

Engaging communities in language documentation and revitalisation efforts

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The language spoken by the Portuguese-Eurasian community in Malaysia, Malacca Portuguese Creole (MPC), continues to survive in the Portuguese Settlement, which was set up in the early 1930s to locate people of Portuguese descent in an area on the coast of Malacca, south of Kuala Lumpur. However, there is a lack of inter-generational transfer (Pillai, Soh & Kajita, 2014), and also competition from English and the national language, Malay resulting in the number of fluent speakers steadily declining over the years. MPC is now categorised as one of the endangered languages in Malaysia. As MPC is inextricably linked to the cultural traditions of this minority community, the disappearance of MPC would be a great loss to a community already struggling with its identity and status within multilingual and multi-ethnic Malaysia (Pillai, Soh & Yusuf, 2015). In 2011, efforts to digitally document MPC began with the support of funding from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme at SOAS. In this presentation, I will describe the challenges involved in engaging members of the community at the Portuguese Settlement in the documentation process (see <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI130545>). I will then explain how the documentation project led to revitalization efforts of MPC. I will share some of the issues involved in moving from documentation to revitalisation efforts (Pillai, Phillip & Soh, forthcoming) based on two community-based revitalization projects between a research team from the University of Malaya and representatives from the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasian Association.

References

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Stefanie Pillai is a Professor at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, where she teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses on Phonetics and Phonology. She is currently the Dean of the Faculty. Her current funded research project is on the segmental and prosodic features of Malacca Portuguese Creole. A book on the Creole, *Beng Prende Portuguese Malaká (Come, Let's Learn Portuguese Malaká)*, in collaboration with the Malacca Portuguese-Eurasian Association, has recently been published. The collaboration also resulted in the production of an audio CD of prayers and hymns in the Creole, *Rezu cum Catiga de Rezu*. Her initial work on the Creole was funded by a grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK. She has subsequently been working on the sound system of the Creole. You can listen to her work on the Creole at <http://www.bfm.my/lingo-episode-10-kristang-part-1.html> and <http://www.bfm.my/lingo-episode-11-kristang-part-2.html>.