

Uncovering the early sociolinguistic history of Malacca Creole Portuguese

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This paper provides a preliminary notice of Baxter (2026), a forthcoming study of the sociolinguistic history of Malacca Creole Portuguese (MCP) in the Portuguese, Dutch and early British colonial periods. It highlights topics from the study. Discussing first the sociodemographic factors that shaped linguistic interactions in the Portuguese period, it considers aspects of the feature pool from which MCP emerged, and the settings for its transmission. Next, shifting to the Dutch period, it examines factors supporting the survival of the MCP speech community and further evolution of its language. Insights are drawn regarding the characteristics of MCP in the 17th and 18th centuries, based on comparative data from Javanese Pidgin and Creole Portuguese, while also noting that a higher register approximating Portuguese persisted at the end of the 18th century. Examination of the British period highlights a continuation of the MCP community's profile established during the Dutch period. It also discusses the earliest linguistic records of MCP, particularly materials collected by Hugo Schuchardt in 1883-1884. These form the basis of a discussion of prime features of 19th-century MCP grammar, aimed at evaluating its relationship with earlier forms and its connections to contemporary regional varieties, and to Modern MCP.

Keywords: sociolinguistic history, Portuguese Malacca, Dutch Malacca, British 19th century, Java connections, basilect features.

1. Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Malacca Creole Portuguese (MCP)¹ has received considerable attention from linguists (Rêgo 1942; Knowlton 1964; Hancock 1975; Baxter 1988; Tomás 2004, Baxter & de Silva 2004; Pillai, Chan & Baxter 2015), among others. However, prior to the 20th century, our knowledge of MCP has depended on Coelho's (1967) documentation of its Singapore offshoot (SMCP), retrospective deduction based on Rêgo's (1942) data collected in Melaka in the 1930s, and on my notice concerning register and possible lectal differences in the early 19th century (Baxter (2018)). While knowledge of MCP prior to the 20th century is scant, knowledge of its beginnings in the Portuguese period (1511-1641) and its survival under the Dutch (1641-1825), has been virtually non-existent. In this paper, I provide an overview of topics covered in Baxter (forthcoming), a first study addressing the status of MCP in the Portuguese, Dutch and early British periods.²

¹ I adopt the contemporary Malay-based name of the town, while retaining the English spelling in the name of the language as traditional in the scientific literature. I also adopt the Leipzig Glossing Rules developed by Comrie and Haspelmath (2015).

² Information and positions presented in the article, except those attributed by references, are derived from the forthcoming book.

2. Background

A considerable volume of historical research addresses the Portuguese, Dutch and early British periods of Melaka (Thomaz 1975, 2000; Hussin 2007; Fernando 2012; Turnbull 1983; Vande Walle 2012; among many others). Yet, with the exception of the study of early Dutch Melaka by Borschberg (2010), sociolinguistic dimensions are rarely addressed in historical research, nor in contemporary historical chronicles. Indeed, most studies of the history of the colonial periods, like 1940s Hollywood films depicting ancient times, give the impression that language contact was never an issue. The means and modes of communication are ignored, with the result that we still lack answers to many basic questions and hypotheses concerning the emergence of MCP and its persistence during the Portuguese, Dutch and early British times.

In relation to the beginnings of MCP, linguistic features shared among the Asian Creole Portuguese varieties have led to two broad hypotheses regarding the emergence of MCP: (i) that key input to its derivation came from a pidgin introduced from Southern India and, (ii) that its derivation was local, influenced by Vehicular Malay, and by later input from L1 and L2 Indo-Portuguese varieties.

Regarding its form and continuity, a primary question concerns the extent to which early MCP resembled its modern form. However, early linguistic data of MCP is still lacking. Yet a further issue surrounds the factors that enabled MCP to survive through the Dutch period and into the early British period. Moreover, in view of the use of a register approximating to Portuguese at the turn of the 19th century, it is also reasonable to ask how this situation emerged, and whether it persisted subsequently. Finally, how similar was 19th century MCP to its modern descendant? In the forthcoming book, I seek answers to these questions, looking into external and internal aspects of the sociolinguistic history of MCP. Here I will sketch some of the aspects of this research.

3. Procedural underpinnings and sources

The study was guided by the framework of the user-based, ecological model of language contact, proposed by Mufwene (2001, 2007, 2009). The model provides a useful platform for investigating the early stages of Portuguese language contact in Melaka, the growth of the community of its users, its generational transmission, post-formative influences and continuity.

The model comprises two dimensions: an external and an internal ecology. The external ecology entails the historic stage-setting of contact, and the demographic, ethnic, and other socio-cultural factors that determine the nature of interaction between speakers. The internal ecology, involves both the pool of linguistic resources in contact, and the factors determining their use: typological congruence, salience, item frequency, semantics-pragmatics and a process of natural language acquisition (Mufwene 1996; Siegel 2008; Clements 2009, 2015; Baptista 2020). The resultant novel contact interlanguages may stabilize and become a communal L2 which, over generations, may

gradually acquire L1 speakers, i.e. a creole language. Ansaldo (2009) stresses that a fundamental factor in this process is the development of a group identity associated with the language.

Sifting through contemporary documentation, the research sought information to enable the fleshing out of factors of both the external and internal ecologies with respect to both the emergence of MCP and its continuity. The fact that the external and internal ecologies permit a degree of mutual deduction is particularly useful when dealing with fragmentary sociohistorical and linguistic information.

4. Sources

To develop a vision of the early sociolinguistic settings of MCP, and to gain a sense of the form of the language in those times I researched sources of three types: (i) published official and non-official accounts contemporary with each colonial period, including correspondence by crown officials and missionaries (e.g. Coolhas 1968; Rêgo 1947-1958; Sá 1954-1988; Wicki 1948-1988; Pato & Mendonça 1915; Schurhammer & Wicki 1996; Valignano 1944, among others); (ii) published research studies (books, articles), translations of historical documents, and academic theses (e.g. Thomaz 2000; Bremner & Blagden 1927; Leupe & Mac Hacobian 1936; Ketelaars 1985; Wijaya 2022; Vande Walle 2012; Schutte (2002), among others); (iii) unpublished archival materials of the colonial administrations and of colonial agents. The latter materials comprise documents pertaining to Melaka in the Dutch VOC Archives in The Hague, the India Office Records (The Malacca Dutch Records; Straits Settlement Factory Records) of the British Library, the Council of World Missionary Archive at the School of African and Oriental Studies, London, and the linguistic materials of the Hugo Schuchardt Archiv of the University of Graz.³

While research of these sources permits a meaningful perspective of the external ecology of MCP, the internal ecology can only be accessed indirectly because actual linguistic data of MCP in the 16th to 18th centuries is yet to be located. In order to visualize the form of early MCP, I considered linguistic materials of Pidgin and Creole Portuguese contact language from Melaka's closely connected administrative capital, Batavia. These included the 17thC Pidgin Portuguese and 18thC Batavia CP (BCP) materials studied by Maurer (2011) and Castro et al. (2023). Subsequently, the assessment of the 19th century form of the language and its speech community relies on rare data of MCP from the Hugo Schuchardt Archiv, compared with 19th century Tugu CP (TCP) and Macau CP (MacCP) (Maurer 2011; Nunes 2010; Barreiros 1943-1944).

In the following sections, I sketch aspects of the main chapters of the book, drawing attention to certain key questions.

³ For both the Portuguese and Dutch periods a vast amount of contemporary archival documentation exists concerning Melaka. The early 19thC British period is similarly well represented. However, although tempting, the consultation of many potentially relevant sources (e.g. archives pertaining to the activities of the Dutch Reformed Church in Melaka) lay beyond the scope and possibilities of the present project.

5. Portuguese in multiethnic Melaka: the setting for the emergence of MCP

At the time of its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, Melaka had a large foreign population of resident traders and non-resident traders, principally from East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, in addition to its local Malay residents and slaves. These diverse groups interacted by means of a common Vehicular Malay⁴ much influenced by their own ethnic languages. Contemporary 16th century Portuguese sources report a population of 10000 during the first quarter of the 16th century, yet this possibly includes both the resident and the seasonal trade population, and it must have been considerably much less in the initial period following the violent conquest. Correspondence from the expedition leader, Admiral Afonso de Albuquerque, reveals that the Portuguese force of 1000 troops, in addition to its non-Asian elements, included 200 Malabar mercenaries (Pato & Mendonça 1915).

This demography entails an especially complex feature pool for language contact. On the one hand, the superstrate was represented by Middle Portuguese L1 dialects and L2 versions, foreigner talk Portuguese, and possibly the hypothesized Malabar Pidgin Portuguese (Clements 2000). On the other hand, the pool also comprised different versions of the Malay substrate, as L1 and L2 (principally Vehicular Malay), foreigner talk versions of Malay, and ethnic languages of the foreign Asian community.

The presence of two contact languages in the pool, one of which had strong roots in Melaka and in the Southeast Asian region, raises the possibility of convergence between Malabar Pidgin Portuguese and Vehicular Malay in the formation of contact Portuguese in Melaka. For example, the pair present parallels with respect to the post-nominal linking possessive structure and the prepositional marking of object case, features shared by modern MCP and many other Asian CP varieties. Where Vehicular Malay and Middle Portuguese are concerned, the possibilities of convergence through congruence entail not only syntactic structure, e.g. pre-nominal determiners, post-nominal adjectives, and SVO configuration, but also extend to the phonology, all with significant parallels in modern MCP.

In this respect, a point that is generally overlooked in studies of the Portuguese period is that the Portuguese would have spoken Malay to varying extents, a fact evident in contemporary 16th century observations. I contend that the typological distance between Portuguese and (Vehicular) Malay would have presented far less obstacles to the Portuguese than the languages of South Asia. Both the conquerors and the conquered population needed to use approximations of Portuguese and Malay in their interactions in the early period of contact. As such, varying qualities of Portuguese must have circulated amongst the conquered population, and the same occurred among the conquerors and their camp followers with respect to Malay. While Portuguese was implanted to varying

⁴ Adelaar and Prentice (1996) report that Vehicular Malay or Trade Malay, and Pidgin-Derived Malay varieties, display characteristics divergent from Malayic ancestry, presumably derived from prior pidgins. The Pidgin-Derived-Varieties exist as L2 vehicular varieties and as vernacular varieties of non-Malay ethnic groups, such as Baba Malay.

degrees, Malay, mainly in its widespread lingua franca form, persisted and weighed heavily on the developing contact language.

5.1 Inter-ethnic social connections, religion, and group identity

After the conquest, the socioeconomic re-establishment of Melaka by the Portuguese involved diverse modes of interaction with the local population. One particular aspect of these interactions concerns the relationship between the Portuguese and the Tamil Hindu and Chinese merchants. Representatives of both groups aided the Portuguese in the lead up to the conquest and subsequently. This was especially true of the Tamils, represented by the merchant Nina Chatu (Thomaz 1975). Following the takeover, the relationship with both groups developed further through participation in the administration of the city and through joint trade ventures. These networkings also display a further dimension: a connection with the religion of the colonial power.

The Portuguese presence brought Catholicism, and in the eyes of local populations the Portuguese language and Catholicism were clearly closely correlated. 16th century correspondence from the Jesuit missionaries in Melaka reports that both Malay and Portuguese were used in their contact with the local population. Moreover, the use of foreigner talk Portuguese in missionary work was recommended by the missionary Francis Xavier, who had served in Melaka (Curto 2009; Valignano 1944).

Mixed marriages and conversions soon created a growing population of Catholics, ostensibly satisfying spiritual needs yet also providing social and potential economic benefits, for the convert became part of the overall Portuguese Catholic society of the conquerors: a *cristão*. In 1613, the Melaka-born *mestiço* Manuel Godinho de Erédia reported that the local *cristão* population numbered some 7400. Most of these were of Indian and Chinese origin,⁵ especially the former who were among the earliest converts reported in Jesuit documents. They came from the Keling (Tamil Hindu) merchant community, which had close ties with the Portuguese (Thomaz 2000:88, 98, 105-123).⁶ Converts were baptized with Portuguese names, providing just one of the sources of Portuguese names and surnames in the wider Catholic community.

The Portuguese, in their 16th and 17th centuries enclaves in Asia, referred to each local Catholic community collectively as *cristão*. This triadic identity factor associating Catholicism, the Portuguese language, and membership of the Portuguese controlled socio-cultural space set the group apart from the non-Christian elements of the population. Within this community, a local Portuguese more closely modelled on the *reinol* variety and a contact Portuguese developed. I now turn to the demographic mechanism that enabled this development.

⁵ This implies that early Malay influence on the formation of MCP probably came from the Malay spoken by the Indian and Chinese communities, in addition to the Vehicular Malay of the wider community.

⁶ Thomaz (2000:121) observes that the Hindu community diminished substantially over the 16thC owing to conversion to Catholicism.

5.2 The question of miscegenation and new generations within the *cristão* community

The overwhelming majority of Portuguese arriving in Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries were men. While official marriages with Asian women certainly occurred, granting the married men certain official privileges under the label of *casado*, in early 16th century Melaka these were relatively few. Nevertheless, the population of *casados* grew from about 8 in 1514, to eventually around 100 by 1580, and nearly 300 in the 17th century (Lobato 1999:88). From the fact that the majority of Portuguese men were not *casados*, the presence of substantial numbers of orphan *mestiços*,⁷ and complaints from the Jesuit missionaries concerning the practice of the Portuguese in Melaka to live with harems of slave women, it is easy to deduce that the bulk of *mestiços* born in the early 16th century were born of unofficial unions (Thomaz 2000:97). Nevertheless, marriages between converts from other ethnic groups also contributed to generations within the *cristão* sector.

5.3 The transmission of Portuguese among the new generations

I assume that there would have been considerable variation in the knowledge of Portuguese among the generations born within the *cristão* social space, depending on their immediate surroundings, social networks and residential locality in Melaka. Some children had more contact with Portuguese, especially in the *casado* households, whereas for others, in the homes of *mestiços* and converts, contact was mainly with second langua-

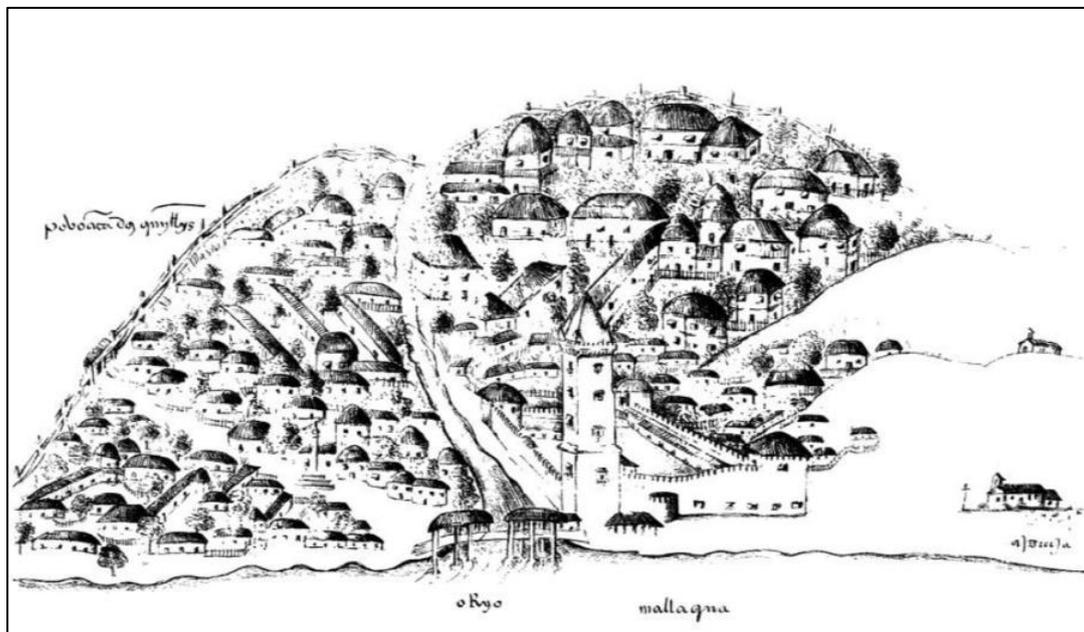


Figure 1: Melaka, early decades 16thC. Source: Correia (1860[1550-1563]:250-251).

⁷ Rather than the English term *mestizo*, the Portuguese *mestiça* and *mestiço* are used to mean, respectively, female and male of mixed *reinol* and Asian descent. The words *mestiço* and *mestiços* are used collectively to represent such persons.

ge versions of Portuguese, some being the most rudimentary, and everyone spoke Malay. With subsequent generations, the extent of contact with *reinol* Portuguese became progressively weaker in an inverse relationship with the *mestiço* and convert population. Different locations within the town implied different ethnolinguistic environments. An impression of this reality may be gleaned from the early 16thC image of Melaka by Curto 2009 (1858), Figure 1.

By the 17thC, contemporary documentation shows the Portuguese *casados*⁸ and soldiers were concentrated mainly in the town, slightly less so in the fortress, and sparsely inland and to the south of the fortress. Obviously, for the non-Portuguese population, residence in close quarters with the administrative, military and missionary elements provided a different degree of contact with Portuguese in contrast with residence in an Indian, Chinese, or Javanese/Malay quarter, or a quarter of mixed ethnicity.

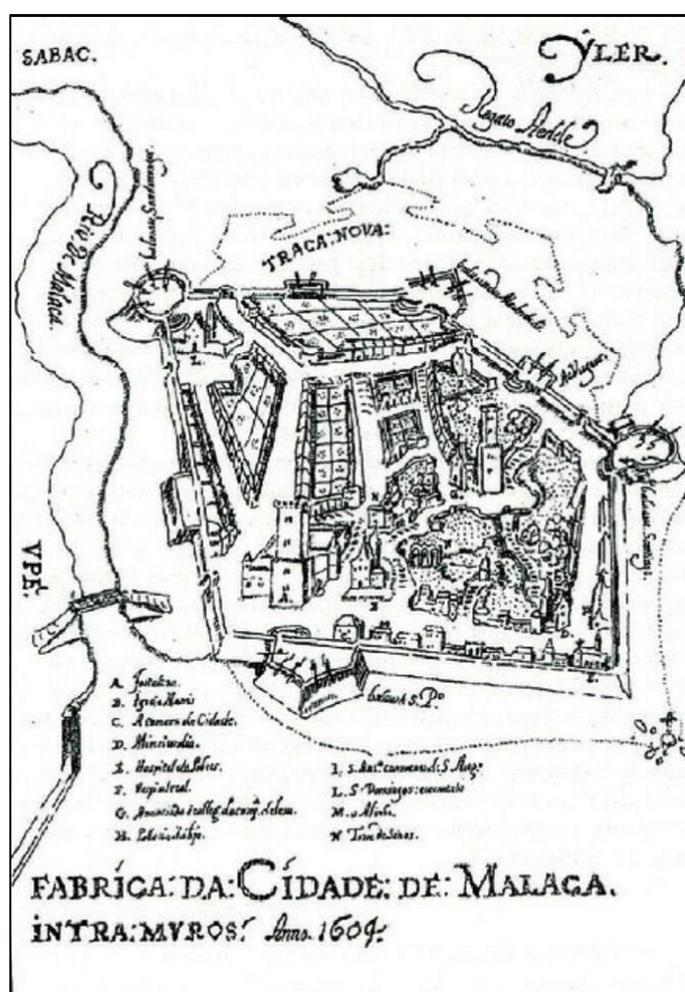


Figure 2: Melaka intra-muros, 1614. Source: Erédia (1881[1630]:9).

In this overall setting, I propose that there were two main trends of generational language transmission based on Portuguese: one closer to influence from European Portuguese, with less influence from Malay, and another closer to influence from Portuguese and

⁸ Portuguese officially married to Asian women.

Malay spoken as second languages. Creole Portuguese emerged in this latter sector, and I contend that the population of this sector would have attained a sufficient volume by the mid-16th century for L2 Portuguese to have achieved a reasonable levelled stability for some children to have acquired an L1 variety based on the L2 variety. In sum, the ancestor of MCP probably began to emerge gradually around the mid-century.

I believe it is feasible that in the post-foundation period, new arrivals in Melaka joining the local *cristão* society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may have contributed to the evolving MCP. Inter-enclave communication was significant. Melaka was a key port in the Portuguese trade network that extended from Goa to Southern India and Ceylon, the Bengal-Arakan region, Southeast Asia and beyond to Macao. Evidence from contemporary 16th and 17th observers shows that this network carried a traffic of Portuguese and their various auxiliaries and slaves. It is reasonable to assume that these included speakers of other varieties of Creole Portuguese and rudimentary Portuguese spoken as a second language. Potential source locations include, among many others, Cochin, on the Malabar coast, Nagapattinam, on the east coast of India, and even Batticaloa, on the east coast of Ceylon.

By the end of the Portuguese period, it may be assumed that the two currents of language transmission in Melaka had firmly established a population of locally born speakers of two main language varieties: one approximating to European Portuguese, and the other a Creole Portuguese language in its own right. Needless to say, varieties of L2 Portuguese must have continued to exist throughout.

5.4 What was proto-MCP like?

Unfortunately, no samples of the language during the Portuguese period (1511-1641) have yet been located. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate a reasonable hypothesis as to the grammatical structure of proto-PK, the ancestor language of MCP. Proto-PK spoken by components of the *cristão* social space would have been influenced by naturalistic second language learning, by local vehicular Malay⁹ and other native languages of the Catholic converts, and by elements of contact Portuguese from South Asia.

6. The shaping of MCP in the Dutch period

The Dutch conquest of Melaka in 1642 had profound consequences for the profile of the Portuguese speech community¹⁰ and for the nature and maintenance of its language. To visualize aspects of the external sociolinguistic ecology, I considered information concerning the demography of the town, Dutch attitudes towards the Portuguese speech community, and aspects of VOC activities.

⁹ Early descriptions of Malay began to appear at the beginning of the 17thC.

¹⁰ For convenience, the term “Portuguese” is used collectively to represent both the gamut of Portuguese-lexified linguistic varieties present in Melaka in the earlier centuries, and their speakers. These linguistic varieties comprised L1 European Portuguese, versions of L2 Portuguese, Pidgin and Jargon Portuguese, Portuguese Foreigner Talk, and varieties of Creole Portuguese.

6.1 The remaining Portuguese population

An examination of the demography reported in Dutch documents reveals that in 1642 the remaining Portuguese community (of *reinol* Portuguese, *mestiços*, converts and their slaves) formed the largest single group among the town population. Even nearly four decades after the Dutch conquest, in 1678, it was still at close to 43% of the total of 2773 free persons. Although some *casados* had remained, the *mestiços*, and the slaves of both these groups, formed the largest component of the Portuguese community. Clearly, the language of this majority was now less prone to influence from *reinol*-modelled Portuguese, while contact with Malay remained constant. Although the community's population alone would initially guarantee linguistic continuity, Dutch restrictions on the practice of Catholicism, during 1645-1666, very likely reinforced its cultural identity, aiding linguistic unity and maintenance.¹¹

6.2 Dutch use of Portuguese

In former Portuguese enclaves, the Dutch were obliged to use Portuguese in their management of their new conquests, and in interaction with their populations (Groeneboer 1998; Taylor 2009). In Melaka as in their other colonies, the Dutch Reformed Church provided religious services and pastoral care in Portuguese, and it operated a school in Portuguese well into the 18thC (Vander Walle 2012:152).¹² These activities are assumed to have employed an approximation of *reinol* Portuguese. Such practices would have reinforced the presence of a higher lect of Portuguese and a register common to transactional activities.

However, the use of Creole Portuguese must have been common to many of the Dutch in Melaka. Similar to the former Portuguese colonial presence, the Dutch presence in Asia was also male-dominated. Dutchmen cohabited with local women, especially Luso-Asian *mestiças*, and slaves of Indo-Portuguese cultural origins (Ketelaars 1985; Groeneboer 1998; Taylor 2009). The use of Creole Portuguese became common in such Dutch households and even among the Dutch themselves (Taylor 2009:18-19, 42-43).

6.3 Further issues associated with VOC endeavors

Without a doubt, demographic movements occasioned by VOC activities introduced some speakers of other varieties of L1 and L2 contact Portuguese. Documented Dutch slaving to Melaka included such South Asian locations as the Coromandel coast, the Arakan/Bengal region and Ceylon (Vink 2003, Coolhas 1968), all potential sources of speakers of contact Portuguese.

Furthermore, the constant current of VOC administrative personnel and sizeable military contingents from Batavia could also have contributed to the use of Creole

¹¹ The supervision of the religion became embedded in the Portuguese-speech community itself through its Dominican confraternity.

¹² In view of the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in education, its archives deserve attention. Unfortunately, this research was not possible within the scope of the present project.

Portuguese in Melaka. In 17thC Batavia, Creole Portuguese, as L1 and L2, had become the widest spoken language alongside Malay, owing to the many slaves from former Portuguese-controlled areas of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Thus, VOC personnel often had prior experience with Portuguese and, especially with Creole Portuguese.

6.4 What was MCP like in the Dutch period?

No samples of the Creole Portuguese spoken in Dutch Melaka have yet come to light. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate a reasonable hypothesis as to the grammatical structure of the creole based on 17th century pidgin and 18th century creole texts originating in Java. Such a procedure is justified by the close communication between Melaka and its capital, Batavia, their parallel administrative and social structures, and similar sociolinguistic settings.

This proposal is underpinned initially by a remarkable text of Pidgin Portuguese from the second half of the 17thC, included in the botanical study of Meister (1692), an employee of the VOC during 1677-1688 (Maurer 2011:343-348). In a brief observation on the text, Maurer listed the 9 features shown in Table 1, noting that they are found in Batavia CP and Tugu CP. They also have cognates forms and/or functions in MCP:

Table 1: Features of 17thC Batavia Pidgin Portuguese compared with modern MCP

Pidgin Portuguese (Batavia)	Modern MCP
(i) future marker <i>lo</i>	<i>lo</i>
(ii) copula and existential marker <i>teng</i>	<i>teng</i>
(iii) object marker <i>por</i>	object marker <i>kù</i>
(iv) repetitive <i>torna</i>	<i>tona</i>
(v) negator <i>nungku</i> with action verbs	<i>nungka</i>
(vi) negator <i>non</i> and its allomorphs with stative verbs	<i>nun</i> and its allomorphs <i>n-</i> and <i>ng-</i> with stative verbs
(vii) 3 rd person plural pronoun <i>ilotërs</i>	<i>ilotu / ilotru</i>
(viii) modal verb <i>muste</i> (<Ptg <i>mister</i> ‘necessity’)	<i>miste</i>

In a re-analysis of the pidgin text, I identified further features with cognates in modern MCP, bringing the total to 17. The pidgin text lends support to the idea that these features would have been common to MCP in the 17th century. Subsequently, I verified that the 17 features have cognates in data from late 17th/early 18th century Java CP (Castro et al. 2022), and the description of 18th century BCP (Anon 1780) studied by Maurer (2011).

The late 17th/early 18th century Java CP texts display variation involving elements of creole and *reinol* Portuguese. I interpret this as a reflection of the sociolinguistic profile of the Portuguese-speaking community in Java/Batavia and the effect of official VOC use of Portuguese. I propose that the setting in Melaka would have been similar, in view of the two Portuguese-based linguistic dimensions within the community: one *reinol*-modelled, and the other the creole of the majority.

In contrast, the materials of later 18th century BCP in Anon (1780) suggest a more levelled and cohesive language, remarkably similar to modern MCP. Although excessively simplistic, example (1) serves to convey an idea of this resemblance, by

placing Maurer's (2011:134) transcription of a BCP text adjacent a parallel text in modern MCP:

- (1) BCP: *nu meo di matu teng ung pos grandi,*
 MCP: *na miu di matu teng ungua posu grandi*
 LOC middle of forest EXIST ART well big
 'In the middle of the jungle, there was a big well,

tredji brasu kung trêś peo su fundu su largura ses peo
trezi brasu kung tres peu sa fundu sa largura ses peu
 13 arm with 3 foot POSS bottom POSS width 6 foot
 thirteen arms and three feet its depth, its width six feet

dos dedu. Ung kobra grandi fika medu por ola teng ala
dos dedu. Ungua kobra grandi fiká medu olá teng (n)alá
 2 finger ART snake big get fear PURP look COP there
 two fingers. A big snake, frightening to see, was there

dentër skundidu. Ilotër larga aquel lugar.
(d)rentu skundidu. Olotu largá akeli lugá.
 in hide.PP 3PL leave DEM place
 hidden inside. They left that place.'

In the forthcoming study, I note that analyses comparing the core vocabularies of BCP and MCP reveal a 96% correspondence, and I show that further parallels in five core areas of grammar are striking. Indeed, Maurer (2011:5-6), in an extensive description and analysis of the grammar of Batavia Creole Portuguese, observes that although there are differences between the two languages there are far more similarities with MCP than with the South Asian CPs.

In this regard, the close connections between Melaka and Batavia, and their parallel social and ethnolinguistic settings are significant: shared VOC administration and military contingents, Malay as the traditional lingua franca, slave populations drawn from former Portuguese enclaves and, in the case of Batavia, a population imported from Melaka in the 17thC. As such, I contend that 18thC BCP and MCP were virtually variants of the same overall language.

By the late 18thC and early 19thC MCP was clearly the language of the overall Portuguese speech community. However, it appears that that a minority had additional knowledge of a higher lect. These were probably the better off group of land owners and traders identifiable in contemporary documents. I draw attention to a range of transactional documents written in a higher register of Portuguese modelled on European Portuguese. A vestige of earlier times, it would have been reinforced to some extent by

VOC use (including in education) and the renewed presence of Portuguese missionaries in the 18thC.

7. Survival into the early British period.

In researching the British period that the Dutch handover in 1825, I found scattered references to the MCP community and its language. The census of 1827 reports that the majority of the community, located in Banda Hilir, is poor, primarily engaged in fishing, and staunchly Catholic. This view is ratified in observations from subsequent decades, yet white-collar occupations are also noted, and a better-off part of the community was detected in the northern areas of the town. While the overall town population of Chinese and Malays had increased immensely, the MCP community's population had remained much as in the mid-18th century, at just over 2000. Indeed, owing to migration to Singapore and other developing centres, its population was still at this level in the decade of 1880.

It is in this early British colonial period that the first notices of the form of MCP begin to appear. A Protestant missionary teaching children from the MCP community reported that the local 'Indo-Portuguese' resembled the Ceylon variety, and requested didactic materials in that variety. Examining the language of a catechism printed by the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Melaka in 1827 I found a close resemblance to missionary Ceylon Indo-Portuguese of the early 19th century. However, it only partially approximates to the grammar of modern MCP. This raises two questions. Firstly, whether general MCP, or a lect of part of its speech community, displayed more resemblance to Ceylon Indo-Portuguese in the early 19th century. Secondly, whether the LMS schools could have influenced the form of MCP in the 19th century.

The situation is only clarified in the 1880s. Prostes (1882), from first-hand observation in Melaka, reported fragmentary examples of the language, noting the form of the verb, pre-verbal TAM particles, the use of a 1SG possessive determiner, negator *nunca*, and certain aspects of the lexicon. However, two years later, Hugo Schuchardt began a research project on MCP. While this project never reached the publication stage, a rich set of resources was gathered through the efforts of two priests who had direct access to the MCP speech community.

The bulk of this material was sourced by Fr Nicolau Pinto, of the Portuguese Mission, who spoke MCP fluently as second language. These materials are preserved in the Hugo Schuchardt Archiv of the University of Graz. They provide a clear picture of the form of MCP at its basilectal level, yet also furnish evidence of a higher register used in written communication, possibly spoken among a better-off minority. The linguistic texts are complemented with notes by Pinto concerning grammatical structure and certain sociolinguistic questions. The latter include comments on the ethnic composition of the MCP community, the community's linguistic self-identity, and the use of MCP as a second language among the Chinese.

In the forthcoming study, ten of these texts furnish data for a comparative discussion of points of MCP grammar. They are classified by register, according to a set of creole and Portuguese morpho-syntactic features. The texts are of three types: (i) transcriptions of oral basilect; (ii) written basilectal approximations; and (iii) non-basilectal materials comprising texts of personal correspondence. The transcriptions of oral basilect are of special interest, comprising a personal narrative, and two interviews, all from identified informants in sessions conducted by Pinto. The material reveals a close similarity with modern MCP. Example (2) is an extract from the personal narrative:

(2) *Eu tambem já achá cholera. Padre Vicente*

1SG also PFV get cholera Father Vicente

‘I also contracted cholera. Father Vicente

já vae ungé com eu, e elle ollá eu sua pulso e

PFV go anoint ACC 1SG CONJ 3SG look 1SG POSS pulse e

went and anointed me, and he checked my pulse and

mandá viziá com eu bom bom que.foi eu muito fraco e

order watch ACC 1SG good good because 1SG very weak CONJ

ordered to watch over me carefully because I was very weak and

não tem pulso. Eu já bebé brandi com agoa e

NEG have pulse 1SG PFV drink brandy COM water CONJ

didn’t have a (firm) pulse. I drank brandy and water and

já ficá parado. Aquelle tanto gente já morré com cholera

PFV stay stopped DEM many people PFV die CAUSE cholera

the illness passed. So many people died from cholera.’

This narrative displays several of the core structural properties noted in comparisons with 18th and 19th C data from the other SEACPs and modern MCP. These include post-nominal possessives (*eu sua pulso*), uninflected verb base <PTG PRS.3SG (e.g. *tem*) or INF (e.g. *achá*), copula derived from PTG (e.g. *tem*), TAM marker *ja*, bare verbs representing perfective aspect (e.g. *ollá*, *mandá*), short negator with stative verb (e.g. *não tem*) and, Ø-copula predication (e.g. *eu muito fraco*), and accusative object marking (e.g. *mandá viziá com eu*).

7.1 Aspects of 19th century MCP grammar

In the forthcoming study, discussion of 19th century MCP grammar focuses on five areas that have been identified as prime structural characteristics of varieties of Asian Creole Portuguese by previous researchers (Ferraz 1987; Clements 2000, 2009; Cardoso 2020):

- Possession structures
- The verb and the syncretic copula
- Tense-aspect-mood markers
- The negation system
- Direct and indirect object case marking

My central aim was to assess the extent to which these areas of grammar resemble those of Modern MCP and those of 19th century SMCP, 18th century BCP and 19th century TCP and MacCP. Further objectives were to identify evidence of variation, change and diversification in the MCP of the 19th century. Here, I briefly comment on some aspects of the above points, principally in relation to the basilectal MCP texts.

7.2 Possessives, and copula structures

In general, I found that there were no categorical differences between the basilectal level of 19thC MCP and modern MCP. Rather, differences related to variation in the actual forms used to represent functions common to both varieties. This was the case both with the expression of possession and in the form of copula structures.

Possession was indicated both by a 1SG prenominal possessive determiner (example (3)) and by the post-nominal genitive construction (example (4)) available to all person-number possessors:

(3) *Minha mulher*
 POSS.1SG woman
 ‘My wife’ (HSA 8845)

(4) *Eu sua filho*
 1SG POSS son
 ‘My son’ (HSA 8845)

In 19thC MCP, the post-nominal genitive occasionally permits anaphoric elision of the possessor head, hence resembling a pre-nominal possessive determiner, a phenomenon present in Modern MCP (Baxter & Bastos 2012). In contrast, in the non-basilectal materials, the pre-nominal possessive determiner is almost categorical.

However, both Pinto’s correspondence regarding the Schuchardt materials and Coelho (1967[1882]) present evidence of variation in the form of the 1SG prenominal possessive determiner, occurring as *minha*, *mia* and *meu*. Coelho (1967[1882]:177), in example (5), also registers the presence of *minha* as head of the post-nominal possessive, a structure found in Batavia and Tugu CP, raising the possibility that the form was also present concurrently in MCP, or in earlier forms thereof.

- (5) *Minha su crença já afoga.*
 POSS.1SG POSS child PFV drown
 ‘My child drowned.’ (Coelho 1976[1882]:177)

At the same time, the form of the possessive marker in the post-nominal possessive construction displays variation in Coelho’s SMCP data, occurring as *sua* or *su*. This variation is absent in the Schuchardt MCP materials, where the marker is consistently *sua*. Schuchardt’s collaborator Pinto makes no mention of a variant *sa*, which is reported in data collected 40 years later by Rêgo (1942). Hence it appears that *sua* was the predominant form in MCP and the reduction of *sua* to *sa* may not have yet become sufficiently evident for Pinto to notice.

When compared with the other (S)EACPs, the MCP data finds close parallels in BCP and TCP, where both have the 1SG possessive determiner *minya* and the post-nominal possessive construction, as well as the compound form of POSS.1SG + POSS (BCP, *minya sua* ‘mine’; TCP, *me sua* ‘my’). Furthermore, the BCP and TCP also employed pre-nominal possessive determiners to some extent. I take this to be a vestige of earlier phases when the sociolinguistic setting in Batavia included a wider lectal grid.

7.3 Copula

Where copula structures are concerned, the Schuchardt MCP data present instances of copula *teng* with AdjP and NP predications, while Coelho’s (1967) SMCP data present similar examples, with AdjP, NP and PrepP predications. At the same time, both 19thC MCP and SMCP data sources present examples of copula-less predications. Examples (6) and (7) show AdjP and NP predication, respectively.

- (6) *Este criança triguêro.*
 DEM child feisty
 ‘This child is feisty.’ (HAS 11.23.6.1)

- (7) *Ele uma gente doide.*
 3SG ART.DEF people crazy
 ‘She/he is a crazy person.’ (Coelho 1967:176)

In Modern MCP, the situation has changed substantially: the norm is for copula-less predication with NP and Adj predicates. Although copula *teng* is used with PrepP predications, it is not normally used with the other predication types, except in the fixed greeting *Teng bong?* ‘How are you (lit. are you well)?’

A comparison with BCP and the situation in subsequent TCP again lends support to the idea that earlier MCP once had a more significant use of *teng* copula. In 18th century BCP, Maurer (2011:67-68) found only rare instances of absence of copula, with NP

predication, although in 19th century TCP it was frequent, occurring with NP, AdjP and PrepP predications.

7.4 Negation, TAM and object marking

Where negation, TAM and object marking are concerned, the data available in the Schuchardt materials and in Coelho (1967[1882]) closely resemble modern MCP. Of these three systems, negation was found to be the most cohesive and consistent across the (S)EACPs compared, and it is identical in Modern MCP. However, differences were found across the compared varieties with regard to TAM marking, and object marking.

The TAM systems of the other (S)EACP varieties resemble, but are not identical with, that of 19th century MCP. For example, the Batavia system employs the imperfective marker *sta/ste* to express continuous and habitual aspects (Maurer 2011:63), whereas in MCP imperfective *ta* is primarily a marker of progressive aspect. Moreover, while the functions of bare verbs are similar across the (S)EACP varieties, there are differences regarding the use of TAM marking. Thus, in 19th century and modern MCP, overt TAM marking is prevalent, but in 18th century BCP and 19th century TCP the bare verb appears to have been the prevalent form (Maurer 2011:53, 61). MacCP of the 19th century presents a partly similar profile, where perfective aspect is more frequently indicated with a bare verb than with the marker *ja* (Nunes 2010).

A similar divergence among the (S)EACPs involves object marking. The limited data of object marking in 19th century MCP by means of a derivation of Portuguese *com* ‘with’ matches the system of object marking of Modern MCP described in Baxter (1988). Human objects represented by pronouns, proper nouns and common nouns are generally marked, whereas indefinite and generic objects are unmarked. The semantic function of object marking in BCP and TCP closely resembles that of 19th century MCP. However, different from MCP, BCP and TCP, and MacCP employ two markers, one derived from Portuguese *por/para* ‘for’ and the other from Portuguese *com*, in a partly overlapping distribution. In the case of BCP and TCP, overlooking certain sub-system details, the distribution of the two markers may be stated in simplistic terms: the former only marks pronominal objects, whereas the latter marks pronominal and nominal objects. In both Batavia and Tugu CP, the *com*-derived marker is dominant. Since both markers occur in BCP, TCP and MacCP, they were probably both present in earlier forms of MCP.

The comparative survey lends reinforcement to the traditional notion of a congruent set of morpho-syntactic features among the Southeast and East Asian varieties of CP. Data from the Schuchardt materials suggest that, in the areas of grammar considered in this chapter, 19th century MCP differs little from Modern MCP. In many regards it closely matches 18th century BCP and 19th century TCP, and partly MacCP.

8. Conclusion

The four centuries of colonial rule of Melaka before the 20th century hold many untold details of MCP and its speech community. The research touching upon many of the issues

mentioned here yielded several significant findings, opening a number of productive paths for further inquiry. The present paper provides glimpses into my forthcoming study regarding some of the prime factors that determined the origins and continuity of the language, the nature of its earlier forms. The roots of the MCP speech community, lie in population movements, ethnolinguistic contacts, religious association linked to a Portuguese socio-cultural superstructure, and an internalizing self-identity dynamic.

Within these glimpses, there are many surprises, not the least of which are the complexity and diversity of the paths of miscegenation and incorporation of persons into the *cristão* sociocultural space, and the constitution of two differential tendencies of localized language transmission within that space: one ultimately engendering the Kristang language, and the other a variety of Portuguese approximating the European variety. Subsequently it seems that the Dutch unwittingly contributed in many ways to the persistence of both these linguistic varieties. Among the most significant proposals of this research are: (i) the fact that core grammatical characteristics of the modern Kristang language were current in the 17th century; (ii) that the form of 18th century Kristang can be assessed deductively from the rich documentation the closely related variety of Batavia CP; and (iii) that 19thC basilectal MCP closely matches modern MCP.

However, in many ways the exploration of the earlier periods of MCP is still at an initial stage. There remains a wealth of information to be researched in the archives of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial eras in Melaka. Hopefully my upcoming study will inspire further investigation in this direction, and in relation to other varieties of Asian Creole Portuguese.

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