The Malay Chetty Creole Language of Malacca:
A Historical and Linguistic Perspective

by

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to describe the Malacca Chetties' historical and linguistic background. It begins with a discussion of the emergence of the Chetties who are descendents of two ethnically and culturally different groups, Indian men from South India and local women of Malacca. The intermarriage between the two groups, which was common especially before the arrival of Islam and throughout the Hindu-Islam transition period in Malacca, gave birth to this unique community. In terms of physical appearance, the Chetties' look more Malay than Indian, yet they maintained their Indian ancestors' Hindu beliefs. The Chetties' draw and adapt from other local cultures, in particular the Baba Nyonya and Malay cultures, in their every day life. The mother tongue of the Chetties for instance is a variety of Malay. As with the community itself, the Malay language used by the Chetties is an amalgamation of various cultures. Grimes (1996) labels the language spoken by the Chetties as a form of creole and names it Chetties Creole Malay or Malacca Malay Creole. The uniqueness of the language is explicated further in the second part of this article which discusses the linguistic similarities and distinctions between the Chetties Creole Malay and other Malay dialects in Malaysia.

Introduction

The term *Chetty* originates from the word *chetti* in Malayalam, *shetti* in Tamil and *setti* in Telegu, all of which refer to people from South India from the Chettiar caste. A review of the literature suggests that there are variations to the word including Chetin, Chati, Chatin, Chettijn, Sitty and so on (Moorthy, 1997: 40)[2]. In the context of Malaysia, the term Chetty generally refers to the Chettiars whose roots could be traced back to Kampung Keling in Malacca. The community is known for its socio-economic position as money-lenders, and because of the strong affiliation with this group, the word Chetty, in the local context generally connotes 'money-lenders'.

Whilst it is true that Chetty means money lenders known as *nagarathar nattukkottai chettiars* (Rabeendran, 1976: 6), what is not generally known is that the term also refers to another community, the Malacca Hindu Babas. Also known as the Hindu or Indian Babas, the main settlement of this group in Malaysia now is in Kampung 7 in Gajah Berang, also an area in Malacca. The Chetty families have been living in the area for six generations (Narayanasamy, 1976: 21). Although this is the case, the number of people in the community has overtime decreased and to date there are approximately 200 members of about 30 families still living there.

This community is known as the Babas as it resulted from intermarriages between merchants from South India and local women in Malacca during the 1600s. The merchants who were mostly Tamil Hindus married and settled with local women of various ethnic backgrounds including Malays, Javanese, Bataks and Chinese. The

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[2] In this article, the generally accepted terms Chetty and Chetties (plural form) are used.

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historical lineage of the Malacca Hindu Babas is described in more detail in the next section.

The historical background of the Malacca Chetties

Historical evidence suggests that trade relations between certain regions in India and those in the Malay Archipelago dated as far back as a few hundred years. Indian traders including the Chulias, Muslims from South India who came from Madras and the Coromandel Shore, and Hindu traders who came from other areas of India were some of the early merchants who were attracted to trade in this region.

During their trading journeys to the east, the merchants who were known for their sailing skills would stop at various trading posts including the well-known port of Malacca. As the journey between India and Malacca often took a long time, many of the merchants lived in Malacca to manage their business and barter for products such as gold, spices and porcelain to be brought back to their own country. As there were many Indian merchants in Malacca at that time, they were allowed to trade in certain areas that were authorised by the Sultan of Malacca. One area that the Sultan provided for them to live in and carry out their business was Kampung Keling[3].

As stated earlier, the merchants from South India were two groups, Muslims and Hindus. The Muslims were much more influential, especially with regard to palace administration matters and trading policies. However, this did not in any way threaten the position of the Hindu merchants. They were able to manage their business and live in Malacca for long stretches of time.

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[3] The term Keling comes from the word Kallingga (one of the states in east Coromandel Shore), which according to the Malay Annals, was used to refer to Indians from South India during the Malaccan period.

Whilst living and trading in Malacca, the traders who travelled from India without women[4] began to marry local women. The Hindu merchants[5] married local women of various ethnic groups including Malay (non-muslims)[6], Javanese, Batak and Chinese. The intermarriage between the merchants and local women was a common practice at that time (Muhammad Yusoff, 1989: 317) as most of the merchants were wealthy and of high rank.

Besides their financial standing, the merchants did not have much problem in finding a local wife because there was no language barrier. Although the merchants spoke Tamil (or some other South Indian language), their economic position as traders required them to know the Malay language, the lingua franca of commerce and trade in the region, especially in Malacca at the time. So, although the merchants and their wives had different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, communication did not pose a problem.

Whilst being married to the locals, the merchants retained their Hindu names, religion, customs and traditions, and continued with these practices in bringing up their children. The only difference was the use of Malay instead of Tamil at home. The mothers used the Malay language with the children as they did not know Tamil. As Malay became the children's dominant language, the fathers also spoke in Malay. This was the situation

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[4] It was an Indian belief then that women were not allowed to sail, let alone migrate out of India (Sandhu, 1983: 179).

[5] The Indian Muslim merchants married Malay (Muslim) women. The descendants of these Muslim merchants and Malay women are known as Keling or mamak. This group is called Jawi Pekan/Pukan/Bukan/Peranakan and live mostly in Penang (Noriah, 2003b; Fujimoto, 1988). The Jawi Pekan, unlike the Chetty professes Islam and practises Malay customs and traditions (Rabeendran, 1976:3).

[6] According to Rabeendran (1976: 6) the marriage between Hindhu merchants and Malay women may have happened earlier, i.e. before the coming of Islam to Malacca or during the Hindu-Islam transition period. However, based on the interviews with the Chetties, it is found that marriages between Hindu man and Muslim women took place. The women became Hindus without their family's knowledge.

during the time and it had since then continued on until now. The mother tongue of the generations of Chetties since the Malaccan Sultanate period is Malay.

When the Malaccan Sultanate fell to the Portuguese in 1511, the Chetties were given the responsibility to lead the other groups of merchants, both Muslims and Hindus. This further encouraged intermarriage between Chetties and local women. However, when the Dutch came into power in Malacca in 1641, the Chetties' trading activities were affected as the Dutch began to put sanctions that made it difficult for them to trade. Whilst a small number went back to India, some of them got out of the situation by turning to agriculture. Incidentally there were large areas that needed to be cultivated at the time and the agricultural system then was similar to that practised in India.

From the early settlement in Kampung Keling, the Hindu Chetties migrated to Gajah Berang, Tengkera and Bacang. In 1781, the Dutch government gave a piece of land of approximately 15,879 square feet to Teivanayagam Chitty, the leader of the Chetties at that time to build a temple. The temple, the oldest in Malaysia, is named Sri Poyatha Venayagar Moorthi temple and is located in Jalan Tukang Mas in Malacca. The Chetty community who turned to agriculture continued to build a few more temples around the land they cultivated. To date, there are nine temples around the Chetty settlement in Gajah Berang. These temples are still used today even though the Chetties have stopped their agricultural activities.

When the British came into power, some members of the Chetty community migrated to Singapore and Australia. In Singapore, the Chetties were concentrated in areas around Rowell Road, Kinta Road, and Selegie Road. When these areas were developed by the Singapore government, the Chetties moved to highrise

accommodations in Bedok, Tampines and Paya Lebar. There are about 200 Chetty families who live in these areas now. They maintain close contacts with their relatives in Kampung Gajah Berang and would usually return to celebrate religious festivals such as *Manggamay* and *Hantu Tetek* (Ong, 1994: 31).

Besides the above account, it has also been claimed that the Chetties are a product of intermarriage between Indian 19th century prisoners (who were nationalists fighting against the British in India during the Indian Mutiny) with local women. According to the Prisoner Theory, the prisoners who were detained in the Andaman Islands were sent by the British to Malacca to do menial work such as building roads and bridges. Many of the prisoners, after their sentence was completed, married local women and continued living in Malacca. Hence the development of a new community, known as the Chetties (Narayanasamy, 1968: 3 – 6).

The Prisoner Theory basically posits that the Chetties only came into being during the British stay in Malacca. However, archival material, namely Portuguese and Dutch documents show that the Chetties had been in Malacca long before the British came into power, that is, during the Malaccan Sultanate. One such document by Eridia (Mills, 1997: 19) clearly indicates that the Indian settlement in Kampung Keling was located within the administrative district of Malacca. According to the author:

> "....the suburb of Upeh (Malacca Town) is divided into parishes, S. Thomas and S. Estevao. The parish of S. Thomas is called Campon Chelin (Kampung Keling). It extends from Bazaar of the Jaos (Javanese) on the beach in a north-westerly direction and ends at the stone bastion. In this quarter live Chelis (Keling) of Coromandel...."

Further evidence comes from Portuguese documents around 1509-1511, which have the word Chetty written seven times (Pintado, 1993). According to the documents, the

leader of the Chetties at the time, Ninachatu, who assisted the Portuguese when they attacked Malacca was generously rewarded with position and wealth by Alfonso D'Albuquerque. It was also documented that after the fall of Malacca, the Portuguese established a new administration but did not interfere with the local customs and religious tradition of the Malays, Chetties, Chinese and other minority groups (Muzzi, 2002: 29).

Given the above, it is undeniable that the Chetties had been in Malacca long before British rule. Their existence of more than 500 years warrants a discussion on some of the integral characteristics of the Chetties that have established themselves as a community in their own right. One very pertinent characteristic of the Chetties is their mongoloid appearance which is very different from their Indian lineage. Secondly as stated earlier, they speak Malay instead of Tamil or any of the South Indian languages. Thirdly, they practice the Hindu religion. This last characteristic of the Chetties is important as it is the deciding point of the assimilation process of the group into the local culture. As they continued to practice the Hindu religion, the process of assimilation of this group into the local culture stops at language and some of the local customs. Unlike the Muslim traders who mostly assimilated totally into the Malay culture, the part assimilation of the Chetties makes the community a rather unique group. Whilst maintaining the Hindu religion, the Chetties enriched their culture with customs of other local cultures especially Malay and Baba Nyonya. For instance, the mother tongue of the Chetties is a variety of Malay which displays a rich and interesting mix of different cultures.

In the following section, I shall focus on the language spoken by the Chetties and on the similarities and differences between their language and the other Malay dialects.

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as a language in terms of vocabulary, structure, style and others to accommodate its function as a mother tongue. The Chetty language could be considered a creole as it fulfils both requirements that is, it is used as a mother tongue and is much more sophisticated linguistically than a pidgin.

As the MCCL is similar to other dialects of Malay, in terms of structure, the variety is generally not very different from other dialects. Nonetheless, there are certain distinctions. The following sections detail the linguistic similarities and distinctions between MCCL and other Malay dialects[7].

Comparing and contrasting MCCL with other Malay dialects

The MCCL is a creole which developed from the bazaar Malay language. Thus it has characteristics which are different from those of Malay dialects in the region such as the Malacca dialect or the Johor dialect. Below are some of the unique characteristics that are found in MCCL. Incidentally, these characteristics are also evident in dialects such as the Sarawak Malay and the Jakarta Malay dialects.

Variation of the phoneme /a/

According to Asmah (1991:2), there are two patterns of pronunciation for the sound /a/ at word final position in Malay, namely the central vowel [ə] (also known as the shwa) variety and the [a] variety. The pronunciation of the phoneme /a/ as [ə], that is as central/mid vowel is spread throughout the middle and south of Malaysia, particularly in

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[7] The discussion on MCCL in this article is based on data from interviews with Chetty informants. Altogether sixty informants were interviewed.

Selangor, Malacca, Johor and Pahang. The pronunciation of the phoneme /a/ as [a] is common in the north of Malaysia such as in Perlis, Kedah, Penang and also in East Malaysia, namely Sabah and Sarawak.

In the Malacca Malay dialect, the phoneme /a/ is realised at the word final position as [ə], that is as a central vowel. However, in the MCCL, this is not the case. The phoneme [a] is pronounced as [a]. Whilst this is true, there is a trend among younger Chetties to articulate the phoneme /a/ as [ə] when communicating with outsiders. This however is not the case with the older Chetties.

It is difficult to establish whether the pronunciation of /a/ by the Chetties has been influenced by the Malay Baba Nyonya creole or some other dialect spoken in the north of Peninsular Malaysia. A few informants reported that some of their ancestors married women from the Penang Baba Nyonya community. Even now there are some informants who married Baba Nyonya men and women, and whose language at home is a mix of MCCL and the Baba Nyonya creole language. Clearly, the intermarriage between men and women of the two communities has had an impact on the speech sound in MCCL.

The process of phoneme deletion

(a) Deletion of the phoneme /r/

The most evident phoneme deletion process in MCCL is the deletion of the rolled alveolar phoneme /r/ in word final position. Only three informants, in their 70s, still articulated the sound /r/ in word final position in their speech. The deletion of /r/ in final

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word position is a common characteristic of Malay dialects spoken in the middle and south of Peninsular Malaysia, namely Johor, Melaka and Pahang. On the other hand, in the Kedah, Penang and Perlis dialects, and also in the Sabah and Sarawak dialects, the final /r/ is maintained but realised as a fricative velar sound [ɣ] or a pharyngeal fricative sound [ʕ]. According to Yunus (1980: 73) most Malaysian and Singaporean speakers do not retain the phoneme /r/ at word final position. Nevertheless this does not affect meaning. For instance the word /bənar/ which means true or correct has the same meaning as /bəna/.

According to Zaharani (1993: 8), one problem that has arisen with regard to the deletion of /r/ is in establishing the existence of the phoneme in the original language because there is no concrete evidence such as written documents that could support the claim. According to the synchronic analysis used in historical linguistics, a particular structure or rule in a language that is manifested in most daughter dialects could be considered as the original structure or rule. This claim is based on the assumption that the existence of a particular rule in the dialects of a language cannot happen by chance or through borrowing, unless it is taken from the original language.

Asmah (1991: 5) states that historically, the /r/ diaphones existed in the Malay language, both in the Peninsula and East Malaysia. The linguistic development that took place caused the /r/ diaphones to disappear except for the Malay dialects spoken in certain areas such as Sabah, Sarawak and the north east regions of the Peninsula.

Based on the above, we could deduce that the phoneme /r/ at word final position was a familiar structure in MCCL. Over time, due to the influence of language use, education

and media, the phoneme has been dropped. Younger Chetty community members use the Johor Riau dialect which has deleted the phoneme /r/ in word final position. Nevertheless, this is not the case for the older generation as stated earlier. Ayatrohaedi (1979: 47) claims that it is more difficult for the older members of the community to change their speech style compared to the younger members who are exposed to outside influence. When older MCCL speakers pronounce the word *acar* or *bakar*, they sound like Tamil speakers speaking bazaar Malay. This further establishes the assumption that MCCL derived from bazaar Malay spoken in old Malacca.

(b) Deletion of the phoneme /h/

Besides the deletion of /r/ at word final position, another obvious deletion of sound in MCCL is the deletion of the phoneme /h/ in all positions. This is not exactly uncommon in most Malay dialects, but in MCCL, almost all /h/ sounds are dropped except in a small group of words.

In this case, it could be said that MCCL displays the characteristics of the bazaar Malay language (pidgin) as the phoneme /h/ is dropped/deleted at word initial and word final positions. Some common examples of the deletion of /h/ at word final position include /dara/ for /darah/, /buwa/ for /buwah/, /suda/ for /sudah/ and /bunu/ for /bunuh/. The deletion of /h/ at word initial position is evident in the cases of /habis/ pronounced as /abes/, /hitam/ pronounced as /itam/, and /halus/ pronounced as /alos/.

The same process takes place in the Malayu Ambong creole language (Minde 1997: 47), the Jakarta Malay dialect (Abdul Chaer, 1979: 49) and the Malay Sri Lanka creole language (Saldin, 1993: 1010). These four dialects may have originated from the same source language, that is the bazaar Malay language. MCCL also portrays similar

characteristics as the bazaar Malay pidgin spoken by Tamil speakers in Malaysia. According to Mashudi (1971: 160), it is difficult for Tamil speakers to pronounce the /h/ sound in Malay. This difficulty has caused the /h/ sound to be almost completely non-existent in the bazaar Malay spoken by Tamil speakers.

Table 1 presents some of the similarities between MCCL, the Melayu Ambon language[8] and the bazaar Malay spoken by Tamil speakers.

Table 1
The similarities between MCCL, Melayu Ambon creole language and bazaar Malay (Tamil) language

Standard Malay Language	MCCL	Melayu Ambon creole language	Bazaar Malay (Tamil) language
empat puluh	ampat pulu	ampat pulu	ampat pulu
sudah patah	suda pata	suda pata	suda pata
anak dia	dia punya anak	dia pung ana	dia punya ana
berenang	bernang	barnang	barnang
kalau	kalo	kalo	kalu
buat apa	bikin apa	biking apa	bikin apa
kakaknya marah	dia punya kakak mara	dia pung kaka mara	dia punya kaka mara
pandai	pande	pande	pande

Source : Adopted and adapted from Minde (1997)

The deletion of /h/ in all positions, that is at word initial, final and mid positions, was studied by Collins and Schmidt (1992: 299) based on a report written by a Dutch in 1599 entitled *Vocabulaer vande Javaensche ende Malaysche Woorden, die selfs op ternate vanden onsen gheschreven zijn* (Javanese and Malay Wordlist written by our

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[8] Minde (1997) used the term Malayu Ambong. Other writers, such as Collins (1987) used the term Melayu Ambon. In this article the term Melayu Ambon is used.

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people in Ternate). The 400 years old list is an important document with crucial data on the Malay language especially with regard to its phonology, morphology, semantics and etymology. Table 2 lists words that underwent the deletion of the /h/ sound at word initial, mid, and final positions based on the study by Collins and Schmidt (1992).

Table 2
Malay words that had undergone the deletion of /h/ in all positions

1. alus	<halus	9. minjaot	<menyahut	17. mira	<merah
2. arry	<hari	10. cassian	<kasihan	18. sauou	<sauh
3. abis	<habis	11. liat	<lihat	19. labo	<labuh
4. idgo	<hijau	12.bodoi	<bodohi	20. peytzia	<pecah
5. idop	<hidup	13.battau	<beritahu	21. sourou	<suruh
6. idom	<hidung	14.manjayt	<menjahit	22. balla	<belah
7. itam	<hitam	15.bamper	<berhampir	23. pana	<panah
8. outan	<hutan	16.payit	<pahit	24. sompa	<sumpah

Source : Adopted from Collins and Schmidt (1992: 299)[9]

(c) Monophthongisation Process

In MCCL, the diphthong /ai/ undergoes the monopthongisation process, that is the process of two vowel sounds shifting to one vowel sound. Words that have the /ai/ at word final position in standard Malay, are articulated or pronounced as /e/ which is a half-closed front vowel in MCCL. Table 3 presents examples in standard Malay that end with /ai/ and their articulation in MCCL.

Table 3
Standard Malay words with the diphthong /ai/ pronounced as /e/ in MCCL

Standard Malay Language	MCCL	Standard Malay Language	MCCL
serai	sere	pakai	pake

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[9] The spelling from the original quotation is preserved.

sampai	sampe	kedai	kede
selesai	selese	pandai	pande
rantai	rante	gadai	gade
ramai	rame	misai	mise
murai	mure		

Another diphthong that changes its quality to a single vowel sound in MCCL is /au/ when it occurs at word final position in standard Malay words. Usually, in MCCL the sound /au/ is realised as /o/ which is a half-closed back vowel. Below are examples of words which end with /au/ in standard Malay that undergo a shift in vowel quality in MCCL.

Table 4
Standard Malay words with the diphthong /au/ pronounced as /o/ in MCCL

Standard Malay Language	MCCL	Standard Malay Language	MCCL
kalau	kalo	hijau	Ijo
pulau	pulo	engkau	engko
harimau	arimo	kurau	kuro
limau	lemo	halau	alo

The monophthongisation process that happens in MCCL is evident in the Sarawak Malay dialect (Madzhi, 1989: 20) and also the Jakarta Malay dialect (Abdul Chaer, 1979: 47). In his study on the Jakarta Malay dialect, Abdul Chaer found that the diphthong /ai/ is often replaced with the vowel /e/ sound when it occurs at word final position. He lists three examples of words form Mester and Tanah Abang sub-dialects[10].

satai   →   sate
rantai   →   rante

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[10] The data presented here are taken verbatim from Abdul Chaer (1979).

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$$\text{gadai} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{gade}$$

Collins (1987: 35) names this process monophthongisation. In the above examples, at first the original forms undergo sandhi. Then the diphthong /ai/ is changed to the vowel /e/. In the following examples the diphthong /au/ undergoes the same process where it is changed to /o/.

$$\text{kalau} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{kalo}$$
$$\text{limau} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{limo}$$

The monophthongisation process causes the high vowels /i/ and /u/ to be lowered and articulated as /e/ and /o/ respectively. This process is also evident in the Baba Nyonya Malay creole languages. These similarities in the process suggest that the languages originate from the same source language, that is the bazaar Malay language that was the lingua franca of the Malay Archipelago especially in ports and trading centres such as Malacca, Jakarta and the Borneo Islands.

(d) Phoneme deletion in consonant clusters of trisyllabic words

The leaving out of a sound or sounds in speech is a common phenomenon in many languages. This process is known as ellipsis. Studies on Malay dialects (Collins, 1987; Asmah, 1991) show that this process is common in Malay especially in words with three syllables that have consonant clusters at the border of the syllables. The clusters are usually a nasal + consonant (nasal followed by a voiced plosive consonant /b/), also known as plosive nasal homorganic consonant cluster. In speech, the cluster loses the consonant sound and is left with the nasal sound only.

Asmah (1991) found that the voiced plosive consonant /b/ is elided in the Kelantan Malay dialect. Consider the following:

serambi   →   serami
sembahyang   →   semaye

The deletion of the /b/ in words with homorganic consonant cluster also happens in certain sub-dialects of the Kedah dialect in certain words. For example:

kambing   →   kamin
lembu   →   lemu

This process is also found in MCCL. The table presents a sample list of words that are trisyllabic in standard Malay that undergo the ellipsis process in MCCL.

Table 5
The trisyllabic words in MCCL which had undergone the phoneme deletion process

Standard Malay Language	MCCL
sembunyi	semunyet
tembelang	temelang
sembilan	semilan
sembahyang	semayang
tembolok	temolok

Phoneme insertion process

The process of phoneme insertion is the opposite of phoneme deletion. In MCCL, phoneme insertion occurs usually at word final position. In particular, it is found that the phoneme /k/ or the glottal stop [ʔ] is inserted at word final position especially in words that end with the vowel sounds /i/, /a/ and /u/ such as the following:

cari	→	carik
nasi	→	nasik
garu	→	garok
bawa	→	bawak
bapa	→	bapak

According to Collins (1983: 48) the insertion of /k/ at word final position is common in many languages. Interestingly, Anderson (1972) labels the phenomenon 'parasite consonants'. This phenomenon is found in the various Malay dialects including the Terengganu Pantai dialect, the Jakarta Malay dialects and also the Pulau Tioman dialect (Collins, 1983: 49).

The influence of the Baba Nyonya Malay creole language

The relationship between the Chetty and the Baba Nyonya communities was established a long time ago. The relationship between the two communities was not just business in nature but also familial. Chetty men chose women from the Baba Nyonya community as their wives and likewise, Baba Nyonya men married women from among the Chetties. This is one of the main factors that caused the Baba Nyonya language to have a great impact on MCCL.

The influence of the Baba Nyonya language on MCCL is evident in Ding (2001: 52) article that explicates the sociolinguistic aspects of the Baba Nyonya Malay language, a Malay creole language spoken in Malacca. According to the author, the Baba Nyonya language is a product of the bazaar Malay language used by non-Malays (Chinese, Arabs, Indians and Europeans) to communicate as early as the 17th century. The language used by the Baba Nyonya community has undergone various changes in

terms of phonology, semantics and syntax. Below is a list of linguistic changes that the Baba Nyonya language has undergone.

Table 6
Changes in the phonology, semantic and syntax of the Malay Baba Nyonya creole language

No.	Type of change	Examples
1	Unique additions	memulakan> mulaikan kebersihan > kbersehan membaharukan> bbharukan
2.	The change of the vowel sound 'i' to 'ik' at word final position	bagi > bagik cari > carik
3.	The change of the diphthong 'ai' to the vowel sound 'e' at word final position	sungai > sunge sampai > sampe
4.	The change of the diphthong 'au' to the vowel sound 'o' at word final position	pulau > pulo kalau > kalo
5.	Realizing 'a' at word final position as 'ak'	bapa > bapak, bawa > bawak, pula > pulak
6.	Wrong pronunciation	ambil > ambek, atau amek
7.	Dropping of the 'h' at word final position	rumah > ruma, bodoh > bodo, boleh > bole
8.	Meaning change	bilang (cakap, memberitahu)
9.	The frequent use of 'punya'	emaknya > dia punya emak; kereta macam itu > seperti itu macam punya kereta bapa duduk di sebelah meja > bapak ada duduk di sebelah punya meja.

Source : Adopted and adapted from Ding (2001: 55)

It is evident from the table that the Baba Nyonya Malay creole language and the MCCL are quite similar. The characteristics and changes found in the former are also found in MCCL.

The influence of the Malay Sri Lankan creole language

According to Lim (1981), the MCCL shares a number of similarities with the Malay creole spoken in Sri Lanka. The Malay Sri Lankan creole language (henceforth

MSLCL) is spoken by approximately fifty thousand speakers in a number of areas in Sri Lanka including Colombo, Kandy, Badulla and Hambantota. The Malays who are in Sri Lanka are descendants of political exiles or soldiers who were brought into Sri Lanka by the Dutch between 1656 and 1850 (Saldin, 1993: 998). The vocabulary in MSLCL is basically Malay but the structure of the language is very much influenced by the Tamil language. The MSLCL is commonly used at home and among friends only. The table below presents a sample of words in the MSLCL that are similar to those in MCCL.

Table 7
Similar words in standard Malay language, MSLCL and MCCL

Standard Malay language	MSLCL	MCCL	Standard Malay language	MSLCL	MCCL
halwa	alua	alua	sanggul	konde	konde
anak angkat	anak piara	anak piara	orang India dari Kalinga	keling	keling
mak cik/adik emak	bibi	bibik	kerbau	kerbo	kerbo
berkata	bilang	bilang	lubang	lobang	lobang
cahaya	caya	caya	kamu	lu	lu
tanah/tanah pamah	darat	darat	kamu semua	lu orang	lu orang
dakwat	dawat	dawat	pak cik	mama	mama
dosa	deraka	deraka	mak cik	mami	mami
bidan	dukun	dukon	cawan	mangkok	mangkok
gagap	gagu	gagok	mengeram	mengeram	mengeram
memanggang	ganggang	ganggang	nafas	napas	napas
garu/cakar	garok	garok	hari ini	nyari	nyari
begitu	gitu	gitu	ubat	obat	obat
guni	goni	goni	pergi	pi	pi
hidung	idong	idong	kuih daripada tepung beras	putu	putu
hijau	ijo	ijo	sampai	sampe	sampe
hiris	iris	ires	serai	sere	sere
jubah	jubbah	jobah	serikaya	sirehkaya	sirekaya
nasi minyak	kebuli	kemuli	teratai	terate	terate

Source : Adopted and adapted from Saldin (1993: 1009)

Conclusion

From the above discussion on the similarities and distinctions between the Malay creole language spoken by the Chetties with other Malay creoles and Malay dialects, we can conclude that this variety has its own unique characteristics which distinguish it from other Malay dialects especially those spoken in the southern regions of Peninsular Malaysia such as the Johor and Malacca dialects. As a creole that developed from the bazaar Malay language, the MCCL shares a number of similarities with other creoles languages spoken in Malaysia and the Malay Archipelago including the Baba Nyonya Malay creole, the Melayu Ambon creole language and the Jakarta Malay creole language (the Betawi Malay). The MCCL is also similar to the creole language spoken by Sri Lankan Malays. Some of the more prominent similarities is the pronunciation of the phoneme /a/ at word final position, the deletion of the phoneme /h/ and the monophthongisation of diphtongs /ai/ and /au/ process. The similar characteristics of the MCCL with the other creoles strongly suggest that they came from the same source language, namely the bazaar Malay language or the low Malay variety that was the lingua franca and the language used in trading in the Malay Archipelago before the arrival of western colonials in the region.

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