

Abstract

The Malay Contact Varieties of East Nusa Tenggara

The province of East Nusa Tenggara is home to two contact varieties of Malay, spoken in Kupang and Larantuka. This study investigates the phonological and morphosyntactic features of these two varieties of Malay, and examines the historical factors which gave rise to these varieties, spoken natively by communities far from the Malay homeland.

The two varieties have differing histories, with Larantuka Malay arising in a Portuguese enclave on the island of Flores, growing out of the colloquial Malay of the Malay peninsula through large-scale migration to Larantuka when Portuguese colonists and their followers were forced out of Malacca in the 17th century, and influenced by colonial Portuguese and, later, Dutch, as well as the Malay language of the modern Indonesian nation since independence. Today it is the native language of most inhabitants of the town of Larantuka, as well as a few smaller communities nearby on Flores and the neighboring island of Adonara. The language, known as Nagi, is spoken natively by about 20,000 people.

The Malay variety in Kupang arose from the Malay trade language used throughout the archipelago for hundreds of years, and, as in other important ports of the spice trade in eastern Indonesia, a community speaking Malay natively appeared. The role of Malay in Kupang was reinforced during the Dutch colonial era, as an administrative and trade language, similar to the colonial Malay used throughout the Dutch East Indies. It is spoken today as a lingua franca in and around the city of Kupang, with a sizeable and growing community of native speakers, numbering over 200,000.

The phonology of Larantuka Malay is very different from the other Malay varieties of eastern Indonesia, through the influence of peninsular Malay and Portuguese (the latter is most likely the source of the nasalized vowels in this variety). Other phonological features found in other contact varieties of Malay are also present, such as loss of word-final consonants. Kupang Malay, on the other hand, is much closer phonologically to the colloquial varieties of Indonesian spoken throughout the archipelago.

Both the Larantuka and Kupang varieties of Malay share many of the morphosyntactic features found in contact Malay varieties in eastern Indonesia, many of which are similar to features found in colloquial (“low”) varieties throughout the Malay world. Some features, such as a reciprocal morpheme (originating from the Papuan language of Ternate), are only found in the contact varieties of eastern Indonesia.

This study presents a brief description and comparison of these two Malay varieties of East Nusatenggara, relying on the investigator’s fieldwork in both communities, as well as published and unpublished sources. The descriptions of these varieties are part of an effort to develop a typology of contact varieties of Malay.