IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society 42

The art of losing

Beyond java, patois and postvernacular vitality – Repositioning the periphery in global Asian ecologies

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https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.42.12lim

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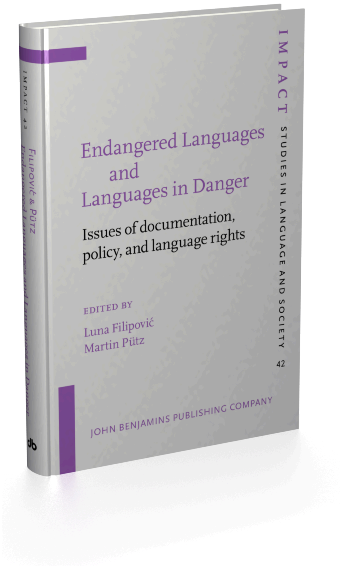
Pages 283–312 of
Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of documentation, policy, and language rights
Edited by Luna Filipović and Martin Pütz
[**IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society**, 42]
2016. ix, 413 pp.



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IMPACT STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY 42
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The art of losing

Beyond *java*, *patois* and postvernacular vitality – Repositioning the periphery in global Asian ecologies

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This paper discusses issues in endangerment and postvernacularity in the context of Asia, a region with complex dynamics in multilingual ecologies that also includes the presence – dominance – of English, a language that entered the ecologies through colonisation. I use as illustration two minority communities with endangered vernaculars – the Malays of Sri Lanka, brought from various parts of the Malay archipelago by the Dutch and British colonial powers, and their vernacular Sri Lanka Malay, traditionally known as *java*, a mixed language of trilingual base (Malay, Sinhala, Tamil); and the Peranakans, descendants of southern Chinese merchants who settled in Malaya and intermarried with local women, and their vernacular Baba Malay, a restructured variety of Malay with southern Sinitic influences, usually referred to as *patois*. I query if linguistic and cultural loss is inevitable, or if such situations of shift – to a language of wider communication or an emergent variety – are in fact instances of empowerment and evolution in response to change, where a repositioning of the periphery in the new global economy brings greater accessibility to and participation in the Centre, and better adaptation for surviving and thriving.

Keywords: Asia, ecology, empowerment, patois, Peranakans, postvernacular, shift, Sri Lanka Malay

1. Introduction

"The art of losing", says poet Elizabeth Bishop (1983), "isn't hard to master / so many things seem filled with the intent / to be lost that their loss is no disaster". The potential loss of 90% of the world's languages within 50 to 100 years is, in the discourse of endangerment, by now widely recognised, and has been met

DOI 10.1075/impact.42.12lim
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in recent decades with urgent calls and initiatives by scholars and supranational bodies such as UNESCO to counter such an inevitability. But a traditional Peranakan saying suggests: *Dah sa chupak tak boley sa gantang* 'a quart will never make a gallon', that is: you cannot change destiny. In this paper[1] I contemplate these sentiments: Is the loss of the ancestral language and culture of a minority community indeed inevitable? What factors play a part in the art of losing such that the destiny of such communities evolves to become empowerment rather than endangerment?

I discuss the issues involved in situations of shift and endangerment in the context of Asia, a region that affords complex dynamics in multilingual ecologies that also includes the presence – dominance – of English, a language that entered the ecologies during colonisation. To this end I use in a close study two communities that are interesting to examine for points of comparison and contrast: the Malays of Sri Lanka, and the Peranakans of Singapore. Both were formed in the time of, and as a consequence of, the development of exploitation colonies in Asia – globalisation of another age. Both are considered creole communities, and have seen language shift and endangerment of their ancestral languages – respectively Sri Lanka Malay, known to the community as *java*, and Baba Malay, referred to as *patois* – and revitalisation. Additionally significant is that these are not remote communities, in hotspots of linguistic diversity and poverty (Romaine 2014); rather, for the most part they may be considered primarily urban, somewhat privileged, communities.[2] This makes them no less significant: the phenomenon of urban linguistic diversity is receiving increased attention, in particular in this era of modern-day globalisation (Endangered Languages Alliance 2012; Siemund, Gogolin, Schulz & Davydova 2013; Lim 2013–2016). While the pragmatic needs of global urban cultures often trigger rapid language shift and loss, resulting in dramatic endangerment situations, it is often in the diaspora in urban contexts that ancestral language practices or cultural vitality are maintained.

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[1] I thank Martin Pütz for inviting me as a keynote speaker at the 36th International LAUD Symposium in Landau, Germany, 31 March to 3 April 2014, which gave me the perfect opportunity to develop and present this work. It was a particular honour to be invited alongside some of the most eminent scholars in the field: Peter Austin, Bernd Heine, Li Wei, Salikoko Mufwene, Shana Poplack, Suzanne Romaine, and Sally Thomason. I am very much obliged to colleagues who provided constructive comments on my work during and after the presentation, in particular, Peter Austin, Li Wei, Andreas Musolff, Salikoko Mufwene, Mário Pinharanda-Nunes, John Singler, Chris Sinha, Eeva Sippola, and Bernard Spolsky – their views have helped put this paper in better shape. I also thank my constant collaborator Umberto Ansaldo and the anonymous reviewers of this paper whose comments have helped me articulate the issues and arguments more clearly. Research grants that have supported various dimensions of research for this paper are: *Exploring the Peranakans as China-West locus in Southeast Asia: The continuing evolution of their linguistic repertoire*, Seed Funding Programme for Basic Research, The University of Hong Kong, and *The ecology and evolution of Asian Englishes*, Research Grants Council (RGC) General Research Fund (GRF) 2011/12 Exercise, Hong Kong, as well as, previously, *The documentation of Sri Lanka Malay: Linguistic and cultural creolisation endangered,* Volkswagen Stiftung initiative for the Documentation of Endangered Languages (DOBES).

[2] This paper focuses primarily on the urban community in Colombo. In earlier scholarship, the Colombo dialect, meant to represent SLM as a whole, is the one usually described, though

2. The days of *java* and *patois*

2.1 The Sri Lankan Malays

The Malays of Sri Lanka came to be through one of the central practices of Western colonialism, namely, the movement of subjects from one colonised region to another. In this way sizeable communities of people from Indonesia (the Dutch East Indies) and Malaya were settled on the island of Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) through various waves of deportation, the majority tracing their ancestry to the communities brought over during Dutch rule (1656–1796) and during British rule (1796–1948).[3] At least three different communities could be distinguished. First, there was a rather sophisticated diaspora of noblemen – nobility exiled during Dutch occupation of the East Indies – who typically would be deported together with their families, as were political exiles from different corners of the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, including Java, Borneo, the Moluku and Goa, among other places. Second, 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, imported first by the Dutch to form a 'Malay' garrison,

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variation between the different communities is briefly acknowledged (Saldin 2001); the issue of variation is addressed in more recent analyses (see e.g. Ansaldo, Lim & Nordhoff 2006). Two points bear mention here. First, while there is a strong sense of identity and separateness for each of the different communities (Ansaldo and Lim fieldnotes 2003–2006), they nonetheless all identify themselves as Sri Lankan Malays. This has surely been the case since colonial rule where this 'Malay' diaspora is attested as 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). Second, however, is the significance of the distinction between the more urban and the more rural communities, where the degree of centralness as opposed to periphery has an impact on issues such as the degree of endangerment faced as well as the implications for citizenship participation (for an account see Ansaldo & Lim fc.).

[3] It is possible that the community based in the Slave Island district in Colombo may have been there during Portuguese rule (until 1656).

which would become the Ceylon Rifle Regiment under the British who continued the same practice (Ricklefs 1974). The soldiers too could also be accompanied by their wives, a practice encouraged during Dutch and British rule (Sourjah 2003; Ansaldo 2008, 2009). A third group comprising convicts, slaves and indentured labourers was surely present from as early as Portuguese occupation, and such importation continued through both Dutch and British rule. Contacts between the groups were indeed quite frequent, due among other reasons to the practice of employing noblemen as officers of the troops, master-servant relations and a common, Islamic faith (Hussainmiya 1987, 1990; Ansaldo 2008, 2009). Overall, the community referred to collectively as 'Sri Lankan Malays' constituted not just single individuals but also included family, retinue, and network ties, whose origins, and thus ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, are very heterogeneous, covering an area from Northern Malaysia to the easternmost provinces of Indonesia (Hussainmiya 1987, 1990). In an earlier era, in fact, these peoples were known as *Ja Minissu* by the Sinhalese and *Java Manusar* by the Tamils: 'people from Java' (Saldin 2003: 3). It was the British who, upon finding a community who spoke 'Malay', attached the corresponding ethnic label to the group, and it is this designation 'Malay' that has persisted.

Since the late 1800s, the Malays have comprised approximately 0.33% of the population, and are still today a numerical minority in Sri Lanka, with the majority Sinhalese comprising two-thirds to three-quarters of the population, and a significant minority of Tamils comprising a quarter of the population. They are also a minority in name. They were subsumed in the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 – together 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). They have thus not had a distinct identity as 'Malays' at this official level. Only very recently are they mentioned in name, albeit grouped together with other communities as "Moors, Malays, Burghers (of Portuguese and Dutch descent) and others" (Government of Sri Lanka 2014).[4]

As a small minority in contact with the major ethnic groups in Ceylon, it is not surprising that, over the centuries, various aspects of the Malay / Indonesian community evolved to become 'Sri Lankan'. While their religious practices were maintained in the Muslim tradition, the community assimilated numerous cultural traditions of the two dominant ethnic groups of the island, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. For instance, until only very recently, the Sri Lankan Malay women have worn the South Asian *sari* as their traditional dress, rather than *baju kurong* or sarong *kebaya* as in Malaysia and Indonesia (Saldin 2003: 1), and weddings involve payment of a dowry as in Hindu practice, in contrast with Islamic tradition which only involves the groom's payment of *mahar* to the bride's father (Saldin 2003: 67).[5]

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[4] In censuses, though, Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lanka Moor, Burgher, Malay, and Other are separate ethnicity categories.

Linguistically, the early Malays would have been speakers of the Malay lingua franca that had existed since the 1st millennium AD in the monsoon Asia region, particularly along the trade routes between southern China and northwest India, most often referred to as Bazaar Malay (Adelaar & Prentice 1996), as in example (1). This Malay variety would have been in contact with two typologically distinct adstrates: colloquial Sinhala, the dominant language of the population of Sri Lanka, and Lankan Tamil, spoken by, amongst others, traders and plantation workers, illustrated in (2), (3). What evolved was a unique restructured variety now known as Sri Lanka Malay (SLM), a mixed language of trilingual base, with lexical items predominantly from Bazaar Malay and grammatical features, including V-final word order, number and case morphology, and agglutination, from Sinhala and Tamil (Aboh & Ansaldo 2007; Ansaldo 2008, 2009; Ansaldo & Nordhoff 2009), illustrated in (4), contrasted with Standard Malay in (5). SLM is usually considered a creole in the literature, with more recent work capturing the process of language creation as one of metatypy (Ansaldo 2009, 2011) leading to a hybrid profile of Lankan grammar and Malay-derived lexicon.

(1) *saya tak tahu cakap melayu* (Trade) Malay (Austronesian)
I NEG know speak Malay
'I can't speak Malay'

(2) *eyaate hungak salli tiuna* Sinhala (Indo-European)
he-DAT much money exist-PAST
'he had a lot of money'

(3) *ongalukku ayare teriyumaa?* Tamil (Dravidian)
you-DAT he-ACC know
'do you know him?'

(4) *samma anakpada manahari iskulnang arpi* Sri Lanka Malay
all child-PL everyday school-DAT DUR-go
'all the children go to school every day'

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[5] Due to the religious affinity with Muslim Tamils, there have been historical and linguistic speculations suggesting that Sri Lankan Malay communities descended from Tamil-Malay intermarriages. This is however a mistaken view based on skewed interpretation of historical sources and not supported by recent historical and linguistic evidence (Ansaldo 2008).

(5) *kanak-kanak semua sehari-hari pergi sekolah* (Standard) Malay
child-2 every one.day-2 go school
'all the children go to school every day'

In addition to their restructured vernacular, the Malays in Sri Lanka have also been noted for being the most multilingual of all the co-existing communities on the island – Sinhalese, Tamils, Burghers – having in their repertoire, alongside their SLM vernacular, the major languages spoken on the island, namely Sinhala and Tamil; in some strata, their repertoire also included the language of the colonial power (Lim & Ansaldo 2007; Ansaldo & Lim 2014).

Such a multilingual repertoire afforded many Sri Lankan Malays the opportunity to function in both Dutch and British Ceylon as intermediaries between colonisers and locals, as they were proficient in the languages needed to interact with all parties concerned. For instance, a majority of the ancestors of the Colombo, Kandy and Hambantota communities were Javanese nobility exiled during the wars of succession in Java during Dutch rule.[6] The proficiency in Dutch of the older Javanese allowed them to be 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. With increased production of cinnamon, these superior officers would be rewarded with more power, promotions and privileges (Burah 2006). 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 the Malays joined the tea estates and, with their proficiency in English, functioned as intermediaries between the English superintendents and the Indian labour force (Saldin 2003: 10). In short, as a consequence of their privileged origins, at least in some cases, and their multilingual repertoire which also included the colonial language, the Sri Lankan Malays have held a status amongst the communities that has been high.

Sri Lankan Malay communities are found around the island, in both the urban centres and the rural peripheries, as a consequence of their diverse origins and settlement patterns. The communities vary in their socioeconomic and

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[6] 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).

Table 1. Sri Lankan 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

educational status, and their linguistic repertoire and communicative practices, as summarised in Table 1 (Lim & Ansaldo 2006, 2007, adapted from Ansaldo 2008). This holds implications for ethnolinguistic vitality, and language shift and endangerment. This paper focuses primarily on the urban community in Colombo.

In spite of their low symbolic capital within the modern nation state, their ethnolinguistic vitality (after Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977) has always been high. There has been 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). Given the symbolic and social capital of the community as outlined above, and their dense and multiplex networks, it is not surprising that SLM was widely spoken as a home language for generations (Hussainmiya 1986).

2.2 The Peranakans

The Peranakans are descendants of southern Chinese seafaring traders who settled in the Malay archipelago from at least the 17th century and who married non-Muslim natives of the region, such as Balinese or Batak slaves. Settling primarily in Malacca and Penang in peninsular Malaysia, and in Singapore – British colonies on the Strait of Malacca which were amalgamated in 1826 to form the Straits Settlements – the Peranakans comprised one of the earliest and largest groups of the influential class of Chinese capitalists in the region. In contrast to the Chinese who returned to China, the Peranakans, even with their trading movements between the ports of southern China and Southeast Asia, always returned to the Straits Settlements and considered Malacca and Singapore their home. Until as recently as the 1950s, only the Straits Chinese (as the Peranakans were also called) could be considered 'permanent', 'native', or indigenised Chinese communities in the region (Song 1923/1967, in Kwok 2000: 205). The new hybrid culture that emerged in this context shows unique traits that set the Peranakans apart from other Chinese, the more indigenous local populations, and other ethnically mixed groups (Tan 1988b; Rudolph 1998). Non-linguistic examples include a mixed *nyonya* cuisine consisting of Chinese culinary practices largely influenced by Malay traditions, and the wearing of Malay / Indonesian *sarong* and *kebaya*, instead of the Chinese dress, by the women. These contrast with the retention of Chinese rituals, such as religious practices mentioned above and traditional wedding customs involving imperial era wedding costumes (Tan 1988b: 299). According to some observers, the Peranakans had "lost touch with China in every respect, except that they continued to uphold Chinese customs, and to practice, in variously modified forms, the social and religious practices of the forefathers" (Lim 1917, cited in Kwok 2000: 202; Tan 1988a: 47). (See Lim 2010a and 2016 for detailed accounts of the Peranakan community.)

In the linguistic world, in particular in creole studies, they are probably best known for their vernacular, Baba Malay (BM), a restructured variety of Malay with substantial southern Chinese (primarily Hokkien) influence. As can be seen in examples (6) and (7), amongst other things, the BM pronominal system derives from Hokkien, and the word order too is Sinitic. Both the sociocultural identity of the Peranakans and their vernacular as a creole language have received scholarly attention (e.g. Tan 1988a, b; Pakir 1986; S. Lim 1988; Rudolph 1998; Ansaldo & Matthews 1999), with their being compared with the more typical creole communities (Ansaldo, Lim & Mufwene 2007).

(6) *Gua punya bilik* Baba Malay
1SG POSS room
'my room'

(7) *Bilik saya* Malay
room 1SG
'my room'

Due in no small part to the fact that they had been in the region longer, more continuously and more permanently than the other Chinese immigrants, the Peranakans formed the larger proportion of the influential class of Chinese capitalists in the Straits Settlements, having established themselves in the mining of gold and tin, the large-scale commercial agriculture business (in gambier, pepper, tapioca, and especially rubber), import-export business, and other economic enterprises that had been drawing Chinese to Malacca for years (Tan 1988a: 48). By the time of the European exploitation colonisation of the region in the 19th century, most Babas of Malacca had accumulated much wealth and become prestigious subgroups in the region, forming separate communities of their own. In particular they distinguished themselves from the later Chinese immigrants, referring to them derogatorily as *sinkeh* 'new guests', i.e. 'new arrivals', whom they considered poor and with low social status (Tan 1988a: 45). In Singapore as well, the Babas were a class apart from the other ethnic groups. Although small in number ('Malacca men' comprised only 2.5% of the Chinese population in 1848, growing to just 9.5% in 1881), their social and economic influence was disproportionately strong in comparison, and they formed an important sector of the local elite (Kwok 2000: 202–204). By the 1920s, Singapore-born Peranakans controlled the pineapple industry, and most of the rubber which was cultivated, at one time more than 8000 hectares in Singapore as well as in Malaya – which, together with tin, drove Singapore's prosperity in the late 19th and the 20th centuries (Liu 1999: 98). In Malacca, the well-off Baba were able to take over the houses of the great Dutch merchants in Heeren Street which then became "the fashionable and aristocratic resort of the Chinese" (Braddell 1853: 74). In Penang, it was also noted that the Chinese "who have long been settled in the place, and who have wedded native wives, dwell in large and elegant houses environed with fruit and flower-gardens" (Thomson 1875: 13). In Singapore, the Peranakans were wealthy enough to afford weekend retreats or second homes in the form of seaside bungalows – some with swimming enclosures – in the East Coast of the island, an increasingly attractive residential area from the end of the 19th century (Liu 1999: 148).

Just as in Ceylon, in the politics of segregation introduced by the Dutch in Southeast Asia (Reid 2000) and continued by the British, individuals of mixed origin were used as middlemen, merchants and interpreters between the colonial administration and local population and newer arrivals. Many of them worked for the British (as well as, in earlier days, the Dutch) East India Company (Tan 1988a: 51f.), and their command of the English language meant closer contact with British administrators and merchants (Nathan 1922: 77). Furthermore, their multilingual repertoire which comprised Baba Malay, Bazaar Malay, Hokkien and possibly one or two other Chinese languages, as well as English, and their knowledge of local ways afforded them a significant role as intermediaries between

Europeans, locals, and Asian newcomers (Tan 1988a; Kwok 2000; Lim 2016). All this together with their business acumen gave them predominance in the commercial sectors (also see Ho & Platt 1993: 8–9), and they were considered the best educated, wealthiest and most intelligent section of the Chinese community (Nathan 1922: 77).

English was already becoming an increasingly important language of Southeast Asia, especially British Malaya, from the early 19th century. Being wealthy merchants of high social standing, the Peranakans not only held a high regard for English-medium education but crucially were one of the earliest and privileged few in Singapore who had access to it, and sent their children, including girls – a rare occurrence in that era – to English-medium schools. By the early 1800s, members of the community had established four educational institutions in Malacca and Singapore which were especially important to the development of the community (Tan 1988a: 52). The establishment of the Queen's Scholarship in 1885 for British subjects in the Straits Settlements further enabled a few Peranakans to be educated in higher institutions in Britain, producing scholars and leaders (Tan 1988a: 65, 82). Already in earlier days the Peranakans were noted to have spoken English "tolerably well" (Earl 1837, in Tan 1988a: 50). By the mid-19th century their ability to converse in this colonial language had strengthened their prominent socio-economic position within other local communities in relation to the British, to the point where they were in fact sometimes referred to as the "King's Chinese" (Tan 1988a: 53), in relation to the King of England.

In other ways they realigned themselves culturally, distinguishing themselves from the continuously increasing population of China-born immigrants by their local (Malayan) orientation and their pro-British sentiments (Tan 1988a: 54f.). In their social clubs "to which they will admit no native of China … they play billiards, bowls, and other European games, and drink brandy and soda ad libitum" (ibid.). Not an uncommon observation then was for Peranakans "on being asked if they were Chinamen [to] bristle up and say in an offended tone 'I am not a Chinaman, I am a British subject'" (Vaughan 1879). Identifying politically with the British (Kwok 2000: 205), they formed the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) in August 1900,[7] with an admitted aim to promote trade with, and foster loyalty to, the British Empire (Song 1923: 319).

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[7] The Malacca branch of SCBA was formed in October of the same year (1900), and the Penang branch was founded later in 1920. The Associations are all still extremely active to date, with the Singapore one renamed The Peranakan Association.

3. The times they are a-changin’

Thus far, we have seen how, during the colonial period, in both communities, the language of the colonisers – earlier Dutch, then English for the Sri Lankan Malays; English for the Peranakans – was acquired and/or wielded to their advantage in attaining greater access to symbolic and economic capital and mobility. Long before what we consider today’s ‘globalisation’, the English language in British colonial contexts was already a main player in language shift scenarios. Subsequently, the language policies instituted in both nations at independence in the mid-20th century, with ideologies of assimilation and/or internationalisation, consolidated the shift, as outlined below. (See Lim 2010b and 2013 for accounts of Singapore and Sri Lanka.)

3.1 Sri Lanka

While English education was introduced to the British subjects of Ceylon during British rule, as in all the other 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. Significantly, most of those who received English education were those in American mission schools in the Tamil north (Colebrooke 1831, cited 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. Ceylon Tamils comprised only 12.4% of the population in 1946 (distinct from Indian Tamils, agricultural workers who were regarded as stateless persons but constituted another 10.4% of the population). Nonetheless, with their resource of English, they were, conversely, well represented in government service, as well as in medicine and law, far more than their share of the population (Bailey 1998: 216). Such a pattern continued through early post-independence Sri Lanka, and it is perhaps not surprising that, as a result, the dominating sentiment was of Tamil favouritism under colonial rule. Leading up to independence in 1948, with a prime minister who was extremely concerned about ethnic and religious harmony and who envisioned a multicultural, secular democracy and a multiracial state that did not favour any ethnicity or any section of any ethnicity, the Legislative Council in 1944 made Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of Sri Lanka. Later, with the rise of Sinhala nationalism, the new coalition government led by Bandaranaike in 1956 proclaimed, in the ‘Sinhala Only’ Act, Sinhala as the sole official language of Sri Lanka. This has been seen to have been catering to the large rural Sinhalese electorate, allowing the Sinhalese scholars to enter political and economic domains, and rectifying past injustices, as English would no longer hamper Sinhalese economic and social development. In spite of the official line, there was a continuing emphasis on English as the language of administration; it remained an important language in the public sector, which was a major provider of employment (Fernando 1996).

A decrease in teaching and learning English after independence also occurred: in the 1950s, while English was not officially banned from education, it was widely believed that it was forbidden to have an English stream in schools and English-medium schools were considered illegal (Gunesekera 2005: 76–77). Ironically, English continued to be a valuable language, because it was the language of commerce, science, technology and a host of other functions in Sri Lanka and internationally. In particular, when the state decided to liberalise the economy in 1977, the public sector shrank with the privatisation of many state-owned companies. At this point, many Sri Lankans, who had received public education in Sinhala or Tamil, and thus had little or next to no English competence, had to face stiff competition for jobs in the private sector which required English, or now limited jobs in the public sector. Thus the children from the elite or rich and urban Sinhalese or Tamil families, who had received private education and had learnt English, had the advantage in employment in particular in the private sector. Nationalism had simply reinforced elitism and exclusivism for English in Sri Lanka.

The implications of such language policy in concrete terms meant that, in the urban Colombo community, where the level of English-medium education was already high, Sri Lankan Malay parents and grandparents made the conscious decision to speak to their children in English in the home domain (Saldin 2001, 2003; Lim & Ansaldo 2006, 2007), 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). The general pattern displayed is a clear shift to English from SLM in the home domain. As a result, by the end of the 20th century, the community was typically showing 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; Lim & Ansaldo 2006, 2007). SLM now had a mere fifth position in the community, after Sinhala, Tamil, English and Arabic (the last in the religious domain). SLM in the urban community is no longer a home language for the younger generation of Sri Lankan Malays.[8]

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[8] Such a shift is found primarily in the urban, English-educated Colombo community, and to a lesser extent in more recent years in the other large urban centres such as Kandy (Sebastian Nordhoff p.c. 2007; Ansaldo & Lim fc.).

We can see the explanation for this choice in terms of the capital the various languages possess in the country. In the local linguistic market – of school, profession, politics – Sinhala is recognised as a necessary capital and accepted without battle; it has in any case always been in the Sri Lankan Malays' repertoire. Similarly, English has been an important variety in their linguistic repertoire; it was a language which allowed the Sri Lankan Malays many privileges as colonial subjects, and in postcolonial Sri Lanka a multilingualism including English was recognised as crucial to the Sri Lankan Malays. In consequence, SLM which has a low capital in the local linguistic market was forfeited, and thus became not only a minority and marginalised language, but also an endangered one.

In the early years of the 21st century, the SLM community recognised the shift that was occurring and the potential obsolescence of their variety, and took steps towards its revitalisation. However the variety selected for revitalisation activities was Standard Malay of Malaysia, due to several factors (detailed in Lim & Ansaldo 2007; Ansaldo & Lim fc.). First, because previous publications on SLM classified it as a creole, the community's perception of their own language was less positive, viewing it as an 'imperfect' code and an ungrammatical dialect of Malay (e.g. Thaliph 2003; Colombo SLM community p.c. August 2006). Second, in contrast with the status the community has in their own country, greater recognition was forthcoming instead from Malaysia (and also Indonesia), in at least two significant and related thrusts, both clearly seen as arising from scholarly and transnational contexts which have associated symbolic and material markets. One of the objectives of Malaysia's Institute of Malay Language and Culture has been "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 was the organisation in Colombo of language classes in the Standard Malay (StdM) of Malaysia (*Bahasa Melayu*). Moreover, the Malaysian High Commission in Sri Lanka in those years demonstrated interest in, and strong support for, the Sri Lankan Malay community, and provided aid in terms of student scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Malaysia, as well as in job market openings, with one of the requirements of the latter being competence in basic Malay. It is not surprising then that it was with Malaysia that the urban Sri Lankan Malay community aligned themselves then, both in terms of language and identity. After two pioneering courses in StdM in 2002, eight of the best students – note: from the Sri Lankan Malay community – underwent a teacher's training course in Malaysia and then conducted regular classes in StdM for the community. During that period, in the annual *Hari Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language Day) organised by the community in Colombo in August 2006 and 2007, activities such as essay-writing and oratory contests were conducted for both SLM and StdM (Ansaldo & Lim fieldnotes 2006–2007; Lim & Ansaldo 2007). Ironically, when

StdM-speaking Colombo Malays attempted to communicate in Malay with Sri Lankan Malays from the other communities, they were not intelligible to each other. In short, the promotion of StdM – far from revitalising SLM – was further endangering the vitality of SLM in the urban environment.[9]

3.2 Singapore

Leading up to Singapore's independence, English was made one of the four official languages – the 'neutral' language not linked to any ethnic group, and associated with modernity and progress – with Malay, Mandarin and Tamil the official 'mother tongues' each associated with the three official races of Malay, Chinese and Indian. English became the medium of instruction in all schools by 1987, and Singapore became for all intents and purposes an English-dominant society. With the Peranakans categorised as 'Chinese' in Singapore's official racial classifications, young Peranakans studied Mandarin as a second language in school rather than have Malay reinforced. Singapore's modern-day ecology also afforded young Peranakans much less exposure to BM: the shift from BM to English was already in place in the community, and other factors, such as the change from extended to nuclear family units, meant that BM speakers of the grandparents' generation were not as present in daily domains as in the past. Furthermore, the demise of BM-speaking generations meant an overall reduction of BM (speakers) in the ecology (Lim 2010a). In the mid-20th century, even while most Peranakans still identified themselves with BM (Tan 1988b) at least symbolically, English grew in importance in the Peranakan community as a lingua franca, resulting in an increasing shift to English as the only vernacular and identity marker (paralleling the broader situation in Singapore as a whole). While BM had competed fairly well with English as a lingua franca until the early 20th century, by the end of the 1960s English had almost completely prevailed de facto as the means of interethnic communication par excellence (Rudolph 1998: 335). Baba Malay is now considered an endangered language, classified as vulnerable (Alliance for Linguistic Diversity, n.d.).

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[9] In sharp contrast are the more rural SLM communities such as that found in Kirinda, which is relatively peripheral as a small fishing village on the southeast coast. 90% of the village are Malay, and they comprise some 4% of the 46,000 SLM population. With a dense and multiplex social network, limited educational and employment opportunities, they exhibit strong maintenance of the vernacular across all generations. The variety of SLM in Kirinda is structurally distinct from other SLM varieties, where, lexically and grammatically, there seems to be a stronger influence of Sinhala and Tamil; trilingualism in SLM, Sinhala and Tamil is very common in all generations (Ansaldo 2008). There was thus no endangerment of the language here; on the contrary, the language displays a high vitality, as the dominant language of all generations of the community, spoken in all domains, even as the working language in the Tamil-medium *madrasah* (school). Kirinda is often said to be the only fully vital community of Sri Lankan Malays in which a young generation of speakers of a SLM variety as first language can be found; similar vitality has also been documented in the Upcountry communities (Sebastian Nordhoff p.c. Jan 2006). Ironically, the 'revitalisation' efforts in Colombo and increased prominence of StdM in the discourse on language led to the Kirinda community becoming even more explicitly aware of the more prestigious variety and the possibilities it might – in theory – hold for them. In 2006, plans were underway for StdM to be taught in the village school as a subject, to children who in fact were native speakers of SLM, as well as to be used as a default written language, for example, in the signs (e.g. 'no shouting'; 'show respect') displayed around the school (Lim & Ansaldo 2007). In other words, while SLM was never endangered in Kirinda, the discourse of the urban centre – involving the promise of increased economic mobility via the 'revitalisation' of a standard variety – was impacting on the periphery, and threatening to displace their vernacular.

4. The art of losing

To return to the trope in this paper, "[t]he art of losing", to repeat poet Elizabeth Bishop, "isn't hard to master / so many things seem filled with the intent / to be lost that their loss is no disaster". The series of losses presented by the poet – including her mother's watch, houses, cities, continents – come with reassurances that all may be absorbed: one might "miss them, but it wasn't a disaster". In this section I explore the question of whether ancestral language loss in a community, such as that found for SLM and BM, is a disaster – in terms of the irrecoverable loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, including their correlation to biodiversity and sustainability, as well as the implications for cultural identity and linguistic human rights – all of which are widely recognised by scholars as well as supranational bodies such as UNESCO. I then continue with a consideration of whether such 'loss' is a development that may in fact be embraced.

4.1 Value for linguistic science

As with most other languages considered endangered, the imminent obsolescence of these varieties together with their value for linguistic science have been recognised by scholars. I briefly mention some aspects below.

SLM, together with a very few other varieties of the region (e.g. BM, Cocos Malay) – unlike its better-known Caribbean 'creole' counterparts – is noted (Ansaldo 2008, 2009; Ansaldo & Lim fc.) for being typologically in a unique position of providing us with an ecology in which no Standard Average European[10] 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, with marked typological differences amongst the languages in contact. As such, SLM can help shed light on issues of universality and specificity in contact-induced language change (Ansaldo 2008, 2009). The relationship between the three language communities involved in its evolution – that is, the Malays, Sinhalese and Tamils – was also of an altogether different type than the better-known creole scenarios of exploitation, slavery or intermarriage between coloniser and slave,[11] and thus provides contrastive material for our understanding of typologies of language contact.

BM, in addition to being valued as a contact language, has also recently been recognised for its significance in the evolution of New Englishes (Lim 2011, 2014, 2016). The pattern of word- or phrase-final prominence found in Singapore English (SgE) contrasts with all other contact varieties in which tone has evolved, such as Nigerian English or Hong Kong English, where the general pattern locates high (H) tones on what would be stressed or accented syllables at word- or phrase-level. SgE's unusual prosody can be explained if we consider the Founder Principle in the ecology paradigm (Mufwene 2001, 2008), which suggests that the founder population in an ecology exerts a strong influence on features, an influence which persists in the emergent variety, and if we consider the Peranakans as a founder population in Singapore's ecology, one with significant economic and social prominence in the ecology. Word-/phrase-final prominence which is widespread in many Malay varieties, is documented in BM, and also developed in PerE as a result of contact in the Peranakans' multilingual repertoire. The Peranakans, though a small minority, were clearly dominant in the external ecology, as outlined earlier, due to their political, economic and social status, and their position as intermediaries, and later as teachers. As early English adopters, crucially during the British colonial period, theirs would have been the early features influencing the emerging variety of SgE.

In short, SLM and BM are significant varieties for informing studies of language contact, language evolution as well as cultural creolisation.

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[10] 'Standard Average European' is a term introduced by Whorf (1941/1956) to refer to Indo-European languages of western Europe on the basis of their sharing structural similarities. More recently, Haspelmath (2001) uses the term to refer to a number of traits characterising a Sprachbund, or linguistic area, defined by a core of twelve features that can be considered 'euroversals'.

[11] Though the type of colonisation and the evolution of the contact variety are comparable.

4.2 Capital in languages of wider communication

A positive note for the fields of creole studies and language endangerment is that both SLM and BM have by now received substantial documentation. A related but separate issue is whether the varieties should see revitalisation in their communities, for the sake of cultural identity and ethnolinguistic vitality of the community. Scholars certainly have held that “there is no language for which nothing at all can be done” (Fishman 1991: 12), and programmes for reversing language shift were already being outlined two decades ago (e.g. Fishman 1991). Revitalisation activities are on the schedule in numerous projects (see Hinton 2011).

Other scholars have however queried the attention and activities involved in such an endeavour of halting language shift and/ or revitalising endangered languages. The late Peter Ladefoged suggested that, since language death is a natural part of the process of human cultural evolution, linguists should simply document and describe languages scientifically, but not interfere with the process of loss and revitalisation. A poignant anecdote, often cited but well worth mentioning, provided by Ladefoged (1992: 810–811), is as follows:

> Last summer I was working on Dahalo, a rapidly dying Cushitic language, spoken by a few hundred people in a rural district of Kenya. I asked one of our consultants whether his teen-aged sons spoke Dahalo. ‘No,’ he said. ‘They can still hear it, but they cannot speak it. They speak only Swahili.’ He was smiling when he said it, and did not seem to regret it. He was proud that his sons had been to school, and knew things that he did not. Who am I to say that he was wrong?

In the urban Sri Lankan Malay and Peranakan communities, a shift to a regionally or globally more dominant language has in fact afforded significant opportunities for upward mobility. As mentioned in Section 2, having a language such as Dutch (in Dutch Ceylon) or English (in British India or Malaya) afforded the communities significant income-earning opportunities and positions as intermediaries. In the modern nation state, having languages such as English or Standard Malay in their multilingual repertoire affords the communities clear advantages in terms of economic capital in both the local and larger linguistic market.

In the case of the Sri Lankan Malays, this has been couched in terms of identity alignment (Lim & Ansaldo 2007; Ansaldo 2009; Ansaldo & Lim 2014), where the community is seen to preserve and represent their subject position by (i) not contesting their imposed identity (which is not negotiable) of ‘Muslim’ in the context of the nation-state; (ii) still maintaining their presumed ethnic identity as ‘Sri Lanka Malay’; while (iii) aligning themselves with an assumed global Malay identity, one which is accepted and not negotiated, via the acquisition of Standard Malay. The new languages shifted to are accepted by the community as legitimate, and valued as resources and not threats. Speakers have agency to opt for a 'shift' in which the economic and cultural functions of the language come together, and through such a choice the group is provided access to better education and enhanced political self-representation, while maintaining their subject position.

With the Peranakan community in the early 21st century, such a shift is no longer even viewed as a problem. As is evident in example (7), from the editorial of the Peranakan Association's (July/September 2002) newsletter, the actual code used by the community is not the issue, and the Peranakan identity and identification are clearly and positively recognised, whatever language is used, "be it [in] English, Malay or Chinese" as the editor writes.

(7) We Peranakans have our own way or style of speaking that has become our trademark, which those outside the community recognise immediately, be it in English, Malay or Chinese. One Nyonya, for instance, tells me she is never surprised when people she meets for the first time straightaway say 'Ah, you are Peranakan, right?

This description explicitly reinforces the observation made earlier in this paper: that it has been and still is the multilingual repertoire of the community that has been significant for their existence and cultural identity, from the colonial era to the present day, rather than any specific language that is critical to their vitality, whether ancestral or emergent (Ansaldo & Lim 2014; Lim 2016).

4.3 Emergence of new varieties

Even if we accept that shift to a language of wider communication might bring increased economic capital, as discussed in the previous section, it is still often hard to counter the argument that the loss of a language is usually accompanied by the diminishing of cultural diversity and loss of intangible cultural heritage. Yet, this is not always the case. In some situations of language shift, the language of wider communication – such as English – with which the vernacular or ancestral language comes into contact, is, as noted by Woodbury (2005), at times adapted ideologically, if not always structurally, to communicative ends which are continuous with those earlier fulfilled by the ancestral language. This is observed, for example, in Aboriginal communities in southeast Queensland, Australia (Eades 1988: 97, 101):

> While many Aboriginal people [in southeast Queensland] may speak English as their first language, the context of conversation has significant Aboriginal cultural and social aspects which lead to distinctively Aboriginal interpretations and meanings. While the chosen language code is frequently English, there are

> important continuities in the ways language is used. … The Aboriginal priority on developing, maintaining, and strengthening social relationships is both reflected in, and created by, the way people speak to each other, whether the language variety is English, Aboriginal English, or Lingo [any Aboriginal language].

Similarly, in Koyukon communities in Alaska's interior, even in the rapid shift from Koyukon to English, cultural patterns are transferred (Kwachka 1992: 70–71):

> The Koyukon people have been able to transfer and permute a very important cultural pattern at the discourse level, the tradition of narrative. … Although [stories from a distant time] are rarely told today, the narrative, as a social and rhetorical structure, has not only persisted but flourished.

In the Peranakan community in Singapore, the emergent variety is a distinct contact variety of English, Peranakan English (PerE), first documented in Lim (2010a). In written mode (based on a corpus of newsletters published by the Peranakan Association (1994–2008), PerE involves numerous lexical items of Baba Malay and Hokkien origin, conveying cultural practices, food, naming and address practices, exclamations, greetings, wishes and thanks, a sample of which are shown in the examples in (8).

(8) a. *dondang sayang* [Malay]: love ballad, originating in Malacca in the 15th century, influenced by traditional Portuguese folk music, now a traditional form of entertainment for Malays and Peranakans involving violin two Malay *rebana* 'drums' and a *tetawak* 'gong', in which singers exchange Malay *pantun* 'poetry' in lighthearted and sometimes humourous style.

b. *biji saga seeds* [Malay *biji* 'seed']: small, hard, bright red seeds from the fruit pods of the red sandalwood, also known as coral tree or saga tree, a deciduous tree found in tropical and subtropical regions of the world; the seeds are used as beads in jewellery, leis and rosaries; they were also used in ancient India for weighing gold; the word *saga* is traced to the Arabic term for 'goldsmith'

c. *kimpoh choh* [Hokkien]: maternal great grandaunt

d. *May we extend to all readers a Selamat Tahun Baru* [Malay 'happy new year'] *and may you all enjoy panjang panjang umor* [Malay 'very long life'] *in the year of the Goat*

e. *The Main Wayang Company would like to say a big KAMSIAH* [Hokkien 'thank you'])

In spoken form, PerE is even more clearly a single English-*Baba Malay* code (Lim 2010a), illustrated in example (9) (Lim 2010a: 336).[12] The speaker, an 81-year-old female, was typical of her generation in having spoken Baba Malay and English with her parents and later her husband, primarily English and Baba Malay with her siblings, and also having Cantonese and Hokkien in her repertoire. She studied in an English-medium school until she was 16, completed her Senior Cambridge examination and teachers' training college, and thereafter went on to become a teacher.

(9) Like drugs you know when you're under drugs … The babies come out crying crying. *Apa dia mo? mo?* Drugs. *Nanti* alcohol the same. They get into their system. *Kita semua tak drin[k]* … Keep yourself clean and healthy. Don[t] drin[k] don[t] drin[k].
'Like drugs, you know, when you're under the influence of drugs … The babies are born crying. What do they [the babies] want? Drugs. Then it's the same with alcohol – it gets into your system. We all didn't drink. … Keep yourself clean and healthy. Don't drink.'

It is clear that aspects of the ancestral culture involving address practices, food, certain cultural and religious practices, and terms of emotive import and value judgement are still transmitted in the emergent contact variety. In other words, the evolution of a mixed code affords the maintenance of culture even if the ancestral language is no longer maintained. Cultural diversity can be and is still maintained, and indexed, in an emergent variety. It may not be felt by older heritage language speakers to convey with precisely the same meanings and affect what is conveyed in the heritage language. But the emergent variety has the advantage of being a variety that is adapted to the immediate, current ecology, and a variety that is acceptable – native – to the younger generation: this means that it is in a good position, as seen in the Koyukon situation above, not only to survive, but to flourish.

4.4 Postvernacular vitality

Minority and endangered language communities such as the Sri Lankan Malays and the Peranakans were groups which saw their formation and evolution in the particular sociohistorical context of the Dutch and/ or British colonial eras.

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[12] The data presented in Lim (2010a) are more English-dominant, since PerE is the focus; in interactions between Peranakans in whom BM is more active, usually in the older generations, a higher frequency of BM is documented (Lim fieldnotes 2010–2015).

Writing about the British Straits Settlements, Bloom (1986: 360) recognises this very fact, pinpointing "the amalgam of Asian cultural traits and the English language in groups such as the Straits Chinese, Anglo Indian groups and Portuguese Eurasians, in particular in the Straits Chinese, [was] unique to the Straits Settlements, which made them an indigenous culture in a palpable sense". The ecology in which they were formed has however certainly changed – to the modern nation-states of Sri Lanka and Singapore respectively. A changing ecology, as already seen, often catalyses shift from and loss of an ancestral language. In this section, I explore in some detail the question of whether the overall cultural vitality of such communities is negatively impacted as well.

Indeed, for a period, the Peranakan community seemed not to have been evolving along with the times: as noted by Peter Lee, a core figure in the community, the community had chosen what has been seen in retrospect a self-imposed exclusivity during the 1960s–1970s, and remained in "ultra-conservative mode, lost touch with the reality of the world then and painted itself into a corner" (Yap 2008). The imminent obsolescence was predicted not only for their language but just as much for the cultural group itself, with predictions being made of "the dying out of the Peranakans" (Kwan-Terry 2000: 96). The new century has however witnessed a renewed vitality of both the Peranakan community in Singapore (Lim 2010a, 2014, 2016), and the Malay community in Sri Lanka (Ansaldo & Lim 2014, fc.), one that has complex layers.

On the one hand, in both communities, there is still symbolic maintenance or revitalisation of the vernacular and traditional culture. Within the Sri Lankan Malay context, while there already were publications by members of the community on their identity and language (e.g. Saldin 2001, 2003), as well as books comparing SLM with StdM (Saldin 2000; Thaliph 2003), further developments were largely the result of a large DOBES[13] documentation project which took place from 2004 to 2009. As outlined in Ansaldo and Lim (2014), documentation brought recognition to SLM as a variety with scientific capital, and thus the bias towards its creole or mixed nature was partly reversed. It became also obvious to the community over time that acquiring StdM was not the same as revitalising SLM, and eventually the latter became a priority in the community and affected the appeal of the former. Also as a consequence of the documentation project, SLM gained attention in the international community, and a number of academic publications reached the community – including a collaboration between academia and community in the form of an SLM dictionary (Saldin & Lim 2007).

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[13] The DOBES programme (Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen) was an initiative started in 2000 by the Volkswagen Foundation in order to document languages that are potentially in danger of becoming extinct within a few years' time; see http://dobes.mpi.nl/.

All this strengthened the perception that the Sri Lankan Malay identity was a unique one, separate from that of Malaysia and Indonesia and unlike any other within Sri Lanka. The unprecedented attention that SLM started and is still receiving now, not only from Western intellectual powerhouses, but crucially from local linguistic institutions, has further strengthened the renewed prestige of a Sri Lankan Malay identity centred in, though not exclusively limited to, its ancestral language. While English is still the dominant language of the urban Sri Lankan Malay community in Colombo, members now do make a point of holding their meetings (at least partly) in SLM. Through a reevaluation of their linguistic capital, SLM communities are now focusing a lot of energy on symbolic maintenance and revitalisation of the ancestral language.

The Peranakan community in Singapore experienced an exceptional surge in cultural vitality towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. This was due to a combination of several factors. A new group of leaders were elected to the community's association, who, as relatively prominent individuals in Singapore, garnered significant state support, both economic and symbolic, as well as presence in local media. Together these led to a level of cultural vitality in the community not seen in modern times (Lim 2014, 2016). There is documentation and maintenance of BM: works such as a BM dictionary and a collection of BM idioms (Gwee 1993, 2006) have been published; plays are written and performed regularly in BM; and a church in a traditional Peranakan district has been holding services in BM (though the BM-speaking priest passed away on 1 June 2013). The Peranakan Association's youth group has regular gatherings which involve not only engaging in Peranakan cultural activities but also revitalising BM by using it in popular culture, for example, in rap and hiphop by a group who set out to modernise Peranakan entertainment as a way to keep the heritage alive through innovation and to reach out to as many people as possible. Increased formal institutional recognition as an important cultural group and/or support by the state also resulted, for example, in a dedicated Peranakan Museum which primarily features traditional artefacts and practices, and the restoration of a traditional ancestral home of a Peranakan family as a heritage house, which opened in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

Both the Sri Lankan Malay and Peranakan situations as described thus far are best understood using the notion of postvernacularity (Shandler 2006), which describes situations where a language serves the purpose of identity-building within a community even after it has ceased to be used as a vernacular for daily communication, and has been receiving attention by several scholars in recent years, for example, with Yiddish in the US (Shandler 2006), Low German in Northern Germany (Reershemius 2009), and Breton (Hornsby & Vigers 2013). For the most part, studies on postvernacularity document the use of the postvernacular language in a number of cultural practices, such as amateur theatre, music and folklore, translation, attempts to learn the language in evening classes, and in its primarily symbolic value and the tendency to preserve only the language's most colourful or evocative elements.

However both situations would appear to go beyond such postvernacularity. This is primarily due to the recognition by the communities of no longer needing to be constrained by the ideology of purity. The Peranakan community, for example, is explicitly embracing evolution in the 21st century, as is evident in a number of different initiatives, as follows. Even in more 'traditional' showcases of the community's culture, such as in museums, there is innovation. As part of the Sarong Kebaya Exhibition in 2011 at the Peranakan Museum, curators provided for an opportunity to 'do' Peranakan – notably in languages other than BM, for example, in their storytelling event, conducted in English. An exhibition on Peranakan artefacts including furniture, beaded and embroidered textiles and porcelain, curated by Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum, which opened in 2010 at the musée du quai Branly in Paris was entitled *BabaBling* – using in its title the African American Vernacular English hiphop (though arguably now mainstream) term *bling* in a display of crossing. In the era of Web 2.0, both the Sri Lanka Malay Association and the Singapore Peranakan Association have websites and Facebook pages, which, apart from cultural items and symbolic uses of the language, are in English (though comments on the SLMA Facebook page may be in Malay or Sinhala). The Peranakan Association's stated aim is "preserving and promoting Peranakan culture" – with no mention of BM; and most of the contributions on the Facebook page *We Facebook in Nonya-Baba Peranakan Patois* – which "seeks to chat in Peranakan patois" – is in English. There is even a Peranakan presence in the virtual world of Second Life (Lim 2010a, 2014, 2016).

Two aspects merit highlighting. First, in both communities, the linguistic and cultural vitality the communities are experiencing is really embodied through all their language practices – that is, not only in their postvernacular languages of SLM and BM respectively, but also in their emergent languages of Sri Lankan English and PerE and SgE (which also include the mixing with the other languages in their ecologies), as already pre-empted in Section 4.5. Second, this challenges traditional wisdom in endangered languages literature of the link between language and identity and vitality of a community, in terms of the language being an essential part of a community's cultural identity and heritage. What is observed – in particular in the Peranakan community in Singapore – is an even stronger cultural vitality than before, in their emergent language.

But perhaps the most significant factor in their evolution has involved the relationship between the Peranakans as periphery and mainstream Singapore. This involved the appearance of Peranakan culture in mainstream media, in the form of two locally produced television series which aired on local televisions channels in 2009. One of them, *Sayang Sayang*, was a sitcom for the local English television channel, and the other, *The Little Nyonya*, was a drama series produced for the local Chinese television channel. The fact that *The Little Nyonya* series was in Mandarin – one of Singapore's four official languages and the major lingua franca amongst the Chinese community since the mid-20th century – raised a furore in the community: why were Peranakans depicted as speaking Mandarin? However, such programming actually meant that the series – and the entire existence of the Peranakans – reached three-quarters of Singapore's population, viz. the Chinese-speaking majority, many of whom became acquainted with the culture for the first time. This led, almost overnight, to the appreciation of the culture outside the Peranakan community, with non-Peranakans in Singapore embracing and consuming its cuisine and material culture. *The Little Nyonya* marked a milestone in terms of the Peranakan community moving into the mainstream.

Once in the mainstream, the value of the Peranakan heritage came to be recognised, and Peranakan culture came to be considered as representing Singapore culture. While they were a previously marginal community in a territory (e.g. subsumed, as they are still, under the category 'Chinese' in Singapore), the Peranakans were proclaimed by Singapore's Arts and Information Minister Lui Tuck Yew in 2010 "multiracial emblems of [Singapore's] social mix". Peranakan culture and performances are now showcased on the global stage as the essence of being Singaporean: Peranakan culture and performances have been used to represent Singapore at international events, such as at the Asia-Pacific Economic Committee (APEC) forum in 2009, and the World Expo in Shanghai, China, in 2010 which featured Peranakan culture in the Singapore pavilion. Singapore's National Heritage Board's newest range of museum merchandise which "celebrates Singapore and what makes us unique" includes the use of designs from Peranakan ceramic tiles (commonly used in Singapore in the past to accentuate the architectural design of shophouses) in prints "to celebrate the intricate beauty and the unique identity of the Peranakan heritage".

5. The art of evolving

To conclude, I return to the elements in the title and the quote at the start of the paper. Are Peranakans and Sri Lankan Malays trapped by the prediction in the traditional proverb *Dah sa chupak tak boley sa gantang* 'a quart will never make a gallon', that is, you cannot change destiny?

In the Sri Lankan Malays and the Peranakans, we see two communities who came into being through the practices of colonialism – 'globalisation' of an earlier age. We can view their creation and the creation of their original vernacular as a logical and natural outcome of (pre-)colonial contexts in which a community negotiates between adequating for political and/or economic advantage (or lack of disadvantage) and retaining or manifesting some of its uniqueness, in the form of a 'creole' identification. Then, in the ecology in which they existed, the acquisition of English and/or some other language of wider communication, such as Standard Malay – and note, that this is the addition of a new language to an already multilingual repertoire – is simply part of that story. It comprises a resource that they found themselves in a position to acquire, which afforded them significant positioning. In other words, 'shift' is simply a continuation of the same trend, one which may be considered positive in terms of speakers having agency in constructing their linguistic identity via identity alignment, and where their multilingual repertoire and/or multicultural identity does not change, even if individual languages in their repertoire change.

Speaking of creole communities such as the Sri Lankan Malays, the Peranakans, as well as the Macanese of Macau, Ansaldo (2010) suggests that such recurring linguistic alignment is particularly salient in communities characterised by linguistic and cultural admixture; this is a consequence of their multilingual practices, which allow them a wide spectrum of linguistic negotiation, as well as a historical heritage of their sociolinguistic conditions of minority-migrant groups adept at constantly adjusting to changing environments. More generally, it is a point that has been made by Mufwene (2004, 2007, 2008) that the emergence of new languages through contact language formation should be viewed as a continuous ongoing process in the cycle of language birth and death, and one needs to consider not just the cost but also the benefits involved in language loss (Mufwene this volume).

It has previously been suggested that endangered contact languages are doubly marginalised (Garrett 2006: 177–178): marginalised amongst the world's languages in general, and then marginalised again amongst endangered languages. In contrast, in the new global order, in particular with multilingual communities, it has been argued that "late capitalism has shifted the positioning of the multilingual [and/or multicultural] periphery … As zones of both authenticity and multilingualism, former peripheries have much to offer" (Heller 2013). In the situations of the Sri Lankan Malays and the Peranakans presented in this paper, I suggest that, if a community is open to evolution in a changing ecology, the loss of their ancestral language need not be a disaster, and the loss of cultural vitality need not be an inevitability. The addition of a language of wider communication to their already multilingual repertoire is not a loss, but a gain in terms of capital and mobility, with the community's culture and identity not being limited to any one language. The emergence of a contact language affords the continued embodying of substantial elements of culture and identity. And the repositioning of a periphery in the new global economy – as in the case of the Peranakans in Singapore, in particular – can transform a community to becoming an important site of authenticity, a source of added value, who does indeed have much to offer. The endgame is not just to participate in one's own postvernacular language community; rather, such evolution brings greater accessibility to and participation in the Centre, increased inclusion of the Other, and better adaptation for survival.

It is not accidental that the Singapore Peranakan Association's logo is a phoenix. As the mythical long-living bird that is cyclically regenerated or reborn, it is an apt symbol of the renewal that communities can undergo in order to survive – even thrive – in the changing ecologies that they experience, whichever language or languages they may speak. The art of losing is really the art of evolution and renewal.

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