

JAMES T. COLLINS

## MALAY DIALECT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA: THE ISSUE OF PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

When European travellers and adventurers began to explore the coasts and islands of Southeast Asia almost five hundred years ago, they found Malay spoken in many of the ports and entrepôts of the region. Indeed, today Malay remains an important indigenous language in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand and Singapore.<sup>2</sup> It should not be a surprise, then, that such a widespread and ancient language is characterized by a wealth of diverse

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the English Department of the National University of Singapore (July 22, 1987) and to the Persatuan Linguistik Malaysia (July 23, 1987). I would like to thank those who attended those presentations and provided valuable insights that have contributed to improving the paper. I am especially grateful to Dr. Anne Pakir of Singapore and to Dr. Nik Safiah Karim of Malaysia, who invited me to present a paper. I am also grateful to Dr. Azhar M. Simin and En. Awang Sariyan, who considerably enlivened the presentation in Kuala Lumpur. Professor George Grace and Professor Albert Schütz read earlier drafts of this paper. I thank them for their advice and encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1881, Maxwell (1907:2) observed that:

'Malay is the language not of a nation, but of tribes and communities widely scattered in the East ... It is spoken in all the states of the Peninsula, in Sumatra, Sunda, Java, Borneo, Celebes, Flores, Timor, and Timor Laut, the Moluccas, and the Philippines ... Siam proper has a large Malay population, descendants mainly of captives taken in war, and the language is therefore in use there in places; it is found also here and there on the coasts and rivers of Anam and Cochin-China. No other language of the Eastern Archipelago is understood over such an extensive area, and it is the common means of communication between the numerous tribes and races of the Malay family whose languages and dialects differ.'

This insight into the geographic range of Malay-speaking communities should be compared to Gosling's comments (1978) about the trading patterns of the present and previous generations of Terengganu's coastal traders. Apparently they sailed not only throughout the Gulf of Thailand but also to Borneo and other islands of the archipelago.

---

JAMES T. COLLINS is a linguist who took his degree at the University of Chicago, and who is currently associate professor of Indo-Pacific Languages at the University of Hawaii. His two most important publications are *The Historical Relationships of the Languages of Central Maluku, Indonesia* and *Ambonese Malay and Creolization Theory*. Dr. Collins may be reached at the Department of Indo-Pacific Languages, University of Hawaii, 2540 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822 USA.

regional and social dialects. Little scholarly interest was given to these dialects during the colonial period<sup>3</sup>, but in the past twenty years a great deal of research has focussed on some of these dialects. It is a source of justifiable pride that most of this basic and critical research has been undertaken by the Southeast Asians themselves.<sup>4</sup> Largely due to their efforts, a clearer notion of many individual dialects, as well as a growing appreciation of the total network of Malay dialects, has evolved. It is the aim of this short essay not to criticize the essential and impressive work of the last decades, but rather to assess some apparent assumptions underlying that work and to suggest a new set of perspectives.

The work of the next twenty years necessarily rests on the efforts of the preceding decades, but it should also go beyond earlier research and provide greater detail and deeper analysis. Discerning flawed assumptions of the past and setting forth a new framework for continued research is intended here to spur the whole endeavor of Malay dialect studies forward.

### 1. Premises and working principles

In the history of linguistic science, the systematic study of dialects is closely related to the development of comparative historical linguistics. That dialectology and historical linguistics continue to complement each other (McDavid 1974:79) and, moreover, share with sociolinguistics a mutual focus of interest (Labov 1980:XIV) does not suggest the even more important methodological premise at the core of both linguistic fields. Dialects and languages are classified on the basis of patterns of innovations. That is so because dialects, like languages, are distinguished from each other phonologically, grammatically, and lexically. Dialects can be mapped into the family tree model which underlies historical linguistics. Furthermore, this model implies that all related languages were at one time dialects of an even older language.

The chief issue, then, in dialect and language classification is identifying the branching of the family tree, not in labelling one branch 'language' and

<sup>3</sup> There are, of course, notable exceptions to this observation. Scholars such as van der Toorn, de Clercq, Helfrich, and Skeat, for example, conducted valuable research, much of which resulted in substantial publications. (See Collins 1983b:vii.)

<sup>4</sup> In Malaysia, there have been scores of BA essays and MA theses written about Malay dialects. There was also a short-lived dialect research project sponsored by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the language bureau of Malaysia. In Indonesia, in addition to a number of unpublished academic exercises, the national language center, Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, has funded numerous dialect research projects and has published many of the subsequent reports. In Brunei, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (the national language center) has undertaken some preliminary studies of the indigenous dialect. In recent years some Singapore and Thai linguists have begun research on dialects of Malay spoken in their respective countries. (See, for example, A. Pakir 1986, Amon Thawisak 1982, Paitoon Masmintra Chaiyanara 1983.)

another 'dialect'. The problem of determining the degree of linguistic difference which separates dialect from language is not the task of the dialectologist. That issue is of greater interest to language planners, textbook authors, and translators of sacred books. The task of the dialectologist is to identify the splits which have yielded the contemporary network of dialects. In other words, delineating the history of a language, its diffusion, and its diversification, is the goal of dialectology.

In taking up this task, the dialectologist relies not only on linguistic data (phonetic descriptions, recorded texts, transcribed wordlists, regional dictionaries, and the like) but also on extralinguistic information. From its inception, dialectology has always been enriched by a strong reliance on social and cultural history, demography, philology, and geography. By using extralinguistic facts to interpret linguistic data, dialectologists have been able to unravel the complex interwebbing of dialects, which might otherwise obfuscate historical splits and – thus – hamper classification.

## 2. The unspoken assumptions

Dialectology is, then, an endeavor fraught with difficulties inherent in the nature of dialect networks, such as cross-dialectal borrowing, areal diffusion, widespread calquing, and so forth. The study of language variants and language variation – even with insights drawn from extralinguistic sources – is, of course, a very challenging field of study. Unfortunately, a perusal of Malay dialect studies indicates that an inherently complex task has been further complicated by the existence of underlying, prescientific, perhaps antiscientific, assumptions. These preconceived notions appear again and again in such studies and seriously obstruct progress in the identification and classification of Malay dialects. Such assumptions unconsciously narrow the researcher's field of vision, and precisely because they are not acknowledged or discussed, have a particularly deleterious effect. For the purpose of the discussion here, four 'prepackaged' perspectives are discussed.

### 2.1 *The canon of Malay dialects*

In a very recent publication of the Malaysian Language and Literature Agency (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), the authors name regional dialects in Malaysia<sup>5</sup>; they are: 'Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Perlis, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Sarawak and Sabah' (Safiah et al. 1986:31-32). The list of Malay dialects – including the hint of a closer relationship among Kedah, Perlis, and Penang – forms the accepted canon of Malaysia's Malay dialects. It has developed over the years, expanding and shrinking according to the contemporary

---

<sup>5</sup> These dialects are listed as 'among' the dialects spoken in Malaysia, but no other dialect is mentioned, except the national languages of Brunei and Indonesia.

viewpoints of the various authors. One might suggest that it was Za'ba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad), the indigenous pioneer of modern Malay language studies in Malaysia, whose specification of Malay dialects yielded a list most closely resembling today's canon.<sup>6</sup> However, Winstedt's early dictionary work (Winstedt 1951:ii, iv, taken from the preface to the 1913 edition, and Winstedt 1960:5) surely laid the foundation for such a list by providing dialect names in a table of abbreviations, as well as inserting a discussion of the relationship between Penang and Kedah.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the source of this accepted canon of Malay dialects, it is one with which most Malaysians and Malay scholars are familiar.<sup>8</sup> It underlies other discussions, for example Mukhtaruddin's (1982:6-7) treatment of dialect continua, and retains its place in the dialect labels of the most recent dictionaries (Iskandar 1984:xxiv). Is there a scientific basis for this accepted list of Malay dialects? Are there linguistic studies which support it?

Hendon (1966:XI) did not think so; he wrote that '... there is scarcely any certain information even as to the location of the major dialect boundaries, and for only three regional varieties of Malay is there sufficient published material to give some notion of what the dialects are like'.

Although his study and other subsequent descriptions of Malay dialects have contributed to the materials which indicate 'what the dialects are like', there remain many gaps in our knowledge of Malay dialects. Furthermore, even until now little research has aimed at establishing 'major dialects boundaries'. Instead there has been a reliance on the accepted catalogue of Malay dialects as a starting-point for investigation.

Among the least studied, indeed least verified, of canonical Malay dialects must be 'Selangor' Malay, an early member of the accepted list.<sup>9</sup> However, until 1985, no linguistic data regarding this variant had been

<sup>6</sup> He writes in Za'ba (1962:282-83) that 'in the Malay peninsula alone persons from Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang speak a Malay differing in dialect and accent even though they all speak Malay' (The translation is mine). He also specifically groups the Malay of Pulau Pinang, Seberang Perai, and Kedah together.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that, while Winstedt appears to be the first to provide the 'standard' list, including the outline of the continuum of Kedah Malay (perhaps drawing on Hamilton 1922), elsewhere (Winstedt 1938:1, originally published in 1916) he notes that: 'Every state has a slightly different dialect: and up the rivers of any state (like Perak) there are often as many dialects as there are villages'. Of course the blasé announcement that every village has its own dialect is hardly a useful contribution and errs in another direction.

<sup>8</sup> Certainly there are other lists of Malay dialects, but even these lists differ mostly in supplying classificatory headings while containing the familiar canonical dialects as subsets under the classification headings. See, for example, Arbak 1981:1, Asmah 1976:24-25 or, with some additions following Ismail (1973), Farid 1980:71-73. What is at issue here is not a specific classification but the deep-seated perspectives antedating those classifications.

<sup>9</sup> Newbold (1839:317) mentions 'Selangore' as one of the dialects which is 'tolerably uniform'. Although Za'ba does not mention Selangor in his list, he does cite examples from that dialect.

systematically collected!<sup>10</sup> Yet it is firmly embedded in the litany of Malay dialects. Moreover, the shadow of Selangor Malay falls on a large piece of maps of dialects of Malay in the peninsula. Nonetheless, the results of a preliminary survey undertaken in the Jugra, Kuala Langat, area suggest there are no significant differences between the variant of Malay spoken in the oldest Malay settlements there and that spoken along the Muar River in Johor.<sup>11</sup>

The results of even a brief survey in a small corner of Selangor have indicated the necessity of a total revision in the enumeration and identification of Malay dialects. Obviously 'Selangor' Malay should be removed from the list. But even more important is the fact that the Selangor results press us to re-examine all these established 'dialects'. What do we know about the 'Johor' dialect? The 'Perak' dialect? Is there a published linguistic study of 'Terengganu' Malay? The prescribed catalogue of Malay dialects should be set aside at least until empirical data can be found to support the inherent claims of such labels.<sup>12</sup> 'Common knowledge' should not subvert research and burke enquiry. It is the unheeding acceptance of the canon which blocks the perspective of contemporary scholars.

## *2.2 The state boundary grid*

Closely related to the existence of a canon of Malay dialects is the idea that the boundaries dividing the states of modern Malaysia somehow provide the basis for classifying Malay dialects. We have seen that today's accepted list of Malay dialects differs in some details with earlier lists. This difference reflects the historical waxing and waning of the interests of colonial policy-makers towards various Malay principalities. Just as it was probably a colonial official (namely R.O. Winstedt) who was influential in providing a canon of dialects, it was also colonial officials who, in many

<sup>10</sup> Examples of Selangor Malay, however, can be gleaned from Skeat (1900) and, mostly from him, in Gimlette (1939 [1971]) and elsewhere. See also Asai (1927).

<sup>11</sup> For details, refer to the initial results published in Collins and Naseh 1986/1987. This research was sponsored by the now defunct Dialectology Project of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

<sup>12</sup> The scant materials assembled in Zahrah (1966) and later Farid (1980) do not reveal much about 'Johor' Malay. Indeed, the initial results of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka survey of the Muar River basin (1985/1986) strongly suggest the need for a review of the label 'Johor' (see comments in Collins and Naseh 1986/1987). However, in Perak Rohani (1986) has recently completed a study of variants around Kuala Kangsar. Furthermore, there are brief unpublished reports on Malay in Hilir Perak with accompanying texts collected by Othman Omar (1985, 1986). The current work of Zaharani Ahmad will further contribute to our knowledge of that dialect. Othman's essay on the Malay dialect spoken in coastal Terengganu (Othman 1984) has advanced our knowledge of that dialect, too, but much more work needs to be done along the various river basins. See Collins 1983a for a discussion of the 'Terengganu' label. It should be noted that in the present article the traditional nomenclature, such as Terengganu Malay, Perak Malay, etc., is largely maintained in order to provide some continuity with earlier authors. The meaning of these labels, that is, the geographic scope and linguistic features of these dialects, has been and is being revised to accommodate new information.

cases, provided the state boundaries of modern Malaysia.<sup>13</sup> With very little elaboration, these state boundaries and the areas enclosed by them form the basis of today's Malay dialect canon.

The literature and reports of nineteenth century administrators demonstrate the development of secure boundaries, resulting from political imbroglia, followed by a shift in the list of 'states' and the number of 'dialects'. For example, between 1839, when Newbold reported on it, and 1856 (Crawfurd), when it was no longer mentioned, Naning ceased to be of importance to policy-makers and gazetteers because it had been earlier absorbed by force into a labelled colony, later state: Melaka. Similarly, while Crawfurd (1856:259) still listed 'Rumbao, Jehole and Jompol' among the 'states of civilized Malays', later authors (Winstedt 1923:96 *inter alia*) referred only to 'Negri Sembilan', the current label for a fusion of principalities, a political entity engineered by officials in the nineteenth century. Likewise, while Crawfurd and, before him, Marsden (1812:112) enumerated only Kedah (or 'Queda') as the center of Malay culture in the north, later authors include Penang as a 'separate' but related dialect of Malay. The realities of the political acquisition of the island (1786) eventually produced *on paper* a separate but related dialect.

It is apparent, then, that throughout history, political manoeuvres first obliterated older 'states' and then created new ones. The history of the current state boundaries of Malaysia is very complex and is seldom related to the dialects of Malay spoken in Malaysia. Yet far too often, state boundaries and state names frame the outlook of scholars writing about Malay dialects. The map grid provides the framework which locks out real research on Malay dialects.

As an example, note that we have the dialect names Sarawak Malay and Sabah Malay. But little is known about the variety of Malay spoken along the Saribas River in Sarawak. What data we do have manifest many differences with the variant spoken in the estuary of the Sarawak River and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Is there ample justification for considering those two variants as subdialects of the same labelled dialect? Conversely, there is considerable evidence that proves that the dialect of Malay spoken in Limbang in Sarawak is the same as the dialect of Malay spoken on Labuan Island and elsewhere in Sabah.<sup>15</sup> This reality, which overrides the arbitrary, Habsburg-style boundaries which divide Sabah from Sarawak, is not reflected in dialect names. Instead, the boundaries have grid-locked the nomenclature and obscured the issue.

<sup>13</sup> A study of the historic expansion of Johor's 'imperial' boundaries, for example, would amply justify this remark.

<sup>14</sup> Some details are noted in Collins 1983c.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the variant spoken in Limbang, see Hasanah 1984. J. Blom (1980) has recorded four extensive vocabularies of Brunei Malay spoken near Papar, Sabah. These may be compared with the Kedayan (Brunei) variant spoken in Labuan (Collins 1983d). See Moody 1984 for locations of other Brunei/Kedayan-speaking villages in Sabah.

A more severe example of adherence to state boundaries which has vitiated dialect research is found in the work of Simanjuntak and Ramli (1980, reprinted in 1982). In this study, the language spoken in the northern part of Melaka state (around Alor Gajah and elsewhere) is identified as a subdialect of Melaka Malay and labelled 'North Melaka Malay', even though in this area (more or less coterminous with the older, ill-fated Naning mentioned above) villagers speak a dialect of Malay unmistakably recognizable as Negeri Sembilan Malay, a well-known dialect spoken in the area adjacent to that part of Melaka state. The authors' strict adherence to the state boundary grid has yielded a false and non-explanatory label.

There is a more subtle example of the pernicious influence of the state boundary grid. In her recent book, *Susur galur bahasa Melayu*, Asmah Hj. Omar (1985) has gone far beyond her earlier efforts at describing and classifying dialects of Malay in Malaysia. Many dialects and subdialects (e.g. Patani, Muar, Kedayan) hitherto ignored in published dialect studies are briefly described and various issues are discussed in innovative and insightful ways. As she notes (Asmah 1985:126-126), dialect regions are independent of the political boundaries of current Malaysian states. But even in this useful, innovative study of Malay dialects, the state boundary grid insinuates itself. The organization of the book, the very chapter headings are according to the names of the states! So, even while dialects which are spoken in more than one state are discussed, the discussion is conducted on a state-by-state basis. Certainly, a heuristic concern led Asmah to organize her book in this way but, notwithstanding that, it is the state boundary grid once again and as such it obscures some of the excellent features of her book.<sup>16</sup>

More examples from numerous sources could demonstrate in both extreme and subtle ways the unrealistic compartmentalization that has occurred due to the persistence of the state boundary paradigm. The mapping of regional dialects, moreover, the ability to perceive new as yet undescribed dialects, is severely hampered by an unconscious reliance on essentially arbitrary internal borders.

### 2.3 *The international borderlines*

To achieve success, the study of dialects or even of a particular dialect requires an appreciation of the siting of that dialect or groups of dialects in both a temporal and geographical context. In order to understand, indeed, identify, changes and to recognize retentions, one must know the relative chronological history of the language and language family from

<sup>16</sup> I am thinking, for example, of her germane comments on the relationship of Muar, Johor and Melaka (Asmah 1985:160-61) and, elsewhere, Selangor (Asmah 1985:172). These are valuable insights into the reconstruction of the diffusion of Malay dialects. But the threads of this argument are not drawn together into a convincing synthesis, partly because of the state-by-state arrangement which paces the book's argumentation.

which the dialect springs. Clearly, this is related to the issue of language genealogy noted in Section 1 of this paper. But another way to obtain a suitable coign of vantage is simply to survey a wider geographical area.<sup>17</sup> By expanding one's viewpoint from a strictly domestic survey to a broader sweep of dialects in nearby or adjacent countries, the quality of the research deepens. In order to improve the quality of dialect studies in Malaysia, a knowledge of Malay dialects elsewhere in Southeast Asia is essential.

Unfortunately, the carefully drawn lines imposed by political advisers and emissaries on maps of the Malay peninsula and Borneo island, separating state from state and nation from nation, have too long interfered with our abilities to perceive broader relationships or to draw on other sources of information to resolve issues in the study of Malay dialects in Malaysia. The compartmentalization imposed by state names and state boundaries is paralleled by the effects of international borders on research perspectives. Two examples are noted below.

There exists an enormous number of studies about Kelantan Malay (for enumerations, see Safiah 1985 and Collins and Hussin 1988). Almost every Malaysian linguist born in Kelantan has written about his or her kampong dialect. Many of these studies have provided valuable information about Kelantan Malay. Some of them, in fact, represent pioneering attempts in Malay linguistics; dialect geography, etymology, suprasegmentals, and sociolinguistics have all been introduced to the Malaysian scholarly community in the garb of Kelantan Malay. However, despite the number and quality of these works, many issues in Kelantan Malay have not been addressed. One example is the failure to discuss high vowel diphthongization and centralization.<sup>18</sup> Another is the only passing notice of the existence of nasal vowels in the dialect (for example, Safiah 1965). These and many other striking features of Kelantan phonetics and phonology have been at best glossed over, although the dialect has been studied many times.

One of the factors behind these oversights in the reluctance of those studying Kelantan Malay to examine the details of Patani Malay. There is also a general lack of familiarity with materials written about that dialect. This is the case even though it is not yet clear that there are any significant differences between Patani Malay and Kelantan Malay. While some subdialects of Patani Malay display remarkable characteristics (Asmah 1985:207-208 citing Abdul Karim 1971-72), the general features of the two variants are closely parallel; not surprisingly, a high degree of mutual intelligibility is likewise reported. Despite all this, most Kelantan

<sup>17</sup> The issue of setting aside boundary lines taken up under different headings in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 is, of course, at heart the same issue. In this paper, the problem is divided into two sections merely to highlight the exposition of the argument.

<sup>18</sup> Collins 1983a takes up the problem in a related dialect and it is treated in more detail in Collins 1983e.



dialect studies contain at most a one- or two-sentence comment that Patani Malay is closely related and easily understood. There is no further discussion.

Without a doubt, the strongest barrier blocking the viewpoint of scholars studying Kelantan Malay is an invisible one, or perhaps a thin red line on a map. Patani Malay is spoken mostly in Thailand, the other side of an international border.<sup>19</sup> This historical coincidence has effectively severed the Malay dialect community<sup>20</sup> of Southern Thailand from the purview of Malaysia's dialect specialists. Geographic contiguity as well as rich historical and cultural links have not compelled a serious consideration of Patani Malay. It is important to note that the most comprehensive materials about Patani Malay are written in English and Malaysian, so there is no linguistic hindrance to access to that material. Rather, what lies behind the omission is the unconscious assumption that an international border constitutes a delimitation of research.

The writings of A. Wilding (1968, 1972, 1979), for example, are strikingly rich in information about the phonetics of Patani Malay. The occurrence of nasal vowel phonemes as well as the diphthongization of final high vowels are considered in her work. Familiarity with these studies could provide a starting-point for further inquiries into Kelantan Malay phonetics. Thus, we see that the scope of bibliographic preparation and, perhaps, of fieldwork needs to be expanded without respect to international borders.

An extreme case of the strength of the international-border-assumption may be found in a paper written by Simanjuntak (1982, apparently published in 1983). The author ties Malay dialect classification to the premise that existent political borders constitute a basis for categorization. So, most glaringly, notwithstanding the recorded history and the linguistic facts, 'Singapore Malay' is considered a branch of Malay distinct from Johor Malay; in fact, the diagram accompanying that paper suggests only a remote connection between the two variants. While it could be true that the *twin-headed monster*, Riau-Johor Malay, may turn out to be a myth (Asraf 1986), the relationship of Malay in Johor Baru and Singapore can only be a very close one. These two variants must be considered two manifestations of the selfsame dialect of Malay, differing only in spatial

---

<sup>19</sup> Note, however, the sizeable communities of Patani speakers in upland regions of Kedah and Perak.

<sup>20</sup> Patani Malay is hardly affected by the standard Malay of schools and officialdom because in Thailand only Thai is used in such formal settings.

location but identical in linguistic detail.<sup>21</sup> Any claim that Singapore Malay is substantially different from Johor Malay is chimerical.<sup>22</sup>

#### 2.4 *The ethnic enclave mentality*

For the past few years, there has been a discussion regarding the proper focus of Malay Studies. In 1986, for example, Ismail Hussein provided an historical sketch of the development of Malay studies in Malaysia and argued for a fuller integration of literature and culture studies. He wrote that the focus of such studies has been *masyarakat induk Melayu*, 'the basic or core Malay community'. In fairness to Professor Ismail, the brevity of his article, written for the popular press, perhaps pre-empted a fuller development of the meaning of this collocation.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this term, 'the core Malay community', can be seen as symptomatic of the trend of past and present Malay dialect studies. The attention of these studies has been directed almost exclusively to dialects spoken by ethnic Malays. Malay dialect studies have been synonymous with ethnic studies. Despite the fact that there exist many Malay dialects spoken by non-Malays, these are rarely investigated. Bazaar Malay, a widespread contact language in Malaysia, is thought of as a variant used by non-Malays (although, in fact, it is used equally frequently by Malays in certain sociolinguistic situations); consequently it has been neglected.<sup>24</sup> However, besides commanding various degrees of fluency in this trade language, many non-Malay ethnic groups use their own dialects of Malay as exclusive home languages. The Baba of Melaka, the Temuan, Orang Hulu, Orang Kanaq, Urak Lawoi', and the Chitty of Melaka all use Malay as their respective home languages,

<sup>21</sup> This statement is difficult to prove because we have little information about Malay in Johor, particularly Southern Johor, let alone in Singapore. Impressionistic observations in Kluang, Johor, and Singapore's Changi airport suggest that the dialects are the same. If it is thought that the Malay spoken in Singapore displays any Javanisms or Indonesianisms, these are well-matched by the same phenomena in Johor. For example in Kluang (July 21, 1987), I recorded *bajing* ('squirrel') instead of *tupai*, and *jajan* ('snack') not *mengudap*. A field study in Singapore may indicate some differences. Have the Kelantan Malay speakers working in Singapore contributed to the development of a Singapore dialect?

<sup>22</sup> It is also very misleading. Simanjuntak's classification was absorbed without change and uncritically into a textbook written for teacher trainees (Raminah and Rahim 1985:3-5).

<sup>23</sup> Ismail (1986:19) also uses the term *masyarakat induk negara*, the nation's core community. Elsewhere he touches on the role of Malaysians, which 'is integrating various new ethnic groups and cultures which are non-Malay and non-Muslim' (*sedang mengintegrasikan pelbagai bangsa dan budaya baru yang non-Melayu dan non-Islam*). How is this related to the decision taken at a recent conference in Malaysia to include aboriginal studies as part of the field of Malay civilization as reported in Boon Seong Teoh (1986:139)? I must confess a lack of familiarity with the issues underlying these terms and decisions. For the purposes of this paper, 'ethnic Malay' refers to persons who consider themselves Malay. This excludes certain groups who are indigenous and speak variants of Malay as their home language but who do not claim to be Malays. Certainly the term 'Malay' is a very fluid one and is made to bear a variety of referential meanings.

<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there have been some interesting studies, although these mostly focus on Bazaar Malay spoken by non-Malays. See Collins, *In press*, for comments on these studies.

and these variants of Malay are distinct from the dialects spoken by ethnic Malays near them.<sup>25</sup>

Although in her pioneering study of Malay dialects (Asmah 1976) she does not mention any of these 'non-Malay Malay dialects', Professor Asmah has taken up the issue in her recent book (Asmah 1985). There is a brief mention of aboriginal dialects (1985:129-30) and a fuller treatment of one dialect, Urak Lawoi' (1985:313-29), spoken in the western islands of the Malay peninsula in Thailand.<sup>26</sup> This is, indeed, a refreshing and bold step in the enterprise of Malay dialectology. But it must be seen as an essential beginning, not a dénouement. The dialects of Malay spoken by other aboriginal groups as well as those spoken by Baba Chinese and 'Chitty-Melaka' Hindus must be drawn into the scope of research. The Malay language is larger than the Malay community. For Malay dialect studies to develop in a scientific way, all variants of Malay should be subject to academic scrutiny. There should be no narrowing of scope based on ethnicity. Solid progress in Malay dialectology can only rest on a broad, all-encompassing foundation.

This caveat holds for other approaches which have narrowed scholarly perspective in the field. Benjamin's treatment of aborigine dialects of Malay (1983), which proposes a classification of those dialects such that they are separated from other Malay dialects by ad hoc labels, obscures the fact that aborigine Malay dialects belong to and must be accounted for in an overall classification of Malay dialects. One can applaud Professor Benjamin's efforts to direct our attention to the aborigines as an ethnic group, as well as his masterful contribution to mapping the location of Aslian languages. But the relationship of *all* the Malay dialects should not be clouded over, no matter how inadvertently or for whatever cause.

Similarly, too many studies of Baba Malay have taken Shellabear (1913) as their starting-point. He claimed that this dialect followed 'the Chinese rather than the Malay idiom' (Shellabear 1913:51). So most subsequent studies have been written as exercises to uncover the Chinese element in Baba Malay, sometimes with a bit of inveiglement and huggermuggery

---

<sup>25</sup> Here I take exception to the authors who have written about Malay among the Orang Asli. For example, Benjamin (1983) writes that the speech of some 'culturally still-tribal populations ... differs from that of ethnic Malays only slightly'. Although very few aboriginal groups which speak Malay as their exclusive home language have been surveyed, indications are that in many cases they speak dialects very different from Malaysian or local dialects spoken by ethnic Malays near them. See Collins 1985, Faredah 1983/1984, and other earlier studies. The recent work among four aboriginal groups on the Muar River basin of Johor also contradicts the notion that aborigine dialects of Malay are just like the Malay spoken nearby.

<sup>26</sup> The data were drawn from Amon Saengmani (1979). Refer also to her more recent study, Amon Thawiisak (1982).

necessary to shore up this preresearch assumption.<sup>27</sup> Instead of approaching Baba Malay as a Malay dialect which requires adequate description and an analysis that includes cross-dialectal comparison, too often these studies have been restricted to turning the pages of Hokkien dictionaries. In this case, the ethnic enclave mentality exhibits a different twist but the effect is the same. However valuable comparison with Chinese may be, there is no excuse for overlooking or, indeed, excluding valuable data from other, especially neighboring, dialects of Malay.

The study of Malay dialects is not the reserve of a specific ethnic group. It cannot be successfully undertaken unless all variants are tapped for information. No source of information can be left unused in our efforts to understand the historic and contemporary networking of Malay dialects. There should be no more ethnicization of Malay dialect studies.

### 3. Perspectives: principles and revisions

In the preceding pages, an attempt has been made to understand what assumptions might underlie dialect research in Malaysia. As noted earlier, these assumptions have not been enunciated or formalized in prefaces; so it has been necessary to extract them by analyzing the lacunae as well as the contents of existing dialect studies.

The paradigmatic structuring of those assumptions into four categories was essayed for the purpose of clarity only. Surely those four categories are closely related to each other. Political labels, classifications, and considerations have mired Malaysia's dialectological endeavor in a muddy epistemological mire which jeopardizes further advance in the field.

Because it is now immersed in the patterns of arbitrary boundaries and nomenclature, Malay dialect studies must be set on a new foundation. It would not be useful to eliminate the present unacceptable framework and replace it with random observations. Sporadic studies on obscure dialects in themselves cannot contribute to the growth of Malay dialect studies. While there is a great need for a larger body of detailed descriptions, random observations must be replaced by systematic ones. Only the examination of the ensemble of dialects can reveal the pattern of replacement and change.

Dialectology aims at explanation. Descriptions of individual dialects only provide pieces in a larger puzzle to be solved. Dialectology is meant to yield an *overall* explanation of interdialectal linking within some geographic area or social setting. So systems of data are not fragments frozen in time but rather living networks of interrelated evidence. A greater

<sup>27</sup> Anne Pakir's (1986) dissertation achieved a better balance, examining both Malay and Chinese elements in Baba Malay. As more information becomes available about Malay dialects and the historical records of the Chinese in Melaka in the crucial seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this sort of balanced inquiry will be more easily accomplished.

emphasis must be laid on using all information available to interpret the results of linguistic fieldwork and dialect research.

Because it aims at explanation about linguistic networking in history and society, there must be working principles upon which the undertaking is based. It is the intention of this paper to propose a new, solid framework for conducting Malay dialect research in Malaysia. By specifying the framework, it will be possible to perform systematic fieldwork and analysis. Furthermore, it will be possible to criticize that framework. The pinpointing of flaws and weaknesses is the first step towards revision and improvement. If there are too many weaknesses, the framework can be rejected. In short, it is proper scientific method to set forth one's premises, procedures, data, and findings.

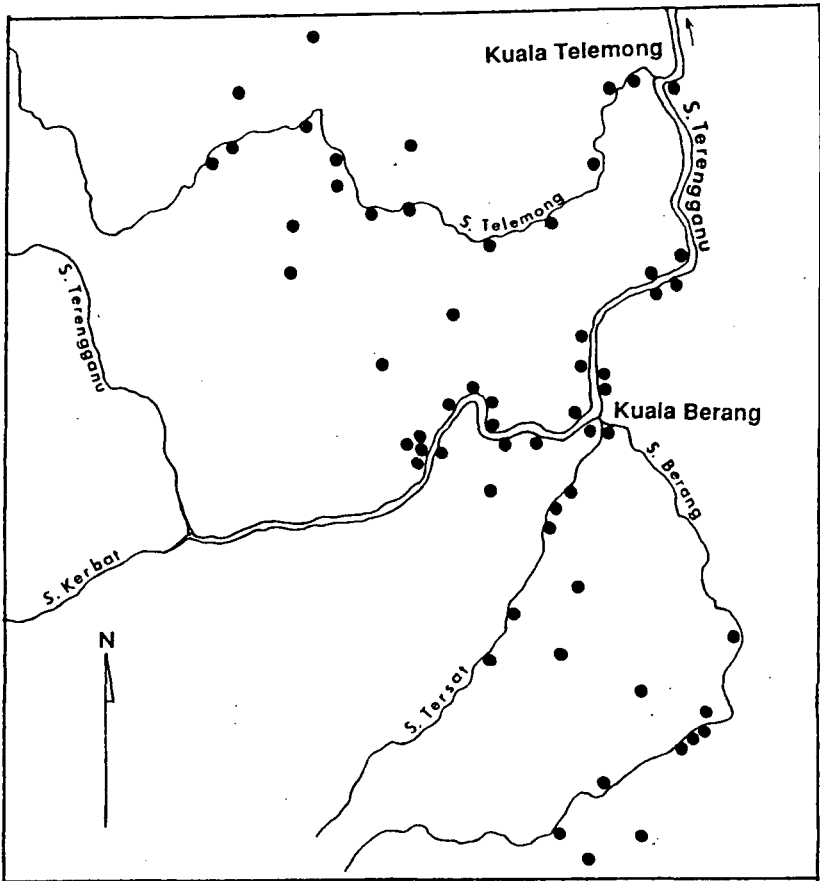
### *3.1 Topography and dialect studies*

The starting-point for the framework proposed here is Trudgill's phrase (1984:53) 'preconceived geographic unit'. While this paper does not use this phrase in the same sense as Trudgill, or at the same stage of research<sup>28</sup>, the usefulness of the concept will be apparent. Here the term implies that dialect research begins with a map, that is, with a keen sense of topography and ecology. Neither politics nor statistics can provide the initial point of reference.

Within the context of dialect research in Malaysia the geographic units must be RIVER BASINS and COASTAL STRIPS. These are the two features of topography that have shaped the earliest patterns of migration and settlement. Miksic (1978:170) wrote: '... two symbiotic patterns of settlement should be considered in discussing early Southeast Asian maritime adaptation: settlement on the levees and beach ridges, utilizing lower land for rice and higher land for coconuts, and seminomadism in the swamps and in the rivers'.

Bronson (1978:43) also explored this basic feature of settlement when he discussed a schematic functional model which would explain and illustrate a kind of ancient exchange network widespread in Southeast Asia. It involved 'the control of a drainage basin opening to the sea by a center located at or near the mouth of that basin's major river'. In surprisingly close parallel to statements by dialectologists (for example, Fischer 1976:334), Bronson further notes: 'The interfluvial countryside of the drainage basin is sufficiently marshy, forested or mountainous to confine all movements of goods to water routes, rendering the economic pattern closely congruent with the dendritic pattern formed by the main stream and its tributaries'.

<sup>28</sup> Trudgill (1984:53) writes of the correlation of dialect geography data with "preconceived" geographical units'. So, in his proposal the purpose is to provide a way of interpreting data already collected, not to provide a starting-point for research. In the paper presented here, the term 'preconceived geographical units' is used to refer to topographic features. See Trudgill (1984:66-67 and elsewhere) for elucidation of his use of the term.



Map A: The Terengganu River Basin and Surveyed Villages.

It is interesting to note that this pattern<sup>29</sup> has been explored in some detail in an economic history of ancient Southeast Asia (Hall 1985). The notion of relating diffusion - economic, technological, or linguistic - to a geographical model is a sound framework for research. This model is particularly relevant to the known details of Malay settlement patterns in Southeast Asia. Until the nineteenth century the Malay population was riverine, maintaining intercommunal links by river and maritime routes. Even the British exploration of the Malay peninsula during that period is recorded in quire after quire of reports of trips down and up the rivers of the peninsula (Swettenham 1885, Kelsall and Ridley 1894, etc.).

<sup>29</sup> Refer to Miksic (1978:172): 'The exchange of products from hinterland mountains, agricultural products from dispersed settlements on beach ridges, and marine products of the swamps and offshore waters probably formed the local focus of redistributive activities'.

Bearing in mind the essential riverine and strand characteristics of Malay settlement<sup>30</sup>, then, these two features have formed the basis of various research projects and various analyses of Malay dialects. Some of these are discussed below.

### 3.1.1 River basins

In 1981, for the first time in Malaysia, a dialect survey was conducted, not on the basis of a certain political unit (state, district, *mukim*, or village) but on the basis of a geographic feature, the Terengganu River. This was a conscious decision made even before the specific sites or the format of the investigation were settled on. As reported in Collins (1983a:19), the survey encompassed all the branches of the Terengganu River above the confluence at Kuala Telemong. All in all, sixty-two villages were visited, several repeatedly, to obtain a variety of data ranging from wordlists to recordings of spontaneous conversation. (See Map A, from Collins 1983a.)

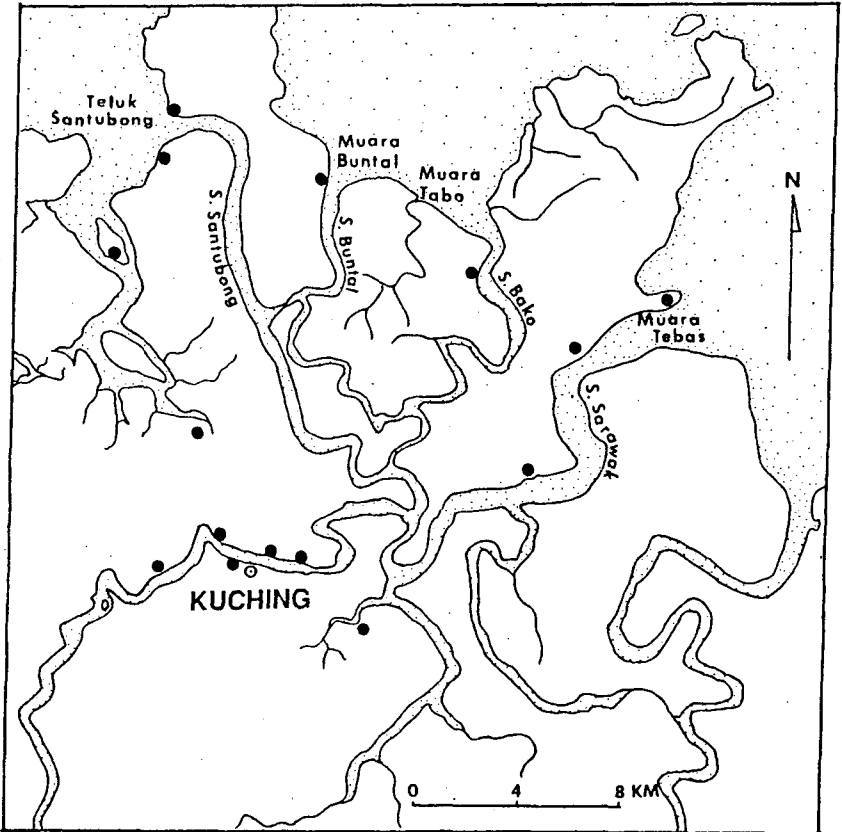
The pre-research decision to focus on a specific area determined by the Terengganu River basin yielded far-reaching results. First of all, the isoglosses which separate Ulu Terengganu from coastal Terengganu could be set forth for testing and revising. That is, a hitherto unknown dialect of Malay was partially described and defined. Second, the linguistic isoglosses matched the boundaries of cultural differences between coastal and interior Terengganu which most recently exploded in the revolt of 1928 (Timah 1981 et al.).<sup>31</sup> Third, the speech varieties of each branch of the Terengganu River (the Tersat, Berang, Telemong and Terengganu) displayed distinctive characteristics. The pattern of subdialects matched the topographic details of the river basin. In short, this exploratory effort at combining geography and Malay dialect studies indicated the necessity of conducting more research within that framework.

Two years later, this working principle framed the fieldwork plan for the dialect survey conducted in Sarawak. Malay settlements along the Sarawak River were the focus of the research. Eighteen villages in that river basin were visited in order to assemble a record of the variant of Malay spoken there.<sup>32</sup> The topography of the Sarawak basin is further complicated by the interlacing of riverways in the complex delta estuary region. (See Map B.)

<sup>30</sup> See Burns (1976:3) and Gosling (1978) for more details on settlement and communication patterns of earlier periods. Refer also to Winstedt, see Note 7 above.

<sup>31</sup> Note the principle enunciated by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968:188): 'Linguistic and social factors are closely interrelated in the development of language change. Explanations which are confined to one or the other aspect, no matter how well constructed, will fail to account for the rich body of regularities that can be observed in empirical studies of language behavior.'

<sup>32</sup> In addition, data from seven other villages outside of the research area were collected for comparative purposes. See Collins 1983c:26-27.



Map B: The Sarawak River Basin and Surveyed Villages.

This survey, briefer and in a geographically and historically complex area, produced results that matched the more comprehensive Ulu Terengganu research (Collins 1983c). First, phonetic and morphosyntactic characteristics of the Sarawak River dialect were isolated from the data and analyzed. Second, there were indications of subdialects within the Sarawak River basin itself, particularly along its two major channels debouching at Santubong Bay and the Tebas Estuary respectively (Collins 1983c:71-73). Finally, on the basis of these data, broader regional patterns could be discerned, possibly useful for further classification (see Section 3.2.2).

Since this research was carried out, several other surveys have been conducted within the framework of river basin exploration. Portions of the Perak and Bernam Rivers<sup>1</sup> (Othman 1985, 1986), the Selangor River



(Collins and Naseh 1986/1987) and the Muar and Kesang Rivers<sup>33</sup> have been surveyed, in most cases with results which have contradicted 'common knowledge' about Malay dialects. The value of the river basin as a preconceived unit for Malay dialect research has proven itself over and over again.

### 3.1.2 Coastal strips

Stretching from just north of Kuala Terengganu southward to at least Mersing on the east coast of Johor is one of the great strand dialects of Malay. Coastal Terengganu is spoken in a narrow strip of sometimes discontinuous villages along more than 400 miles of West Malaysia's eastern coast.<sup>34</sup> In some places, for example near Kuala Terengganu itself, it is the dialect of a densely populated settlement extending tens of miles inland, but most often – for example in Nenasi, Pahang – it is a dialect spoken only in a string of seaside fisherman homes built on a sandy ridge a few hundred yards wide. Nonetheless, the number of shared lexical, syntactic, and phonetic innovations demonstrates the essential unity of this great trader and fisherman dialect.<sup>35</sup> (See Map C.)

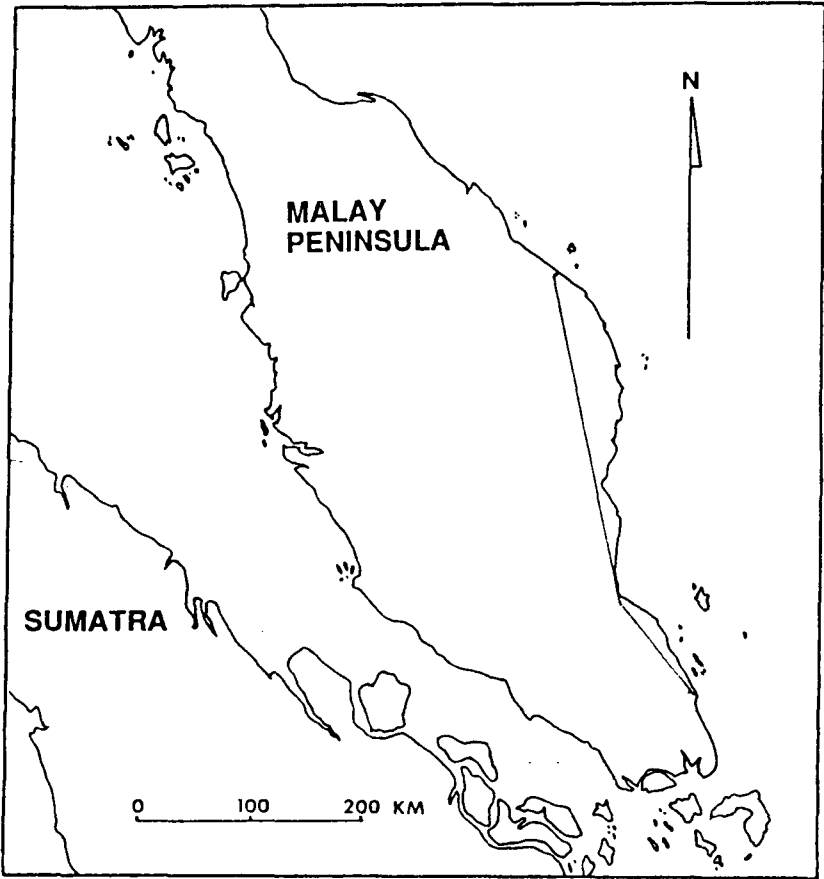
It is in this light that some other dialects of Malay should be seen. Although the origins of Kedah Malay are not clear, it is very likely that there was a riverine dialect along the Kedah River which later diffused along the transport and irrigation canals that accompanied the rapid expansion of rice culture in the swampy lowlands of northwest Malaysia. It has also spread along the west coast of the Malay peninsula and its adjacent islands from Satun in Southern Thailand nearly all the way to the mouth of the Perak River. The expansion of the Kedah kingdom, coupled with the military, farming, and sailing prowess of her people, resulted in the spread of Kedah Malay to deep within the hinterland of that region. Asmah (1985:186-87) discusses a few of the historical factors involved. Ismail (1973) describes the geographical range of Kedah Malay. Map D attempts a mapping of his insights on that topic.

Analysis of existing descriptions and of the distribution of data regarding these two dialects – Coastal Terengganu and Kedah Malay – has yielded a picture of their spread which is consistent with the notion of coastal strips as a model for studying Malay dialects. The ecological niche

<sup>33</sup> Again, this research was conducted as part of the ill-fated Dialectology Project of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. To date, no reports have been published.

<sup>34</sup> The fact that Terengganu Malay almost reaches to Johor Baru as well as the long-standing role of Terengganu sailors in shipping and trading from Singapore goes a long way towards explaining some of the features of Terengganu Malay which are similar to 'Johor' Malay.

<sup>35</sup> The only systematic linguistic study conducted about Coastal Terengganu is Othman (1983/1984). Asmah (1985) has culled some information from unspecified BA essays, but most of these are not about Coastal Malay, rather variants spoken in the interior. The quality of the original transcriptions (which are not phonetic, or at least not based on the IPA) is dubious.



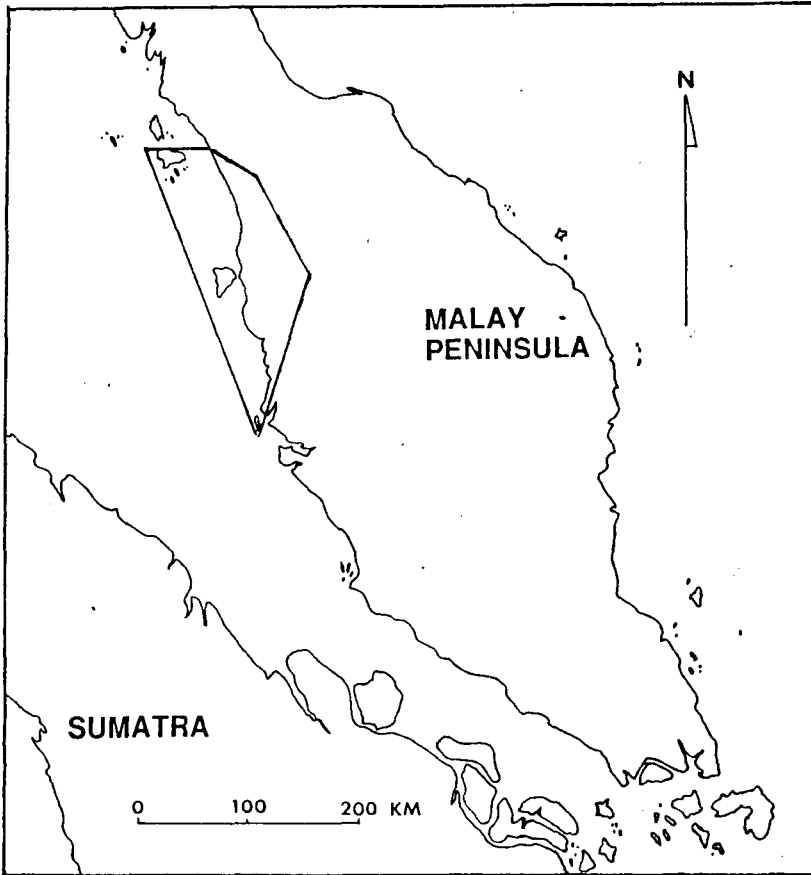
Map C: The Distribution of Coastal Terengganu Malay.

of the coastal strand is one characteristically inhabited by speakers of Malay, probably even from ancient times.

### 3.2 *Complications and revisions*

The working principles outlined here reflect an essentially topographic approach to exploring Malay dialects. It is a rude sort of beginning but a productive one. In this paper, topography has been stressed not simply because it is a more or less unchanging feature over time<sup>36</sup>, but also because the river systems and strands of insular Southeast Asia have been of absolute importance in the shaping of the area's cultural and economic history. Thus, by giving research priority to features of the ecology, we

<sup>36</sup> This statement, of course, exaggerates the 'permanence' of the river courses and of coastlines, particularly in areas where swampy estuaries and shifting beach ridges are endemic.



Map D: The Distribution of Kedah Malay in the Malay Peninsula.

have taken into account known settlement and trading patterns. Topography is the stage for society's interaction with the environment.

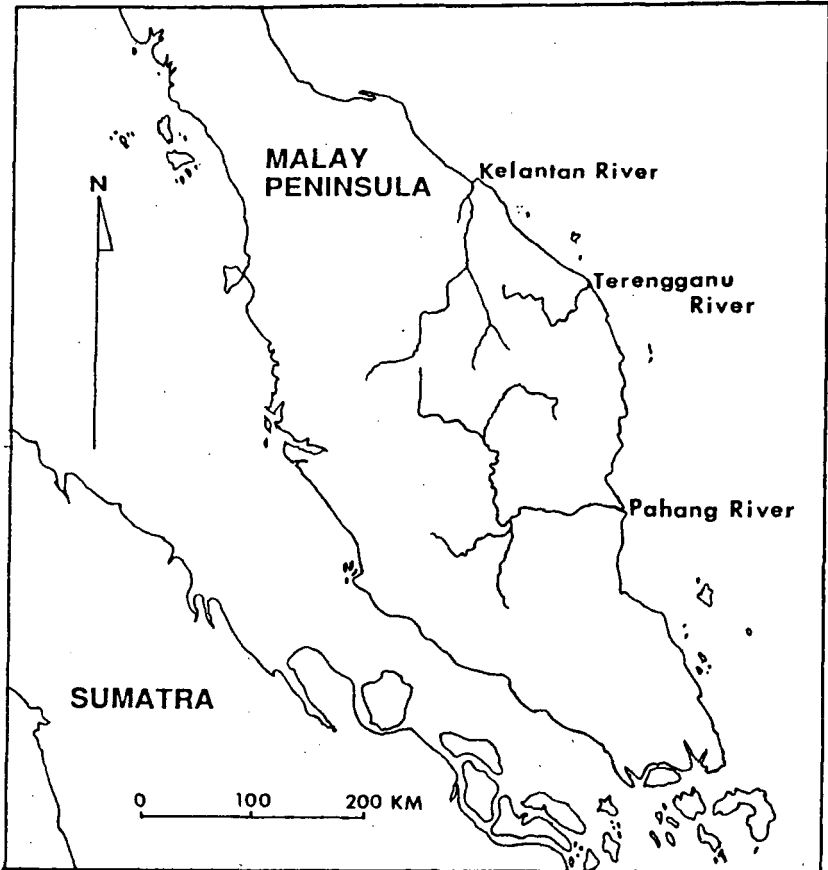
Nonetheless, recent fieldwork and subsequent analyses which were based on the two topographic features emphasized here have indicated many, far more complex variants of these two models. These complexities suggest not the need for revisions of the working principles but the importance of providing greater detail to the model. Towards that end, four variants of the river-basin and coastal-strip models are briefly outlined below.

### 3.2.1 Interlinking river basins

One of the most striking developments in the study of Malay dialects is the growing realization that the dialects of the east coast of the Malay

peninsula form a recognizable subgroup.<sup>37</sup> Shared sound changes as well as lexical and morphosyntactic peculiarities strongly support the theory that the variants now called Kelantan, Ulu Terengganu, Coastal Terengganu, and Pahang Malay must have formed a single dialect group at some earlier time. The details of this evidence are not presented here. What is under consideration, rather, is the relationship of this theory to geography.

A glance at Map E indicates the apparent factors which link these dialects to each other, despite the great distances separating them.



Map E: The Major Rivers of the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula.

<sup>37</sup> Asmah (1976) classifies Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang into separate subgroups of Malay, although she notes that Pahang (or some parts of Pahang) may be a transitional area linking Terengganu Malay to Johor Malay. In 1985 she revised her classification, placing Kelantan, Pahang, and Terengganu in a single subgroup. This subgrouping was first discussed in Collins (1983:108-10), including Ulu Terengganu as well; but a more reliable data base is necessary in order to test its validity.

Although the coastal areas are sparsely settled, the upper reaches of these three river basins are almost contiguous.

This geographic fact explains why the dialects spoken in these river basins share many innovations. Based on the features of the map alone, one would predict patterns of communication involving the headwaters of each basin. Not surprisingly, both archaeological and written historical documentation testify to the importance of these routes in the movement of peoples.<sup>38</sup> Even today, villages in higher parts of one watershed can cite the distance (measured in the number of nights in the forest) to a neighboring watershed.

It is clear, then, that the model proposed by Bronson (1978, discussed above) for economic exchange patterns does not take into account possible communication patterns in the upper reaches of the river; it requires some elaboration. Using the river basin as a starting-point for dialect research is still valid, but the possibility of complex linking of several watersheds in the interior should be taken into consideration.

### 3.2.2 Maritime chains

Although the coastal strip model proposed above is useful and explanatory, there exists a fairly widespread variant of that model. Throughout the archipelago, including the Malay peninsula, the chain of communities speaking a single Malay dialect is not always a nearly contiguous strip of villages. Very often the chain is discontinuous, that is, separated by uninhabited areas, along a coast or across the sea linked by maritime routes.<sup>39</sup> Bits of land on the coast and/or small islands comprise single dialect groups. As was implied in the discussion of coastal strips, the sea functions as a major communication route guaranteeing a high density of communication.

Research conducted from 1982-85 on Tioman and Aur Islands demonstrated the existence of a hitherto unrecognized dialect of Malay, Southeast Island Malay (Collins 1986). This dialect, spoken on at least three islands in Johor and Pahang, is a good example of a communication system linked by the sea as well as by intermarriage and shared cultural patterns. Furthermore, preliminary research has proven that the Malay variant most closely related to this island dialect spoken off the coast of the Malay peninsula is Sarawak Malay, spoken across the South China Sea in north-west Borneo.<sup>40</sup> The relationship of these two dialects to the Malay of the

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Swettenham 1885, Kelsall and Ridley 1894.

<sup>39</sup> It is not unlikely that Coastal Terengganu is better characterized as a discontinuous chain. Even in some parts of the Terengganu shoreline the villages are in no sense contiguous. Until the recent development of that coast, villages were often separated by long stretches of uninhabited scrub forest. Kedah Malay is more or less continuous along the west coast, but of course the existence of numerous islands where Kedah Malay is spoken (Langkawi, Pulau Pinang, Pangkor, etc.) suggests that in this case the coastal strip is, in fact, a complex chain of islands and strand.

<sup>40</sup> This issue is discussed in Collins 1983 and in greater detail in Collins 1986.

Anambas and Natuna Islands in Indonesia is not clear because of the absence of data regarding the variants spoken there. Map F shows the geographic pattern of stepping-stone linking between the Southeast Islands (Tioman, Aur, Pemanggil) and Sarawak.

This variant of the coastal strip model is probably widespread. For example, in some sense, the distribution of Baba Malay matches this pattern. Although the presumed 'homeland' of Baba Malay is Melaka, it is spoken by a fairly large community in Singapore as well (Anne Pakir 1986). This distribution is not ancient; it could not predate the British occupation of Singapore island in 1819. But the *pattern* is an ancient and traditional one; the spread of Malay-speaking communities follows a coastal pattern.<sup>41</sup>

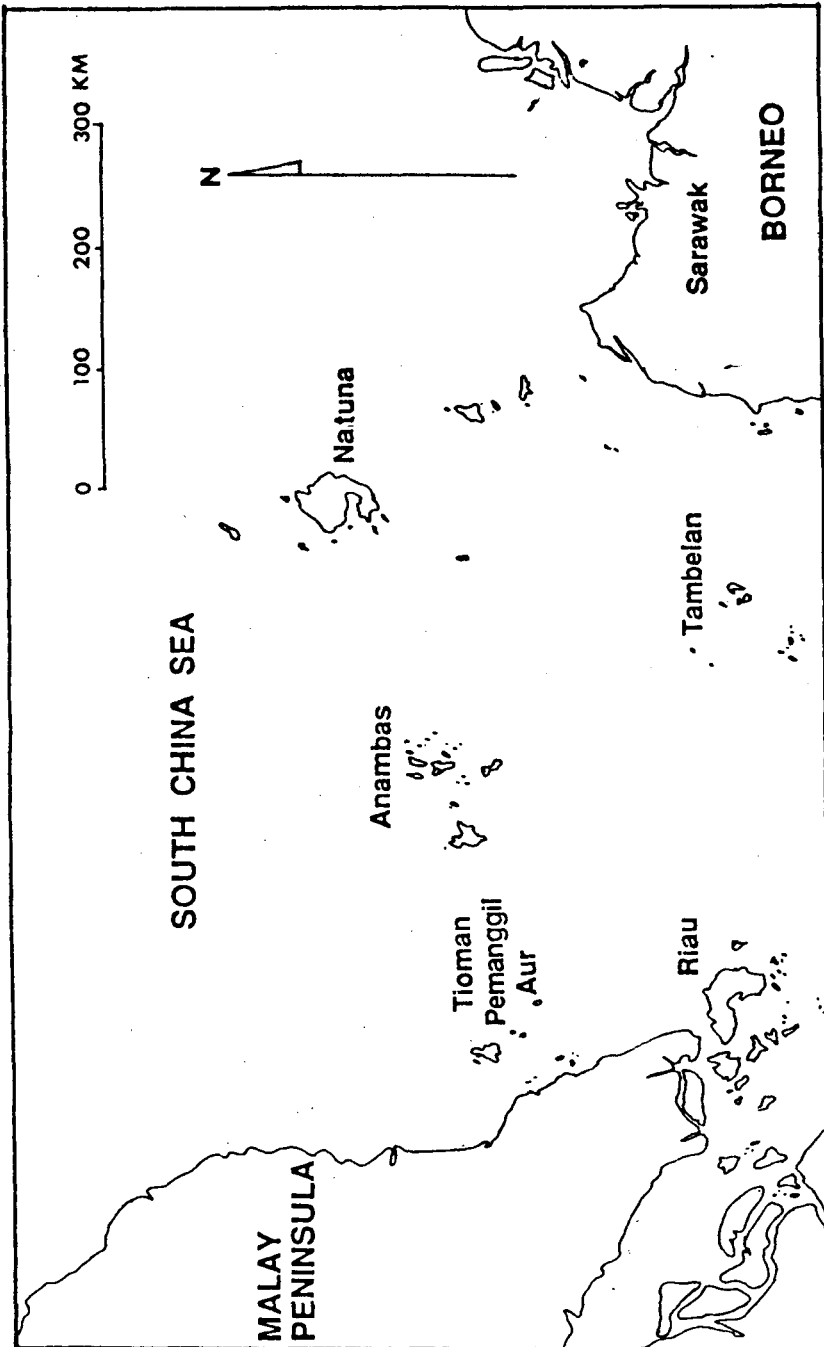
### 3.2.3 Riverine and coastal fusions

Reference has already been made to the existence of a variant of Malay spoken in the Langat River, Selangor, which is clearly related to the Malay spoken along the Muar River (from Panchor to Segamat). It has further been suggested that there are probably other pockets of speakers of this variant near the estuaries of the Kelang and Selangor Rivers. As Asmah (1985:160-61) observed, these variants are also related to Melaka and 'Johor' Malay.

The pattern that emerges, then, is an intricate fusion of coastal settlements, river basin complexes, and scattered villages in swampy estuaries. In the case of the Jugra-Muar-Melaka- 'Johor' fusion the geographic range is daunting. The effectiveness of the pre-European coastal transportation system is confirmed by this fusion. But sometimes the pattern of fusion of two types — coastal and riverine — is on a much smaller scale and of a very different type.

Research conducted in Nenasi, Pahang, from 1981-83, partially reported in Collins 1985, indicated the existence of a very small but very complicated spatial fusion of the coastal and riverine models. This fusion was characterized by the spatial layering of various Malay variants, all within a radius of a few kilometers. Along the narrow shoreline ridge of Nenasi, coastal Terengganu Malay is spoken as the home language of many families of fishermen living there. However, formerly clustered along the lower reaches of Nenasi's waterway, the Bebar River, is a

<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that once Baba Malay is viewed from the perspective of its identity as a Malay dialect rather than as an odd variety of Chinese, evidence and facts fall together in a convincing way.



Map F: The Southeast Islands and Sarawak.

sizeable hamlet of speakers of a variant of Pahang Malay.<sup>42</sup> In recent times, these two communities have been more tightly linked by the small cluster of shops, and more recently a community center on the river bank between the fishing village and river bank hamlet. The construction of primary and secondary schools in the Pahang-speaking hamlet as well as a road and bridge across the river ensured a spatial expansion of both elements (coastal and riverine) of Nenasi towards each other.<sup>43</sup> This spatial relocation of two communities speaking different Malay dialects is further complicated by the existence of a large number of Orang Hulu hamlets on the mid- and upper-reaches of the Bebar River. The Orang Hulu of eastern Pahang occupy a distinctive ecological niche — the swampy, ridged land between the coast and the hills.<sup>44</sup> These aborigines, who speak a distinctive dialect of Malay (Collins 1985), interact on a daily basis with the other two Malay-speaking communities. Furthermore, the riverine hamlet of Pahang Malay speakers has begun to engage in agricultural activities further inland, while the Orang Hulu speaking community has established small hamlets within one or two kilometers of the expanding riverine hamlet. Note, too, that new buildings for the secondary school have been built at some distance from the Nenasi center, near the road connecting the Orang Hulu to Nenasi. The result is a spatial fusion of three different communities which have so far maintained their distinctive speech ways, although a high degree of bidialectalism exists.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to the far-flung west littoral fusion of Jugra-Muar-Melaka-‘Johor’, which form a clear subgroup scattered over a great distance, the Nenasi complex represents a layering from coast to interior of three different dialects. There is spatial continuity but not linguistic merger. It

<sup>42</sup> Cant (1973:10) writes of nineteenth-century settlements along the Southern coast of Pahang:

‘The coastal areas from Endau to the Trengganu border had not recovered from the ravages of piracy in the earlier part of the century and the steps taken to suppress piracy from 1836 onwards . . . Only at Beserah, Kuala Pahang and Kuala Rompin were there well-established villages which could compare in size with those lining the Pahang River. Elsewhere in the coast, settlement was temporary and the population transient. During the fishing season, there was an influx of Trengganu and Kelantan Malays but few remained during the north-east monsoon . . .

South of the Pahang River there were few Malay settlements . . . The rivers of south-east Pahang did not seem to have attracted Malay settlement . . .’

<sup>43</sup> The various projects mentioned here took place over a long period of time and the spatial merger of these two communities has been only gradual.

<sup>44</sup> Is this a separate type of settlement pattern or does it represent a more recent movement away from the river banks?

<sup>45</sup> Bidialectalism is probably an underestimate of the linguistic competence of many speakers. In my notes of March 24, 1982, I remarked that schoolchildren appeared to speak Coastal Terengganu Malay among themselves. Persons from any of the three linguistic components of Nenasi may also speak Malaysian, the school language. Orang Hulu speakers, especially young informants, seemed fairly adept at speaking any of the three variants: their home dialect of Orang Hulu Malay, the two other local dialects, Pahang and Terengganu Malay, as well as Malaysian.



is likely that there are other spatial juxtapositions at least as complex as the Nenasi phenomenon.<sup>46</sup>

#### 3.2.4 Disjunct maritime communities

A fourth and unusual pattern was discovered in 1985. It is a variant of the maritime chain, but in some ways resembles the west littoral fusion. On the other hand, it is strikingly different because the two major components of the chain are not of the same ethnic group or national allegiance; nor do they seem to be aware of each other's existence. Yet the Malay dialect spoken is the same.

In preceding pages, Kedah Malay has been discussed frequently. Based on Ismail (1973), it is a maritime chain consisting of islands and coastal settlements along the north-west shore of West Malaysia. In fact, however, Kedah Malay is also spoken in at least two communities on the northeast coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. In a recent summary of data (Collins 1988), sufficient evidence is presented to prove that the language of the Orang Laut of the Bampu Estuary north of Medan, Sumatra, is a subdialect of Kedah Malay.

Based on the report in Burhanuddin et al. (1983), the Orang Laut are not considered ethnic Malays in an area of Sumatra traditionally inhabited by Deli Malays. Moreover, apparently the Orang Laut have only within this century embraced Islam. Neither they nor the research team which collected the data seem to know of Kedah Malay. It is even less likely that there are Kedah Malay speakers who know of these two small hamlets built on mudbanks facing the northern limits of the straits of Melaka. They are disjunct and maintain no lines of communication. Nonetheless, Map G demonstrates the range of Kedah Malay, sweeping across the straits to include a few hundred speakers whose cultural background appears to be quite different from the Kedah rice-farmer and coastal fisherman.

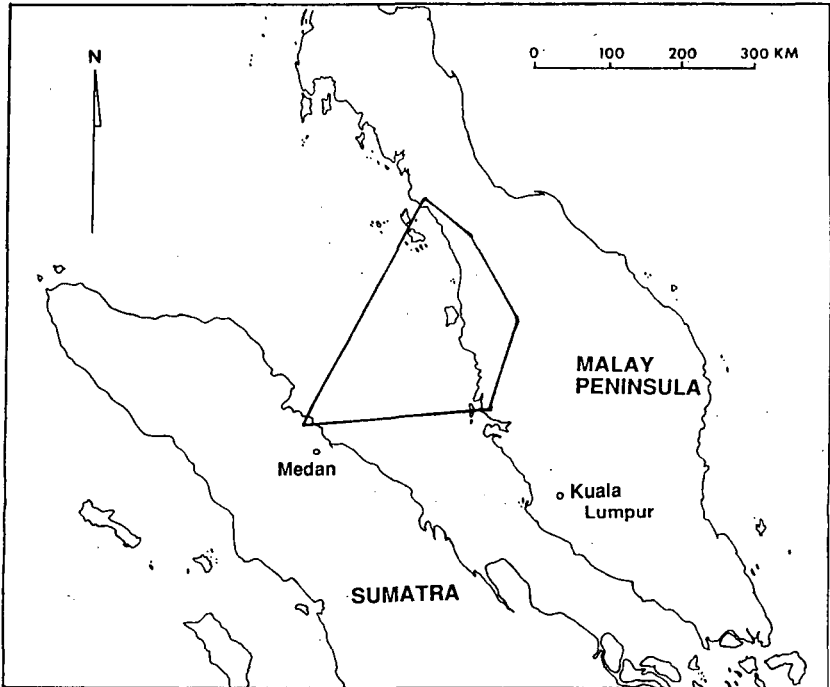
### Conclusion

In this short paper, a partial survey of recent Malay dialect studies has been attempted in order to distill from them some insights regarding the apparent underlying assumptions of those studies. Despite the many and brilliant achievements of Malay dialectology in the last two decades, progress has been retarded by an inability to recognize and, then, to abandon unscientific premises which place stale ethno-political categories above geographic perspectives. It is proposed to attempt future dialect research based on the realization that in the context of Southeast Asia, in particular

<sup>46</sup> One thinks immediately of Melaka, the city where at least three dialects of Malay (Baba, Chitty and Melaka Port Malay) have been spoken for generations. Historically, Temuan, an aboriginal dialect of Malay, was also spoken near the town.

the Malay-speaking world, river basins and coastal strips should determine our choice of research sites and shape our methods of data collection.

Various experiments, both in the field and in the library, have been reported here to show the strengths and weaknesses of research anchored



Map G: The Distribution of Kedah Malay.

in a perception of the topography and its relation to settlement and communication patterns. As a model, the riverine-coastal paradigm needs revision and refinement so that it can more successfully encompass the intricate variations of settlement history and dialect diffusion in the Malay archipelago. Nonetheless, its essential usefulness should be apparent to the reader.<sup>47</sup> Merely in glimpsing the existence of 'Orang Laut' Kedah Malay in Sumatra (Section 3.2.4), the time-worn clichés of international bound-

<sup>47</sup> Evers (1986) has criticized Hall's model (1985) of riverine political entities. He noted that Melaka didn't have a river of any consequence but still played an important role in the exchange system. Because Hall's analysis parallels some features of the model proposed here, it is worth replying to Evers' comment. Melaka's river was the Muar River, the most important waterway and trade route in Southeast Asia. The fact that the kingdom's capital lay some distance from that river should not obscure the central importance of it to the state's economics and politics. Although the political and historical relationship of Muar and Melaka is covered in myth, we know that the connections were very close and it was to the Muar River basin that the sultan of Melaka fled when the Portuguese overran the Melaka bastion.

aries and ethnic identification have been proven to be useless obstructions to the progress of Malay dialect studies.

Topography has been highlighted perhaps at the expense of other aspects of social environment which also must be examined in order to interpret dialectal data. But the social history of Southeast Asia is so closely tied to its ecology that neglecting to interleaf explicit examples of social history can perhaps be countenanced in a brief paper such as this. At the same time, the reader may be disappointed that, with the exception of the Nenasi example (Section 3.2.3), little has been said about the contemporary distribution of Malay dialects. While research and data collection are focused on contemporary communities, the restriction of the scope of the work to riverine and coastal chains — complicated as they may be — ignores the modern spread of Malay spurred by the introduction of new modes of transportation, the expansion of urban centers and industries, and the ruthless destruction of the rain forest.

However, it is the contention of this author that unless we know something about the history of traditional Malay settlement and a great deal about the varieties of Malay spoken in those settled areas, we will never be able to study, describe and understand the modern, contemporary diffusion and diversity of Malay dialects. Without the deliberate circumscription of data in a meticulous step-by-step fashion, there will be no valid data base and no formulated theories to use, test, and reject in the interests of future study. Science flows from the dialectical interplay of successive hypotheses. The task is plain: put first things first. Let us identify Malay dialects and their historical distribution in order to explore other linguistic phenomena.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdul Karim Yusof, 1971-1972, *Dialek Baling: Sifat-sifat umum dan kumpulan teks*, Universiti Malaya, B.A. essay.
- Amon Saengmani, 1979, *Phonology of the Urak Lawoi' language: Adang Island*, Mahidol University, M.A. thesis.
- Amon Thawiisak, 1982, *Phaasaa chaaw lee (Urak Lawoi')* [Krungthep]: Sathaaban wicay phaasaa le wattanatham phua phatthanaa chonnabot, Mahaawitthayaalay Mahidon.
- Arbak Othman, 1981, *Tatabahasa Bahasa Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Sarjana Enterprise.
- Asai, Erin, 1927, 'Malay-hanto ni okeru Malaygo-on no Chihoteki Sai ni kansuru jakkan no kosatsu Kenkyu no mokuteki to sono zairyu no han-i', *Asia Kenkyu* 6:1-22.
- Asmah Hj. Omar, 1976, *The phonological diversity of the Malay dialects*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- , 1985, *Susur galur bahasa Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Asraf, 1986, 'Bahasa Melayu Tinggi ditinjau dari sudut fonologi', in: Nik Safiah Karim (Ed.), *Bahasa Melayu Tinggi: Teori dan penerapan*, pp. 35-43, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Linguistik Malaysia.
- Benjamin, G., 1983, Notes on 'Peninsular Malaysia' in: S. Wurm and S. Hattori (Eds), *Language atlas of the Pacific Area, Part II, Japan area, Taiwan (Formosa), Philippines, mainland and insular Southeast Asia*, Map 37, Canberra: The Australian Academy of the Humanities in collaboration with the Japan Academy.

- Blom, J., 1980, *SIL fieldnotes on languages in Sabah*, Unpublished Ms.
- Boon Seong Teoh, 1986, 'Bes Hyang Dney: A Jah Hut myth of peninsular Malaysia', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 59(2) :139-144.
- Bronson, Bennet, 1978, 'Exchange at the upstream and downstream ends: Notes toward a functional model of the coastal state in Southeast Asia', in: Karl L. Hutterer (Ed.), *Economic exchange and social interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from prehistory, history and ethnography*, pp. 39-52, Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan. [Michigan papers on South and Southeast Asia 13.]
- Burhanuddin Ch. Usman, et al., 1983, *Struktur bahasa Orang Laut*, Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa.
- Burns, P.L. (Ed.), 1976, *The journals of J.W.W. Birch, first British resident to Perak, 1874-1875*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Cant, R.G., 1973, *An historical geography of Pahang*, Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.
- Collins, James T., 1983a, *Dialek Ulu Terengganu*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan.
- , 1983b, 'Introduction', in: James T. Collins (Ed.), *Studies in Malay dialects, Part I*, pp. VII-VIII, *NUSA* 16, Jakarta: Badan Penyelenggara Seri NUSA, Universitas Atma Jaya.
- , 1983c, *Laporan kajian dialek Sarawak*, Unpublished report, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- , 1983d, *Fieldnotes of Kedayan Malay spoken in Kampong Pantai, Labuan*, Unpublished, Ms.
- , 1983e, 'Diftong dan diftongisasi dialek Hulu Terengganu', *Dewan Bahasa* 27:562-581.
- , 1983f, 'Dialek Pahang: Rangka pengenalan', *Dewan Bahasa* 27:7-29, 99-118.
- , 1985, 'Dialek Melayu di Kampung Landai, Pahang: Menuju penelitian tatabahasa Melayu di kalangan Orang Asli', *Dewan Bahasa* 29:476-493.
- , 1986, 'Dunia Melayu dan dialek Melayu: Wilayah Laut China Barat Daya', *Dewan Bahasa* 30:895-907.
- , 1988, 'Wilayah dialek Kedah: Bukti dari Sumatera Utara', *Dewan Bahasa* 32:494-525.
- , In press, *Bibliografi dialek Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Collins, James T., and Hussin Dollah, 1988, 'Catatan fonologi Kelantan: Konsonan [ʃ]', *Dewan Bahasa* 32:874-887.
- Collins, James T., and Naseh Hassan, 1986/1987, 'Dialek Melayu Selangor: Tinjauan di Jugra', *Jurnal Persatuan Linguistik* 2:74-94.
- Crawfurd, J., 1856, *A descriptive dictionary of the Indian isles and adjacent countries*, London: Bradbury and Evans.
- Evers, Hans-Dieter, 1986, 'Review of *Maritime trade and State development in early Southeast Asia* by Kenneth R. Hall', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 59(2):145-147.
- Faredah Mahadi, 1983/1984, *Dialek Temuan di Melaka*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, B.A. essay.
- Farid M. Onn, 1980, *Aspects of Malay phonology and morphology*, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Fischer, A., 1976, *Dialects in the South-West of England: A lexical investigation*, Basel: Francke Verlag Bern.
- Gimlette, J.D., 1939 [1971], *A dictionary of Malay medicine*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Gosling, L.A. Peter, 1978, 'Contemporary Malay traders in the Gulf of Thailand', in: Karl L. Hutterer (Ed.), *Economic exchange and social interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from prehistory, history and ethnography*, pp.73-95, Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan. [Michigan papers on South and Southeast Asia 13.]
- Hall, Kenneth, 1985, *Maritime trade and State development in early Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

- Hamilton, A.W., 1922, 'Penang Malay', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3(2):56.
- Hasanah Junaidi, 1984, *Fonologi dialek Melayu Limbang*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, B.A. essay.
- Hendon, R.S., 1966, *The phonology and morphology of Ulu Muar Malay (Kuala Pilah District, Negri Sembilan, Malaya)*, New Haven: Department of Anthropology, Yale University.
- Iskandar, Teuku, 1984, *Kamus Dewan*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. [Second edition.]
- Ismail Hussein, 1973, 'The Malay dialects in the Malay peninsula', *Nusantara* 3:69-79.
- , 1986, 'Pengajian Melayu dalam peralihan jalan', *Mastika* 46(1):18-19.
- Kelsall, J.H., and H.H. Ridley, 1894, 'Account of a trip up the Pahang, Tembeling and Tahan rivers in an attempt to reach Gunong Tahan, 1891', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25:33-56.
- Labov, W. (Ed.), 1980, *Locating language in time and space. Quantitative analyses of linguistic structure*, Vol.1, New York: Academic Press.
- Marsden, W., 1812, *A grammar of the Malayan language with an introduction and praxis*, London: Cox and Baylis.
- Maxwell, W.E., 1907, *A manual of the Malay language with an introductory sketch of the Sanskrit element in Malay*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd. [Eighth edition.]
- McDavid, R., 1974, 'Field procedures: Instructions for investigators', *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States*, in: L. Pederson et al. (Eds), *A manual for dialect research in the southern states*, pp. 35-60, The University of Alabama Press.
- Miksic, John N., 1978, 'Archaeology and palaeogeography in the Straits of Malacca', in: Karl L. Hutterer (Ed.), *Economic exchange and social interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from prehistory, history and ethnography*, pp. 155-175, Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan. [Michigan papers on South and Southeast Asia 13.]
- Moody, D.C., 1984, 'The Malayic language family', in: Julie King and John King (Eds), *Languages of Sabah: A survey report. Pacific Linguistics C78*, pp. 91-100, Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Mukhtaruddin Raja Mohd. Dain, Raja, 1982, *Pembinaan bahasa Melayu: Perancangan bahasa di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Newbold, T.J., 1839, *Political and statistical account of the British settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Vol. 2, London: John Murray.
- Othman Omar, 1983/1984, *Fonologi dialek Terengganu Pantai: Kajian di mukim Merchang*: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, B.A. essay.
- , 1985, *Laporan tugas tinjauan awal ragam Melayu Hilir Sungai Bernam*, Ms.
- , 1986, *Laporan tinjauan awal penentuan sempadan dialek pesisir pantai Negeri Perak*, Ms.
- Paitoon Masmintra Chaiyanara, 1983, *Dialek Melayu Patani dan Bahasa Malaysia: Satu kajian perbandingan dari segi fonologi, morfologi dan sintaksis*, Universiti Malaya, M.A. thesis
- Pakir, Anne Geok-in Sim, 1986, *A linguistic investigation of Baba Malay*, University of Hawaii, Ph.D. dissertation.
- Raminah Hj. Sabran, and Rahim Syam, 1985, *Kajian bahasa untuk pelatih maktab perguruan*, Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti.
- Rohani Mohd. Yusof, 1986, *Dialek geografi Kuala Kangsar: Satu kajian perbandingan fonologi*, Universiti Malaya, M.A. thesis.
- Safiah Karim, Nik, 1965, *Loghat Melayu Kelantan: Suatu cherakinan kajibunyi bahasa*, Universiti Malaya, M.A. thesis.
- , 1985, 'Dialek Kelantan: Satu lambang sosio-budaya wilayahnya' in: Nik Safiah Karim and Wan Abdul Kadir Yusof (Eds), *Kelantan dalam perspektif sosio-budaya: Satu kumpulan esei*, pp. 121-149, Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya.

- Safiah Karim, Nik, et al., 1986, *Tatabahasa Dewan 1*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Shellabear, W.G., 1913, 'Baba Malay: An introduction to the language of the Straits-born Chinese', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 65:49-63
- Simanjuntak, M., 1982, *Aspek bahasa dan pengajaran*, Chapter 5, Kuala Lumpur: Sarjana enterprise.
- , 1983, 'Masalah dialek dan pengajaran bahasa (Malaysia)', in: Nik Safiah Karim (Ed.), *Rampaian linguistik Malaysia; Kumpulan makalah Persatuan Linguistik Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Ilmu Raya Sdn. Bhd.
- Simanjuntak, M., and Ramli Salleh, 1980, 'Perubahan-perubahan bunyi bahasa: Satu kajian kes bahasa Melayu Melaka', *Dewan Bahasa* 24(10):31-43, 24(11):56-70.
- , 1982, 'Perubahan-perubahan bunyi bahasa: Satu kajian kes bahasa Melayu Melaka', *Jurnal Budaya Melayu* 5:4-30.
- Skeat, W.W., 1900, *Malay magic, being an introduction to the folklore and popular religion of the Malay peninsula*, London: Macmillan.
- Swettenham, F.A., 1885, 'Journal kept during a journey across the Malay peninsula (with maps)', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15:1-38.
- Timah Hamzah, 1981, *Pemberontakan tani 1928 di Trengganu: Satu kajian ketokohan dan kepimpinan Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Trudgill, Peter, 1984, *On dialect: Social and geographical perspectives*, New York: New York University Press.
- Weinreich, U., W. Labov and M.I. Herzog, 1968, 'Empirical foundations for a theory of language change', in: W.P. Lehmann and Y. Malkiel (Eds), *Directions for historical linguistics: A symposium*, pp. 95-188, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Wilding, A., 1968, *Spoken Pattani Malay*, Yala: Overseas Missionary Fellowship.
- , 1972, *Introducing Pattani Malay*, Yala: Overseas Missionary Fellowship.
- , 1979, *Pattani Malay dictionary, A-K*, Yala: Overseas Missionary Fellowship.
- Winstedt, R.O., 1923, *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States*, London: Constable.
- , 1938, *Colloquial Malay: A simple grammar of conversation*, Singapore: Kelly and Walsh. [Fourth edition.]
- , 1951, *An English-Malay dictionary (Roman characters)*, Singapore: Kelly and Walsh. [Third edition.]
- , 1960, *Kamus Bahasa Melayu*, Singapore: Marican.
- Za'ba, 1962, *Ilmu mengarang Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. [Second edition.]
- Zahrah Buang, 1966, *Loghat Melayu Johor (dan perhubungan-nya dengan bahasa umum); Suatu cherakinan kaji-mofim*, Universiti Malaya, M.A. thesis.