

STUDIES IN COUNTRY MALAY

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PREFACE

The greater part of this book consists of reproductions from three former books of mine, viz. (i) *Perak Malay* (Papers on Malay Subjects, Second Series), (ii) *Kelantan Malay* (Papers on Malay Subjects, Second Series), and (iii) *Trengganu Malay* (Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. XIII, Part III). For kindly according to me permission to reproduce portions of those books in this one I wish to express my thanks to the Government of the Federation of Malaya in respect of (i) and (ii) and to the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in respect of (iii).

I wish too to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. D. Cowan, Lecturer in Arabic at this School, for assistance given to me in regard to Appendix A: to Mr. E. H. S. Simmonds, Lecturer in Tai at this School, who has helped me in regard to words of Tai origin in use in Kelantan Malay: and to Inche' Muhammad Yunus Maris, a student at this school, whom I have consulted on various points of Malay.

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this book is to introduce the student to what for lack of a better term may be called "Country Malay". By it I mean the Malay spoken by the Malays of the countryside amongst themselves, on their own subjects and in their own environment. This is a language entirely free from the influence of English: it is *bahasa Melayu jati* "true Malay", of which it has been so well said¹

"As a tongue which is capable of expressing, with admirable terseness, the most minute shades of difference between every physical action, and between many states of feeling . . . Malay has probably few rivals . . . (It is) a language . . . which is essentially idiomatic and in which many words in themselves contain what in English would require a whole sentence to express. . . .

The repositories of this Malay are the people who live on the banks of the big rivers and along the shores of the East Coast; in other words the greatest part of the indigenous Malay population of the Peninsula, among whom are to be found some of the most charming people to be found anywhere. Their friendship, so well worth winning, will be extended the more readily to the student if he can speak to them in their own tongue: to which end this book will, I hope, be of some assistance. I have called it *Studies in Country Malay*: I might have called it *Studies in True Malay*, for that is what in these days Country Malay alone is.

Part II of the book consists of dialogues illustrating the Malay spoken on the Perak river and in Kelantan and Trengganu. With the exception of Kelantan XIII (which I wrote myself to familiarize the student with some of the expressions used in a Kelantan law-court) these dialogues were composed entirely by Malays themselves, and, what is more, by Malays with little or no knowledge of English, which is all to the advantage of what they wrote. Unfortunate though it may be, the influence of English on Malay is disastrous. What is known as "modern Malay", with its English constructions and Indonesian vocabulary, may have advantages for the journalist, but it is not the language of the vast majority of Malays who live in the Peninsula.

These dialogues, which are nothing if not true Malay, afford glimpses of the things that loom large in rural life, telling as they do of such matters as expeditions to market, homely handicraft, the woes of the padi-planter, the ups and downs of the fisherman's life, the subtleties of a deal in fish or produce, *sepak raga* and the like. Their authenticity as specimens of the Malay they purport to illustrate cannot be questioned. I have endeavoured by means of the spelling (see the note on

¹ Clifford and Swettenham's Dictionary of the Malay Language (Introduction p. (ii)), hereinafter referred to as C. & S.

spelling on p. 55) to imitate, as far as the limitations of the Roman alphabet permit, the local pronunciation in each case. The dialogues are preceded by Introductions (pp. 57 and 124) and there are explanatory notes.

Admittedly the Malay of which the dialogues give samples is that of only a part of the Peninsula. It is true too that some of them were written a good many years ago and may contain here and there words and expressions which may have become archaisms even in their country of origin. But as I know from contacts with Malays who come neither from the banks of the Perak river nor from the East Coast there is a vast amount of "true Malay" which is common to all parts of the Peninsula where indigenous Malays live: and the Malay peasant is a very conservative person, in language as in other things.

Non cuivis homini . . . and it is given to few of us to speak any foreign language "like a native". The best that most of us can achieve is to say the simple, everyday things in the way the foreigner says them in his own tongue: and that is something. For that reason an appreciable part of the book, viz. Part I, is devoted to a study of some of the idiomatic uses of simple, common words, illustrated mainly, though not exclusively, by quotations from the dialogues in Part II. There is of course no suggestion that all the uses of the words selected are given: the object is merely to give examples of some uses of a particular word which are important in Country Malay but are not perhaps adequately explained in dictionaries or manuals.

Appendix A contains a certain number of Arabic words which are constantly used in Country Malay though their users have no real knowledge of Arabic whatsoever; and in Appendix B will be found some expressions used for denoting the times of day or night without reference to the clock. They occur *passim* in the dialogues, and I fancy it will be many years before the wrist watch puts them out of use.

It is not only the English student of Malay that I have had in mind in producing this book. I have been thinking too of the Malay student of English, and I hope that the book will be of interest and use to him also. As I know from experience as an examiner, Malays do not translate well from English into Malay. They seem to think that the English before them must be repeated literally in Malay, with the result that they merely produce a string of Malay words corresponding to the English ones, without however producing a Malay sentence. This is a matter in which the translations of the dialogues should be of assistance, as the student can see from them how Malay goes into colloquial English and how too in everyday conversations on non-technical subjects there is always a "true Malay" equivalent for the common English expressions which the student may know but can seldom reproduce correctly in Malay. I hope too that Malay students seeing their own language as they themselves speak it set down before their eyes in print may realise how good a language "true Malay" is. No one of course suggests that *bahasa Melayu jati* is adequate for all present-day needs or that foreign words should not be incorporated into it to supply its deficiencies. But a language can borrow words, as indeed Malay

has borrowed them freely in the past, without exchanging its style and characteristics for those of another language, and those Malay students of English who are apt to speak rather patronizingly of "classical Malay" as though it had had its day and was ready now for the scrap heap should weigh the judgment I have quoted in the first paragraph of this Introduction. To discard "true Malay" with its terseness and precision in favour of "modern Malay" which has neither and is only what they themselves would describe as *ular bukan, ikan pun bukan*¹ would surely be *bértukar jiwa dĕngan sĕmangat*?²

¹ See my Malay Sayings (Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 77.

² Ditto, p. 12.

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PART ONE

Some Uses of Simple, Common Words in Country Malay

(The spelling in this Part is that of "standard Malay", though common abbreviations such as *nak*, *tak*, *'dah* are so written. The pronunciation will of course depend on the locality in which the phrase is used, see pp. 57 and 124.)

ACHU—used in Kelantan and Trengganu where *chuba* or *pandu* would be used in the Western States, thus:

- (a) with its primary meaning of "attempt", "try".

La¹ 'ni baharu achu nak buat.

We're just making a start on it now.

Q.² Mu besa-kah³ bẽdil?

Can you handle a gun?

A. Tak achu lagi.

I've never tried.

(Cf. the Perak use of *pandu*:

Q. Kamu tahu-kah mẽnguli?

Can you knead (clay)?

A. Ĕntah-lah, bẽlum saya pandu lagi.

I can't say, I've never tried.)

(b) with its applied meaning, in the imperative, corresponding to the English "just" ("just look at this") or "you might" ("you might get me a paper"), thus:

Achu pẽrgi royat⁴ ka-Awang esok nak ilir.

You might go and tell Awang we'll be going downstream to-morrow.

Ambil bẽnang-lah ini, achu pẽrgi bubul, aku nak achu kẽleh.

Here's some thread, just go and mend (the net),

I'd just like to see you doing it!

Achu mari aku tengok.

Just let me have a look at it.

ADA—W.⁵ defines *ada* as "existence: to be: present: appertain to: (vulg.) to have". These meanings are all to be found in Country Malay, thus:

¹ See note on p. 150. ² Q., A.=Question, Answer. ³ See W. under *biasa*.

⁴ See note on p. 135. ⁵ Wilkinson, R. J., Malay-English Dictionary (1932).

(1) "existence".

Q. Měsjid itu ada lagi-kah?

Is that mosque still in existence?

A. Ta' ada lagi, tikas-nya pun ta'ada 'dah.

No, it isn't, there isn't even a trace of it left.

(2) "present".

Q. Dia ada-kah?

Is he here? (Is he in, i.e. at home?)

A. Tadi ada, ini 'dah ilir gamak-nya.

He was here a moment ago, but I fancy he must have gone downstream now.

Udoh molek, ada bēlaka.

Plain and pretty—all of them were there.

Kamu turun karang, laung-lah aku, aku ada di-tēbing.

Give me a hail when you leave your house, I shall be on the river-bank.

(3) "to be"

Bukan ada lauk-petok yang lain.

It's not as though we had anything else to curry with the rice.

Takut ta'ada sangat karang, sa-kati pun jadi.

In case there's not much to be had, a catty'll do.

Ada yang bērbēndang, ada yang bēlum lagi.

Some have got wet-padi land, others not yet.

(4) "appertain to"

Q. Mana dia surat itu?

Where is the letter?

A. Ada pada Yusoh

It's with Yusoh.

(5) "(vulg.) to have"

One does hear, very commonly,

Ada mika sampan?

Have you got a boat?

Tēman ada juga pisang tiga ěmpat tandan.

I have got two or three bunches of bananas.

but one also hears:

Ada-kah kamu bērpadi burong?

Have you got any bird-seed?

Aku tak bērotan.

*I haven't got any rattan.*Sudah nak main, t'ada bērchaping¹ pula!*Here you are coming to play (sepak raga) and blest if you don't turn up without your footguards*

and this is surely the true Malay way of saying "to have", the *ada* in each case meaning "to be" and the *bēr* "in possession of".

¹ See note on p. 91.

There are other idiomatic uses of *ada* not covered by W.'s definition, viz.,

- (a) to introduce a question, like the French *est-ce que*, thus

Ada-kah mika mēngidup ayam?

Do you keep fowls?

Ada-kah dia nak mudek esok?

Is he going upstream to-morrow?

- (b) used alone, or as an auxiliary, to form a past tense (preterite or imperfect, but not perfect), thus

Pada pētang itu mu ada di-mana?

That afternoon where were you?

- Q. Sampai di-kēbun Nik Leh mu ada kēleh siapa-siapa?

When you got to Nik Leh's plantation, did you see anyone?

- A. Kēleh. Ada orang bawa bungkusan.

Yes, I did. There was a man carrying a package.

Ada juga saya bērkhabar pada to' Penghulu.

I did tell the penghulu.

- (c) with *-kan*, i.e. *adakan*, with the meaning "provide", thus

Tinggal lagi kayu itu-lah yang payah sikit, siapa nak mēngadakan-nya?

The only other thing is, about the timber, there's a difficulty there—who's going to provide it?

- (d) with *-lah*

(i) expressing qualified agreement, the subsequent clause explaining the qualification, thus

- Q. Mika ada-kah bērpērdah?

Have you got a spare adze handle?

- A. Ada, ada-lah, 'tapi bēlum bērkērawat lagi.

Yes, I've got one, but it hasn't got the fastening on it yet.

(ii) where the *-lah* seems to add little to the meaning of the sentence and is perhaps merely added for the sake of balance, thus

Moh-lah kita tēbang, tēman mēnulong ada-lah sēsikit.

Let's fell the trees, I'll give you a hand.

S'ari dua ini ada-lah bētah sikit.

He has been a bit better these last few days.

Kalau tak mati, bongkar chērah karang ada-lah tēman datang.

All being well, at crack o' dawn I'll be with you.

- (e) in the following common form of sentence the function of *ada* is difficult to determine.

Dia itu mēnipu orang pun ada juga.

And he was a swindler as well.

(f) *sudah ada* with the meaning "is ready", "is at hand" or "has appeared", thus

Kayu sudah ada, opah
The wood's there, ready for you, granny.
 Orang 'dah ada.
The people are here (waiting).
 Durian ada 'dah di-kédai.
Durians have appeared in the market.

ADEK—means literally "younger brother or sister" and this is what it would mean in

Dia itu dua kali adek pada saya.
He is as much younger than I am as to be my second younger brother (or sister).

(where, be it noted, the person referred to may quite possibly be no relation to the speaker).

But where a Malay says:

Mika bĕrapa bĕradek?
How many are there of you in the family?

and the answer is:

Tĕman ĕmpat bĕradek.
There are four of us.

the man who answers the question may well be the youngest of the family.

(2) *adek* in conjunction with *kakak* may mean "relations", thus:

Mak Teh itu adek-kakak ayah dia.
Mak Teh is related to his father.

or it may merely mean "people" of a place, thus:

Adek-kakak disana pun baik juga kalau sakit dĕmam.
People there are kind when one is ill.
 Kalau kĕmudahan, tulong Che' Ali tĕmpah dĕngan adek-kakak ulu chari isi kapur.
If it's not too much trouble, Che' Ali, you might commission the people upstream to get me some lime.

(3) *chara adek-bĕradek* means "in a brotherly fashion" or "as between friends", thus:

Pakai saya kata sa-kali, buat chara adek-bĕradek sudah-lah.
Let's take the price I name, as though it was a family affair, and have done with it.

AGAK—not often heard in Kelantan or Trengganu but in constant use in Perak, with various shades of meaning:—

(a) it can translate the English "I should say", "it seems to me", "I fancy" thus:

Agak itu-lah mika belir sangat marahkan budak itu.
That comes of your for ever scolding the child, it seems to me.
 Padi tĕman pun agak-nya bagitu juga.
My padi too's about the same, I should say

Q. Tidak-kah sarat sangat sampan kita ini?
Aren't we over-loaded?

A. Tidak agak-nya.
No, I don't think so.
 Ini sudah mudek agak-nya.
At this moment I fancy he's away up river.

(b) interrogatively it tones down what might seem too direct a question, thus:

Apa khabar agak-nya Pak Panjang ka-mari ini?
What brings you here, Pa' Panjang, if I may ask?
 Siapa agak?
Who may it be?
 Bila agak tuan nak ilir?
When will you be going downstream?

(in the two latter cases *agak* may be shortened down to '*gak*').

(c) negatively, *tak bĕragak*, lit. in a way that there's no guessing, may mean "badly", thus:

Itu-lah bĕbudak 'ni dayong tak bĕragak sahaja, di-salahkan-nya pĕrahu pula.
There you go, rowing any old how, and you blame the boat if you please:

or it may mean "headlong" "precipitately", thus:

Dia pun lari-lah tak bĕragak.
He took to his heels and ran headlong.

AKAN—seldom heard in spoken Malay as a preposition, though '*kan*' (*akan*) *hal-nya* is a common variant of *pada hal-nya*, see HAL (d) in App. A.: but with the negative, viz. *tak 'kan* (*tidak akan*), with the meaning "it is unlikely", the word is in constant use, thus:

Tak 'kan orang buat lolok.
People wouldn't merely "invent" a thing like that.
 Anak-nya tak 'kan bĕjurus.
The calves (of such cattle) aren't likely to be any good.
 Apa nak mika buat ikan banyak sangat itu? Tak 'kan lalu mika makan sĕmua-nya.
But what are you going to do with all that fish? It's not as though you could eat it all.

and even with a double negative

Tak 'kan tak lĕkat utang orang.
One is bound to run into debt.

it is very commonly heard. A common alternative of this *tak 'kan* is *tahil*, q.v. in App. A.

ALA (HALA)—with the meaning "direction" is in constant use in Kelantan and Trengganu even in contexts where it is practically redundant, thus:

Ka-mana ala-nya itu we?
Where are you bound for?
 Nak pĕrgi hala ka-mana itu?
Where are you going?

In other instances of course there is point in the "direction" signified by *ala*, thus:

Molek-kah padi hala kampong dema?
Is the padi doing well down your way?
 Aku kĕleh si-Mek bawa nyiur ala ka-nu¹ tadi.
I saw Mek carrying a coconut yonder a moment ago.

In a negative sentence *bala* may be added to *ala*, thus:
 Surat nikah tok janda aku dahulu itu lĕsap, tak tahukan ala-bala.
The certificate of my marriage with my former husband has disappeared, I can't imagine where it's got to.

AMBOH—this, and not *ĕmboh*, is the common form of the word used invariably on the coasts of Trengganu and Pahang in the negative instead of the *tak mau* or *ta'ndak* of the Western States, see note on *ta'amboh sĕtarang* on p. 195, thus:

Bĕrasa sĕrek, ta'amboh bara ka-lain 'dah
I've learnt my lesson and there's no more going abroad for me.
 Kalau mu ta'amboh balek, aku tak payah nanti mu.
If you're not proposing to come back, then I needn't wait for you.
 Nak bĕrĕnti 'dak apa, ta'amboh pun 'dak apa.
Stop or not stop—it's all the same to me.
 Tĕlur ta'amboh sa-kampoh?
You wouldn't like (to buy from me) a fish roe?

APA—(A) as an interrogative:

- (i) alone and in its simple form:
- Q. Ambohi, t'ada siapa-siapa mari?
But didn't any one come to the house?
- A. Ada pun, jadi apa? Dudok tĕrtinjau-tinjau di-tanah.
If anyone came, what good was it? They just stayed outside peering up.
 'dah, payah apa?
Well, what's the difficulty?
 Kayoh apa main-main ini?
And what sort of paddling do you think you're doing?

In Perak in certain contexts *apa* evidently is used to mean not merely "what" but "why" (see *mĕngapa* in (ii) below), thus:

¹ See W. under *nu*.