

## Abstract

### What do we mean when we say 'Malay'?

Scott Paauw (University of Rochester)

The term *Malay*, as a name for a linguistic entity, is used by different speakers in different places to mean many different things. It means entirely different things to speakers in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Sumatra, and Eastern Indonesia. It is used to mean different things in the linguistic literature and in ethnographic studies.

Furthermore, there is great confusion when different varieties of Malay are considered. Observers commenting on the variety sometimes called *Bazaar Malay* have historically used, and in some cases continue to use, very different definitions of what the term refers to.

This study attempts to disambiguate the various linguistic varieties which exist under the banner of *Malay*, and to disassociate some of the terms from their political, sociological, historical, and even at times racist, connotations, and to provide a clear framework for classifying and describing Malay varieties. The historical development and expansion of the Malay language are considered, as well as the impact of modern political developments in states which use a variety of Malay as a national language (Indonesia and Malaysia, and, to a lesser extent, Singapore and Brunei).

The objective of this study is to propose a common terminology for Malay varieties and a method for defining varieties, as opposed to the competing and contradictory labels applied at present, both by speakers of these varieties and by linguists and other researchers who are interested in these varieties.