

Abstract

Language Contact Issues in the Development of the Lexicon of Sri Lanka Malay

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Workshop on Sri Lanka Malay

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Leipzig, Germany

November 10, 2010

Various issues arise when two languages come into contact, depending upon variables including the number of speakers of each language involved, power relations between the two communities, the type and degree of cultural contact between communities, and the degree of language shift involved. In the case of Sri Lanka Malay, these factors came into play in a fashion which created a new language under the influence of unique forces.

An earlier study (Paauw 2004) has shown that the lexicon of Sri Lanka Malay has to a great extent retained the vocabulary of Vehicular Malay which was part of the language from its earliest days in Sri Lanka in the 17th century, even while the syntax and morphology of the language have undergone extensive changes through the influence of the linguistic ecology of Sri Lanka.

This study specifically examines the lexicon of Sri Lanka Malay, through an analysis of available data sets, to determine the degree of lexical borrowing which has taken place over time in the Lankan environment, the types of vocabulary which were borrowed, and the sources of borrowing. The sociohistorical forces, including colonial policies under the Dutch and British as well as national policies since independence, along with communal traditions and alliances, which influenced this environment are discussed.