

Identity alignment in the multilingual space: The Malays of Sri Lanka

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1. Overview

This chapter presents a case study of the Malays of Sri Lanka as an intriguing illustration of the negotiations and constructions of language and identity performed by them as members of a postcolonial multilingual society, in a country where language is a sensitive issue. There is a community displaced through the usual movements of colonialism—first Portuguese, then Dutch, and finally British—from their origins in the Southeast Asian Malay world to (then) Ceylon. A minority in that multilingual space, with a majority Sinhalese and a significant minority Tamil group, their linguistic variety evolved to a unique restructured variety known as Sri Lanka Malay (SLM). While most work on the Malays of Sri Lanka focuses on SLM, a crucial aspect of their linguistic repertoire that is often understated is that the SLM community is characterised not only by this restructured variety, but also by the fact that it is perhaps the most multilingual of all of the island's communities—Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers—having in their repertoire all the languages spoken on the island (save Veddah and Indo-Portuguese), plus that of their last colonisers, English.

Over the centuries, as a consequence of various national policies and world orders, the Sri Lanka Malays have responded with what are traditionally viewed as shifts in their language use, leading to different degrees of loss of their vernacular in favour of other more dominant languages. In our account in this chapter, based on participant observation and interviews during several fieldwork trips in the period 2003 through 2006, we describe the two most significant shifts—both to larger, more ‘international’ languages—and discuss their motivations. The obvious protagonist in such scenarios is often English, increasingly the *de facto* language of commerce and education in many postcolonial societies around the globe. Indeed the first shift we discuss is that to English in the home domain, which is noted as the root of the endangerment of their SLM variety. Interestingly, this is a consequence of other language factors in the Malays’ local multilingual space, namely the implementation of the Sinhala Only policy of language in education. But English is not alone. The second and more recent shift in the SLM community is to Standard Malay of Malaysia, a target for small Malay diasporas in their attempt to gain stronger ethnic recognition and/or increased economic capital in a larger linguistic market.

Viewing such language choices in terms of shift, however, is associated with the sentiment that languages are lost or forsaken for some other conquering language—whether this be conquest by war, politics, or economy. Traditionally linked to this is the issue of identity: with the shift away from a mother tongue, the traditional interpretation would be that a crucial part of identity would also be forsaken. While we do acknowledge that language shift can be a forced choice due to hegemony at the macro level, we propose that shift can also be viewed as positive agency on the part of the community of speakers. Taking our cue from the conceptualisation of the negotiation of identities through linguistic practices, we suggest that such choices made by communities which, like the Sri Lanka Malays, are to a large extent defined by their multilingualism be seen as alignments in terms of both language and identity, made during different eras of a community's existence, within the multilingual spaces that they inhabit, both local and global, over changing circumstances. We thus present the notion of *identity alignment*, which resonates with the model of linguistic citizenship, as a model more suited to understanding and encapsulating the linguistic repertoire and identity of multilingual communities, and propose it as an alternative to the concept of shift.

2. Colonial construction: The creation of the Sri Lanka Malays

The very creation of the community of ‘Malays’ in Sri Lanka was through one of the central practices of Western colonialism, namely, the displacement of subjects from one colonised region to another. The Dutch and subsequently the British, in their East Indies dealings, moved large numbers of peoples from their origins in the Southeast Asian Malay world to other locations in their possession, in this case, to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). In this way were sizeable communities of people from Indonesia (the Dutch East Indies) and Malaya settled on the island through various waves of deportation. While the community based in the district of Slave Island may well have been there during Portuguese rule (until 1656), the bulk of SLM trace their ancestry to exiled nobility and political dissenters, slaves, and soldiers during Dutch rule (1656-1796), and the continued importation of slaves

and soldiers for the garrison during British rule (1796-1948) (Hussainmiya 1986). From the late 1800s, census data show that the ‘Malays’ consistently comprised approximately 0.33% of the population.

While they are referred to homogeneously as Sri Lanka Malays, their origins are in fact very heterogeneous, covering an area from Northern Malaysia to the easternmost provinces of Indonesia (Hussainmiya 1987, 1990). Naturally, their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds are similarly extremely diverse. Under the Dutch, political exiles, as well as convicts, were deported to Ceylon from different corners of the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, including Java, Borneo, the Moluku and Goa, among other places. The largest group of people attributed a Malay origin came as soldiers also from disparate places such as Bali, Java, Riau, Ambon and peninsular Malaysia, such that “almost all the major ethnic groups from the region of the Eastern archipelago were represented” (Hussainmiya 1987: 48). In an earlier era, in fact, these peoples were known as *Ja Minissu* by the Sinhalese and *Java Manasar* by the Tamils: ‘people from Java’ (Saldin 2003: 3). It was the British who, upon finding a community which spoke ‘Malay’ (see later in this section), attached the corresponding ethnic label to the group, and it is this designation ‘Malay’ that has persisted.

Typically, the nobility would be deported together with their families, and, although contact between these groups was discouraged by the Dutch, intermarriage between the different royal families did indeed take place (Hussainmiya 1987). The soldiers too could also be accompanied by their wives. It is not so clear how common this was during Dutch rule, as Ansaldo (to appear) notes, though there is certainly reference to the presence of wives of the Amboinese soldiers; under the British, however, this practice was encouraged (Ansaldo to appear), with arrivals of large numbers of families being noted in governors’ despatches and memoirs (Sourjah 2003). Overall, it has been suggested that at least two different communities could be distinguished: (a) a rather sophisticated diaspora of noblemen, and (b) a ‘Malay’ garrison, what would become the Ceylon Rifle Regiment under the British (cf. Ricklefs 1974). A third group comprising convicts, slaves and indentured labourers was surely present from as early as Portuguese occupation; this group would have been rather heterogeneous ethnically and linguistically but historical records do not provide us with any detail about size, specific provenance, etc. (Hussainmiya 1990, Ansaldo forthcoming). As far as the first two groups are concerned, contacts between the groups were indeed quite frequent (Ansaldo to appear), due among other reasons to the practice of employing noblemen as officers of the troops (Hussainmiya 1987, 1990). In other words, the community of Malays in Sri Lanka was one which constituted not just single individuals but also included family, retinue, and network ties, which settled in the community. As testament to their permanence in their new country, when the British took over the island and made arrangements for the repatriation of all the Malay soldiers in 1799, the Malays as one refused to be repatriated because they had settled with their families and made Ceylon their home (Burah 2006: 72-73).

Over the centuries of their existence in the multicultural, multilingual space that is Sri Lanka, with a majority of Sinhala-speaking Sinhalese comprising two-thirds to three-quarters of the population, and a significant minority of Tamils comprising a quarter of the population,¹ we see the first of the processes of identity construction that these ‘Malays’ have engaged in as a consequence of colonialism: that of the formation of their identity as Sri Lanka Malays. While their religious practices were maintained in the Muslim tradition, other aspects of culture developed to become much more akin to those of Sri Lanka than of Malay/Indonesia. For instance, until only very recently, the Malays’ sartorial practices have been completely Lankan, with women wearing *sari* as their traditional dress, rather than *baju kurong* or *sarong kebaya* as in Malaysia and Indonesia (Saldin 2003: 1), while weddings involve the Hindu practice of payment of a dowry, whereas Islamic tradition only involves the groom’s payment of *mahar* to the bride’s father (Saldin 2003: 67).

A significant aspect of their cultural reconstruction is of course language. Given their diverse origins outlined above, the early days of the ‘Malay’ diaspora in Sri Lanka would be expected to have involved many different languages, such as Javanese, Amboinese, Riau Indonesian, Malay (colloquial and high), etc. (Ansaldo to appear). Clearly, a type of Malay-based contact variety, such as Bazaar Malay—the *de facto* lingua franca of the trade route stretching from Southern China to Northwest India from at least the 15th century, based on Low Malay and Low Javanese, as well as borrowed elements from Hokkien, Southern Min—would have been a good candidate for a language of interethnic communication (Hussainmiya 1990: 47). This has also been referred to collectively as ‘Pidgin-Malay derived’ (PMD) varieties, the various Malay-based contact languages of the region (Adelaar & Prentice 1996: 674), or ‘Vehicular Malay’ as a cover term for a generic colloquial Malay variety of interethnic communication (Smith, Pauw & Hussainmiya 2004). These colloquial Malay varieties of the PMD type would have been in contact with two adstrates: colloquial Sinhala, the dominant language of the population of Sri Lanka and Lankan Tamil, spoken by, amongst others, traders and plantation workers. Mixed together these evolved to a unique restructured variety now known as Sri Lanka Malay.²

Recent analyses have taken into account both sociohistorical information and structural data, and have avoided biased viewpoints and traditional frameworks of creolisation, and view SLM as a mixed language of trilingual base, with lexical items predominantly from PMD and grammatical features from Sinhala and Tamil (Ansaldo 2005a, b, to appear).³ Previous accounts have, however, traditionally considered Sri Lanka Malay a creole: it is referred to as a creole in an early account by a historian (Hussainmiya 1986) which had a high impact factor in the community itself, and is listed as Sri Lankan Creole Malay in *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005). As noted in Garrett (2006:180f.), and as will be shown in the case of SLM (also elaborated on in Ansaldo & Lim 2006a

and Lim & Ansaldo 2006a), such a classification in fact has a significant impact on the type of shift that may occur as well as its speed: the awareness of speaking a ‘corrupt’ or ‘broken’ variety, as is often implied in the current definition of creole languages, may lead to a perception of their linguistic variety as not being ‘good’ enough to maintain, and further strengthens a community’s desire to move away to a more standard variety. Indeed, one may argue that contact languages are particularly endangered, given their marginalisation amongst languages in general and endangered languages in particular (Garrett 2006: 178).⁴ However perhaps more significant to this chapter is the fact that a community whose language is considered a creole or contact language is usually a community that has seen displacement at some point in their history. Such displacement has been taken to mean that the community faces a lack of territorial rights, makes some identification with a more remote community perceived as from their origins, and has a less coherent and robust identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985, Errington 2003).

In section 3, we will show how, with one exception, all these risk factors apply to the case of the SLM communities: how their linguistic variety, classified a creole or described as just an ungrammatical dialect of Malay, is perceived as less worth acquiring compared to another variety; how, within their country, their language and culture lack rights and prominence; and how they find greater support and interest from a more remote motherland. All these put together lead unsurprisingly to what may be considered a shift towards a standard variety. Where identity is concerned, however, we will argue that the conceptualisation of identity of a displaced community as less coherent and robust does not in fact apply to multilingual communities such as the Sri Lanka Malays.

The restructured variety Sri Lanka Malay is however not the only thing to characterise the linguistic repertoire of the Malays in Sri Lanka. Another significant feature is their multilingualism: the SLM community has always been perhaps the most multilingual of all the communities co-existing in Sri Lanka—Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers—having in their repertoire the main languages spoken on the island, *viz.* Sinhala and Tamil, alongside SLM (Ansaldo to appear; SLM community p.c. 2003-2006), and in some strata, also that of their last colonisers, English. In both Dutch and British Ceylon, many Sri Lanka Malays were in positions in which they functioned as intermediaries between colonisers and locals (see also section 3.2), and were proficient in all the languages needed to interact with all parties concerned. A recent small-scale survey of the Malays (Lim & Ansaldo 2006b)⁵ shows that they are still clearly multilingual: 66% speak at least four languages: SLM, English, Sinhala & Tamil; and the remaining 34% merely have Tamil absent from this multilingual repertoire.

The Sri Lanka Malays are found in various communities located around the island, who vary in their socioeconomic and educational status, and their linguistic repertoire and communicative practices, as summarised in Table 1 (Lim & Ansaldo 2006a, adapted from Ansaldo to appear).⁶ Although SLM appears to comprise perhaps some five different varieties (Lim & Ansaldo 2006a), and there is also a strong sense of identity and separateness for each of the different communities (SLM community p.c. 2003-2006), they nonetheless all identify themselves as Sri Lankan Malays, as will be further described in section 3.2. This has surely been the case since colonial rule where this ‘Malay’ diaspora is testified to being a close-knit community, in which contacts between the different Malay/Indonesian ethnicities as well as the different social extractions were maintained through the ranks of the army as well as through common religious practice (Ricklefs 1974). The various communities do however face different degrees of endangerment depending on their locality and network, as will be seen in the following sections. In this chapter, we highlight what may be considered two poles in the SLM communities, those of Colombo and Kirinda, with the former considered most endangered, the latter most vital.

Table 1: Sri Lanka Malay communities

Community	Characteristics
1. Colombo	Middle-upper class community in capital city; restricted usage of SLM in old-middle generations; common Sinhala (and some Tamil) competence; English fairly fluent to native speaker competence; standardising in Malay; no SLM in younger generation
2. Slave Island	Lower class community in a poor district of Colombo; strong Tamil influences; no English
3. Kandy & other Upcountry	Middle-lower/rural class communities in the central hill country area; SLM in old-middle generations, and in some younger generation; Sinhala competence; some English proficiency, especially in younger generation
4. Hambantota	Community on the south coast, traditionally heavy Sinhalese-speaking area; SLM in old-middle generations; often trilingual with Sinhala and Tamil; limited English
5. Kirinda	Fishing community on southeast coast; SLM dominant in all generations; fully trilingual with Sinhala and Tamil, especially in middle-younger generations; English limited to a few individuals

3. Postcolonial deconstruction

Before assessing the situation of the Sri Lanka Malays, we need to appreciate the linguistic situation of the multilingual society in which they exist, that of Sri Lanka. Whatever makes the news these days with regard to this nation is really a consequence of a heritage of the politics of language, a culmination of political decisions made at various points of the island's modern history, beginning primarily during British colonialism and continuing through the nation's independence and postcolonial challenges.

3.1 Language and politics in Sri Lanka

As in all the colonies of the British Empire, one of its legacies was the English language; however, again as in the colonies, English was available only for a small and unbalanced proportion of the population. The Colebrooke-Cameron Report estimated that in 1828 less than 2% of the population were in school, and for those 250,000 under the age of puberty, only 800 were taught in the English language, most of these in American mission schools in the Tamil north (Colebrooke 1831, in Bailey 1998: 210f.). At independence there were more missionary built schools in the Tamil-dominated north (Jaffna) than in the rest of the island. With this resource of English, although only 12.4% of the population in 1946, Ceylon Tamils (distinct from Indian Tamils, agricultural workers who were regarded as stateless persons but constituted another 10.4% of the population) were well represented in government service, as well as in medicine and law, far more than their share of the population (Bailey 1998: 216). This pattern continued through early post-independence Sri Lanka. It is perhaps not surprising that as a result, the dominating sentiment was of Tamil favouritism under colonial rule,

In the years leading to independence, from 1931, the discourse dominating policy involved language. In 1943, Jayewardene introduced the sweeping resolution to declare Sinhalese the official language of the country. Even though this was passed with the amendment to attach the words "and Tamil" to each mention of Sinhalese, all other minorities felt threatened and would rather have had any other foreign language than Sinhalese as the official language (Russell 1978: 61, Bailey 1998: 217). The Tamils had the most to lose.

The Sinhala Only Act of 1956, introduced once the People's United Front Party took power, made Sinhala the sole official language, restricted many government jobs to Sinhala speakers and changed university admissions policies, which reduced the number of Tamils getting higher education. Subsequent legislative provisions did little to pacify the other groups (Bailey 1998: 218). While the Burghers did "burgher off to Australia" (as Bandaranaike allegedly endorsed; Roberts, Raheem & Colin-Thomé 1989: 170-171), the Tamils who remained in the country became increasingly territorial and separatist.

The Act has been amended through subsequent provisions and constitutions through to 1988. In the current constitution, both Sinhala and Tamil are national and official languages, languages of administration, legislation and the courts. English is officially the link language and remains the *de facto* language of rule (the business of government continues to be carried out in English, with the drafting of legislation being in English, although the law states that the Sinhala version should take preference). It is seen as an important key to advancement in technical and professional careers. Where education is concerned, either of the two national languages serves as medium of education. Though English was once the medium of instruction in schools, in particular the mission schools, this is no longer the case, not since 1972.

3.2 Vitality of the Malays in Sri Lanka

The Malays can be seen to constitute a minority group in the Sri Lanka population both in name and number. As mentioned in section 2, they comprise some 0.33% of the population. At the official level, the Malays possess low symbolic capital within their own country, and the level of ethnolinguistic vitality from the objective criterion of institutional support (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977) can be assessed as low: they have not had an official distinct identity as Malays, being grouped together in the Ceylon Citizenship Act with the Sri Lankan Moors (Tamil-speaking people tracing their ancestry to Arab traders who arrived in Sri Lanka between the 8th and 15th centuries) and Indian Moors (from India) as 'Moors' (Official Website of the Government of Sri Lanka) or 'Muslims' (Sri Lanka Government Web Portal).⁷

Nonetheless, their status within the country can be seen to have always been quite high. As outlined in section 2, a majority of the ancestors of the Colombo, Kandy and Hambantota communities would have been Javanese nobility exiled during the wars of succession in Java during Dutch rule. Official documents of 1792, for example, list 176 individuals belonging to 23 families of royalty and nobility exiled together with their families from Java, Batavia and Sumatra to Ceylon (Burah 2006: 44). The older Javanese, because of their proficiency in Dutch, were appointed *Hoofd de Maha Badda* (Sinhala *maha badda* 'great trade', referring to the cinnamon industry first established by the Sinhala king in the 1500s for Portuguese trade) or *Hoofd de Cinnamon*, namely, the 'captain' supervising the cinnamon gardens, the spice being one of the most precious commodities during Dutch rule (Burah 2006: 39-42f.); with increased production of cinnamon, these superior officers would be

rewarded with more power, promotions and privileges (Burah 2006: 59). Most of the exiles became enlisted in the military, and were later retained under the British as members of the Malay Regiment (as well as in the Police and the Fire Brigade, COSLAM 2002), where, although they dropped their royal titles, they did nonetheless maintain their status as was the practice of the time (Burah 2006: 46-47). After the disbandment of the regiment in 1873, many of these joined the tea estates and functioned as intermediaries between the English superintendents and the Indian labour force (Saldin 2003: 10). The Malays' contribution to sports has also been significant, with the Colombo Malay Cricket Club, founded in 1872, being the oldest cricket club in the country, producing numerous cricketers and hockey players who have represented Sri Lanka (COSLAM 2002). In short, the Malays were certainly not an oppressed or enslaved colonised people, but rather have held a status amongst the communities that has been high, in no small part due to their origins and their linguistic abilities.

It is consequently not surprising that—in spite of their lack of identity in the Ceylon Citizenship Act—the Sri Lanka Malays' own identity has always been extremely vibrant. There is much awareness and expression of their culture and ancestry (e.g. Saldin 2003, Burah 2006), and there are a large number of social and cultural groups, including, for example, the Sri Lanka Malay Confederation (SLAMAC) (the umbrella organisation), the Sri Lanka Malay Rupee Fund, the Conference of Sri Lanka Malays (COSLAM), and Malay Associations of the communities located around the island, which are all extremely active in the organisation of regular social, cultural, commemorative and fund-raising activities and initiatives (Ansaldo & Lim fieldnotes 2003-2007). It is also not surprising that, with their dense and multiplex networks, SLM has been widely spoken as a home language for generations (Hussainmiya 1986).

3.3 SLM response to postcolonial policy

As the language of a minority group, however, Sri Lanka Malay has never been a language for public discourse in the country, and certainly not in modern history.⁸ Largely as a consequence of the more recent language and educational policies mentioned in section 3.1, a decrease in linguistic vitality in the SLM home domain has been noted in recent decades (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, Lim & Ansaldo 2006a). In the cosmopolitan Colombo community, where the level of education is high, Sri Lanka Malay parents and grandparents with the resources make the conscious decision to speak to their children in English at home (Salma Suhood Peiris p.c. February 2003, January 2006; T.K. Azoor p.c. January 2006; also attested to in Saldin 2001: 26, 2003: 76-77, Lim & Ansaldo 2006a), in order to provide them a resource recognised as requisite for communication and advancement internationally—"the key to a good job and a comfortable life" (Saldin 2003: 76). This is particularly true of the Colombo community—which ironically is the community which would have the resources to promote and maintain SLM—which as a general pattern displays a clear shift to English from SLM in the home domain. As a result, the community typically shows strong linguistic vitality in SLM in the oldest to middle generations and rapidly decreasing linguistic competence to nil in the vernacular in the young generation (Ansaldo & Lim fieldnotes 2003-2006). SLM is seen now to have a mere fifth position in the community, after Sinhala, Tamil, English and Arabic (the last in the religious domain) (T.K. Azoor p.c. January 2006). SLM in this community is no longer a home language for the younger generation of Sri Lankan Malays.

In short, the new generations have had to grapple with the new politics of language of postcolonial Sri Lanka. In the local linguistic market—of school, profession, politics—Sinhala is recognised as necessary capital and accepted without battle; it has in any case always been in the SLM's repertoire. Similarly, English has been an important variety in their linguistic repertoire; it was a language which allowed the SLM many privileges as colonial subjects. Although possessing less capital in postcolonial Sri Lanka, a multilingualism including English is recognised as crucial to the Malays. And SLM which has low capital in the local linguistic market is thus forfeited.

3.4 SLM response to endangerment

The fact that SLM is an endangered linguistic variety has been recognised by the community in recent years, and as a response to this, there are current thrusts within the SLM community in language revitalisation.⁹ As pointed out in sections 3.1 and 3.2, there is no place in the official spheres for addressing and politicking for minority rights. Instead, civil society organisations—outside of state structures—have stepped in and initiated discourse on the issues of their language being a minority and being endangered—with interesting consequences. The subaltern publics, i.e. sites formed around social and civil movements, are the SLM groups mentioned above, as well as individuals in the SLM community, in particular in the Colombo community, who can be seen to be more linguistically aware, as well as to have the inclination and resources.¹⁰ On their own steam, members have, for example, published books on their identity and language (e.g. Saldin 2001, 2003), as well as books comparing SLM with Standard Malay (Saldin 2000, Thaliph 2003) and Malay primers (Emran Deen 2001). The 'revitalisation' taking place is not however of SLM itself, due to a combination of two general phenomena.

First, as mentioned earlier, due to previous publications on SLM, classifying it as a creole, the community's perception of their own language is less positive, viewing it as a creole, which is interpreted as an 'imperfect'

code, and/or an ungrammatical dialect of Malay (e.g. Thaliph 2003, Colombo SLM community p.c. August 2006).¹¹

Second, in contrast with the status the community has in their own country, greater recognition is attained instead from Malaysia, in at least two significant and related thrusts:

- (a) One of the objectives of Malaysia's Institute of Malay Language & Culture is "to get in touch with Malays in different parts of the world and teach them the real Malay" (T.K. Azoor p.c. January 2006). One of the realisations of this is the organisation of language classes in the Standard Malay of Malaysia (*Bahasa Melayu*).
- (b) The Malaysian High Commission in Sri Lanka has in recent years demonstrated interest in, and strong support for, the SLM community, and provides aid in terms of student scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Malaysia, as well as in job market openings; one of the requirements of the latter is competence in basic Malay. Before the setting up of (a), the previous First Secretary's wife also "endeared herself to the Malays" by taking it upon herself to run two classes in Standard Malay (COSLAM 2005).

Clearly these can be seen as implications arising from scholarly and transnational contexts which have associated symbolic and material markets.

With these two phenomena above working together, it is not surprising then that it is with Malaysia that the SLM community align themselves, both in terms of language and identity, and the choice in the revitalisation process is consequently not for Sri Lanka Malay but for Malaysia's Standard Malay. After the two pioneering courses in Standard Malay in 2002, eight of the best students underwent a teacher's training course in Malaysia, and now conduct regular classes in Standard Malay for the community. One of the results of this is that recent encounters between StdM-speaking Colombo Malays and other SLM speakers ensued in a lack of mutual intelligibility. Most recently, in the *Hari Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language Day) organised by the community in Colombo in August 2006, activities such as essay-writing and oratory contests were conducted for both SLM and Standard Malay (Ansaldo & Lim fieldnotes 2006).

What is also significant to note are the implications that the discourse on language, centring in Colombo, has for other SLM communities. In sharp contrast to the urban community of Colombo is the speech community of Kirinda, which comprises some 4% of the 46,000 SLM population. Relatively isolated as a small fishing village on the southeast coast, with a dense and multiplex social network, with low education and employment levels, they exhibit strong maintenance of the vernacular.¹² The children of Kirinda (ca. 200) are said to be the only children to be native monolingual speakers of a variety of SLM (T.M.M. Hamin p.c. December 2003). Thus this speech community is the only fully vital community of Sri Lanka Malays in which a young generation of speakers of a SLM variety as first language can be found.¹³ In Kirinda however, the 'revitalisation' efforts taking place in Colombo have trickled down in a different form. Obviously there is no need for the Kirinda community to be concerned about their language being endangered, vital as it is; thus there is in fact no need for any kind of revitalisation. However, the increased prominence of Standard Malay of Malaysia in the SLM discourse has led to the Kirinda community becoming even more explicitly aware of the more prestigious variety and the possibilities it holds for them. As of January 2006, plans were underway for Standard Malay to be taught in the village school as a subject, to children who in fact are native speakers of SLM, as well as to be used as a default language of discourse, for example, in the signs (e.g. 'no shouting'; 'show respect') displayed around the school (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, Lim & Ansaldo 2006a).

The rationale is not difficult to understand, of course; it repeats itself every day in every minority community that wishes to join the global world. The belief is that the acquisition of Standard Malay will not only provide cultural capital such as available written material for education, but, more importantly, increased economic and political capital, to plug into the global economy and direct their trajectory in social space upwards (after Bourdieu 1984). As the president of the Conference of Sri Lanka Malays explains, "Our educational upliftment is very very important. Because at the end of the day, the economy is what matters [...] If you are economically in a strong position, well, everything else looks after itself." (T.K. Azoor p.c. January 2006).

4. Language and identity of a multilingual community

4.1 Shift, loss?

The language choices made by the Sri Lanka Malays described in section 3 would, from the point of view of minority language rights, be seen as threatening. As pointed out previously (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, Lim & Ansaldo 2006a), the knee-jerk reaction of the linguist involved in endangered languages would not be immediately positive. The choice of Standard Malay in the Colombo community as the language for revitalisation will mean new generations gaining a competence in a Malay variety which is in fact not their 'own' Sri Lanka Malay variety. The perception that Standard Malay exposure may help in slowing down the attrition of SLM is quite strong in the community. This perception, albeit a commonly observed one, is unfortunately a mistaken one, and the sensitive relationship between standard and local varieties within the contexts of endangered minorities needs to be paid attention to. In the Kirinda community, the choice of Standard Malay as a school subject—where the school is an important domain for primary socialisation in the village—can have a significant impact on the use of, and attitudes towards, SLM.¹⁴ There was also the implicit suggestion that Standard Malay could eventually be used as a language of instruction. In such an event, such subtractive bilingualism (see e.g. Lambert 1978), viz. the use of a language as a medium of education which is not the vernacular of the children, can have a negative effect on the learning of the additional language and on other skills, as has been shown in many studies. Such an interdependence (see e.g. Cummins 1979) between the languages should be paid attention to in such a context.

In a nutshell, approached from a generic linguistic human rights (LHR) reading, the situation would count the loss of SLM as a loss in terms of linguistic diversity, and the community would be seen to be sacrificing their right to the use of their own linguistic variety, when they should be trying to find empowerment of their minority language; this reading would also include the forsaking of their unique identity. Indeed, in one of our earliest reflections on the situation, we suggested that the choice of the Malays could be seen ironically as the product of the striving for an identity in a group of migrants displaced by economic rationales of the 18th to 20th centuries, in which, as globalisation sweeps the world threatening diversity, in the hope of saving that same identity, the SLM communities may have to sacrifice what most defines them (Lim & Ansaldo 2006c).

The LHR paradigm has however been critically evaluated in recent decades. Amongst other things, the LHR paradigm has been said (e.g. Stroud & Heugh 2004: 197) to endorse an ethno-linguistic stereotyping in the form of monolingual and uniform identities, and force a group of speakers to work actively to differentiate themselves from others, by claiming unique linkages of language and identity so as to gain political leverage in the competition for scarce resources—this however exacerbates problems of linguisticism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1986) that motivated the rights paradigm in the first place. The LHR paradigm also works on a very local perception of relevant language delimited by national territorial borders (Stroud & Heugh 2004: 202). If instead we take the view of language not as a discrete construct that can be owned or lost by a community, but rather the view of language articulated in terms of linguistic citizenship (LC) (Stroud 2000, Stroud & Heugh 2004), where language is all at the same time a semiotic resource for the (re)construction of agency and self-representation, an economic resource and site of political and economic struggle, a global resource to address local-global concerns, and an intimate resource as the foundation of respect for difference on a global level, then the ensuing response is different. In the LC paradigm, the community is served by its linguistic resources—which comprise pluralist alternatives reflecting the reality of the linguistic market, and, consequently, negotiable multiple, diverse and shifting identities—and is not restrained by its language. Individuals and speech communities choose to empower themselves in what they see as the best possible way with regard to existing power relationships, including, for example, the *they-code*, pragmatic *we-code*, adopted standard *we-code* (see Kamwangamalu 2004 and Djité 2006 for details on these concepts).

The conscious 'shift' in the Sri Lanka Malay community from SLM to Standard Malay—the latter a variety in which cultural and economic functions of language come together—is thus one that is made in appropriate circumstances, and which aids the acquisition of a resource on the semiotic, economic and global fronts. This outcome of the consequence of postcolonial practice may thus be seen as a resource, rather than a threat, that enables a minority group to gain access to better education and enhanced political self-representation (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, Lim & Ansaldo 2006a).¹⁵ In other words, the Malay communities of Sri Lanka can be seen to be achieving two ends:

- (i) they not only gain a useful economic tool, but
- (ii) also manage to preserve and represent their position by what we term *identity alignment*, which involves:
 - (a) not contesting their *imposed* identity, which is not negotiable, of 'Muslim' in the context of the local nation-state, and
 - (b) still maintaining their *presumed* ethnic identity as 'Sri Lanka Malays', and
 - (c) aligning themselves with an *assumed* global 'Malay' identity, that is, one which is accepted and not negotiated.

In this relation, see Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004) for types of identity and Edwards (1985) for more on ethnic identity. Their assumed identity is one which is recognisable through an empowered linguistic identity, and recognised by the Malay 'homeland'; we also see in this the identification of displaced communities with a more remote community.

4.2 Multilingual resource, identity alignment

At the outset of this chapter, we suggested a fresh interpretation of 'shift' where multilingual communities in multilingual spaces are concerned, as in the case of the Sri Lanka Malays. In the view of identity alignment we propose, we partly echo the idea of the acts of identity that speakers engage in as a consequence of their desire to identify more with one social group in a given circumstance (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985). Going beyond repertoires and choices at the level of the individual speaker and circumstance, we view the situation of the Sri Lanka Malays in terms of the exploitation within a multilingual community of the codes they have at hand, in order to align their identity according to changing times and environments. It has been suggested that identity options offered to individuals at a given moment in history are subject to shifting language ideologies that legitimise and value particular identities more than others (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004). In this respect, this postcolonial era affords a globalised existence where, not only are languages not limited to one territory, but more poignantly, formerly displaced communities do indeed have the option and the capacity to reconnect with their pre-colonial origins, as the Sri Lanka Malays have done with Malaysia. In this era of global economic opportunities, we can also see how the ideology of being included in the larger Malay world is legitimised and valued. The Sri Lanka Malays' acquisition of Standard Malay is clearly a resource which allows them this choice in their alignment options.

What we feel is additionally significant are two things: first, that their identity is defined by being multilingual. By this we mean to make a contrast with the view of a community that undergoes "a process of identity adaptation, [...] constantly changing identities, [...] sometimes at great sacrifice [...] and who] live constantly with multiple identities" (Djité 2006: 12) or "simultaneous identities" (Woolard 1999: 20-21). In other words, we find it more appropriate to frame the Sri Lanka Malays in terms of having a (singular) identity, who are not conflating or changing identities; rather, this identity is simply multifaceted as is their linguistic repertoire. The lack of a need to rigidly associate Sri Lanka Malay identity with the Sri Lanka Malay language is markedly observed in a recent survey where, as a response to the statement 'Speaking SLM is crucial to my identity as SLM', the few younger respondents chose the answer 'strongly disagree' (Lim & Ansaldo 2006b).

Second, we wish to argue that this identity is what has not changed. In colonial times, the Malays had within their multilingual repertoire SLM, Sinhala, Tamil, English, and these different linguistic varieties served various functions and allowed various identity alignments. In this present postcolonial period, while SLM is being replaced—in the traditional view of shift—by Standard Malay, this does not make a qualitative difference to the Malays' multilingual repertoire, nor to the identity they have. After all, as outlined earlier in this section, the Standard Malay variety still fulfils the same function as that of SLM, namely their identity as Malay, both locally in Sri Lanka, and globally in the wider Malay world. It may also be noted, not without irony, that the aligning of identity with the larger global Malay world can be seen as identity alignment coming full circle: it is this original Malay region which constitutes the Sri Lanka Malays' origins, and in fact, although they may have chosen first to assimilate and then to remain in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Malays of the previous generations preferred not to own land there and used to always talk about going home (Salma Suhood Peiris p.c. 2006).

Our analysis of the situation of the Sri Lanka Malays as identity alignment has one final implication for the traditional notion of shift. We have been hinting throughout this chapter at the fact that this notion is somewhat limited. Indeed shift is classically defined as the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication (Fishman 1964). It is usually associated with negative social, political and/or economic issues, such as the destruction of autonomous communities or the deprivation of traditional land, and this is usually accompanied by the call to reverse shift (Fishman 1991) and/or to document and maintain endangered languages.¹⁶ We would suggest that with communities such as the Sri Lanka Malays for whom multilingualism in a multicultural context is nature—cf. the western monolingual, one-nation-one-language ideologies that have been imposed on scholarship—we can certainly go beyond the idea of language shift and identity loss, and even beyond the dynamic of continuously constructing one's own identity through language (cf. Djité 2006: 14). What we suggest is a paradigm shift in our conceptualisation of such communities: more than being in a constant process of construction, multilingual communities can be seen to have an identity, one which is defined by being multilingual in terms of linguistic repertoire and pluralist in terms of identity. Their negotiations are thus not a matter of language shift with the accompanying identity forsaken; instead, just as they may 'choose' from their repertoire a linguistic resource appropriate for a given circumstance, so do they align themselves with a particular facet of their identity. This we feel forms a model better suited to understanding the practices and encapsulating the linguistic repertoire and identity of multilingual communities in multilingual spaces.

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Notes

¹ Population census provides the following data (selected): in 1881: Sinhalese 66.7%, Tamil 25%; in 1953: Sinhalese 70%, Tamil 23%; in 2001: Sinhalese 80%, Tamil 9% (but this excludes LTTE areas); in all census, Malays are a constant 0.33%.

² Apart from an unpublished MA thesis by Bichsel-Stettler (1989), SLM until very recently had been only very briefly described, by Hussainmiya (1986), Adelaar (1991) and Saldin (2001), the former two based on small-scale studies, and the latter on personal knowledge. For more recent work, see e.g. Smith et al. (2004) and Ansaldo (to appear).

³ Unlike its better-known Caribbean ‘creole’ counterparts, SLM – together with a very few other varieties of the region (e.g. Baba Malay, Cocos Malay) – is typologically in a unique position of providing us with an environment in which no Standard Average European acrolectal variety is involved in the dynamics of contact. Furthermore, with Sinhala and Tamil as its adstrates, the languages involved in the formation of SLM varieties come from three distinct language families: Austronesian, Dravidian and Indo-European. As such it can shed light on issues of universality and specificity in contact-induced language change (Ansaldo to appear). The relationship between the three language groups involved in its evolution was similarly of an altogether different type than the better-known scenarios of exploitation/ slavery/ intermarriage etc., and thus provides contrastive material for our understanding of typologies of language contact. From the linguistic point of view, SLM is a precious variety for studies of language contact, language evolution as well as cultural creolisation.

⁴ In spite of this, this present project documenting SLM was the first DoBeS project documenting a ‘creole’.

⁵ The sample comprises a majority of Colombo Malays (i.e. more urban, English-educated, higher class), and middle and older generations.

⁶ In earlier scholarship, the Colombo dialect, meant to represent SLM as a whole, is the one usually described, though variation between the different communities is briefly acknowledged (Saldin 2001); the issue of variation is addressed in more current analysis (see e.g. Ansaldo et al. 2006). The high degree of variation in a speech community such as SLM, which in fact comprises a number of smaller communities in different geographical areas, can be accounted for by at least two factors: (a) the relation with network type; and (b) diffusion and linguistic openness (Foley 2005).

⁷ The Malays comprise about 5% of the ‘Muslim group’, which forms 7% of the Sri Lanka population (U.S. Library of Congress 1988).

⁸ Given the social turmoil and economic decline witnessed in the country due to the Tamil situation, at the outset, it can be simply said that there is not only no public, official space available in Sri Lanka’s political climate for any kind of debate on SLM rights, but certainly no conducive conditions for any kind of rights solutions to be broached or to work (Ansaldo & Lim

2007). The SLM situation is surely not comparable to that of the Tamils in Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, where the policy of mother tongue revival “enables mobility”: the (monolingualist) policy of Tamil-only in official contexts “helps the previously underprivileged groups to move up the class ladder” (Canagarajah 2005: 433-438). As also soberly noted (Ansaldo & Lim 2007), the empowerment of Tamil as minority language can be seen to be successful only in the LTTE-controlled state; moreover the status of Tamil and Tamils has been achieved through immense and long-drawn out political struggle, with much bloodshed.

⁹ The awareness and ‘revitalisation’ activities described here pre-date this project’s commencement in the community.

¹⁰ The first of these may be seen to be the publication in a local newspaper *The Daily News* on ‘The Sri Lankan Malay Language and its future’ (23 July 1987) followed by a public lecture on the same theme at the Sri Lanka Malay Association (9 Oct 1987), both by B.D.K. Saldin (Saldin 2003:94).

¹¹ It has also become clear to us in discussions and discourse that in many cases the community does not make a very clear distinction between SLM and Standard Malay. One of the local publications mentioned above, a textbook presented in Standard Malay with Sinhala, Tamil and English, is intended to “help Sri Lankan Malays to study their mother tongue in its internationally recognised form” (Emran Deen 2001: foreword).

¹² In initial investigations (Ansaldo 2004, 2005a, b; Ansaldo & Lim 2005), the variety of Kirinda has been found to be structurally distinct from other SLM varieties: Ansaldo (to appear) describes its nominal case system, a striking feature considering the rarity of complex morphological marking in contact languages in which a rare case of split is occurring, developing a new coding for object marking from a morpheme originally used for dative-like functions. Lexically and grammatically, there seems to be a stronger influence of Sinhala and Tamil, and trilingualism in SLM, Sinhala and Tamil is very common in all generations (Ansaldo to appear).

¹³ The Upcountry communities are reported to show similar vitality (Sebastian Nordhoff p.c. Jan 2006), though this is probably still less so than in Kirinda.

¹⁴ We see a parallel with the successful annual Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore, first launched in 1979 and meant to support the bilingual education policy: this led swiftly to a shift in most domains, in particular the home, from the other Chinese languages to Mandarin, and subsequently to a generation of children not being able to understand their grandparents.

¹⁵ The reality is however more complex than this: while the urban communities benefit more immediately and greatly from the shift to a more global variety, the addition of another linguistic variety does not necessarily address the problems of lack of higher education, economic mobility and political representation that the more peripheral communities face (for a discussion on this, see Ansaldo & Lim 2006a; also Ansaldo & Lim 2007).

¹⁶ By no means do we intend to be critical of the various activities that address the state of endangered languages, and are ourselves involved in documentation and revitalisation; we do nonetheless evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the linguist in such situations, in Ansaldo & Lim (2006a, 2007) and Lim & Ansaldo (2006a).