

# DIALECTS OF THE MELANESIAN TRIBES IN THE MALAY PENINSULA.

(*Being Extracts from two Letters to H. E. Otto. Böttlingk,  
Member of the "Imperial Academy of Sciences at  
St. Petersburg."*)

BY

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[ TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN. ]

*Read at a Meeting of the Society, held on the 6th May, 1878.*

[ Extract from Letter I. ]

"MY desire to know something about the inhabitants of the interior of the Malay Peninsula, and to ascertain their position in relation to Anthropology, induced me to undertake this journey into the Peninsula. It also appeared to me of importance not to delay it, for I know from my own experience that the solution of this problem will become more difficult as time elapses, and we shall only reach what is likely to prove less and less reliable as a *point d'appui* for satisfactory conclusions. For example, the original language of the *Orang Utan* (1) of Johor, is constantly becoming more and more displaced by Malay. Not only is it disappearing year by year, but the death of every old man (acquainted to some extent with the language of his forefathers) creates a fresh gap never to be filled up.

This decline of the tongue, which precedes the gradual modification of the anatomical type, induced me to collect what does remain very carefully, in order to secure it before its complete destruction.

During my excursion in the Peninsula whenever I came across a number of men I gathered them round me, and listening attentively to them I took down as many words as possible that were *not* Malay. In order to collect the following scanty vocabulary I always held quite a "Council," for *only a few old*

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1 *Orang Utan* is the usual expression among the Malays in speaking of the wandering tribes in the interior of the Malay Peninsula.



men remembered any of the words of their fast-disappearing language. (2)

These I have shewn to several Malays who know their own language well. All declare that they *are not Malay words*; I, myself, am incompetent to decide this question, and, I should like therefore, to hear your opinion, as this may be of great importance in its bearing upon the question of the origin of these vanishing tribes.

Purely anthropological observations and considerations lead me to accept the supposition of a *Melanesian* element (a remnant of the original race) which, through intermixture with the Malays, is being more and more supplanted.

Three words in this Vocabulary (3) I find similar to three in my notices of the Papuan dialects, *Dak* (Sea), *Koi* (Head), *Tal* (Hut).

This similarity struck me as curious but I must point out clearly that from this circumstance no further positive conclusion can be drawn.

If the old language be not quite forgotten or lost, we have to thank a superstition which has favored its retention. A belief prevails that people who visit the camphor trees in the jungle in on the search for camphor, must always use the old tongue if they are to be successful in their search. If they speak Malay, the tree will either disappear before their eyes, or their eyes, will become incapable of seeing the it. For this reason the dialect is also called the "*Bhâsa Kâpor*" or the "*Camphor language*!" Some of the Malays who live in the jungle, endeavour on account of this superstition to learn the "*Camphor language*.\*

It is not difficult to explain how this superstition arose. It is certain that the old stock of the race, who lived a roving life in the jungle, were peculiarly qualified to appropriate the jungle produce. Later on, when the primitive race mingled with the

2 Thus for example, the numerals of the language of the *Orang Rayet* of Palong (tributary of the River Moar) were only known by one very old man, and by him only up to 4; none of his tribe companions knew even these. The old man further explained that in earlier days he knew the other Numeral's also, but he had now forgotten them. Most of the young people satisfied themselves with the declaration that "the elders knew the old tongues, but they only spoke Malay."

3 *Dak*, used to express "Sea" by the Papuans of Mt. Limai in the island of Lûçon which I visited in 1873.

*Koi* and *Ooi* meaning "head," also in use among the Papuans of Mt. Limai.

*Tal*—"House," used by the Papuans of the Maclay-Coast in New-Guinea.

\* [Mr. Logan also refers to the "*Camphor Language*" in his description of these Tribes (I.A. Journal vol. 1. p. 263), but his account of the matter is a little different, and suggests a comparison with the "*Krama*," or ceremonial language of Java. He says:



Malays, and, in consequence of this, more or less modified their habits of life, it was, again, these same people who attached themselves to the manners and occupations of their fore fathers, and became in their turn the best qualified to trace out the various products of their own home-jungles. Wandering isolated in the forests, they had but few opportunities to hold any dealings with the Malays; and naturally kept more exclusively to their own language than those who trafficked with the Malays more frequently, and lived in their neighbourhood. Thus it happened that in preserving the old language (going as it did hand in hand with primitive habits of life) they found a secret means of bringing to their homes a rich booty from the jungle. This superstition is believed in various parts of Johor, and will, for a long time, protect the ancient language from total extinction; and even if the signification of many words is wholly forgotten, yet will they still remain as the true rudiments of the language, and serve as a monument of the original race of the "Orang Utan."

I found it impossible to ascertain sufficiently the number and limitation of the different dialects. That more have existed is probable. I have arranged, somewhat arbitrarily, the following words in two dialects. I have only noted down (as said before) those words which appeared to me *not* Malay. (4)

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"While searching for Camphor, they abstain from certain kinds of food, eat a little earth, and use a kind of artificial language called the Bhâsa Kâpor (Camphor language). This I found to be the same on the Sidili, the Indau and Batu Pahat. From the subjoined specimens it will be seen that most of the words are formed on the Malayan, and in many cases by merely substituting for the common name one derived from some quality of the object, as "grass-fruit" for rice, "far sounding" for gun, "Short-legged" for hog, "leaves" for hair &c.

(Here follow 80 words of which 33 are Malay, and of the rest none resemble in the least those given by M. de Maclay.) "It is believed that if care be not taken to use the Bhâsa Kâpor great difficulty will be experienced in finding Camphor trees, and that when found the Camphor will not yield itself to the collector. Whoever may have been the originator of this superstition, it is evidently based on the fact that although Camphor trees are abundant, it very frequently happens that no Camphor can be obtained from them; "were it otherwise," said an old *Benua*, who was singularly free from superstitions of any kind, Camphor is so valuable that not a single full-grown tree would be left in the forest. Camphor is not collected by the Bermun (Negri Sembilan) tribes, at least on the Western Side of the Peninsula, and they are unacquainted with the Bhasa Kapor."]



## DIALECTS OF THE ORANG-UTAN OF JOHOR.

Sun	Matbri	Tunkat
Earth	Atei	Atel' (+)
Sea	Dak	Dak
Mountain	Benum	Benum
Forest	Bri	..... †
Stone	Gmu	..... ‡
Fire	Us', Ul'	Us.'
Smoke	Dilok ul'	.....
Water	Dak, diao	Diao
Hut	Dol'	Tschendejia
Road	Swag	Prokn
Plantation	Glokul'	.....
Tree	Delokn	.....
Banana	Kei-kei	Diok
Ratan	Drein	.....
Dog	Tiau, Tchiau	Diaun
Tiger	Diagign	Tiasma
Pig	Kumo	Kumokn
Fowl	Kampokn	.....
Man	Limo	Simo
Woman	Kodol'	Kodo, amai
Father	Ita, Mbai	Mba
Mother	Gado	Gado
Wife	Kompotn	.....
Child	Knon	.....
Son	Limon'	.....
Daughter	Kodo-kanit	.....
Brother	Piatn	.....
Head	Koi	Bubon
Hair	Suk	Suk
Eyes	Mot	Padingo
Nose	Mu	.....
Mouth	Bibir	Snut
Tongue	Lipes	.....
Ear	Ntokn	.....
Arm	Tein	.....

(4) As the Orang-Utan are Nomads it appears to me quite immaterial to specify the place in which I have taken down the words.

† ..... 'Shows that the end of the word must be pronounced *soft*.

‡ ..... 'Shows that the word of the original language is supplanted by Malay.



Finger	Tü	Raan
Neck	Marokn	.....
Breast	Gno-Kampotn	.....
Stomach	Lopot	.....
Back	Bahoi	.....
Leg	Ano-kompo,	betit, lutat
Foot	Diokn	.....
Toe	Tschere-Diokn	.....
Cold	Tkat	.....
Hot	Khob	Gohom
Dead	Kobs	.....
To Eat	Intia, ntia	Ndia
To Drink	Diao	.....
To Sleep	Ietek	.....
To Go	Swag	.....
To Run	Palo	.....
To Cut	Nako	.....
Sumpitan	Blahan	.....
Arrow	Dama	.....
1.	Moi	Moi
2.	Npotn	Dua
3.	Npe	Npe
4.	Pru	Npun
5.	.....	Massokn
6.	.....	Pru
7.	.....	Tempo

According to the statements of the Malays, the Orang-Utan of Pahang, where I am now going to travel, speak their own language, which is quite unintelligible to the Malays, and so these poor wild men are cruelly treated; and on this account become more isolated than those who live here in Johor. I hope to make further and fuller contributions towards the knowledge of the language of this people."

The Istana, Johor, 28th May, 1875.

[Extract from Letter II.]

"Before receiving your answer to my last letter, which I await with much interest, I find myself in a position to anticipate it in consequence of my second Journey into the Malay Peninsula. In the Mountains of Pahang and Kelantan as far as Singora and Ligor, I have discovered a *Melanesian* population. This people, which is probably the primitive race of these parts undoubtedly belongs to judge from its physical "habitus" to the *Melanesian* stock. Leading a nomadic life, these people retire



before the influx of Malaydom into the mountains and forests of the Peninsula, and have thus kept themselves free from intermixture, still retaining their *own* language.

I had the good fortune to find these people in many other places, and I have not failed during my Anthropological studies to collect as many words as possible of their dialects, although a naturalist can do little with the materials of language. I undertook this small task (which nevertheless required no small amount of patience and attention) for the reason named in my first letter; viz, that these languages are disappearing, partly because the tribes intermingle with other races and partly because they die out. Although I can draw no conclusions as to the various relations of these dialects to other Papuan tongues, this small collection has nevertheless given me some interesting and not unimportant facts.

*Firstly* as to the connection between the various tribes of the Orang Sakai, living quite cut off from one another, in Pahang, Kelantan and Singora.

*Secondly*, and what astonished me still more, as to the relation in point of language between the very mixed and distant-dwelling Orang-Utan of Johor, with the Orang-Sakai in the north of the Peninsula.

It is undoubtedly an interesting result to have ascertained that these tribes, isolated and ignorant of each other, are throughout the whole peninsula, from Johor to Ligor (South of Siam) thus closely connected in speech. This circumstance gives me a fresh conviction that my opinion expressed in the beginning of this year\* and before my second journey, is correct, viz: that the *Orang-Utan* of Johor, notwithstanding their great intermixture, undoubtedly show traces of a *Melanesian* blood. I send you herewith a small Comparative Vocabulary of the dialects collected. I hope the result I have arrived at will coincide with your opinion upon the origin of the language of the Orang-Utan of Johor.

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\* N. Miklucho-Maclay. Ethnologische Excursion in Johor. Naturkundig Tijdschrift, 1875.



	Dialects of the <i>Unmixed</i> Tribes of the Orang—Sakai of the Interior.		Dialects of the <i>Mixed</i> Tribes of the Orang—Utan of the Interior.	
	Ulu Kalantan.	Ulu Patanis.	Palon (Rumpen.)	Ulu Indau.
Sun	Kirkto	Merkets, Kirkto	Matbri	Tunkat
Moon	.....	* Kitchi	.....	Bulatnah
Heaven	Kte	Karé	.....	.....
Earth	Kliet	Tei	Atei	Atel' Ate'
Water	Tom	Bateu Tom	Dak	Diau, Dak
Sea	Tambü	.....	Dak	Dak
Stone	Tmu	Kula, Balu	Gmu	Gmu
Fire	Oos	Oos	Us'	Us,' Ul,'
Smoke	Assin—oos	Ayei, Eieioos	.....	Dilok—Us'
Mountain	Benun	Butjak Tul'	Bnum	Benun
Forest	Kib, ghi	Dagib, Daven	Bri	Bri
Hut	Digos	Dign	Tol,' Dol	Tschendeya dol
Road	Harbau	Tib	Swag	Prokn
Boot	Kupon	Diahu	.....	.....
Man	Timkal' (+)	Timkal'	Limo	Limo, Simo
Woman	Jalu	Badonn, Kogn	Amai	Kodól Kodo,
Father	äh	äh	Mba	Ita: M'bai
Mother	Nah	Nau, bü	.....	Gado
Brother	Tuh	Tuh pah	.....	Piatn
Sister	Tuh-jalu	Nau	.....	.....
Husband	Gai	Késsij	Linio Simo	Limon'
Wife	Knie	Kne	.....	Kompotn
Child	Auva kanit	Wogn, Tanganet	.....	Knön, Knotsch
Daughter	.....	.....	.....	Ko o-Kanit
Head	Kui	Kui	.....	K-i
Hair	Sok	Sogk	.....	Suk
Brow	Pti	Woos' pti	.....	.....
Nose	Mo	Moh	.....	Mu
Eyes	Med	Med	.....	Mot
Nostril	Hajan—moh	.....	.....	Annmanmno
Mouth	Tiuim	Han' nis	.....	Nut
Teeth	Han'	Nis	.....	Limon'
Tongue	Lentek	Lentek	.....	Lipes
Ear	Anten	Anten	.....	Ntokn

(\*) ' Shows that the word is supplanted by Malay.

(+) ' Shows that the end of the word is pronounced *soft*.



Miklukho-Maklai, Nikolai Nikolaevich. 1878. "DIALECTS OF THE MELANESIAN TRIBES IN THE MALAY PENINSULA." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1, 38–44.

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