COCOS MALAY LANGUAGE SINCE INTEGRATION WITH AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are a remote Australian territory in the Indian Ocean and are home to the Cocos Malay people, who have developed a distinct dialect. It was predicted over 30 years ago that the Cocos Malay language faced extinction, perhaps even within the timeframe of one generation. Two possible threats to the Cocos Malay language were identified. It was felt that English, as the language of power, may replace the Cocos Malay language. The other possibility was language convergence, where Cocos Malay would be subsumed by another, larger Malay dialect. With these issues in mind, I explore developments in the Cocos Malay language since the Islands' full integration with Australia in 1984. Drawing from extensive ethnographic work and linguistic research into Cocos Malay I also refer to the work of other researchers to analyse how the Cocos Malay language has developed over the past 30 years, in a time of great social change. I argue that integration with Australia and attempts at assimilation have resulted in social dynamics where Cocos Malay language remains a defining marker of Cocos Malay identity positioning. In this social environment, Cocos Malay therefore remains viable and, despite language change, does not face immediate extinction.

Keywords

Cocos Malay, linguistic imperialism, language extinction, language convergence

Introduction

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands (henceforth simply referred to as the Cocos Islands) is an external territory of Australia located at 12.1 degrees south and 96.5 east - 900 kilometres south west of Christmas Island (Figure 1). Collectively the Cocos Islands and Christmas Island form the administrative entity of the Australian Indian Ocean Territories. The Cocos Islands fully integrated with Australia in 1984, following a United Nations' supervised referendum. The ensuing 30 years has been a period of rapid and significant social, economic and political change for the Cocos Malay community; marked by an increase in disposable income for families and enhanced mobility of Cocos Malay people. The Clunies-Ross family ruled the Cocos Islands under the umbrella of various legal entities as part of the British Empire, including a period under Singaporean administration and under Australian sovereignty since 1955 (Clunies-Ross, 2009). Throughout these periods of different jurisdictions, the Cocos Malay community remained under the authority and, in practical terms, the responsibility of the Clunies-Ross regime. However, in the 1970s and early 1980s Australia came under increased

international criticism for not appropriately exercising its sovereignty over its citizens and ensuring their rights to self-determination and access to basic human rights including education. It was against this contextual background that in 1984 the Cocos Malay community were offered an act of self-determination witnessed by the United Nations with three options: a) full integration with Australia; b) independence; or c) free association (ie maintaining the status quo under the Clunies-Ross regime) (Bunce, 1988). The vote resulted in full integration with Australia.

Figure 1 – Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands and their location in the north east Indian Ocean (source: http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S38/13/46E21/

Despite high levels of unemployment on the Cocos Islands since integration, contrasted to recollections of some older Cocos community members of 'full-employment' in the Clunies-Ross era, the introduction of minimum wages and a range of welfare benefits mean that the disposable income of Cocos Malay families has increased substantially since integration with Australia (Welsh, 1999). Compulsory education has become the norm and has increased mobility and led to social change. Cocos Malay children are educated on the Australian mainland for their last two years of high school, ie years 11 and 12 (Welsh, 1999), with partial funding support to do so. In recent times an increasing proportion of Cocos Malay students have continued on to tertiary education. This has meant that young Cocos Islanders who have been schooled on the Australian mainland have tended to stay on the Australian mainland on a longer-term basis. These educational opportunities also have a socially divisive outcome. For Cocos Malay young people who complete a university education, there are few employment opportunities back in the islands (Welsh, 1999). This remains the case today. Moreover, young graduates, with little employment experience in their chosen profession, find it difficult to compete for so few sought-after professional positions on the Cocos Islands. Given that the current population of the Cocos Islands is only around 600 people, jobs are scarce, particularly in specialised professional fields. This means that young people who have moved to the Australian mainland often find it difficult to return to the islands on a permanent basis.

The history of human settlement in the Cocos Islands is well documented from first settlement in 1826, on what were originally uninhabited islands. The group of first settlers represented a diverse ethnic mix and purportedly included people from Bali, Bima, Celebes, Madura, Sumbawa, Timor, Sumatra, Malacca, Penang, Batavia, Cerebon, Banjarmasin, Pontianak and Tasikmalaya (Bunce, 1988). In addition, convict and contract labourers from Java were brought in to the islands between 1837 and 1910 (Hunt, 1989). From first settlement, Malay was adopted as the main language of communication in the Cocos Islands' community. The origins of Cocos Malay have been linked to "the trading Malay lingua franca of the East Indies" (Bunce, 1988: 43). The unique mix of Malay speakers in the Cocos Islands, including the British colonials, compounded by geographic isolation, enabled the fusion and consolidation of different linguistic elements to develop as a unique Malay dialect. This included the adoption of loan words from Javanese, Sundanese and English, lexical and morphological 'distortion' and the emergence of original lexical items. Arthur Keyser, an author and colonial resident in territories of what are now Malaysia, reflected on his visit to the Cocos Islands in 1896, observing that "their language, mixed with English and Javanese words, was gradually becoming an exclusively local dialect" (Keyser, 1922: 205). In more recent times, Cocos Malay has been recognised as a unique Malay dialect (Lapsley, 1983; Adelaar, 1996; Welsh, 2001) and as a Malay creole (Lewis, 2009; Soderberg, 2014). In terms of the Cocos Islands context today, Cocos Malay is not used as a koine (a language or dialect arising from contact between two or more groups with mutually intelligible varieties of the same language) since its speakers, who have grown up in the Cocos Islands, do not speak other Malay dialects, nor other languages aside from English. Moreover, Sundanese, Javanese and English languages, from which loan words are evident in Cocos Malay, are not mutually intelligible with Cocos Malay. However, it is possible that Cocos Malay functions as a koine in other Cocos Malay speech communities, such as those in Malaysia. Based on Soderberg's (2014) research of Cocos Malay in Malaysia, it seems likely that Cocos Malay is used alongside other mutually intelligible Malay dialects.

Since full integration with Australia in 1984, the Malay community on the Cocos Islands has had to respond to rapidly changing social, political and economic environments. The past three decades have also been a time of great technological change, characterised by communication technologies and enhanced human mobility. In the face of such significant change and trends of globalisation, it has been predicted that the Cocos Malay language faces the imminent threat of extinction.

> *In recent years English-medium education has been introduced to the islands, and while the language is adapting to a rapidly changing socio-political environment, it is doubtful whether it will survive the present generation - given the size and the socio-linguistic vulnerability of the community.* (Lapsley, 1983:12)

It is against this contextual background that I seek to evaluate the predictions of Lapsley (1983) and Adelaar (1996) that Cocos Malay faces imminent extinction. In this article, I examine predictions of Cocos Malay being replaced with English, and of Cocos Malay converging with standard Malay. While discussion necessarily extends to other Cocos Malay speech communities, namely those on the Australian mainland, Singapore and Malaysia, my focus in this article is on Cocos Malay in the context of the Cocos Islands' speech community.

Researching Cocos Malay

In this article I draw reference from three key types of sources. These are: my own field work data, in the form of ethnographic and linguistic research; relevant literature written by other researchers; and online media sources that report on tensions in the Cocos Islands in 2009, in relation to language policies and the use of the Cocos Malay language.

My own data is the result of ethnographic fieldwork from 1993 until my most recent visit to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in September 2011. I worked as a Malay interpreter in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from mid-1993 until early 1995[1], and have subsequently visited the islands in 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2011, during which I conducted ethnographic and linguistic research.[2] In considering the state of the Cocos Malay language and influences upon it, I also refer to relevant literature produced by other researchers, particularly that related to the Cocos Malay language by Lapsley (1983), Adelaar (1996) and Soderberg (2014). Also relevant for informing this discussion is recent anthropological research into marriage migration to the Cocos Islands from other Malay speech communities by Winarnita and Herriman (2012) and a critique of approaches to education in the Cocos Islands schools by Bunce (2012). In drawing from a range of relevant research between 1983 and the present, I am able to analyse previous predictions and current trends that relate to the Cocos Malay language and community. This will include discussion of the effects of globalisation, mobility and technology on the Cocos Malay speech community.

In analysing issues of language use and the potential for language change, I draw from post-structuralist thought in relation to identity positioning, which is regarded as being temporary, dynamic, and fragile, as people readily adopt multiple identity positions across time and space (Bhabha, 1994; Weedon, 1997). Identity is an important reflection of language, whether it be the choice of a particular language over another, or in terms of language style. In analysing whether Cocos Malay is at risk of extinction due to competition with English or other Malay dialects, it is important to understand the social dynamics that influence language use. To do this, I draw upon the concept of dialectics (Krasner, 2004) and the works of Kristeva (1991), Said (2003) and Holliday (2011) that provide insights into how identity positioning of self and other can reflect a binary logic of a superior self and inferior other. This theoretical basis in identity positioning is useful for understanding processes at work that determine whether or not the Cocos Malay language remains viable, and how those processes operate.

Will English replace Cocos Malay?

There has been a long-standing recognition and acceptance of the importance of English by the Cocos Malay community that pre-dates integration with Australia. Examples from recent decades include John Cecil Clunies-Ross, the former ruler of the Cocos Malay community[3], teaching English to Cocos Malay children in the school he oversaw on Home Island in the 1970s[4] and compulsory school education for Cocos Malay children being introduced in 1980 (Bunce, 2012) with English as the language of instruction. Since integration with Australia in 1984, English has taken on an even higher level of importance, as the national language of Australia and as a necessary capability in accessing educational and vocational opportunities. The Cocos Malay people readily recognise the importance of English and have embraced opportunities to

develop English language capabilities for themselves and for their children. One example that demonstrates the acceptance of English by the Cocos Malay community was the uptake of free-of-charge adult English language classes provided by the Cocos Islands Administration[5], which ended in the early 1990s. The cessation of these adult education English classes was lamented by Cocos Malay people who had participated in the programs in order to improve their English and thereby enhance their employment prospects. Embracing English has not been, and is not, a problem for the Cocos Malay community. The problem, I argue, has been in an approach that imposes English to the exclusion of Malay, ie, the practice of linguistic imperialism[6]. This approach is underpinned by assumptions that English is a superior language, reflecting a binary logic that positions Cocos Malay language as inferior. The implications of this binary logic can mean that Cocos Malay culture and people are also regarded as inferior. This kind of logic readily leads to repressive attitudes and risks resulting in tensions in intercultural relations.

As reported in the Australian[7] and foreign media[8], tensions arose in the Cocos Islands in 2009 over institutional policies of language use. It was reported that the Cocos Islands schools and shire council were applying repressive policies with regards to the use of Malay language, banning the use of Malay and requiring the exclusive use of English. As a result of Cocos Malay shire council staff being instructed to only use English and not to use Cocos Malay in the workplace, there was "a breakdown of relations"[9]. Cocos Malay leaders were angry about a lack of respect for their culture and people. In a bid to help resolve tensions, the Federal Minister of Home Affairs visited the islands, and proposed a 'common sense' approach to language use where both languages should be accepted. Concerns also arose in 2009 in relation to the Cocos Islands schools when restrictions were applied on the use of the children's native language. In a bid to increase the use of English, Cocos Malay students were being punished at school for speaking their native Cocos Malay (Bunce, 2009; 2012). As a former teacher on the Cocos Islands in the 1980s, Bunce (2012) critiques what she witnessed during a return visit to the islands in 2009, where students could be issued a 'speaking ticket', along the lines of a 'speeding ticket', by students who had been appointed as 'English police'. The penalty for students was to pick up five pieces of rubbish in the following class break. There was also a 'Quarantine Block' in the Home Island School designated as an English-only zone. Bunce (2012) suggests these practices represent linguistic imperialism and claims them to be a breach of human rights, as stipulated by the United Nations,[10] where children were denied opportunity to use their native language.

It is indeed an interesting approach to consider the use of Cocos Malay children's native language as a punishable offence, and something to be policed. It is an unfortunate choice of imagery that links language use to the justice system, symbolically positioning English as right and Malay as wrong. With similarly negative connotations, the implications of 'quarantining' language conveys an image that Malay language is somehow unclean and needs to be kept out of the educational domain. Such an approach reflects a lack of intercultural awareness and sends a message, whether intentional or not, that Cocos Malay is inferior. A legacy of colonial attitudes and beliefs about cultural and linguistic superiority is reflected in contemporary attitudes towards the Cocos Malay language, culture and people.

During a visit I undertook to the Cocos Islands in 2011, it was evident that there was no longer an explicitly punitive approach towards the use of Malay language in Cocos Islands' schools. A change in approach seemed to have resulted from a different

leadership regime. Teaching staff from the Australian mainland typically work on the islands for periods of several years, so there is a fairly regular turnover of teachers[11]. However, the issue of language use is highly likely to resurface as a legacy of colonial attitudes, and with changes of teaching staff. Even well-intentioned practices of encouraging the use of English in a classroom setting, in order to develop students' English skills, need to be carefully considered in terms of intercultural relations and their deeper implications. In the context of the Cocos Islands, attempting to ban the use of Malay language is very likely to exacerbate inherent power imbalances and, as a repressive act, can lead to problematic social dynamics. Banning the Cocos Malay language, in order to promote the use of English, reflects a monolingual mindset, as is common in Australia. It risks disrupting social cohesion by promoting a repressive superior-inferior binary logic of the respective languages and cultures.

In critiquing the Cocos Islands' education system, Bunce (2012) reports on inherently negative attitudes demonstrated by monolingual teachers in the islands' schools, where students are primarily framed as having a language deficit and where Cocos Malay is viewed as a liability rather than as an asset. This reflects the legacy of a colonial view that applies the practice of 'othering', which Holliday (2011) describes as an essentialist act that demonises the other as inferior and stereotypes all members of a particular group, society or nation. It posits the self and other as being in binary opposition, where the self is superior and the other is inferior. Holliday describes othering as being so common, yet also complex and subtle, to the point that it remains hidden. Despite the power and pervasiveness of the superior-inferior binary view involving the 'Western self', acts of othering often remain invisible by those who enact them and neutrality is imagined. What Holliday (2011) describes is obviously inspired by, and similar to, Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978). Said's contribution to post-colonial studies enables a critical analysis of the 'old' colonial view of the inferior other and challenges the act of othering that applies a binary notion of a superior self and inferior other. The legacy of a colonial mindset is evident in the events of 2009 as outlined above, where teachers and non-Malay shire council members sought to implement initiatives to restrict the use of Malay language, without realising the implications. These events demonstrate the potential for those in a position of power (as part of a majority group) to be blind to their acts of othering in marginalising a minority. In such acts of othering, power, and the lack of it, is associated with membership of particular ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic groups.

To further explore intercultural relations, I draw from the work of the French linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1991), who identifies an inherent tendency for people to hold a binary view of the superior self and an inferior other, based on difference. She argues that when strangeness of the other cannot be reconciled or assimilated it will inevitably be viewed as inferior and repressed within the self (Kristeva, 1991; Barclay, 2010). Where such repression of otherness within the self is projected onto the other, the unique identity position of the other is effectively denied and erased (Brandist, 2002). This is a repressive act that exerts agency and power by refusing to accept the other as they are and, as a result, maintains boundaries between the self and other. Such phenomena demand assimilation that echoes predictions of extinction of the Cocos Malay language.

A binary view of self and other is also referred to as dialectics (Krasner, 2004), which is demonstrated by a view of closed and static identity positioning. In practice, dialectics is primarily adversarial in nature, and involves a conflict or contestation of views and attitudes. Even if dialectics results in 'resolution' then the outcome is regarded as

finalised and no longer open for negotiation. In this way, whilst dialectics may involve some 'negotiation', the outcome is still fixed and so is still used to maintain boundaries between self and other. This kind of social dynamic lends itself to processes of assimilation, and is influenced by power relations. However, Kristeva identifies a contradiction where an individual can alternate between cultural binaries through repressing or rejecting otherness, yet simultaneously identifying with it. In post-structuralist thinking, this can be understood as a common phenomenon of changing identity positions, in response to variable social contexts and power relations.

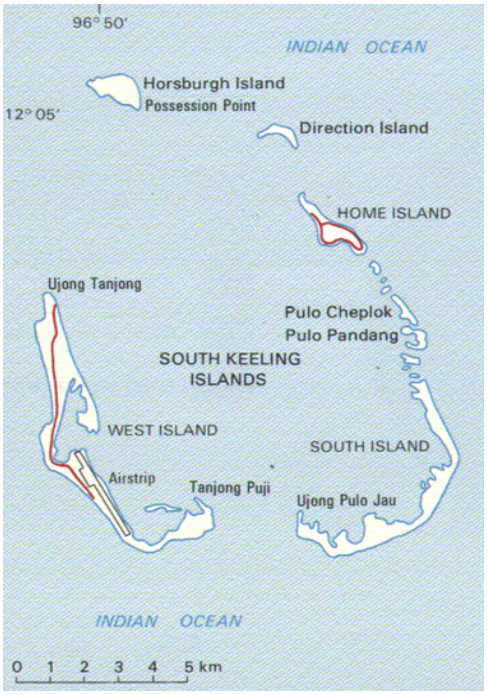

Figure 2 - map of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Source Geoscience Australia: http://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/geographic-information/dimensions/remote-offshore-territories/cocos-keeling-islands

It is now pertinent to reflect on Lapsley's (1983) prediction of the likelihood that Cocos Malay would become extinct, possibly within the timeframe of one generation. As part of that prediction, Lapsley suggested that Cocos Malay could be replaced with English. Clearly that has not happened, and I argue it is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future, despite events such as those outlined in 2009. One of the reasons for that concerns the forces of dialectics evident in intercultural relations. Efforts to restrict the use of Malay in Cocos Island schools and the shire council workplace (as outlined above) were interpreted as repressive acts intended to speed-up assimilation. Such practices represent repressive acts of othering, which may not have even been recognised as such by those who carried them out. This reflects the blindness of the monolingual and mono-cultural self (of the Australian majority) that has little real awareness or understanding of the cultural other. Bunce (2012) is quite scathing of intercultural relations on the Cocos Islands, as influenced by those in positions of power, who are predominantly monolingual white Australians. The historic divide that

remains where white Australians (Westerners) primarily reside on West Island and the majority of the Cocos Malay population reside on Home Island (Figure 2), extends far beyond its geographic reality. Abstract boundaries of cultural, linguistic and religious differences also represent clear divides between the two small communities and are factors in dialectic social dynamics.

It is, in large part, because of these dialectic social dynamics that Cocos Malay identity is strong and is likely to remain so. Despite the pressures to assimilate within the context of an English-speaking nation, the Cocos Malay people demonstrate a cultural resilience. This is reinforced by their membership of a minority religious group, as Muslims in Australia. Cocos Islanders enact the contradictory dialectic ability described by Kristeva (1991) to alternate between two binary cultures. On the one hand, Cocos Islanders reject the otherness of English-speaking Australia, yet at the same time identify with it. Alternation between two binary cultural identity positions can be described as being bicultural (Byram, 2003) and involves a capability to straddle two very different linguistic and cultural worlds. This capability is demonstrated by Cocos islanders as they operate in various domains of English-language contexts yet, at the same, time maintain Malay language and culture. To simplify this phenomenon, two broad identity positions can be identified as reflected by the use of English and Cocos Malay language in different social realms and linguistic domains. I add a brief cautionary note at this point that by simplifying social dynamics in this way I do not overlook the possibilities for more complex intercultural spaces, as demonstrated through code switching. I have certainly observed the potential for Cocos Islanders to enact intercultural spaces, but for the purposes of the current discussion, it is the phenomenon of binary opposite identity positioning that holds particular relevance.

So, despite the forces of assimilation exerted on the Cocos Island speech community to use English, Cocos Malay language remains strong as an identity marker of Cocos Malay culture. It is the dialectic phenomenon that enables Cocos Islanders to embrace English, yet at the same time, maintain Malay. For Cocos Islanders growing up nowadays, English proficiency is necessary to exercise their membership in Australian society and to access educational and vocational opportunities. Older Cocos Islanders who lacked educational opportunities, and so lack literacy and English proficiency, are becoming fewer, following the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1980. For generations since, being bilingual and bicultural is the norm and, while there may be implications for cultural change, I argue that this poses no immediate threat to the viability of the Cocos Malay language. Since integration with Australia, it seems that Cocos Islanders have become more exposed to dialectic social dynamics with greater exposure to the dominant binary view that positions English as superior and Cocos Malay as inferior. Yet, rather than leading to assimilation, exposure to this repressive mindset has created resistance that galvanises the Cocos Malay language and culture, in dialectical opposition to the dominant cultural and linguistic forces associated with English.

Convergence with other Malay dialects

Whilst Cocos Malay language is used as a defining identity marker to resist the assimilative forces of English, questions arise as to whether it can also resist language convergence with other, larger Malay dialects. Lapsley (1983) and Adelaar (1996) both predicted the possibility that Cocos Malay would lose its uniqueness due to convergence with standard Malay. Both researchers note Cocos Islanders' perceptions

of the prestige associated with other Malay dialects and the negative images of Cocos Malay as an inferior, unsophisticated language. Such perceptions remain evident, largely due to the status of other Malay dialects as national languages, as in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia. Moreover, as national languages, the aforementioned larger Malay dialects are associated with a strong basis in literacy, which Cocos Malay lacks. There is a common view shared by outsiders and Cocos Malay people that Cocos Malay is inferior, due to its impoverished lexicon and traditional status as an oral language. To this end, Cocos Malay has readily adopted loan words from English and from key Malay dialects, such as the national languages of Indonesia and Malaysia. Like all languages, Cocos Malay needs to evolve in response to a changing world where new concepts and discoveries require a continual growth in lexicon. Such language change does not necessarily mean that Cocos Malay will lose its uniqueness.

Yet, Cocos Malay language seems incredibly vulnerable when considering that the Cocos Islander speech community now only has a population of approximately 500 people. In the 1950s, as a result of economic difficulties, many Islanders emigrated from the Cocos Islands to Christmas Island and to Sabah, Malaysia. Emigration continued in the 1970s, as Cocos Islanders started to migrate to the Australian mainland, with one-way tickets (in line with the Clunies-Ross policy at the time that they were free to leave but not to return). As a result of ongoing migration, Cocos Malay communities are now established in Western Australian cities, including Perth, Katanning, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Port Hedland (Welsh, 1999). Those Cocos Malay communities outside the Cocos Islands now provide a source for migration back to the islands, particularly for young adults who marry into the Cocos Island community.

The phenomenon of marriage migration to the Cocos Islands has been researched by Winarnita and Herriman (2012). Their fieldwork, conducted in 2011, yielded some interesting findings. The first point to note is that 38 of the 100 households on Home Island had a marriage migrant. Of these 38 marriage migrants, four were Anglo-Australians who had converted to Islam and the remaining 34 were 'ethnic Malay' from Singapore, Malaysia or Indonesia. A significant proportion of local households have marriage migrants, but it is not surprising given the small size and isolated nature of the Cocos community on Home Island. It remains a long-standing issue for locals to find a suitable partner from their own community, with awareness of the potential dangers of in-breeding. The phenomenon of Cocos Islanders seeking marriage partners from outside the islands is not merely a recent occurrence but enhanced mobility since integration with Australia has led to the growing trend for Cocos Islanders to marry someone from outside the islands.

Another of their key findings is that the Cocos Islanders show a clear preference to marry within what is regarded as the Cocos Malay ethnic or cultural group, including Cocos Malay diaspora groups elsewhere. This includes speech communities on the Australian mainland, in Sabah, on Christmas Island and in Singapore. Winarnita and Herriman (2012) conclude that this preference to marry within the Cocos Malay 'ethnic' group suggests that it is of great importance for Cocos Islanders to seek to maintain a homogenous identity group. This point is consistent with what I have argued earlier, where a Cocos Malay identity position is used to resist the assimilative forces of English language. It is interesting to note that a differentiation is also made between Cocos Malay and other Malay groups. This has implications for how Cocos Malay language may be used as a distinctive identity marker against other Malay dialects, and points to the potential for the Cocos Malay language to retain its currency and to resist convergence with (an)other Malay dialect(s).

In terms of understanding how Cocos Malay language may retain its uniqueness, it is important to understand the influences that exert a convergence with other Malay dialects. The key influences at work are enhanced mobility and migration as well as exposure to other Malay dialects through access to technology, such as television and the Internet. It would seem that marriage migration to the Cocos Islands is not exerting a substantial linguistic influence, at least not in terms of threatening the uniqueness of Cocos Malay. This is especially so if we recognise that there is a strong preference for marriage partners from other Cocos Malay communities. However, migration to the Cocos Islands from other Malay-speaking countries has potential to enact language change, at least in terms of expanding the Cocos Malay lexicon. I regard lexical expansion, rather than lexical replacement, as a process of language change that need not result in Cocos Malay losing its uniqueness. However, it is possible that processes of lexical expansion and lexical replacement can operate simultaneously. To determine the extent to which each is occurring in the Cocos Islands would require more detailed linguistic fieldwork.

Satellite television from Indonesia and Malaysia has been accessible to the Home Island community since the early 1990s and, as a result, the Cocos Island community have become significant 'consumers' of programs in other Malay dialects. A mix of viewing preferences is evident between television programs and stations from Malaysia and Indonesia. This means that the Cocos Island speech community has been exposed to various dialects of Malay, not just a single dialect. Moreover, the nature of television programs, such as *sinetron*[12] from Indonesia, has meant that program content often involves informal, non-standard language styles, including slang and regional dialects. Exposure to this kind of combination of dialects and language styles means that Cocos Islanders have not been exposed to a single standard variety of Malay. This is likely to have been a significant factor in negating the predictions of Lapsley (1983) and Adelaar (1996) that Cocos Malay will converge with standard Malay.

More recent technological innovation that has accompanied the Internet era is also likely to have a linguistic influence, although I suggest it may be one of lexical expansion rather than language convergence. We should not underestimate the claim that Cocos Islanders have "a new-found global connectedness with the wider Malay-Indonesian-speaking world" (Bunce, 2012: 55) through access to the Internet and a proliferation of electronic devices including iPads, iPhones and laptops. It is claimed that Cocos Island school students have a "South-East Asian worldliness" (Bunce, 2012: 56) that includes popular cultural phenomena such as trends in music and social media. The potential of social media to facilitate connectedness with other Malay-speakers is supported by anecdotal evidence of a boy who became engaged to marry a girl from Sabah, through Facebook, without the two ever having met (Winarnita and Herriman, 2012)[13]. Another important effect that Bunce suggests is a connectedness to mainstream Islam that has led to a growing confidence in religious practices and knowledge, although it is unknown to what extent the Internet facilitates this.[14] I suggest that the role of Islam in identity positioning substantially reinforces the notion of a Cocos Malay identity as a broader sub-identity position of Malay.

In considering the threats of Cocos Malay language extinction and language convergence, it is often assumed that the Cocos Malay population is declining due to a fall in population on the Cocos Islands. However, such assumptions are challenged by Soderberg (2014) who disputes the total world population of Cocos Malay speakers as

estimated at 5,000 by Lewis (2009). By contrast, Soderberg (2014) suggests there is a total of approximately 22,400 speakers of Cocos Malay worldwide[15]. He argues there is a growing population of Cocos Malay speakers in Malaysia, where he conducted research into the Cocos Malay language.

If the number of speakers of Cocos Malay is substantially greater than previously thought, and if its number of speakers is indeed growing, there are implications about the extent and significance of use of the distinctive dialect. It means that the notion of Cocos Malay being threatened with imminent extinction needs to be rethought. Perhaps it has been assumed that the Cocos Malay spoken by people who migrated to Malaysia would have merely converged with (an)other local Malay dialect(s) in Malaysia. However, Soderberg's (2014) work suggests that Cocos Malay, as used by migrants from the Cocos Islands and by their descendants in Malaysia, has sufficiently withstood pressures of language convergence to remain identifiably unique as Cocos Malay. Soderberg's findings from research in Malaysia that Cocos Malay has remained viable and that its number of speakers has actually grown are surprising. It is less surprising that Cocos Malay remains as a unique dialect in the Cocos Islands, as the islands at least have geographic isolation as an enabling factor. Moreover, as discussed earlier, Cocos Malay remains a strong identity marker in the Australian context of dialectic social dynamics, in contrast to English, which represents an instrument of assimilation. Although far from conclusive, and deserving of further research, it would seem that similar social dynamics may operate in Malaysia which result in diasporic Cocos Malay communities continuing to use the Cocos Malay dialect as a distinctive identity marker.

Conclusion

In discussing the current state of Cocos Malay language, my focus has been on the speech community of Home Island, in the Cocos Islands, and the pressures exerted on the language since full integration with Australia in 1984. I have addressed two predicted scenarios for the possibility of language extinction: of Cocos Malay being replaced with English (Lapsley, 1983); and of Cocos Malay being replaced with standard Malay (Adelaar, 1996). Whilst there is evidence of Cocos Malay language change as a result of contact with English and other Malay dialects, I argue that this language change is a process of lexical expansion and does not represent an imminent threat of extinction of the Cocos Malay language.

From my ethnographic work on the Cocos Islands between 1993 and 2011, there is clearly an improved level of English language proficiency in the Cocos Malay speech community but I argue this is not at the risk of language extinction of Cocos Malay. I believe that the Cocos Island community will continue to be bilingual into the foreseeable future and that dialectic social dynamics and an alternate Cocos Malay identity position will help preserve the Cocos Malay language in the Cocos Islands. Social engagement in the workplace and educational settings with predominantly monolingual English-speaking, non-Muslim Australians may demand linguistic and cultural assimilation. However, as the events of 2009 discussed in this article demonstrate, dialectic social dynamics provide a stark contrast between the Cocos Malay self and the Australian other and prompt Cocos Islanders to maintain identity positions as Cocos Islanders, as Malays, and as Muslims. Since identity positioning is complex, fluid and multiple, individual Cocos Islanders are able to occupy multiple different identity positions across time and space. As such, Cocos Malay teenagers can

engage with global popular cultures, with educational systems and a diverse range of external influences. It does not mean that they necessarily lose their Cocos Malay identity position.

Although the focus of this article is on the Cocos Islands speech community, in discussing the potential for language change it has been important to consider the interconnectedness of the Cocos Island community with other Malay speech communities. Of particular importance are Cocos Malay diaspora speech communities on the Australian mainland and in Malaysia, which Winarnita and Herriman (2012) have identified as having strong ties with the Cocos Island speech community. Their work suggests that strong connections and marriage migration remain between these geographically distant communities of Cocos Malay groups, and that Cocos Islanders have a strong preference for marriage partners who are regarded as Cocos Malay, including members of diasporas who reside outside the islands. This suggests an enduring local identity that has resisted the forces of globalisation and increased mobility.

In terms of a Cocos Malay identity, Winarnita and Herriman (2012) note that Cocos Islanders and Cocos Malay diasporic communities who reside elsewhere regard Home Island as their place of origin. Although most Cocos Islanders identify their ancestors as coming from what is now Indonesia, and from Java in particular, they regard the Cocos Islands as a place of origin to which there is a strong symbolic connectedness. Yet, despite geographic and apparent social isolation, Cocos Islanders demonstrate a connectedness with other Malay speech communities. Perhaps there is a new-found prestige of Malay language and in identifying as Malay, not merely as Cocos Malay but as being connected to a Malay-speaking world, characterised and defined by shared cultural norms and values, and grounded in Islam. Yet, within a broad identification as Malay, the Cocos Malay dialect is showing a certain resilience associated with its unique heritage. Associating more broadly as Malay, does not preclude nor subsume the unique identity position of Cocos Malay people, which is reinforced by the unique Cocos Malay language.

A post-structuralist understanding of the possibilities for multiple identity positioning enables an appreciation that Cocos Islanders can readily identify themselves as being Malay, as being Cocos Malay, as being Muslim and as being Australian. These identity positions are not mutually exclusive, despite some clashes of cultural and religious norms, values and principles. Perhaps predictions of Cocos Malay language extinction reflect a structuralist dialectic logic where it was assumed that Cocos Malay people would have to merely assimilate, whether it be to English or standard Malay. Considering post-structuralist thinking that recognises the possibilities for multiple identity positions, we can more readily appreciate why Cocos Malay language has not become extinct, as it was predicted. However, there is evidence of influence from other Malay dialects, notably with dialects from Indonesia and Malaysia, as a result of increased mobility and access to Indonesian and Malaysian television since the early 1990s. Whilst influences of language contact may be considered by some as evidence of convergence; I would be wary of regarding it as such, for two reasons. First, I suggest that language change is largely occurring as a process of lexical expansion rather than as replacing Cocos Malay lexicon, where loanwords are adopted from other Malay dialects, and from English. Second, language change for Cocos Malay is occurring in an eclectic and unique manner so that it does not represent convergence with any single Malay dialect. In this way, Cocos Malay is retaining its uniqueness, despite changing. It is absurd to expect any language to remain unchanged and it is

important to recognise that language change does not equate to, nor necessarily lead to, language extinction. The limited lexicon of Cocos Malay due to its history and geographic isolation has meant that lexical expansion has been necessary, particularly in a time of rapid technological change and globalisation over the past 30 years.

The resilience of Cocos Malay language is demonstrated through its viability associated with a cultural identity position that has endured huge social, political and economic change in recent decades. Cocos Malay language has been shown as resisting the assimilative forces exerted by English in the Cocos Islands and as existing as a distinctive dialect used in Malaysia, which Soderberg (2014) has found to be growing in its number of speakers. As Soderberg's work was limited to phonetic descriptions of Cocos Malay in Malaysia, I suggest a productive line for future research would be a socio-linguistic line of enquiry to explore if there are dialectic social dynamics at play in Malaysia, as I have found to be the case in the Cocos Islands. Research of this nature could shed more light on how socio-linguistic processes on the remote, isolated Cocos Islands compare with other Cocos Malay speech communities and could provide a stronger basis for predicting the future for this small unique dialect, on the Cocos Islands and elsewhere.

Endnotes:

[1] I was employed as an Interpreter/Communications Officer by the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Sport and Territories and worked in the Cocos Islands Administration from mid-1993 until early 1995.

[2] In 1998 I undertook a research project to record and analyse Cocos Malay language, which also informs discussion in this article. I used data from that research project in my MA (Preliminary) thesis (Welsh, 2001).

[3] John Cecil Clunies-Ross inherited the role of ruler of the Cocos Malay community. He effectively remained in that role until full integration with Australia in 1984. In this role he was sometimes referred to by outsiders as a white raja (king). Cocos Malay people commonly referred to him and addressed him as "tuan", a deferential Malay term that equates to the English 'sir'.

[4] A former Cocos Malay colleague told me of his educational experiences in the Home Island School in the 1970s, including his experiences learning English with John Clunies-Ross as his teacher. Cocos Malay children who were regarded as more intellectually inclined were selected to attend school, while others who were not deemed to be as suitable for the classroom were allocated different learning experiences and tasks, such as carpentry, fishing and a range of other agricultural and labouring jobs.

[5] The Cocos (Keeling) islands Administration was under the Territories Section of Commonwealth Department of Environment, Sport and Territories (DEST).

[6] "A working definition of English linguistic imperialism is that the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages." (Phillipson, 1992: 47)

[7] Taylor (2009a: online).

[8] Bunce (2009: online) reports that the issue of banning the use of Malay made news in the Hong Kong newspaper the *South China Morning Post*.

[9] Taylor (2009b: online).

[10] See Article 30 of the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child,* 1989, United Nations Publications, New York.

[11] Cocos Islands schools are staffed and administered by the Education Department of Western Australian, under a Service Delivery Agreement implemented by the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development.

[12] *Sinetron* is an Indonesian term derived from *sinema electronik* (electronic cinema) that equates to the English term 'soap operas'.

[13] The anthropological work of Winarnita and Herriman (2012) suggests that marriage often occurs through 'match-making' or what may be loosely termed 'arranged marriages'. They describe this as occurring where both partners agree, rather than it being a 'forced arrangement'. This is particularly common between Cocos Islanders and Cocos Malay diaspora groups in Australia and Malaysia and a couple may become engaged without having met.

[14] A growing connectedness to Islam and other Muslim communities was evident in the 1990s, before the Internet was available. Enhanced mobility enabled Cocos Islanders to more easily undertake travel, including visits to Malaysia and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Enhanced mobility was facilitated by greater disposable income than was ever possible prior to integration with Australia.

[15] See Soderberg (2014) for more details. The total figure of 22,400 includes 17,700 in various locations in Malaysia, 3000 in various places in Western Australia and 1000 in Singapore.

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