

Sinicization versus Creolization in the history of Eastern Malay.

Ever since the pioneering research of Adelaar and Prentice (1996) the matter as to whether the Eastern Malay contact varieties (Hereinafter: EM) are to be considered creolized varieties of Malay (we will refer to this as the pidginization hypothesis: Hereinafter PH) or not has been amply discussed in the scholarly literature. Despite this, no consensus exists today on the matter. While McWhorter (2008) has claimed that EM and indeed all Low Malay varieties are nativized pidgins (i.e. creoles), several other scholars (*inter alios* Wolff 1988) are skeptical, with Paaus (2008) being seemingly agnostic on the issue.

A core methodological issue relates to the ambiguity of the evidence. A case could thus be made that EM owes its isolating typology to contact with Hokkien Chinese, itself a highly isolating language. We may call this diachronic scenario the Hokkien Chinese hypothesis (Hereinafter: HCH). Both hypotheses predict the same observed outcome (namely, near-total loss of earlier Malay morphology in EM varieties).

The goal of the proposed presentation is to present a hitherto-unexamined piece of evidence relating to the controversy. Namely, the loss in EM of the inherited Malay ordinal numeral-forming prefix *ke-* (cf. Malay *tiga* “three”, *ke-tiga* “third”). This prefix, inherited from Proto-Austronesian, has cognates in most Austronesian languages. More importantly, it is typologically highly similar to the Hokkien ordinal numeral-forming morpheme *tē* (cf. Hokkien *sā* “three”, *tē sā* “third”). It should be added, in this connection, that ordinal numeral-marking morphology is cross-linguistically highly conservative. English “third”, for example, has cognates in a great many distantly related Indo-European languages (Italian *terzio*, Modern Greek *tritros*, Modern Russian *tretij*).

Considering I-The areal spread of Sinitic numerals, including ordinal-marking elements, in East and South-East Asia, often coexisting with non-Sinitic (native) numerals and with diachronically and typologically distinct ordinal numeral-forming systems (cf. Sino-Japanese *san* “three”, *dai-san* “third” versus (indigenous) Japanese *mittsu* “three”, *mittsu-me* “third”), and II-The typological similarity of the Hokkien and Malay systems, in addition to the basic conservatism of ordinal-marking morphology, as pointed out above, the HCH would predict that EM varieties would (as a whole) preserve the inherited Malay ordinal numeral-marking system.

What we find, instead, is a near-total absence in EM of any type of ordinal-marking system whatsoever. While wholly surprising from the vantage point of the HCM, this finding is quite expected if we assume the PH hypothesis to be the true one in accounting for EM genesis. This is because pidginization, as a process, causes features to be lost (see especially chapter 2 of McWhorter 2018), *even if such features are present in all the languages whose contact gave birth to a pidgin*.

It will be argued that this finding, combined with several others, provides decisive evidence in favor of the pidginization hypothesis.

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