

# **Kristang (Malacca Creole Portuguese) –a long-time survivor seriously endangered**

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the survival of Malacca Creole Portuguese from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, focusing on present endangerment. It first identifies key sociohistorical factors leading to linguistic continuity in the early centuries and describes the central domains facilitating the maintenance of a Kristang-speaking community until recently. It then discusses the attrition of Kristang in the 20<sup>th</sup>C, and considers recent surveys on language use by the Kristang community, noting that existing legislation regarding this minority could, in theory, protect the language. Subsequently, it considers certain linguistic reflexes of attrition and shift in Kristang, in the lexicon and structure, under pressure from Malay and English. The paper concludes by evaluating prospects for revitalization and maintenance of Kristang.

**Key words:** Kristang, Malacca Creole Portuguese, language endangerment, language maintenance.

## **Resumo**

Este artigo trata da sobrevivencia do crioulo portugués de Malaca dende o século XVI ó XX, centrándose na situación actual de perigo de desaparición. Primeiro, identifícanse os factores sociohistóricos clave que permitiron a continuidade lingüística nos séculos precedentes e descríbense os dominios centrais que facilitaron o mantemento da comunidade falante de kristang ata hai ben pouco. A seguir, expónse a decadencia do kristang no século XX e considéranse os informes recentes sobre o uso da lingua na comunidade kristang, tendo en conta que a lexislación existente sobre esta minoría podería, teoricamente, protexer a lingua. A continuación, considéranse certos indicios lingüísticos de perda e cambio en kristang, no léxico e mais na estrutura, baixo a presión do malaio e do inglés. O

artigo conclúe avaliando as perspectivas de recuperación e mantemento do kristang.

**Key words:** kristang, crioulo portugués de Malaca, linguas en perigo, mantemento lingüístico.

## 1. Introduction

Kristang, or Papiá Kristang, is spoken by a small community in the Hilir suburb of Malacca, West Malaysia, and by their descendents elsewhere in Malaysia and in Singapore. It is the last variety of the East and South East Asian creole Portuguese still being acquired by children (Baxter, 1988, 1996; Holm, 1988).

A language whose roots lie in Portuguese colonial expansion of the 16<sup>th</sup>C, Kristang has survived over the centuries in a community with strong cultural traditions and a notable capacity to assimilate outsiders. In the past, the Kristang community has displayed remarkable adaptability and resilience in the face of history. However, rapid socioeconomic change of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>C, coupled with natural demographic change, has placed increasing pressure on the language. Even a conservative appraisal must conclude that Kristang has reached a significant crossroads.

This paper discusses aspects of the maintenance of Kristang until today, and its prospects for survival. Three broad topics are considered. Firstly, it considers some key aspects of the genesis and maintenance of Kristang until the early 20<sup>th</sup>C. Secondly, it discusses social factors contributing both to maintenance and attrition in the 20<sup>th</sup>C, and describes certain linguistic reflexes of attrition. Finally, it discusses the prospects for maintenance and revitalization of Kristang.

## 2. The genesis of Malacca Creole Portuguese

The origins of Malacca Creole Portuguese lie in the strategies that the Portuguese adopted to cope with a critical manpower problem in their Asian colonies. The European Portuguese were always a small minority in their colonies and they drew heavily on local peoples, free and enslaved, in maritime trade and military endeavors. Missionary activities created local Christian populations of Portuguese cultural and linguistic orientation. However, most important, in terms of social cohesion and control, was the creation of a *casado* class (European Portuguese officially married to local women), which produced stable bi- and multi-lingual *mestiço* populations loyal to Portugal.<sup>1</sup> In such Asian settings Creole Portuguese arose.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *casados* constituted an official group with rights to a range of privileges, according to a policy introduced by Alfonso de Albuquerque, the first governor of Portuguese India.

<sup>2</sup> Baxter (1996: 299-301) discusses the sociolinguistic details leading to the formation of Creole Portuguese in such settings.

The Portuguese controlled Malacca from 1511 until 1641, when it was conquered by the Dutch.<sup>3</sup> Thirty six years later, the ‘Portuguese’ still constituted the strongest ethnic group. A 1678 census lists 1,469 “Portuguese half-castes and blacks”, owning 551 slaves (Bort, 1927[1678]: 39-44).<sup>4</sup> These very likely groups very likely spoke ‘Portuguese’<sup>5</sup> and Creole Portuguese.<sup>6</sup> Today’s Malacca Creole Portuguese are their descendents.

### **3. Factors aiding survival from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries**

Among the motives for Kristang’s survival into the 20<sup>th</sup>C, two interrelated factors are salient. One is linguistic reinforcement, through a dynamic association of religion, language and ethnic group, and through missionary education. A second factor is the development of a common socioeconomic base in the core community, a characteristic which persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup>C.

#### **3.1. Roman Catholicism and the Portuguese language**

A bond between the ‘Portuguese’ language and Roman Catholicism was a fundamental factor in the survival of Kristang<sup>7</sup> after the Portuguese period, through the Dutch and British periods.<sup>8</sup> This connection developed through the representation of Catholicism via the Portuguese language. The potential of religion

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<sup>3</sup> Baxter (1988: 3-7) discusses the sociolinguistic demography of Malacca in the Portuguese and Dutch periods.

<sup>4</sup> The other ethnic groups listed by Bort were: 733 Dutch (+394 slaves), 588 Malays (+180 slaves), 214 Moors (+214 slaves) and 426 Chinese (+237 slaves).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘Portuguese’ is used to represent a continuum of L1 and L2 varieties, some approximating metropolitan Portuguese and others approximating a Creole system.

<sup>6</sup> The strength of ‘Portuguese’ language use in this early stage of the Dutch period is evidenced by the fact that Portuguese continued to be a lingua franca of Malacca, and was even used by the Dutch Reformed Church (Andaya, 1983: 199). By 1678, however, it may be assumed that the presence of L1 Portuguese approximating to a European model would have been insignificant as a target for acquisition. Throughout the continuum of ‘Portuguese’ there would have been varying degrees of influence from local ‘Portuguese’ input, and from other languages such as Malay and Hokkien.

<sup>7</sup> I use the term ‘Kristang’ to refer to Malacca Creole Portuguese throughout this period.

<sup>8</sup> The relevant dates of these respective periods are: Portuguese: 1511-1641; Dutch: 1642-1795, 1818-1823; British: 1795-1818, 1823-1957; Malaysia: 1957-present.

as a key factor facilitating language maintenance in adverse contexts has been noted by Dorian (1998: 16).

Today, one of the clearest manifestations of the bond between language and religion in Kristang culture is the *Irmang di Greza* ‘brothers of the Church’, a confraternity founded by the Dominicans in the 17<sup>th</sup>C. A significant domain of Kristang language until recently, the *Irmang di Greza* played a key role in maintaining Catholicism for the ‘Portuguese’ population during the periods of prohibition under the Dutch (Teixeira, 1963: ch.XI). Simultaneously, this bond was maintained through Portuguese-speaking priests, intermittently present in the late 17<sup>th</sup>C and permanent after 1710, through the Portuguese Mission.

Roman Catholicism, represented by Portuguese-speaking priests of Macanese, Goanese and Portuguese origins, evidently provided a strong cultural focus facilitating the maintenance of Kristang. The traditional name of the language underlines this dynamic sincretism. Derived from the Portuguese word *Cristão* ‘Christian’, Kristang signifies (Creole) Portuguese, Christian religion and Creole ethnicity.

The Catholic Church also provided linguistic reinforcement through pastoral and liturgical use of ‘Portuguese’, and partially, through education. While there is no direct evidence of the use of Creole Portuguese in the church domain by Portuguese priests in the Dutch period, I surmise it to have been used, together with a variety based on metropolitan Portuguese. Many priests were trained in the seminaries of Goa and Macau, and had exposure to Asian varieties of Creole Portuguese.

Elderly Kristangs in 1980-83 reported that the priests prior to the Second World War, resident in Malacca since the 19<sup>th</sup>C, were fluent speakers of ‘Kristang’. In my observations of communication between post-war priests and Creoles the priests used a register of Kristang heavily influenced by metropolitan Portuguese. It may be assumed that both the pre- and post-war circumstances shed some light, on the language used by priests in the 19<sup>th</sup>C. Certainly, late in the 19<sup>th</sup>C, some liturgical materials were prepared in ‘Creole Portuguese’ (p.c. Fr. Manuel Teixeira, 1982; Baxter, 1996: 308). One such document (Anon., 1829), strongly influenced by metropolitan Portuguese, resembles texts used by the Portuguese Mission until the Second World War (see Rêgo, 1998[1942]).<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1.1. The teaching of Portuguese and Creole Portuguese

Further linguistic reinforcement may have come from the use of Portuguese and Creole Portuguese in schools in the 19<sup>th</sup>C. Three types of schools gave classes in

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<sup>9</sup> Within the Church domain in the 19<sup>th</sup>C there may have been some degree of ‘diglossia’ in the Creole community, as the records of the governing body of the St Peter’s Church for the 19<sup>th</sup>C are written almost exclusively in Portuguese (Baxter, 1988: 12).

‘Portuguese’. In the early 19<sup>th</sup>C some schools were organized by the Portuguese Mission (Baxter, 1988: 9).<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the London Missionary Society ran Portuguese language schools which, between 1832 and 1834, had an average of 120 students (Baxter, 1996: 308). Simultaneously, the Malacca Free School, as of 1826, also taught Portuguese (Baxter, 1988: 12). Children were initially segregated according to their language group. Initial instruction of the Portuguese children was conducted in “their own language” (The Eleventh Report, 1836).

Later, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>C, a boys’ school and a girls’ school were again run by the Portuguese Mission,<sup>11</sup> the latter school was later administered by the Cannossian nuns (Baxter, 1988: 12). Indirect evidence, based on records of the schools and testimonies of elderly speakers in 1980, suggests that these Mission schools taught Portuguese, and that the girls school was partly staffed by Portuguese-speaking nuns from Macau (Baxter, 1988: 12-13).<sup>12</sup>

The London Missionary Society used both in Portuguese and Creole Portuguese –the latter being referred to as “Indo-Portuguese” (Baxter, 1996: 308).<sup>13</sup> Creole Portuguese materials were printed at the Malacca Mission (ibid.) and three of its schools operating in 1831 are referred to as Indo-Portuguese schools. The Society was sensitive to the nature of Malacca Creole Portuguese. One missionary observed that the “Malacca Portuguese do not speak the Madras Indo-Portuguese –It is that of Ceylon which approaches nearest to *our* [emphasis in original] local dialect” (Garling, 1830 apud. Baxter, 1996: 308).

At today’s distance it is difficult to assess the extent to which education may have reinforced Kristang, at a time when the prime aim was to impart English (Baxter, 1988: 9-10). In the early 19<sup>th</sup>C, these schools may have had granted ‘Portuguese’ a degree of legitimacy and recognition in the wider community, alongside other local languages. The use of ‘Portuguese’ in education may also have given Kristang some lexical reinforcement, although this is difficult to assess since there are no attestations of Kristang prior to the 1890s.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear from available documentation whether any schools were run by the Portuguese Mission during the 18<sup>th</sup>C.

<sup>11</sup> Most likely these schools had been in continuous existence since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>C. However, documentation of the Mission Schools for the period is incomplete.

<sup>12</sup> In the pre-war period, the Canossian Convent, called the ‘Portuguese’ convent by elderly speakers in 1980, ran a boarding school for girls and also a general day school, referred to as the *skola masang*. Informants reported that some parents preferred not to send their children to these schools for fear they would not learn English.

<sup>13</sup> Indo-Portuguese is the blanket-term used by the missionaries to refer to ‘Creole Portuguese’ in South and South East Asia.

<sup>14</sup> There is some indirect evidence to suggest that this may have been the case. Firstly, the fact that the local governing body of the Portuguese Mission church compiled its records

Overall, the relationship between Roman Catholicism and membership of the Creole group seems to have been the prime contributor to the survival of Kristang until the 20<sup>th</sup>C. However, there is another very significant factor: the conjugation of Kristang population size and socioeconomic status.

### 3.2. Demographic facts and socioeconomic status

In the Dutch Malacca of 1678, the ‘Portuguese’ were the largest ethnic group, and owned more slaves than did the Dutch (Baxter, 1988: 6-7). Evidently these ‘Portuguese’ still had a reasonably high socioeconomic position. Strength of numbers and socioeconomic status would have aided language maintenance at this stage.<sup>15</sup>

However, by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>C the status of the Creoles had been inverted, and there were signs of clustering of residential location. An 1827 census reports 2,289 Creoles, mainly impoverished fishing families in Banda Hilir. They are described as a separate ethnic group of “biggotted Roman Catholics (...) regularly supplied with Priests (...) by the two colleges at Goa and Macao”, and speaking “a language peculiar to themselves (...) Creole Portuguese [sic]” (Dickinson, 1941: 260-61). By then, the role of the fishing families as a principal domain of Creole Portuguese seems firmly established.<sup>16</sup> Fishing continued as a principal Creole economic activity until the mid-20<sup>th</sup>C. Indeed, the topic of fishing is central in Kristang oral traditions.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup>C, both the size of the Kristang population in Malacca and their socioeconomic status underwent further change. The impact of education, the spread

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in Portuguese throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>C implies that some locals had a knowledge of Portuguese approximating to the Metropolitan variety. Secondly, some of the oldest speakers interviewed in 1980 reported having learned counting, the days of the week, names of the months, catechism, and some prayers in Portuguese at the ‘Portuguese’ convent school and at the *skola masang*. Some such older speakers had an awareness of ‘correctness’ of gender pairs of human nouns, and of the feminine subject pronoun *ela* ‘she’. The consistent Kristang pronunciation [v] in the word *novi* ‘nine’, when the sound is very rare in the language, having generally been replaced by [b], could also point to the influence of education in Portuguese.

<sup>15</sup> The cultural status of the creoles, and the bond between religion and language, has over the centuries facilitated a strong assimilation dynamic in cases of intermarriage. Thus, the creoles have assimilated not only other Eurasian elements, of Dutch and English origin, but also (and even in recent times) have assimilated Chinese, Indian and even occasional Malay elements.

<sup>16</sup> The community has been associated with fishing at least since the end of the Portuguese period. In the first Dutch report compiled after the fall of Portuguese Malacca, reference is made to the Portuguese “black fishermen” (Baxter, 1988: 6).

of English, and employment opportunities elsewhere in the colony, led to an exodus of Kristangs to areas of growth such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. An English speaking Kristang middle class flourished. The core Kristang-speaking community in Malacca, however, while gradually acquiring English, maintained much of its characteristics of the early 19<sup>th</sup>C.

#### **4. Factors in the survival and attrition of Kristang in the 20<sup>th</sup>C**

The fate of Kristang in the 20<sup>th</sup>C has been determined by a set of partially opposing and partially complementary factors. On the one hand, there is some historical continuity in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the community, and the sociolinguistic role of religion. Simultaneously, until the early post-war period, there is continuity in the role of fishing as a cultural socioeconomic activity and a domain of Kristang. However, changing demographic and socioeconomic conditions have placed the language under increasing endangerment.

##### **4.1. The creation of *Padri sa Chang***

The most significant event contributing to the survival of Kristang in the 20<sup>th</sup>C occurred in 1933. Under an initiative of the Catholic Church, aided by the British Administration, a large number of poorer creoles from the central town areas of Bunga Raya and Trankera, and some from the Praya Lane area, were resettled in Hilir, on the coast south of the town. The resettlement, to a location adjacent to two traditional nuclei of Creole residence, *Banda Kanu* and *Banda Praya* (Praya Lane), created a large Kristang speech community, with a concentration of low-income families devoted to fishing. Within the 28 acres of the Portuguese Settlement, or *Padri sa Chang* ‘the priest’s land’<sup>17</sup>, only Kristangs resided. In the late 1960s this community displayed strong inward focusing in kinship and friendship relations, a high degree of intramarriage, and a high proportion of extended families with elderly Kristang speakers present (Chan, 1969). These tendencies were still partially in 1980 (Baxter, 1988: 12).

##### **4.1.1. Kristang population and speaker numbers today**

*Padri sa Chang* has been the subject of a number of linguistic and socioeconomic studies since the 1960s, and estimates of speaker numbers in Malacca are usually based on this work. However, no surveys have yet been conducted which directly address the complicated issue of speaker numbers. Any

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<sup>17</sup> The name reflects the fact that it was a priest who organized the resettlement project. It also is a further reminder of the association of the Kristangs with the Catholic Church. Ironically, the cleric in question was not Portuguese, but French.

perspective on changes in speaker numbers since the 1980s can only be based on estimates made by fieldworkers and by the *Padri sa Chang* governing panel.<sup>18</sup>

In 1979, The Portuguese Settlement had a population of 1,100 (Sta Maria, 1979). During my fieldwork in 1980-3, the following observations were made: 60% of this population were estimated to be fluent active speakers, and most people over 20 yrs of age (roughly 45% of the total population), yet only a third of those of speaking age below 20, were speakers of Kristang. Moreover, there were Kristangs resident in other areas, such as Bunga Raya, Praya Lane and Banda Kanu. However, for these, no information was available about speaker numbers or the extent of transmission of Kristang.

In 1991, there were 2,157 Eurasians in Malacca state (National Census Report, 1991), and it is reasonable to assume that most were Portuguese Eurasians.<sup>19</sup> In 2001, the total number of residents of *Padri sa Chang* was estimated at 1,000, by the community leaders. In reality, the total population of this community may be lower than 1,000. Lee (p.c., December 2002; 2004), extrapolating from her recent survey of 85/118 households (72% of the population, i.e. 470 people: 130 of 0-12yrs, 132 of 13-30yrs, 121 of 31-50yrs, and 87 of 51+yrs) estimates a total population of 750 people.<sup>20</sup> What is striking about these figures is that they show the population of *Padri sa Chang* to be quite 'young'.

How many of these Kristangs are fluent speakers? Lee (p.c., December 2002; 2004) has conducted a self-report survey on best/fluent speakers in these 85 households, and has found that 96.4% of fluent speakers fall in the 31+yrs age group, with 77.6% in the 40+yrs age group. Extrapolating from Lee's population figures and best/fluent speaker report, it is clear that the number of fluent speakers today must lie between a half and one third of the overall population of *Padri sa Chang*, and they are mainly over 40yrs of age.

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<sup>18</sup> Grimes (2000: 550-51) reports 5,000 speakers in Malaysia, and 5,000 or more in Malaysia and Singapore. While it is true that there are speakers of Kristang in other cities of Malaysia, and there is a community in Singapore, it is unclear on what criteria the *Ethnologue* figures are based. Considering the comments in Baxter (1996: 309), these figures seem excessive.

<sup>19</sup> The fact that Portuguese Eurasians, in spite of being the huge majority of Eurasians in Malaysia, are not clearly identified by the census is a reflection of the low status of the Kristangs at the macro-community level.

<sup>20</sup> The estimates given by the Regidor's panel and by Lee seem much closer to reality than the figure of 3,000 proposed by Ma'alip (2001) who also estimates that there are another 1,200 speakers in the surrounding area of *Padri sa Chang*. This latter figure seems rather high.



#### 4.2. The domain of religion since the Second World War

In the last half century, changes in the presence of the Portuguese Mission have had negative consequences for the language.

Both pre-war priests of the Portuguese Mission were executed during the Japanese occupation, and the new breed of priests arriving after the Second World War appear to have been less sensitive to the Kristang language and culture than their predecessors. Their introduction of regional Portuguese music and dance to the community, in the early 1950s, is a notable example of the influence of Salazarian cultural ideology. The Kristang community had a rich musical and song tradition (Rêgo, 1998[1942]), deriving from general Asian Creole Portuguese culture in sincretism with Malay and Baba Malay traditions. Still vital in the late 1970s, but mainly represented by elderly Kristangs, this tradition has been replaced by the European Portuguese songs and dances introduced by the Portuguese priests.<sup>21</sup>

Change in the demography of the Catholic congregation of the Portuguese Mission has made the Kristangs a minority at St Peter's Church. Since the Second World War, the congregation has swelled with Chinese and Indian parishioners (p.c. Fr. Manoel Pintado, 1983). This change has been so strong that even the confraternity of the *Irmang di Greza* has recently weakened as a domain of Kristang.

However, post-independence politics set in place circumstances which, inevitably, would eventually eliminate the role of Portuguese-speaking priests and considerably weaken the role of the Portuguese Mission as a focus of Creole culture. In the wake of independence, restrictions were gradually imposed regarding the entry of Portuguese (and other foreign) priests into Malaysia.

In the mid-1990s, the last Portuguese superior of the Portuguese Mission, Fr Manoel Pintado, retired and his Goanese subordinate was posted to Singapore. The Portuguese Mission was then placed under the jurisdiction of St. Xavier's Church, traditionally known as 'the French Mission', whose priests neither speak Portuguese nor Kristang. Thus, the symbolic link between the Kristang community and the Catholic Church as represented through Portuguese-speaking priests was finally broken.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Another rich oral tradition, that of story telling, also derived from general Asian Creole Portuguese and Malay origins, has also died out in the last twenty years.

<sup>22</sup> This seems quite poignant when one considers that survey by Nunes (1996), in the *Padri sa Chang* community reports 55% of respondents in favour of the revival of religious celebrations in Kristang, as a factor aiding the preservation of the language.

### 4.3. The rise of English

The shift towards English as the language most widely spoken by Kristangs began in the mid 19<sup>th</sup>C as Kristangs sought employment in clerical and auxiliary positions in British colonial society. By the early 20<sup>th</sup>C, thanks to the growing network of schools in Malacca (Harrison, 1983), English was spreading among the creoles.<sup>23</sup> This fact, coupled with growing employment opportunities in elsewhere, led to a constant drain on the Malacca Kristang community, and the demise of fishing as a creole activity (Baxter, 1988: 9-10). English was a prestige language, a key to employment, Kristang was not.

An important consequence of this process was the growth of an English-dominant Kristang middle class in urban centres, which gradually shifted to English. This had significant repercussions for the core Kristang-speaking community in Malacca. The middle-class Kristangs viewed the traditional Malacca Kristang-speaking community as low prestige. Doubtless such sentiments weighed heavily on the core community in Malacca, facilitating a breakdown in transmission of Kristang.

With the independence of Malaysia, Malay became the official language and replaced English as the main language of education (Gaudart, 1987: 533). Nevertheless, although the Kristangs have been educated in Malay since the early 1970s, English has not been displaced. During fieldwork among the Malacca Kristangs in the 1980s, the prestige of English was readily apparent. In many families of higher socioeconomic status, English was the home language and Kristang was not being transmitted unless elderly Kristang-speaking relatives resided in the same house. Furthermore, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the family, English, and not Malay, was the language to which Kristangs normally had exposure through the media.

In interviews during 1980-1, the attitudes of residents of *Padri sa Chang* towards Kristang and towards English often reflected the high prestige of English and the low prestige of Kristang. Direct evidence of the failure to transmit Kristang was common. The following comments from an elderly Kristang-dominant grandmother concerning her grandchildren reflect this.

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<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, in their traditional roles in poorer fishing families, some women were still not acquiring English even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>C. Three of my oldest female informants in 1980, from very traditional backgrounds, claimed to know so little English that they could only communicate with their grandchildren in Kristang.

1. *Yo lo papiá neta netu, papiá Kristang. Mas, papiá*  
 1s FUT speak granddaughter grandson speak Kristang. But, speak  
*Kristang olotu ngka mutu chadu la (...) kauzu olotu sa*  
 kristang 3pl NEG very clever EMPH (...) because 3pl GEN  
*mai pai tudu ke papiá ingles. Yo papiá kristang*  
 mother father all want speak English. 1s speak Kristang  
*olotu membe kere resposta ingles.*  
 3pl sometimes want reply English.

[I speak to my grandchildren in Kristang. But they are not very clever at speaking Kristang! (...) because their parents both want to speak English. I speak Kristang to them; sometimes they want to reply in English].

In other cases, parents had transmitted Kristang early in the informant's life only to change to an almost exclusive use of English when the informant attended school. Both attitudes were common in the interviews conducted in 1980-81.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.4. Socioeconomic change

In the last three decades, radical changes occurred in the socioeconomic profile of *Padri sa Chang*, all of which have serious implications for the survival of the Kristang language. While Kristangs still migrate for work, there is a trend towards local employment. Industrial growth around Malacca and in the tourism and hospitality industry is significant. For younger Kristangs from low-income families, this has meant a greater interaction with people outside the Kristang community. Similarly, since the late 1970s, there has been a growth of restaurant businesses within *Padri sa Chang*, which has provided work for young Kristangs and also has brought a constant flow of outsiders, tourists and locals, into the community. These local developments have led to a significant improvement in the socioeconomic level of *Padri sa Chang* and also to far greater exposure to English and Malay than previously.

However, by far the most significant recent socioeconomic changes came about as the result of an environmental issue. Since the end of the 1970s, the Kristang communities of the Bandar Hilir area of Malacca have been progressively affected by a land reclamation project along the Hilir foreshore. By 1980, the Praya Lane Kristang community had already been land-locked, with the result that fishing was largely abandoned as an occupation. In turn, the landfill had serious implications for fishing at *Padri sa Chang* (Baxter, 1988: 14). Led by the Kristang politician Bernard Sta. Maria, now deceased, the Kristangs of the Bandar Hilir communities became

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, while English is undeniably the language most widely spoken by Kristangs, in all the interviews conducted in 1980-1 with Kristang speakers in the age group 17-35, the majority claimed to be committed to transmitting Kristang.

politicised and organized protests (Sta Maria, 1982). Thus, the plight of the Kristangs and the environmental implications of the land reclamation came to the notice of the wider public. A further problem which came to a head at the same time concerned overcrowding in the available housing in *Padri sa Chang*. Since 1933, various sections of the settlement area had been taken over by a school operated by the Canossian Convent,<sup>25</sup> and a housing complex for workers of the Malaysian Government Customs Department (*ibid.*).

The conjugation of these problems, and an increased awareness on the part of politicians concerning the tourist potential of the ‘historical’ Kristang community were to have two unexpected consequences. Thus, the Portuguese Settlement was given a ‘Portuguese-style’ building to house restaurants, and where cultural shows are staged daily.<sup>26</sup> This provided an alternative source of employment within the settlement and fostered a new basis for self awareness. The Kristang cultural identity now has a certain value both within and beyond the community. Another result of this development was an enormous influx of outsiders, so that *Padri sa Chang* is now a regular stop for tourist buses. The language of communication between Kristangs and such outsiders is normally English.

The other unexpected consequence was that the Kristangs were to receive overtures from the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the ruling party of the Barisan Nasional coalition. In Malaysia, political parties work along racial lines, and Malays have certain privileges, as defined by *bumiputera* ‘sons of the soil’ status, enshrined in the New Economic Policy of 1970 (Fernandis, 2000: 263). This policy grants privileges with respect to banking, education, and the civil service profession, among others. In 1991, certain *bumiputera* rights, in relation to bank loans and investments, were extended to the Kristangs, although full *bumiputera* status has not been granted.<sup>27</sup> The extension of this privilege was to be conditional on three core factors: Malaysian citizenship, Catholic religion, and the ability to speak Kristang.<sup>28</sup> Here was yet another basis for increased self-regard.

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<sup>25</sup> Nuns of the Italian-based Catholic Canossian order of women were instrumental in the foundation of schools in the Malaysian peninsular and Singapore in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>26</sup> The venture was funded by the Portuguese-based Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, through the intervention of the superior of the Portuguese Mission, community leaders, local and national politicians, and the Portuguese Embassy in Thailand.

<sup>27</sup> A panel of historians was constituted by the state to decide whether the Portuguese community could be accorded *Bumiputera* status. A decision has not yet been announced. However, the attitude of some prominent UMNO figures has been most positive, considering the Kristangs in many ways more Malay than Portuguese (Fernandis, 2000: 264).

<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of the language factor in the conditions was the significant initiative of community elder Patrick de Silva.

### 5. Alarm bells: Three recent sociolinguistic surveys of *Padri sa Chang*

Various aspects of recent surveys by Nunes (1996), David & Noor (1999), Sudesh (2000) and Lee (p.c. December 2002; 2004) paint a very worrying picture of language use by the Kristangs, pointing to unmistakable evidence of a strong shift away from Kristang towards English.<sup>29</sup>

Nunes' (1996)<sup>30</sup> study revealed quite alarming results regarding the mother-tongue status of Kristang. Only 56% of respondents identified Kristang as their mother-tongue, and only four age-groups showed majority results: <15yrs (54%),<sup>31</sup> 31-40yrs (64%), 41-50yrs (60%) and >50yrs (75%). Kristang's mother-tongue status is weakening in inverse proportion to age. Moreover, the fact that the 16-20yrs (23%) and 21-30yrs (38%) groups show low mother-tongue status for Kristang, points clearly to a shift away from Kristang as a mother tongue.

David & Noor's study (1999: 473), with a much smaller sample, revealed 72.6% of respondents with Kristang as their mother tongue, while 20.9% indicated that it was English. However, only 46% claimed to be fluent in Kristang, a 30.2% claimed average spoken fluency and a further 23.8% stated they had no fluency. In contrast, 62.9% claimed fluency in English and a further 29% claimed average spoken fluency. In comparison with the spoken skills in Kristang and English, only 32% claimed fluency in Malay, with a further 50% claiming average spoken fluency. Added to this, in both David & Noor (1999: 471) and Sudesh (2000: 145) respondents predominantly considered English to be the most important language, whereas Malay also rated highly as the second most important language.

Among the domains investigated by David & Noor (1999) and Sudesh (2000), the home/family and ethnic group friendships are particularly indicative of language shift. In the home domain, both studies found that only the oldest age-group preferred to use Kristang alone. In other age-groups, English and Kristang were used. Curiously, David & Noor (1999: 474-75) report found that both the second oldest group and the youngest group displayed a strong majority preference for the

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<sup>29</sup> Nunes (1996) surveyed 225 residents of *Padri sa Chang*, in six age-groups: <15, 16-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and >50; factors addresses included age-groups, gender, degree of use (with purpose, addressee), and opinions regarding vitality and undertakings for maintenance. David & Noor (1999) worked with 62 respondents (from each of 62 households) in five age-groups: 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-59 and 60-89. Sudesh (2000) surveyed 64 respondents in four age-groups. Lee (2004) surveys 85 households and works with data of three types: reported language use via questionnaire; actual language use by tape recordings; tape recorded interviews with the respondent.

<sup>30</sup> As Nunes' survey did not address comparative English and Malay use, only its results on Kristang mother-tongue status are considered here.

<sup>31</sup> This slightly favourable result is possibly owed to speakers from this age-group being more from the lower income families in the sample.

use of Kristang together with English (Kristang+English): 60% of the 40-59yrs group and 77.8% of the 10-19yrs age group. In the middle range age groups, the sectors of each group preferring Kristang alone in this domain were: 40% of the 40-49yrs group, 50% of the 30-39yrs group and 35.7% of the 20-29yrs group. While the results presented by Sudesh (2000: 141) are similar, he registers a preference for English in his youngest three age groups, underlining the shift to English. More poignant, however, are the findings of Lee (p.c. December 2002; 2004). Her self-report survey obtained the following results per age-group regarding the best/fluent speakers: 7-12yrs (1.2%), 13-20yrs (1.2%), 21-30yrs (0%), 31-40yrs (18.8%), 41-50yrs (37.6%), 51+yrs (40%). The transmission of Kristang is clearly under threat.

In the friendship domain, David & Noor (1999: 475) found an overlap of reported use of Kristang and Kristang+English for each age group except the youngest and the oldest groups. The oldest group used Kristang alone, whereas the youngest group used Kristang+English and no members of the youngest group claimed to use solely Kristang in friendships. Thus, a shift is clear: the older speakers using Kristang alone, the middle age-group speakers using Kristang and Kristang+English, and the younger speakers using Kristang+English alone. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in both the 20-29 and 30-39 age-groups, Kristang was used by a larger proportion of respondents than Kristang+English. The results presented by Sudesh (2000: 143) are somewhat different, although they too indicate a shift, with the two older age-groups preferring Kristang and the two younger ones preferring English. At the same time, he reports that half of the respondents of his youngest age-group claimed to use Kristang for same-ethnicity friendship purposes. Taking the analysis a step further regarding peer groups, Sudesh investigated the school domain and found that males of school-age preferred Kristang with same-ethnicity male peers, whereas females preferred English with same-ethnicity female peers (Sudesh, 2000: 143-44).

Both studies found English to be dominant in the domain of business transactions (David & Noor, 1999: 477; Sudesh, 2000: 139b). According to Sudesh, English also dominates in the prayer domain (ibid.: 144). This reflects changes in the use of Kristang in the religion domain, as discussed in section 4.2. The work domain, investigated by Sudesh (ibid.: 139-40), showed that English dominates in the work domain of those employed outside *Padri sa Chang*. However, as was noted earlier by Chan (1969) and Baxter (1988), Sudesh too finds that Kristang is strong in the work domain within *Padri sa Chang*.

The most alarming finding is that all three studies show clear evidence of a shift between the language use patterns of the oldest and the youngest groups. Generational transmission is breaking down. However, there is also some evidence that might be interpreted as resistance on the part of the Kristang language, something on which a language revitalization program might capitalize. Sudesh (2000: 145) also assessed the attitude of respondents to Kristang and to its promotion within *Padri sa Chang*. The results identified a very positive attitude

overall. However, Sudesh (*ibid.*) notes that this attitude is not in evidence in actual language use. Ominously, the language is being maintained in the main by the presence of older Kristang speakers. Yet, as noted in section 4.1.1, according to Lee, the older speakers represent the smallest section of the population and fluent speakers are a minority which largely overlaps with the oldest age group.

Finally, intermarriage with other ethnic groups also represents a danger to the survival of the language. Amongst the Kristangs, to judge from David & Noor (1999: 470) and Lee (p.c. December 2002; 2004), marriage to non-Kristang speakers is now significant. David & Noor point out that in 62 households surveyed, out of a total of 120 households, 20% of married couples were of mixed origins.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Lee's recent survey of 85 households found 22 non-Kristang spouses, yielding a 25.9% rate of out-marriage. Of these predominantly female spouses, Lee found that only 22.7% can understand and speak Kristang and 59% can understand but not speak Kristang. The remaining 27.3% can neither understand nor speak Kristang. Most significantly, Lee noted that 86.4% of non-Kristang parents never used Kristang with their children and 25% of non-Kristang parents use Kristang "not much of the time". This suggests that marriage out of the Kristang community is a cause of Kristang language decline within the home, leading to a shift in the mother tongue of children in this setting. The linguistic assimilation dynamic of the Kristang community in the past seems no longer significant.

Overall, unless the community turns its attitudes into actions, it is only a matter of time before the Kristang-speaking elders disappear and a total shift to English eventuates.

## 6. The current situation –A ray of hope for language maintenance?

With the extension of eligibility for partial *bumiputera* rights to the Kristangs, the community was unexpectedly handed a mechanism which could be used to their advantage to facilitate the maintenance of their language. However, so far, it has not been associated with the question of language maintenance. This points to a general lack of awareness of language issues on the part of community committees, who perhaps have not seen the maintenance of the language as an issue.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The origins of the 22 non-Kristang spouses were: Indian (10), Chinese (7), Eurasian not from Malacca (2), Malay/Indonesian (1), and German (1).

<sup>33</sup> Past community committees initially applied the language requirement for limited *bumiputera* rights only loosely, and Portuguese Eurasians throughout Malaysia seized the opportunity to avail themselves of Kristang status. This yielded numerous officially recognized 'speakers' of Kristang with unclear competence in the language. The rather high number of Kristang speakers listed by Grimes (2000: 550-51), is possibly owed to these circumstances.

Hopefully, the alarming results of the recent surveys of language use in *Padri sa Chang* (David & Noor, 1999; Sudesh, 2000; Lee, 2004) will serve to stimulate further action on the part of the Kristang community leaders. It may not be too late to make the official Kristang identity language requirement work in favor of the Kristang language (see section 8.3 below).

## 7. Some linguistic reflexes of language decline

The sociolinguistic changes mentioned earlier, the loss of exclusive domains, the shift towards English and the rise of Malay as a national language, have important implications for the Kristang language as a system. Although Kristang is well documented (see section 8), studies have not addressed the linguistic repercussions of language loss. This section presents a preliminary glimpse at some aspects of linguistic change in data from the 1980s<sup>34</sup> and 1990s<sup>35</sup>, pointing to four tendencies:

- (i) lexical ‘shrinkage’ since the wordlists of Rêgo (1998[1942]: 155-89) and Hancock (1973);
- (ii) Malay lexical items in competition with Kristang items;
- (iii) competing and non-competing forms from English and Malay;
- (iv) ongoing structural convergence with English.

### 7.1. Evidence of ‘shrinkage’ in the Kristang lexicon

The 835 lexical entries in Rêgo (1998[1942]), collected from native speakers during in Malacca in the 1930s (Baxter, 1998: 34), provide a useful window on change in Kristang over the last fifty eight years. A comparison with the Malacca Creole Portuguese dictionary by Baxter and de Silva (2004), reveals that 78 items listed by Rêgo have been lost, and another 13 have changed meaning. So, in this particular lexical set, the rate of loss over sixty years is in the order of 9.3%, whereas the rate of semantic shift is in the order of 1.5%.

Further loss is observable since 1973, comparing the 971 items listed by Hancock (1973) with those registered by Baxter and de Silva (2004). Here, 68 words have been lost and another 15 have changed meaning, yielding a 7% rate of loss and a 1.5% rate of semantic shift. Clearly a loss of 7% of this lexical set in 28 years is more serious than a loss of 9.3% in 58 years. The language is now receding at a faster rate.

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<sup>34</sup> This data base was compiled for the purposes of syntactic description of the language of Kristang-dominant speakers. Thus, fieldwork deliberately targeted Kristangs from families where Kristang was observed to be used predominantly, or who were observed to use Kristang predominantly, within the community.

<sup>35</sup> Data collected during the preparation of Baxter & de Silva (2004).



Other evidence of ‘shrinkage’ in the lexicon was noted during of the preparation of Baxter and de Silva (2004). Words were classified as *archaic* if they were very rare, that is, used by few (elderly) speakers and/or known passively by such speakers. This category comprises 204 words, or 8.3%, of the data-base of 2,429 single head entries.<sup>36</sup> Not included in Baxter and de Silva (2004) are certain words remembered phonologically but not semantically by speakers today.<sup>37</sup> Some such words, for example *strabaladu* ‘afflicted, distressed’, *nozamintu* ‘mourning’, *muchadu* ‘full, swollen’, were listed and defined by Rêgo (1998[1942]).

Since 1942 and since 1973, some words were lost as their referents became obsolete. This is the case of *askung* ‘glove’, which is no longer part of the Kristang reality.<sup>38</sup> However, most lost words are not in this category. Table 1 shows some examples. In current Kristang, the functions of these words are carried by semantically related single lexical items or by lexical phrases. The current items may have been alternative forms at the earlier stages. This is true for the words representing ‘to fool about’, and ‘wife’. However, all items on the left of the table have been lost.

**Table 1. Some words lost from the Kristang lexicon since 1942 and 1973.**

<u>Rêgo, 1998[1942]</u>		<u>Current equivalent</u>	
<i>asniá</i>	‘to fool about’	<i>brinká dodu</i>	‘(lit.) play fool’
<i>compania</i>	‘company’	<i>jenti kompanyá</i>	‘(lit.) person accompany’
<i>emado</i>	‘glutton’	<i>pustemadu</i>	‘glutton, gluttonous’
<i>fermosura</i>	‘beauty’	<i>buniteza</i>	‘beauty’
<i>nescitá</i>	‘to need’	<i>prësizu</i>	‘to need’

<sup>36</sup> The latter number excludes 574 variants of head words and a huge number of lexical phrases listed under the head words. In reality, the total number of ‘lexical concepts’ (i.e. represented by single lexical items or by lexical phrases) appears to lie in the vicinity of 4,500, since the English to Kristang entries total 4,350.

<sup>37</sup> Evidence of words losing their semantics before losing their phonological form, and even before losing their grammatical class, was found constantly during the compilation of the dictionary data-base. When assessing rare words, or when proposing a new entry, a speaker could recall the phonology, and often the grammatical class, but not the meaning. In the case of rare words which were fully recalled, or proposed complete with a meaning, such words often displayed radical divergences from the meanings of the entries in Rêgo (1998[1942]) or Hancock (1973). The meanings more recently attributed to these words probably arise from the obsolescence of the words (and speakers’ conscious attempts to recollect a meaning) rather than from semantic change that occurred when the word was actually in use in the community.

<sup>38</sup> Gloves were formerly used by brides during the traditional Kristang bridal ceremony.

Hancock, 1973

<i>kidá</i>	‘to care for’	<i>biziá (kuidadu)</i>	‘(lit.) to watch over (with care)’
<i>ripará</i>	‘to see’	<i>olá</i>	‘to see’
<i>sanggrá</i>	‘to bleed’	<i>sai sanggi</i>	‘(lit.) to emit blood’
<i>spoza</i>	‘wife’	<i>mule</i>	‘(lit.) woman’
<i>tang</i>	‘so (adv.)’	<i>bong bong</i>	‘(lit.) good good, very’
		<i>isorti</i>	‘(lit.) this type’
<i>úniku</i>	‘unique, alone’	<i>justu ungua</i>	‘(lit) just one’
		<i>onsong sa</i>	‘(lit.) alone + GEN’

**7.2. Non-Kristang lexical items in Kristang discourse**

The influence of non-Kristang lexicon displays two broad tendencies. Firstly, it may involve the use of non-Kristang words in competition, or variation, with Kristang words. Secondly, it may involve the use of non-Kristang words when there is no conceptual equivalent in the Kristang lexicon. These tendencies have been fundamental in shaping the Kristang lexicon over the centuries.

Variation with Malay, while involving a wide range of grammatical classes, is particularly noticeable in a small set of highly frequent adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions. Some of the most common of these are shown in table 2<sup>39</sup>, which presents a set of Kristang and Malay items registered at three points in time: in Rêgo (1998[1942]), Hancock (1973), and Baxter and de Silva (2004).

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<sup>39</sup> In comparing data from different periods, it is evident that extensive comparisons cannot be made because sample sizes are different and the nature of the informants is not fully clear. Some of Rêgo’s young informants of the 1930s later became some of my oldest ‘conservative’ informants of the 1980s. On their testimony, I know that Rêgo’s informants were from fishing families in the Praya Lane community and included some quite elderly speakers. For the 1973 material, Hancock (p.c., 1985) worked also with a range of informants, although much of his data came from younger informants.

**Table 2.** A set of adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions at three points in time.

	<b>KRISTANG</b>	Rêgo 1942	Hancock 1973	Baxter / de Silva 'present'	<b>MALAY</b>	Rêgo 1942	Hancock 1973	Baxter / de Silva 'present'
'same'	<i>igual</i>	✓		✓	<i>sama</i>	✓	✓	✓
'always'	<i>sempri</i>		✓	✓	<i>slalu</i>		✓	✓
'only'	<i>namás</i>	✓		✓	<i>seja</i>	✓		✓
'too'	<i>taming</i>	✓	✓	✓*	<i>pun</i>	✓	✓	✓
'or'	<i>ke</i>			✓	<i>atu, atau</i>		✓	✓
'but'	<i>mas</i>	✓		✓	<i>tapi</i>		✓	✓
'if'	<i>kantu</i> <i>si</i>	✓ ✓		✓ ✓*	<i>kalu</i>		✓	✓
'for'	<i>para, par, pa</i> <i>padi</i>	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	<i>pada</i>			✓
'until'	<i>ati</i>	✓	✓	✓*	<i>sampe</i>	✓	✓	✓

\*infrequent and not widely known.

In this table (see Table 2), it is assumed that the listed Kristang (< Portuguese) words were present in 1942 and in 1973, although they may not have been recorded by Rêgo or Hancock. Where the Malay words are concerned, we suggest that, in most cases, the absence of the Malay equivalent term may well mean that it was not a notable variant.<sup>40</sup> Thus, it appears that there has been an increase in the Malay items in variation with Kristang items in this set. On the one hand, local Malay *atu/atau* 'or', *tapi* 'but', *kalu* 'if' and *pada* 'for' that were not registered in 1942 are frequent in current Kristang. On the other hand, Kristang *taming* 'too', *si* 'if', and *ati* 'until' are infrequent in current Kristang.

<sup>40</sup> The absence of a word in Rêgo's register could indicate that the item in question was either not a notable variant, or not a variant at all, since Rêgo had direct contact with speakers of both Kristang and Malay for a number of years, and in his 1942 study he gives considerable attention to Malay items. In Hancock's case, since he had considerable contact directly and indirectly with younger speakers, this same assumption seems valid.

### 7.3. The proportions of non-Kristang elements: English and Malay

Data from fluent speakers in the 1980s provide a further perspective on the linguistic repercussions of the generational shift discussed in section 5. Thus, competing and non-competing forms from Malay, and especially from English, were found widely distributed across fluent speakers in interviews in the early 1980s. Logically, the occurrence of non-Kristang items would be conditioned by a range of linguistic and non-linguistic factors, the study of which lies beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a glance at English and Malay items used by individual speakers recorded in 1981 reveals certain linguistic reflexes of the shift to English. Table 3 presents the total numbers of first occurrences of switched non-Kristang lexical items<sup>41</sup> (English-total and Malay-total) in interviews with four fluent female speakers in 1981.<sup>42</sup> The table includes both non-Kristang items that compete with Kristang items and those that do not.<sup>43</sup>

**Table 3.** A sample of four female speakers showing ‘competing’ and ‘non-competing’ words from English and Malay.

Speaker	38	29	23	19
Age				
English non-competing	20 (38%)	47 (46%)	32 (51%)	25 (34%)
English-competing	18 (35%)	38 (37%)	19 (30%)	28 (38%)
English total	38 (73%)	85 (83%)	51 (81%)	53 (72%)
Malay non-competing	6 (12%)	6 (6%)	5 (8%)	7 (10%)
Malay-competing	8 (15%)	11 (11%)	7 (11%)	13 (18%)
Malay total	14 (27%)	17 (17%)	12 (19%)	20 (28%)
Total non-Kristang	52	102	63	73

A tendency for English items to prevail over Malay items is clear. Where competing words are concerned, English dominates. Where non-competing words are concerned, again English dominates. That certain competing English items were more familiar or even unique among younger speakers was confirmed in a translation-elicitation exercise.<sup>44</sup> When eliciting certain kinship terms, English

<sup>41</sup> This counting excludes switched *islands* (intersentential switching) and includes only the first instances of particular switched items. Repetitions were not counted.

<sup>42</sup> This was a pilot exercise conducted during fieldwork in 1981. The interviews were of 1.5 hours duration, followed a Labovian format and were conducted in Kristang. The informants who were well-known to the researcher (at that time resident in the community) and with whom the sole means of communication was Kristang.

<sup>43</sup> Competing items are those which have an equivalent in the Kristang lexicon.

<sup>44</sup> This too was a pilot exercise conducted during fieldwork in 1980.

terms were supplied either exclusively or they were the first item supplied and followed by the traditional Kristang item. Table 4 is based on the results of that exercise and presents items that informants claimed as Kristang equivalents of the five English kinship terms at the far left. The variation displayed by the five ‘older’ speakers is resolved categorically through English items by the two younger speakers.

**Table 4.** Results of a translation-elicitation exercise for kinship terms.

Informant		67	65	63	38	30	22	19	18
grandfather	<i>abo</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
	<i>machu</i>								
	<i>grempa</i>					x		x	x
	<i>pa gren</i>	x							
grandmother	<i>abo femi</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
	<i>grema</i>					x		x	x
	<i>ma gren</i>	x							
uncle	<i>tiu</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
	<i>angkl</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x
aunt	<i>tia</i>	x	x	x	x		x		
	<i>enti</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x
brother-in-law	<i>kunyadu</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		
	<i>bradinlo</i>							x	x

#### 7.4. Evidence of structural borrowing

In the 1980s recordings, the shift towards English is also reflected in linguistic structure. Two such instances warrant mention. They involve functional and syntactic convergence yet retain Kristang morphemes.

The first instance involves the genitive *sa*. This particle is traditionally obligatory with pronominal possessives in the sequence ‘possessor + possessed’, for example *yo sa kaza* I#GEN#house ‘my house’. However, some middle age-group and, mainly, younger age-group speakers, variably omit the genitive particle with

first person singular possessors and with the possessed kin terms *mai/ma* ‘mother’ and *pai/pa* ‘father’. Thus, the innovation *yo pai* I#father ‘my father’ is found in variation with the traditional form *yo sa pai* I#GEN#father ‘my father’. The innovation seems owed to English structure, rather than to an alternative Malay structure which has the order possessed+possessor, for example *bapak saya* father#I ‘my father’. Local vernacular Malay is also irrelevant in this case.

It seems reasonable to attribute this innovation more to the influence of English than to that of Malay. The absence of the Kristang genitive particle may be interpreted as evidence of convergence with the grammar of English, which disallows pronominal genitives and which encodes possession, person and number in a single determiner.

The second instance of convergence with English concerns the preverbal particle *ja*. The distribution of *ja* in data analyzed by Baxter (1988) and Thurgood & Thurgood (1996) identifies it as a perfective aspect marker. However, each of these authors detect divergences in the use of *ja* by younger speakers, suggesting that *ja* is functionally influenced by English. Thus, Baxter (1988: 120) noted that *ja* in past contexts involving active verbs, and its ready use in translations of English past tense, suggested that the particle was a past marker for some speakers. Subsequently, Thurgood & Thurgood (1996: 54-57) confirm that for some *ja* has clear English present perfect functions, marking (i) events that began in the past and continued into and finished in the present, (ii) the present relevance of events that occurred in the past, (iii) a change of state that is relevant to the time of speaking.

### **7.5. Linguistic repercussions of language decline: Conclusions**

Domain loss and the growth of functions not represented by the Kristang lexicon enhanced code-switching within Kristang matrix language discourse of fluent speakers in the 1980s, facilitating long term borrowing. At a structural level, increased English use by Kristangs also yields borrowing of sub-components of lexical structure. Curiously, the morphosyntactic borrowings considered above substitute English lexical structure for Kristang surface morphemes rather than adopting new system morphemes (which would overtly be a step towards a turnover of the matrix language). This is reminiscent of Pennsylvania Dutch (Fuller, 1996), which retains the outward appearance of Dutch, because of cultural implications, while converging on English lexicalization patterns. If Kristang displayed such resistance in the 1980s, does it do so now? A current assessment of the extent of ‘resistance’ to a turnover of the matrix language would be an important indicator of the potential for success of any language preservation program.

## 8. Prospects for maintenance and strengthening

### 8.1. The state of documentation of the language

Kristang has a considerable body of linguistic documentation.<sup>45</sup> The grammar has been variously described by Rêgo (1998[1942]), Hancock (1969, 1973, 1975), Baxter (1983, 1988, 1990, 1994/1996), Nunes (1994), and Thurgood & Thurgood (1996). The lexicon has been documented by Rêgo (1998[1942]), Hancock (1973), Marbeck (1995) and, recently, in the form of a dictionary, by Baxter & de Silva (2004). Also, substantial lexicons have been compiled by senior members of *Padri sa Chang*, Joe Bosco Lazaroo, Patrick de Silva and Aloysius Sta Maria. Rêgo (1998[1942]) records traditional verse, and Marbeck (1994, 1995) covers a range of cultural and historical topics.

### 8.2. The choice of an orthography

Most materials written in Kristang have used a confusing spellings, inconsistent in their phonological representation, either Portuguese-based or a mixture of Portuguese, English and Malay elements (Baxter, 1988). This lack of uniformity, and the fact that most Kristang speakers did not have access to these materials, meant that such efforts have been of little consequence to the community. Thus, for example, Rêgo (1998[1942]), in a Portuguese-based spelling, contains an immensely valuable Kristang lexicon, a catalogue of traditional Kristang verse, and liturgical texts, yet is virtually unknown to the community. Yet, even if it had access to this work, the community would have considerable difficulty reading it because of the spelling. An orthography based on Malay, an idea proposed by Hancock (1973: 25), has considerable appeal. It is “a system with which most speakers (...) are already familiar, and may easily be used since the phonological systems of the two languages are, broadly speaking, identical” (ibid.). With a minimum of effort, Kristangs could read and write their language, virtually overnight. This could contribute significantly to language maintenance, if materials were readily available in Kristang and if speakers were motivated to read them. Moreover, this orthography would be accessible to those English-dominant Kristangs who have minimal knowledge of Kristang.

### 8.3. Strengthening and maintenance

A revitalization and maintenance program is feasible. The language still has a reasonable number of speakers and is there is ample linguistic documentation to serve such a program. Kristang self-regard is changing, in part because the larger

<sup>45</sup> Kristang is well documented in the 20<sup>th</sup>C. However, so far, only two documents in Malacca Creole Portuguese have been located from an earlier period, from the 19<sup>th</sup>C (Baxter, 1996: 308).

community now values their culture, and the core Kristang community is now more prosperous. Dorian (1998: 12) notes how such factors can aid a community to resist abandonment of an ancestral language. Furthermore, legislation now grants the language a special status, a prestige which it has not had previously. Most important, as Sudesh (2000: 145) has noted, Kristangs in the *Padri sa Chang* community view their language with considerable good will.

To start a maintenance program, a community must determine whether it has the motivation to preserve and maintain the language. In the literature, this has variously been referred to as “prior clarification” (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998: 62-63) or “goal setting” (Hinton, 2001b: 53). Thus, a starting point in the Kristang community would be the mere recognition of the endangerment problem (via a survey of the attitudes of the community towards a language revitalization program –Hinton, 2001b: 54-55) and the creation of a community-based language revitalization and planning body (Lee, p.c. July 2001).

It is important that a revitalization program be firmly in the hands of the community, to obviate what Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer (1998: 68-71) refer to as “avoidance strategies”, whereby responsibility for the problem is handed to outsiders. Hinton (2001b: 52) suggests that a committee will be effective if accompanied by community participation. Ideally, this body should involve individuals competent in Kristang. Furthermore, it should involve community members who have already worked on the language in some capacity, as well as those who have expertise in community traditions (cf. Hinton, 2001a: 17; 2001b: 51-55). It should also have a wide representative base of community members, from different age groups, who are supportive of the language. This group should include community members who have skills useful to language revitalization, such as, for example, computing and pedagogical skills. Finally, the revitalization and planning body should have access to outside associated consultants who have conducted research on the language and the community.

Again, following the framework of Hinton (2001a: 17), such a body must to be sustainable, with new members constantly involved, so as not to lose impetus. It would need to be very persistent, to overcome any negative attitudes on the part of the wider community, and indeed of the Kristang community itself. And it would need to be self-critical, constantly assessing the effectiveness of its work.

Such a committee could formulate and implement language planning and maintenance programs, and organize the training of community members as language activists, technicians and trainers. The community might envisage the introduction of Kristang in the pre-school and primary school programs, under the umbrella of Malaysian Government legislation regarding the teaching of minority languages. An Education Act of 1961 provided that instruction can be given in a student’s mother tongue if the parents of at least 15 pupils request it, and providing an appropriate teacher can be found (Lasimbang, Miller & Otigil, 1992: 335). So far



this has happened mainly with Tamil and Mandarin, although, recently, efforts have been made to include Iban into the school curriculum in Sarawak (*ibid.*). The fact that Nunes (1996) found that 77% of his respondents were in favour of Kristang being taught suggests that an education program would be well received.

As Kristang is well documented, it would be feasible to produce didactic materials, and to produce a range of bilingual community information materials,<sup>46</sup> including bilingual information on the existing monolingual community web-site.<sup>47</sup> A final and fundamental issue is the financing of such a project in order to render the revitalization and maintenance materials and activities genuinely accessible to the target community. On the one hand, it may not be difficult to gain the support of Portuguese-based international cultural foundations, which in the past have been supportive of Kristang community projects.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the type of project outlined above should be viable with the support of the wider Portuguese Eurasian community, which now recognizes the importance of the core Kristang-speaking community in Malacca.

## 9. Conclusion

Kristang, endangered for several decades, has reached a significant cross-roads. Its speech community is shifting strongly towards English, which is now used in most age-groups, and is also strong in the family and friendship domains. Fluent speakers of Kristang are mostly over 40 years of age, and elderly Kristang mother-tongue speakers are few. Transmission to younger generations is severely weakened. Domain loss and other contact induced change is evident in lexical shrinkage, lexical replacement, code-switching and grammatical convergence.

However, the Kristang community is relatively oblivious of the imminent danger to its language. While the community views its language positively, this is negated by an over-relaxed attitude towards protecting the language. The future of Kristang is anything but rosy.

The viability of language maintenance hinges on the community's ability to recognize the impending danger and to establish a language revitalization program. Indeed, there are several factors on which a revitalization program could capitalize:

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<sup>46</sup> However, Nunes (1996) found that only 22% of his respondents felt that a community newsletter in Kristang might aid language preservation. This may reflect early wellintentioned attempts at such a community newsletter that ended up being produced predominantly in English.

<sup>47</sup> <<<http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Paradise/9221/>>>

<sup>48</sup> While such bodies as the IPOR (Instituto Português do Oriente) have been most supportive of the teaching of Standard Portuguese in Malaysia, they have not yet voiced an opinion on the issue of Kristang.

Kristang is still used in the work domain within the speech community, and in family, friendship and neighbourhood domains, mainly by the lower socioeconomic sector.

The community still has elders who speak Kristang as a mother tongue.

The community has members actively interested in Kristang language issues.

The community has an experienced internal government body that could establish a language revitalization committee.

The community can draw on the expertise of researchers who have studied the Kristang language and the community.

Kristang has recently gained official status as a characteristic of ethnic group identity.

The teaching of ethnic languages in schools is enshrined in a Malaysian Government Education Act.

Support could be sought from the wider Portuguese Eurasian community in Malaysia, and from international cultural foundations.

With so many factors favourable to a revitalization program, Kristang might still be saved for future generations.

### **Appendix: Abbreviations**

1s	first person singular
3pl	third person plural
3s	third person singular
ACC	accusative relator
EMPH	emphasis
FUT	future marker
GEN	genitive relator
LOC	locative relator
NEG	negation
PF	perfective aspect marker
S	source relator

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