of Amsterdam), project director
- Dr Lisa Lim (University of Amsterdam)
- Sebastian Nordhoff (University of Amsterdam), PhD researcher
- Prof Walter Bisang (University of Mainz)
- Prof Thirm Kandiah (University of Peradeniya)
Ideas and goals

- Every community has the right to speak their own language (UNESCO)
- Languages are part of the cultural heritage of humankind
- Insights into the faculty of language are easier when able to draw on many languages
- The Malay language in Sri Lanka allows special insights into language contact phenomena
The Malays in Sri Lanka

- Colombo
- Kandy
- Hambantota
- Kirinda
- Badulla
- The Malay language is disappearing everywhere but in Kirinda (Ansaldo2005)
Previous research

- Smith
- Bichsel (1989)
- Adelaar (1991)
- Saldin (1996)
- Smith and Paauw (2004)
- Slomansson (2004)
- Ansaldo (2005)
Colonization

- Colonization from the West ...
- ... brought people from the East
  - Exiles
  - Soldiers
  - Convicts and slaves
Migration of Malays to Sri Lanka

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1658

1796

1873
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Development of the Malay population

- soldiers
- Kandy
- free Malays
- convicts
- exiles
- based on Hussainmiya 1987, 1990
Contact with the Lankan peoples

- Malays were mostly in the Sinhala area
- but religious link to the Moors (Tamil-speaking)
- intermarriage with Lankan population (Hussainmiya 1990, Smith et al. 2004)
- well-integrated by 1800
- strong linguistic influence from Sinhala and Tamil (Smith et al. 2004, Ansaldo 2005)
- language probably stabilized before 1800
Post-regimental history

- Malay Ceylon Rifle Regiment disbanded in 1873
- No more Malay mosques, schools, libraries
- Soldiers work as police officers and firemen
- This entails dispersal all over the country
- Cultural achievements were slowly lost
Post-colonial history

- around 1957 Malay was introduced as a school subject, but not for long
- The Sinhala-only law
  - no more English-medium schools, preferred by the Malays
  - Sinhala at school, Tamil at the mosque, English for economic progress
  - Malay language was left behind
- possible effects of the Tsunami on Kirinda and Hambantota
Vitality

- The language is mostly spoken by the older generation
- The language is not used outside the home
- The languages is transmitted less and less to children
- → the language is severely endangered
Preservation and documentation

- Malay associations work for the preservation of the language
- COSLAM as the umbrella organisation
- Local associations in Colombo, Kandy, Nawalapitiya, Badulla, Kurunegala and other places
- Photos and videos exist in private hands, but are presently not accessible to the public
Plans

- The Dobes-project, funded by the VW foundation (Germany), provides an electronic archive where the existing material can be stored.
- This material will be complemented by audio and video recordings, transcriptions, grammar and dictionary in the course of the project.
- Further development of the existing orthography.
- Promoting the use of Malay in domains other than the home.
Bibliography


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