



**INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SILK ROADS:  
ROADS OF DIALOGUE**

**MALACCA, MALAYSIA**

**4<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 1991**

**Organized by:**

**Ministry of culture, Arts and Tourism, Malaysia**

**National University of Malaysia**

**Ministry of Education, Malaysia**

**Chief Minister Department, Malacca**

**With cooperation of**



**UNESCO**

# **Portuguese Words in the Malay Language**

by

Ahmat Adam Ph.D

In 1511 when Alfonso D'Albuquerque invaded the rich Malay port city of Malacca a new age of European entry into Asia was begun. With the capture of Malacca, the Portuguese dream of controlling the spice route from Southeast Asia to the Persian Gulf, through the Indian Ocean, was now a reality. As soon as Portuguese control was established Albuquerque wasted no time in attempting to restore the city of Malacca to its position as an important trading emporium. He did his best to lure the Peguan, Indian and Chinese merchants back to Malacca by giving them friendly treatment. He even established relations with neighbouring states, among which were Siam, Java and not least Kampar.

Even though the native traders of Southeast Asia prevented the Portuguese from securing a monopolistic hold on the rich spice trade they were, nevertheless, able to secure considerable share of the cloves trade in the Moluccas and Ambon and nutmegs in Banda, as well as securing the sandalwood trade of Solor and Timor. They were able to do this by strictly following a policy of avoiding conflicts and by concluding treaties with the native rulers of Eastern Indonesia.

As the first of the Europeans to have established a colony in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese certainly had to acquaint themselves with the language and culture of the people that they had come in to contact with. While it is true that relations between Portuguese and Asians were mainly confined to trading transaction, the nature of the trade in Southeast Asia which was conducted between Asian ports meant that the Portuguese had to adopt the language of the port-cities where the intra-Asian trade was conducted as their means of communicating with the merchants in Southeast Asia. In this regard Malay was the lingua franca that had long been functioning before the arrival of the Portuguese. It is the purpose of this short paper then to look at the influence of the Portuguese language on the Malay language and vice-versa during the period of the sixteenth century.

When the Portuguese arrived in Malacca they discovered that Malacca was very much interconnected with the port-cities of the Malay Archipelago. The main commercial centres were the Malay speaking areas namely, Pasai, Malaka, Johor, Patani, Aceh and Brunei. The language was so widespread used that not only was Malay predominant in the Indonesian archipelago but it was also widely spoken in Central and southern Philippines and in as far as Paulo Condore, off the coast of southern Vietnam (cited Reid 1988:7).

The Malay language had drawn considerable interest from Europeans from as early as 1521 when the Italian, Antonio Pigafetta, arrived in the Moluccas. He was so drawn to the fact that the people of that region were using the Malay language as it was spoken in Malacca. Untrained as he was in language and linguistics, Pigafetta had relied on a Malay speaker from Sumatra to provide him the data for his compilation of Malay words which ultimately became the first Malay glossary to have been written. Sixty years later, van Linschoten, a Dutch sailor, who had visited Indonesia, reported that Malay was not only a well-known language but was also the most courtly of the oriental tongues, a knowledge of which was as indispensable in the Indies as that of French in Holland (cited Takdir Alisjahbana 1956:8). Even St. Francis Xavier wrote his comments on Christian doctrines in the Malay language when he visited the Moluccas in the sixteenth century.

Indeed, when the Sultan of Ternate was competing for Portuguese favour with the Sultan of Tidore two letters in Malay were sent to the King of Portugal in 1521 and 1522 even though the style of the Malay used was rather unsmooth, possibly written by scribe or scribes not well-acquainted with the Malay language (Blagden 1930:87 - 101). These letters like the ones written by the Sultan of Aceh and addressed to Queen Elizabeth of England in 1602 and to King James in 1612 (W.G. Shellabear 1898: 107-120) are indicative of the importance of the Malay language for communication in the Malay world of Southeast Asia. However, it is interesting to note that in all the above letters no Portuguese words were used. But in the Raja of Birni's letter addressed to an English captain at Jambi, which was probably written in the early 17th century, the word 'Sinnyor' was used in addressing, an English captain.

It is difficult to determine when Portuguese words were absorbed by the Malay language. Based on the Sejarah Melayu, however, of which the earliest version was written in 1612, and the Hikayat Hang Tuah, which was probably written at a later date, one could speculate that Portuguese influence on the Malay language probably took effect by the beginning of the 17th century. Using both the Sejarah Melayu and the Hikayat Hang Tuah as well as other literary works including Malay letters, I have tried to prepare a list of Portuguese words that have been absorbed into the Malay language.

These words could be categorized into clusters which cover areas such as navigation and trade, furniture and household items, food and leisure and entertainment.

Words pertaining to navigation and trade

<u>Malay</u>	<u>Portuguese</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
baluarti	Baluarte	bulwark
bordu	Bordo	side of a ship; gunwale
beledu	Veludo	velvet
bendera	Bandeira	flag; banner
bulu	Velo	fleece; wool
cit	Chitao	chintz
cita	Chita	calico; cotton print
fusta	Fusta	pinnace (warship - eightoared)
ghali	Gale	galley
istinggar	Espingarda	flint-lock or matchlock gun
kapitan	Capitao	captain
kerakah	carraca	an ancient sailing ship
kernu	corno	powderhorn
lancang	lanca	large launch; barge
Ian car	lancar	to launch
limau	lirnao	lemon
peluru	pelouro	cannon balls
renda	renda	rent (fine in Malay)
sis	sis	transfer tax (percentage taken from a sale of property as tax)
wardi	ordi	instructions; orders

Words pertaining to furniture and the house

almari	almeirah	wardrobe
bangku	banco	bench; stool
beranda	varanda	veranda
jendela	janela	window
meja	mesa	table
mertul	martelo	hammer

Words pertaining to leisure and games

biola	viola	violin
bola	bola	ball
dadu	dado	dice
perada	perada	tinsel; gold foil; gold leaf
pesta	festa	party
renda	renda	lace
tambur	tambor	drum cylinder

Words pertaining to positions

mandur	mando	power; authority
merinyu	meirinho	municipal officer for justice; inspector
mesteri	mestre	a master hand at anything
paderi	padre	priest
pakenira	faccionaria	faction
senyur	senhor	sir

Words pertaining to food

bolu	bolo	cake
keju	queijo	cheese
kubis	couves	cabbage
labu	nabo	bryony (climbing plants); turnip
mentega	manteiga	butter
paong	pao	bread
terigu	trigo	flour

Words pertaining to common items

bantal	avental	pillow
butang	butao	button
cepiau	chapeu	hat
cerutu	charuto	cigar
pena	pena	pen; feather; plume
peniti	alfinete	pin
petam	fito	band; tape
roda	roda	wheel
sabun	sabao	soap
sepatu	sapato	shoes
tinta	tinta	ink
tuala	toalha	towel

### Words pertaining to common items

garpu	garfo	fork
kemeja	camisa	shirt
kereta	carreta	cart

### Others

bersiar	passear	to take a walk
gagau	gaga	stammering
gelojoh	guloso	gluttonous
gereja	igreja	church
kisar	pisar	to pound; to trample on
meski (pun)	mas que	though
minggu	domingo	Sunday
palsu	falso	false
saku	saco	pocket; bag
sekolah	escola	school
soldadu	soldado	soldiers
tempoh	tempo	time
tentu	tanto	so much; as much (in Malay: surely)
tukar	trocar	to change

### Malay words that have been absorbed by Portuguese

bende	okra
gongo	gong
jambo	guava (Malay apple)
Malaio	Malay
rota	rattan
sagu	sago
velejar	to sail

From the above list it seems clear that many Portuguese words that have crept into the Malay language are words that concern navigation, and trade merchandise. There are a few words concerning furniture but certainly very few words concerning games and pastimes or even- the arts.

It appears that a few words in the Malay language have also been incorporated in the vocabulary of modern Portuguese. This bilateral exchange of vocabularies is quite natural considering the fact that the Portuguese ruled Malacca from 1511 until 1641. The existence of

mestico or half-blooded Portuguese community in Malacca today is another evidence of Portuguese presence for a period of slightly over a century and a quarter, a time span that even exceeded the period of the Malacca sultanate.

The period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was indeed a new era for the development of the Malay language. It was a period of rapid changes for Southeast Asia. Anthony Reid calls it the age of commerce which saw the port cities, especially in the Malay world, coming closer to each other via the maritime link established long before the arrival of the Europeans. This link is further promoted by the widespread acceptance of the Malay language as the lingua franca of the region. When the Dutch arrived to establish their challenge to Portuguese dominance, the Malay language continued to respond to European culture by borrowing numerous elements from the language of the Dutch and later also that of the English.

## **Bibliography**

Alisjahbana, Takdir, Sedjarah Bahasa Indonesia, Jakarta: Pustaka Rakjat, 1956.

Bastin, John & Harry Benda, A History of Modern Southeast Asia, New Jersey: Prentice Halls, 1968.

Bausani, Alessandro, Indonesia dalam Laporan Pelajaran Antonio Pigafetta (Indonesian translation), Roma: Institute Italiano per Il Medio ed estremo Oriente cento Italiano di Cultura - Jakarta, 1972.

Blagden, C.O., "Two Malay Letters From Ternate in the Moluccas, written in 1521 and 1522", Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies London Institution, Vol. VI, 1930 - 32.

Harun Aminurrashid, Kaiian Sejarah Perkembangan Bahasa Melayu, Singapura: Pustaka Melayu, 1966.

Kassim Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1962.

Reid, Anthony, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450 - 1680 Volume One: The lands below the Winds, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.

Sejarah Melayu (edisi Shellabear), Singapore: The Malaya Publishing House, 1957.

Shellabear, W .G., "An Account of Some of the Oldest Malay Mss. Now extant", Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, No. 31, July 1898.

Taylor, James L., A Portuguese-English Dictionary, London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd.,n 1959.

Thomas, Luis Filipe F.R., "Pengaruh Melayu dalam Peradaban Orang Portugis", Beriga, Oktober-Disember 1988.

Wilkinson, R.J., A Malay-English Dictionary (Romanised) 2 Volumes, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1959.