

Collins, James T. *Malay, world language; A short history*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2000, xii + 101 pp. [Second edition.] ISBN 983626034. Price: MYR 10.00.

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Collin's *Malay, world language* is a well-written, much needed resource on the history of the Malay language. Despite its shortness it contains a wealth of information on the 1300-year history of Malay from the earliest inscriptions to its development as a modern language, which now enjoys the status of the national language of four Southeast Asian nations.

Considering the small size of this book, it has a fairly large bibliography and a comprehensive index of about five pages each. Including the three tables and 31 illustrations, the book actually consists of not more than 50 pages of text. These are divided into five chapters of which Chapter 3 is the largest with 23 pages, while each of the other four chapters has a page count between three and nine pages. This rather unbalanced equilibrium is further distorted by the fact that the most voluminous chapter covers a period of 100 years, while all other chapters, excluding the final chapter, cover periods of at least 250 years each. In the preface to his work the author cautions that this book is a 'hurried and inadequate essay'. This is partly a polite understatement in the Malay tradition, but it also alerts the reader to the fact that this book, with its limited size, cannot provide much more than a few snippets of the history of the Malay language.

The book reviewed here is the second printing of the second edition. It is, however, labelled as the first printing of the second edition. The second printing is virtually identical to the first, which was published in 1998, with the only differences being that in the 2000 printing, illustrations 1 and 16 are no longer upside down and all of the illustrations are printed in black and white instead of colour.

The five chapters of this book are diachronically arranged and each cover one of the five periods of the Malay language according to the author's own periodization. Chapter 1, *Surveying the prehistory of Malay*, provides a brief outline of the spread of the Austronesian languages with an emphasis on the development of Proto-Malay, which according to the author has its ultimate origin in western Borneo, a theory that is supported by linguistic evidence provided by Adelaar and Nothofer. Chapter 2, *Early Malay*, covers almost 1,000 years in only nine pages of text (plus tables and illustrations). Not only did the language change considerably from the earliest inscription (dated AD 682) to the sixteenth century, which marks the era of the European 'discovery' of the Malay language, but it was also written in a number of different scripts. The oldest inscriptions are all in the southern Indian Palawa script, which gradually developed into the Old Javanese script. Beginning in the fourteenth century, this script was progressively replaced by the Arabic Malay script. Before this, another orthographic change occurred when 'vernacular writing systems based on Indian orthography' emerged in Sumatra and the Philippines. Unfortunately the author pays little attention to these writing systems, which for the first time provided the local languages with a simplified writing system perfectly adapted to their individual sound systems. The nature of early Malay literacy is certainly too complex to be covered adequately in a chapter of only a few pages.

According to the author, the sixteenth century was a 'transitional period, which led to substantial changes in the status, functions, and structures of Malay'. Chapter 3, *Early Modern Malay*, commences in the seventeenth century when the 'Latin of the archipelago' became the pre-eminent language of scholarship, commerce, diplomacy and religion in the 'Age of Commerce', which was also the period of contact with European nation-states. While Malay language and culture became

more and more associated with Muslim identity in Southeast Asia, Malay also became the language of Christian missions and an important tool for colonial expansion and consolidation. This was also the 'century of [...] appropriation of Malay', when the language underwent considerable changes through the introduction of a large number of European loan words and European-induced structural changes. Malay expanded through absorption of other ethnic groups and through the replacement of local languages. At the same time Malay literature flourished in the seventeenth century - not only in the *belles-lettres* but also in the writing of letters, theological treatises, historical chronicles, and contractual agreements. Jawi was still the script most frequently used. Most texts were chirographically produced, but some texts, usually written by Europeans, appeared in the Roman script, and an increasing number of texts were printed. Supported by the introduction of a basic educational system, the print medium allowed for a much wider circulation of texts.

Chapter 4, *Late Modern Malay*, covers the period from the eighteenth century up to 1945, in which the colonial world in the archipelago was rearranged into two separate spheres of Dutch and English influence over the Malay language. These changes resulted in the present pattern of Indonesian and Malaysian Malay. In the period following the disintegration of the VOC, literary activities declined in accordance with the economic recession. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generally saw a comeback of Malay literature supported by the emergence of Malay newspapers, Chinese and Eurasian literature in Malay, and the colonial publishing house Balai Pustaka. Despite the flood of printed material, power and equality were denied to speakers of Malay, the language engine that powered the colonies. The Malay language was finally renamed the Indonesian language in the Youth Oath of 28 October 1928, creating a new deracinated ethnic identity. The Japanese invasion in 1942 increased the political bargaining power of Malay as an Indonesian-based school system was introduced and the Malay language became both a tool and a symbol of nationalism. Chapter 5, *Postcolonial Malay*, emphasizes the importance of Malay as a political tool in the struggle for independence and the formative period of nationalism, as well as the unprecedented growth of the language in postcolonial times. The two sibling languages are now spoken by approximately 200 million people as a first or fluent second language, while the importance of regional languages, such as Javanese, is in decline.

This small book is fun to read and should be compulsory reading for the more than 100,000 foreign students currently studying the Indonesian-Malay language. Unfortunately, however, this is unlikely to happen given that the book is published by the Malaysian Institute for Language and Literature, has a limited circulation, is currently out of print, and is difficult to obtain, even from libraries that are normally well stocked with books featuring an Indonesian-Malay focus.