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## A CASE STUDY IN CULTURAL CONTACTS THE MALAY LANGUAGE

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**M**ALAY is one of the Indonesian languages, a group which forms a branch of the Malayo-Polynesian linguistic family. This family covers the territory extending from Madagascar in the west, through the Indonesian archipelago, across the Malay Peninsula to the borders of Burma and Siam, to the Philippines and Formosa in the north and across the Pacific to Melanesia and Micronesia, even to distant Hawaii. It comprises, apart from the Indonesian language group, the Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian languages. The Indonesian group is the largest branch of this group. Malay, a member of this group, is the language originally spoken in middle and southern Sumatra and later in the states on the peninsula of Malaya.

The interinsular trade which flourished in the fourteenth century brought about the extension of the use of this language to the coastal areas of the islands in the entire Indonesian archipelago; and, when new foreign influences came to the Indonesian archipelago, the Malay language automatically became the medium for the expansion of these influences. Three times it was the language used in such a process. First, by the Indian traders who brought the Islamic religion with them, then by the Portuguese with whom the Malays of Malaya first came into contact, and, finally, by the Dutch. The situation is now such that the Malay language is spoken and understood everywhere on all the islands of the archipelago except for the most remote rural areas. In many sections it has even replaced the original native tongues, as in West Borneo, Batavia, and most of the islands of the Moluccas between Celebes and New Guinea. It became the language spoken in the ports and the bazaars of the Indonesian

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archipelago, the medium of the Dutch colonial administration and of the Islamic and Christian missions. The enormous expansion of the use of the Malay language outside the regions where it was originally spoken cut it off from the continuous rejuvenation enjoyed by a language which finds its roots in the vernacular of a people. At the same time, subjected to the impact of foreign users, it became removed from the classical Malay as spoken in the courts and literary circles of Malayan feudal society. Thus, with its original basis lost, the Malay language as the lingua franca of the Indonesian archipelago reached a very chaotic state, to the extent that the Dutch linguist, Berg, refused to consider the Malay language as a language but preferred to call it a "language-like phenomenon."

The development of the nationalist movement in Indonesia, however, greatly strengthened the position of the Malay language and definitely set the pattern of its development toward a fully adequate cultural medium. The Indonesian nationalist movement, which was born in its modern form in 1908, had, by 1929, finally overcome the more or less separatist and regional elements of its initial growth. In that year it emerged as a culturally and politically unitarian movement comprising the entire territory of the Dutch East Indies. At the same time it adopted the Malay language, thereafter called the "Indonesian language," as its national tongue. Nationalist propaganda and agitation and nationalist political education from then on were almost exclusively carried out in the Indonesian language. This was generally accepted by the Indonesian people, despite the fact that thirty million of the seventy million inhabitants of the archipelago spoke a language which in many respects was better developed and had a longer cultural past, that is, the Javanese language.

It was this decision which gave the development of the Malay language a tremendous impetus. It was this which changed Malay from its status of an unorganized handmaiden for all foreigners and for widely varied ethnic groups, an ancilla used rather loosely without a strict observance of either its classical grammar or its idiom, to a modern language which had to serve as the medium between Western culture and the nationalist renaissance. Rigorous adaptation and development were neces-



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sary in order to make the language a suitable vehicle for the expression of modern political and social thinking. Furthermore, in the literary field, the nationalist renaissance created the desire among the people to free themselves from the frozen and rigid forms of literary expression, from the epic and from the pantun, the Malay quatrain; and it was at that time that the first attempts were made to find new forms of literary expression. The process of individualization which took place as a part of the general nationalist reawakening in Asia was reflected in the emergence of the novel and of modern forms of poetry.

The Japanese military occupation and the consequent discarding of the Dutch language precipitated the full development of the Malay language to a medium which could adequately cover all fields of human activity. It was then that the first language commission was set up, which codified the new developments and became the vanguard of further adaptation and renovation of the Indonesian language. This process was accelerated even more by the fact that, during the Japanese occupation, all education, especially on the higher levels, was shifted overnight from Dutch to Indonesian. The new and sudden requirements, especially in the field of modern science and as a medium for higher education, forced the Malay language to grow too quickly. The process was further accelerated by the fact that the Western-educated intelligentsia started using the Indonesian language, while they did not command the classical Malay. In this situation many elements of Dutch syntax and idiom were brought into the Malay language, sometimes to the extent of corruption of its own grammar. At the same time, however, there grew a strong tendency to check all these new forms and terms against the classical Malay. But this process of adaptation, although it may have corrupted some of the classical purity, brought about a greater flexibility and the larger descriptive power which is so necessary for an adequate medium for modern culture and science.

The Indonesian revolution confirmed this development, and, since this revolution expressed the self-assertion of the people, actually of a new people and their assertion of a new life and a new sense of living, this modern Indonesian language emerged as the medium of expression of this new sense of life. The alien



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elements and changes in structure and substance were accepted in their own right. Conformity with the structure of original Malay was no longer considered obligatory, since the Indonesian language was to become a new language, the language of a new nation now in the process of being born. The revolution, in terms of the development of the Malay language, means a breach with the past in this respect as well as in so many others.

The literature created in this revolutionary period reflects the attempts of the younger generation to define their newly discovered individuality, their newly discovered "I." In our modern poetry the search for that definition of the uniqueness of the individual and his relations in life and society, a search reflected in the poetry of men like the Dutch poets Slauerhoff and Marsman, is the central theme. It may also account for the popularity of T. S. Eliot. Thus it is clear, merely from a superficial examination, that the Malay language, especially the Malay language as spoken in the Indonesian archipelago, is a reflection and even an expression of the nationalist development. Therefore, its role is closely connected with the political development of Indonesia.

The question then arises, since the modern Indonesian language is an expression of Indonesian nationalism, What will its role be in any regional thinking in Southeast Asia? In order to clear the way for a consideration of this question, it should be remembered that outside Indonesia the Malay language is spoken in the Malay Peninsula and in British West and North Borneo and that Tagalog, one of the Philippine languages, is a member of the Indonesian linguistic group. Apart from small Malay-speaking minorities in Burma, Siam, and Indochina, the languages of the countries around Indonesia have no relationship to the Malayan language. It is possible to go even further than that. Several of these countries have not solved their own linguistic problems. In Indochina there are three totally different languages: Viet-Nameese, which is the most widely spoken; Cambodian; and Laotian. In Burma there are also three languages: Burman, Karen, and Shan.

It is equally important to realize that colonial nationalism and, therefore, Indonesian nationalism have only a limited objective and only a temporary and interim character. Colonial



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nationalism has no aims beyond the attainment of political freedom as the only possible basis for a life of human dignity. Certainly, colonial nationalism has no claim whatsoever for a universal application of those values and standards, spiritual and political, by which its adherents live. In that respect it differs fundamentally from the kind of nationalism which arose in some of the free countries of Europe in the twentieth century. In short, colonial nationalism as such has no political or cultural expansionist elements. It is a rejection and a reaction, and thus it can be expected that, after having attained its political aims, colonial nationalism will die down and the other elements of revitalized energies of the peoples will come to the fore. Therefore, a deliberate expansion of the Malay language beyond the boundaries of the former Dutch East Indies is out of the question. It remains possible, of course, that as a result of Indonesia's emergence as a free nation the Malay-speaking territories outside Indonesia will seek closer ties with Indonesia. This may prove to be the case, particularly for the Malaysians in Malaya who would like to safeguard their position in their own country, especially vis-à-vis the Chinese. It is even theoretically possible that, with the necessary stimulus from the Philippines, the dream of several leaders in those areas of a pan-Malayan federation will be revived. Current thinking in regional terms, however, is much more along the lines of Southeast Asian regional alignment.

In fact, regional alignment is a constant preoccupation of the leaders in Southeast Asia. The solution to many economic and political problems and even the answers to the question as to how much political strength can be generated by the entire Southeast Asian region as a whole will depend on the ability of these newly emerged and emerging nations to approach these problems on a regional basis rather than a national one. On the other hand, apart from the fact that the interest of the people of the entire area is for the moment focused on their own individual national problems, there remain strong potential elements of political and economic isolationist thinking. It is impossible to say at this stage what direction the developments in these countries will take. In any case it is likely that a development will take place on the basis of political and economic fac-



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tors pertinent to the individual situation in each country and to the mutual relationship within that region and the position of Southeast Asia as a whole vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In working out the mutual relationships in such a regional alignment, the question of cultural relationship does not arise, and certainly language does not figure a priori in this problem. The question of which language will be spoken predominantly throughout these areas, if such an alignment does emerge, will not be determined in the first place by factors of cultural kinship or by a deliberate choice. It will be determined much later by the factors of political and economic development, by factors based on the power relations within such a regional alignment, and even by the changing political scene in Asia outside Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asian regional thinking is a product of modern political reasoning, based on a rational approach to economic and political problems. It is the thinking of the politically articulate leading groups and commercially active parts of the different societies, those groups which have broken away from the past and have in common the modern rational approach to the problems of today. The common cultural elements of the past will most likely play no part in such a development and certainly not for some time to come. The question of a common language or even of a predominantly accepted language, therefore, does not arise.

It should also be realized that, in the development of such regional thinking, the question of language is not of primary concern, at least if no desire for cultural domination exists in any of the nations concerned. This is illustrated by the fact that neither the Congress of Europe nor the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi raised this problem. Therefore, in the development of regional thinking in Southeast Asia the development of the different languages of the nations concerned and the question of cultural kinship will play no role. It is highly probable that, for the time being, the question will be left entirely to considerations of practicality, that the present situation will be continued, and that the English language will play an important role in cementing the relationships in these areas.