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Translators and Interpreters; translation and interpretation[1]

Maria Johanna Schouten

This article concerns the linguistic contacts between the European and the Southeast Asian worlds, focusing on interpreters, the individuals who built a bridge between universes with different languages and different symbols, norms and customs. Interpreters were crucial in diplomatic processes, as they not only helped to render two worlds more intelligible to each other, but also, in many cases, could give advice on the correct rules of conduct, so crucial in diplomacy. They helped avoid awkward situations of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, which might ruin a diplomatic process that had been carefully built up over a long time. Interpreters were usually much more than merely linguistic mediators: they also served as informants about the customs and habitat of the people involved and sometimes as ambassadors of goodwill. They could also have been very useful as eavesdroppers during initial contacts, overhearing and transmitting what the other party, unsuspectingly, was deliberating.

Most of these translators and interpreters have remained anonymous; and even in the case of those who are known, exact data about their origin is absent or insufficient[2]. Just as the reports of the illustrious predecessors of the Portuguese, Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta, did not elaborate on the issue of linguistic communication, the travel reports of the Portuguese do not abound with information about the language used and the people who helped to smooth intercultural communication.

In the following pages, the diverse backgrounds of the interpreters will be examined more closely than individuals. A brief incursion will be made into the development of Malay and Portuguese as contact languages in the Southeast Asian archipelago, as these tongues were, in many cases, fundamental for translations and in some situations rendered the work of translators redundant. The period under discussion also comprises the age in which the Dutch were the foremost European power present in the archipelago.

1 I would like to thank Benjamin Teensma and Arie Pos for their invaluable advice.

2 Dejanirah Couto, "The Role of Interpreters, or *Linguas*, in the Portuguese Empire during the 16th Century" in *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, s.l., vol. 1, No. 2, Winter 2003; Henk M.Maier & Jan van der Putten, "Van tolken, papegaaien en predikanten: het Maleis en de VOC" in Leonard Blussé and Ilonka Ooms (eds), *Kennis en Compagnie. de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de moderne wetenschap*. Amsterdam: Balans, 2002, pp. 100-113.

In this period the Portuguese influence was still considerable and was manifested precisely in language use and the customs of several communities throughout the archipelago.

Malay as a contact language

When the Portuguese arrived in Southeast Asia in the early 16th century, the Malay language was a vehicle for contact between the various peoples of that region. Being a language used by prominent merchant groups in Malacca, its importance and scope had increased with the growth of this port. Examples of persons of distinct and distant origin being able to communicate with each other in Malay appear in some Portuguese travel reports. Malay was also known, to some extent, in the western Indian Ocean and several mercantile tongues (such as Arabic) of that area absorbed elements of Malay[3]. In this way, Portuguese seafarers could pick up some Malay before actually sailing to Southeast Asia. In Malacca, Arabic was still of some use but in this hub the Portuguese had plenty of opportunity to learn Malay, as was the case with Tomé Pires, who explored the archipelago shortly after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca[4]. Pires's reasonable command of Malay is evident from his virtually exact transcriptions, although during his travels and in his interviews he would have undoubtedly also relied on assistants with more comprehensive linguistic competences.

In Ternate and the surrounding islands, a region with great ethnolinguistic diversity, Malay was a contact language in the 1530s, the period in which António Galvão was the Portuguese captain there. As he wrote: "*At present the Malayan language has come into vogue; and most of them speak it and avail themselves of it throughout the whole region, where it is like Latin in Europe*"[5].

Indeed, like Latin in medieval and Renaissance Europe, in maritime and coastal Southeast Asia during that age Malay was the language of religion, of diplomacy and of scholarship and evidence of its knowledge conferred prestige. A simplified version of Malay was used in daily interactions among merchants from different lands. The Dutchman Jan Huygen van Linschoten, who lived in Goa at the end of the 16th century, compared the position of Malay to French, the language which had been catching up with Latin as a contact language for the European elites:

"And this language, called Malay, has become famous and is considered the most

3 Couto, *Ibidem*.

4 Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, Written in Malacca and in India 1512-1515, and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues: Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East before 1515/ translated from the Portuguese ms. in the Bibliothèque de la Chambre des Députés*. Armando Cortesão (ed.). London, Hakluyt Society, 1944.

5 In the original: "*Prezão-se aguora do malayo e os mais ho ffalão e servem-se dela por toda terra como latim na Eyropa*" in the source edition by Jacobs *A Treatise on the Moluccas c.1544 - Probably the Preliminary Version of A. Galvão's lost História das Molucas*. Rome, Jesuit Historical Institute, 1971, pp. 73-75.

gallant and appropriate of all the East. And anyone in India who does not have a command of the Malay language is not respected, as is the situation among us with French"[6].

Translation as a key process

Elementary Malay, supplemented by gestures and a few words from other languages (including the speaker's native tongue) may have been perfectly satisfactory in some situations of contact between Portuguese and Southeast Asians. When it came to official relations however, an imperfect mastery of simple "*pasar*-Malay" (literally: the Malay of the market-place) with its numerous regional variations did not suffice. In such cases, interpretation and translation could not be at random and sophisticated Malay, the language of diplomacy, was called for.

In official documents and treaties, the wording could not allow for any ambiguity, even more so because of the high value attached to the written word in diplomacy in Southeast and East Asia. The utmost care was taken with editing and composing and the aesthetical aspects of diplomatic letters reflected their importance and degree of respect for the addressee. They were solemnly presented to the dignitary in silk envelopes, on a platter. Some letters were real works of art. An outstanding specimen is the large and richly ornamented Surat Emas (golden letter) sent by Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh to King James I of England in 1615[7]. This may be contrasted with the torn paper used by the mandarin of Nouday in China for a reply to a group of Portuguese, a story related by Fernão Mendes Pinto[8]. With such a "letter", it was not even necessary to read the actual message to be aware of the mandarin's animosity.

The starting point of a formal relationship was marked by the exchange of gifts and the delivery of the letter of introduction and therefore Portuguese delegations sought to always have translators on standby. Mendes Pinto described an embassy from the king of Batak to the captain of the Portuguese fortress in Malacca, Pero de Faria, on which occasion a letter, written on a palm leaf, was handed "which was immediately rendered into Portuguese from the Malay in which it had been written". Thereupon the king of Batak "explained to Pero de Faria, through an interpreter, the reason for the conflict between the tyrant of Aceh and the king of Batak"[9]. In his depiction of the usual course of the ceremony in Batavia during the period of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC), Blussé also refers to the role of translators:

"After everybody was seated, the letter was handed over and the presents displayed on the table. Thereupon the letter was opened and read aloud by the master of ceremonies – if the text was written in Malay or Portuguese. Otherwise the missive had to be passed on to specialists to be deciphered"[10].

The oldest surviving manuscripts in Malay, dating from 1521 and 1522, are letters sent to the king of Portugal by Abu Hayat, ruler of Ternate. These letters, written in Jawi, a script based on Arabic, describe the relationships between various realms in the Moluccas. The peculiarities of the Malay used in this letter led linguists to believe that the authors were native Ternatans at the court who were proficient in Malay.

Interpreters and translators

In such diplomatic contacts, in which the wording of each statement had to be given due consideration, the necessary subtleties could not be transmitted easily by people who were not well versed in the languages in question. The parties involved in such contacts thus had to resort to professionals, usually called *língua*, later also *jurubaça* or *jurabaça* (derived from Malay *jurubahasa*)[11]. By means of some special studies, talent or life experience such individuals were able to transmit different languages and cultures, along with their respective subtleties.

Translators played a key role in the smooth running of ceremonial encounters and negotiations. Their position was also one of confidence, as the information they obtained from both sides was susceptible to abuse. Incompetence aside, they could also deliberately opt to mistranslate or manipulate messages. Their lords thus kept them under watch and ward, sometimes even virtually holding them prisoners, and there are indications that they were dismissed or arrested at the slightest suspicion[12]. They were considered to be positive assets in negotiations, but conversely they might become the scapegoats in case of any

6 In the original: "*E esta língua, chamada malaio, veio a ser famosa e considerada a mais galante e apropriada de todo o Oriente ... E quem na Índia não dominar a língua malaia, não é tido em conta, como entre nós se passa com o francês*". Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerário, viagem ou navegação para as Índias Orientais ou Portuguesas*, Rui Loureiro and Arie Pos (translation and edition.). Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997, p. 115.

7 A splendid collection of such letters and other manuscripts, in various languages on different types of material, and referring to the contacts between Indonesian and British authorities, is compiled in the work by Annabel Gallop and Bernard Arps: *Golden Letters, Writing Traditions of Indonesia*. Surat Emas, budaya tulis di Indonesia. London/Jakarta: The British Library/ Yayasan Lontar. 1991. Also see Russell Jones, "European and Asian Papers in Malay Manuscripts: A Provisional Assessment" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 149, 3: 1993, pp. 474-502.

8 Fernão Mendes Pinto, *Pelgrimsreis*. Arie Pos (transl.). Baarn: De Prom, 1992, chapter 64, pp. 148-150.

9 Idem, *Ibidem*, chapter 13, p. 25.

10 Blussé, Leonard, "Queen among Kings. Diplomatic Ritual at Batavia" in Kees Grijns and Peter J.M. Nas (eds) *Jakarta-Batavia. Socio-cultural essays*. Leiden, KITLV Press, 2000, p 34.

11 Carlos Castilho Pais, "Nomear o intérprete – Turgimão – Língua - Jurabaça" in *O Língua - Revista Digital sobre Tradução*, Lisbon, Centro Virtual Camões, No. 1, May 2002 [http://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/olingua/01/lingua2b.html].

12 See the examples by Couto, *Ibidem*.

failure. However, if the course of events was satisfactory, their skills were highly respected and rewarded.

Translators had diverse origins. They included Asian individuals who had travelled aboard ships, after having been recruited with the promise of material and immaterial compensation. Or they were prisoners or slaves more or less forced to perform such a job[13] – however, there would certainly have been some prize involved as an incentive: less harsh treatment and/or the prospect of release. This was the case with Henrique[14], the slave Fernão Magalhães had obtained during his stay in Malacca shortly after its conquest by the Portuguese. According to the chronicler Pigafetta, this young man hailed from Sumatra and subsequently accompanied his master to Portugal and to Morocco. Later he joined Magalhães's great exploratory journey around the world, on behalf of the king of Spain. Upon reaching the archipelago of the Philippines, it was Henrique's ability to communicate with the local population that confirmed Magalhães's hope that he had indeed reached Southeast Asian waters. Henrique played an active mediating role during this memorable episode, the first time a European fleet had reached the eastern archipelago from the east, which had been the objective of this voyage. Magalhães died shortly thereafter in Cebu, but his testament, which ordered the manumission of Henrique, was not respected by Magalhães's successor, who wanted to retain Henrique as an interpreter. Out of vengeance, Henrique took advantage of his monopoly on intercultural communication and mistranslated the messages the new commander conveyed to the ruler of Cebu, with unpleasant consequences for the Europeans[15].

Europeans among crews also served as interpreters. Some had explicitly studied a language (or languages), while others had mastered Asian languages thanks to longstanding contacts with Asians. There were men who had lived in Asia after having deserted from crews, there were free-riding traders, or former prisoners. The Dutchman Frederik de Houtman was held captive in Aceh from 1599 till 1601 and the Malay he learned during that period was sufficient to produce a Dutch-Malay phrasebook, published in Amsterdam in 1603[16]. This language guide, which followed the model of a popular French-Dutch predecessor, accounted for such subtleties as the various contexts of conversation and the nuances of politeness. In the parts that deal with situations of formal encounters with dignitaries, reference is made to the presence of interpreters and the respect shown for official letters[17].

The importance that Dutch VOC merchants attributed to proper communication with Asian rulers is evident from the inclusion of so-called taalmannen among their most senior officials. These "language men", who had comprehensively studied other languages and cultures, played a key role in many of the embassies to supreme rulers such as in Peking, Delhi and Isfahan[18]. The VOC also had special translation departments. During the 18th and 19th centuries, in their contacts with the realms of Central Java, the Dutch could rely on the services of *translateurs*, entrusted with the task of translating speeches on official occasions in which Dutch and Javanese took part. These Dutch or Eurasian individuals were usually confidents at the courts and some of them actively contributed towards the development of Javanese philology in Dutch academia[19].

In certain circumstances, interpreters had to be hired on an ad hoc basis from among the local residents. The harbour masters or *syahbandar* were the most obvious choice for this job – their activities and contacts equipped them with a wide range of knowledge, including linguistic skills. Many of these officials were ethnic outsiders, especially Chinese or Arabs.

There were also experts in Asian languages among the Roman Catholic missionaries. Owing to their familiarity with local customs and language(s), missionaries often acted as interpreters and as intermediaries in the broadest sense between Asians and Europeans. Shortly after the arrival of the first missionaries in the archipelago, in the 16th century, their religious congregations decided that Malay would be the main vehicle for their activities[20]. Francis Xavier, who was active in the Maluku Islands in 1546-1547, translated basic religious texts into Malay, such as the Creed, the Declaration of the Articles, the General Confession, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Hail Holy Queen, and the Commandments. In addition, and as a further testimony to his linguistic skills and enthusiasm, the Basque missionary "composed long explanations of the Creed in rhymed Portuguese for the children of the *casados*"[21]. Subsequent missionaries in the Maluku Islands, in particular the Jesuits, also seem to have been quite productive. Although original documents are missing, there

13 It seems that some of these were even brought to Lisbon for some time in order to improve their knowledge of the Portuguese language and culture.

14 "*Uno schiavo del capitano generale, che era de Zamatra*", the same as "*L'interprete nostro, che se chiamava Enrique*" (Pigafetta, Antonio, *Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo*, 1522, chapters XVIII and XXVIII).

15 Pigafetta, chapter XXVIII.

16 De Houtman, Frederik, *Spraeck ende woord-boeck, in de Maleysche ende Madagaskarsche talen, met vele Arabische ende Turcsche woorden*. Amsterdam: Jan Evertsz. Cloppenburch, 1603. Edited by Nicoline Van der Sijs, *Wie komt daar aan op die olifant? Een zestiende-eeuws taalgidsje voor Nederland en Indië, inclusief het verhaal van de avontuurlijke gevangenschap van Frederik de Houtman in Indië*. Amsterdam: Veen, 2000.

17 Nicoline van der Sijs (ed.), *Wie komt daar aan op die olifant? Een zestiende-eeuws taalgidsje voor Nederland en Indië, inclusief het verhaal van de avontuurlijke gevangenschap van Frederik de Houtman in Indië*. Amsterdam: Veen, 2000, pp. 190-192.

18 Leonard Blussé, *Tussen geveinsde vrunden en verklaarde vijanden*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999, p. 26, n. 31.

19 Ulbe Bosma & Remco Raben, *De oude Indische wereld 1500-1920*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2003, pp. 119-121; J. L. Swellengrebel *In Leydeckers voetspoor. Anderhalve eeuw bijbelvertaling en taalkunde in de Indonesische talen. 1820-1900*. Vol. I. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, pp. 45-46.

20 James T. Collins, "Language Death in Maluku. The Impact of the VOC" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 159, 2003, pp. 247-289.

21 Leonard Y. Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993, p. 128. *Casados* were Portuguese men, settled overseas and usually married to local women.

are indications that they wrote down a considerable number of religious texts in Malay, such as a catechism composed by an Italian[22].

Alongside Malay, knowledge of indigenous languages and cultures remained fundamental for missionaries. In their eagerness to master the language, they had to overcome unexpected obstacles of all kinds. With regard to the Spanish Franciscans who arrived in the region of Manado, North Sulawesi (Celebes), in 1619, the story was told that during their crash course in the local language they had to hand over small presents for every single word or phrase which the natives taught them[23]. Later missionaries in the same region also zealously devoted themselves to language studies[24].

Similarly important was the category of "natural interpreters", *i.e.* people of mixed blood, whose biological origins spanned Asia as well as Europe, suggesting that they were familiar with the cultural codes of two worlds. These *mestizos* often lived in or near European settlements in the archipelago, in communities characterized as "intermediary societies", with their own cultures in which Asian and European elements had given birth to a new and distinct environment.

A case in point is the community which developed in and around the Portuguese fortress in Ternate, consisting of 123 people in 1536, eighteen of whom were married men (the so-called *casados*), the rest being women, slaves, servants and children, of mixed or fully Asian origin. In the 1570s, a large part of this "Portuguese" Christian community was evacuated to Ambon, where they joined the group of Portuguese families and their followers already living there. Their descendants were a sizable part of the group which in the VOC period would be designated as "Mardijkers", a term most probably derived from the Malay *orang merdeka*, literally "free men", because most of them were (descendants of) manumitted slaves hailing from elsewhere in Asia or even Africa. They were proficient in contact languages, such as Malay in the Maluku Islands.

The term "Topasses", which was sometimes used for *mestizos*, especially in Timor and southern India, might actually refer to an activity as interpreters. The etymological roots of this term may be the same as those of the Anglo-Indian term *dubash*, interpreter (in Hindi *dobashi*, literally "man of two languages", in Tamil *tupashi*, with the same meaning)[25]. More plausible however is an origin with the Hindu word *topi*, hat, "tupasses" thus meaning "hat-wearers", referring to their distinctive dress code[26].

22 James T. Collins, "Language Death in Maluku. The Impact of the VOC" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 159, 2003, pp. 247-289; James T. Collins "Studying Seventeenth-Century Ambonese Malay: evidence from F. Caron's sermons (1693)" in *Cakalele*, 3, 1992, pp. 99-122; James T. Collins, *Malay, World Language. A Short History*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1998, pp. 26-27.

23 S. Stokman, "De Missies der Minderbroeders op de Molukken, Celebes en Sangihe in de XVIe en XVIIe eeuw" in *Collectanea Franciscana Neerlandica*, 2, 1931, p. 533.

24 Idem, *Ibidem*, pp. 550-554.

25 *Hobson-Jobson; A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell (new ed. by William Crooke). New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal. Jacobs, H. (transl. and ed.). 1994. P 328. [1903].

The Portuguese linguistic legacy

Not long after the arrival of the Portuguese in the coastal zones of Asia, their language became a new lingua franca in the area of the Indian Ocean and in particular along the shores of Southeast Asia. Portuguese even became a language of prestige and several powerful rulers and princes spoke and read it, such as Sultan Hairun of Ternate (r. 1535-1570) and the *Karaeng* (chief minister) Pattingalloang (r. 1600-1654) and Karunrung (r. 1654-1664) of Gowa in South Sulawesi[27]. Of course, this did not mean that they could do without linguistic assistants. A Dutchman explains the eagerness of the elite to learn Portuguese in a way that seems to be inspired by envy rather than linguistic or historical analysis:

> *"Just like the English, the Portuguese seem to lack an aptitude for learning foreign languages. Therefore they urged their trade partners to master a sort of Portuguese, which gradually became commonly used along the coasts they frequented"*[28].

When the Dutch began their Asia-bound voyages, they were aware of the importance of the Portuguese language in coastal areas. The treaty signed at their first expedition in 1596 with the administrator of Banten was composed in Portuguese. Interpreters of Portuguese could usually be found aboard Dutch ships and Admiral Jacob van Neck encountered Portuguese-speaking seamen in the Indian Ocean in 1598[29]. On this voyage he carried a credential from the Dutch Prince Maurice of Nassau, written in Portuguese and, as stated in the document, intended for "all the emperors, kings, dukes, princes and governors of provinces and republics to whom these [credentials] are presented"[30].

Some years after van Neck's expedition, the Dutch had become the predominant European power in the archipelago and Batavia became the headquarters of the VOC in Asia. But Portugal would continue to exert its influence and remained present at least

26 H. G. Schulte Nordholt, *The Political System of the Atoni of Timor*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, p. 165, n. 25; Hans Hägerdal, *Lords of the Land, Lords of the Sea*. Leiden, KITLV Press, 2012, p. 193.

27 Andaya, *Ibidem*, p. 58; Charles Ralph Boxer, *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo: A Portuguese Merchant-Adventurer in South East Asia, 1624-1667*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, pp. 4-5; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680. The Lands below the Winds*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, vol. I, pp. 232-234.

28 Frederik de Haan, *Oud Batavia*. 3 vols. Batavia: Kolff, 1922: p. 110.

29 Sijs, *Ibidem*, p. 124.

30 In the original: "... *todos os Emperadores Reys Duques Principes e Governadores de Provincias e Respublicas a quem estas foram presentadas desejamos saude en Deos Nosso Sen[h]or e nos offerecemos prestes aparelhados a lhes fazer todo serviço e amizade...*" Cf. David Lopes, *Expansão da Língua Portuguesa no Oriente durante os séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII*. 2nd edition, revised, preface and annotations by Luís de Matos. Oporto: Portucalense Editora, 1969, p. 38.

in cultural and linguistic aspects. In Batavia, it was Portuguese, or rather a "creolized Portuguese", which was the main language in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was not just a lingua franca, but even the mother tongue of a large part of the population, probably even two thirds in 1674[31].

Portuguese was also the language of the sizeable Mardijker population, consisting of Christian manumitted slaves and people of heterogeneous origin. It was also used by the slaves imported to Java from Portuguese-dominated places in South Asia and hence became the language of communication between (Dutch) masters and slaves. Portuguese was the means of communication even in VOC offices, particularly when – as was often the case – non-Dutch functionaries were involved. Dutch children became fluent in Portuguese through their daily interactions with slaves. All this interfered with the initial intention of the Dutch to reduce the vestiges of Portuguese, a policy sometimes reiterated by orders such as the one promulgated by Governor-General Anthony van Diemen in 1641, the year when the town received a considerable influx of Lusophone refugees from Malacca.

It has been suggested that the preference among Asians for the Portuguese rather than the Dutch language, apart from historical backgrounds, was related to linguistic features: it was said that Portuguese was easier to understand and had, in the words of Benjamin Teensma, a greater "capacity for creolization" (*creoliseringscapaciteit*)[32]. In Ambon in 1645 the governor considered that Dutch was too difficult to understand for the natives, if compared with Portuguese or even English, and therefore he advised against its use as a language of the church.

The VOC aimed to establish a Dutch culture in Batavia, but it was also committed to ensuring the spiritual well-being of the population, including that of the Portuguese-speaking Mardijkers and slaves, who had adopted the Protestant religion of their masters. Therefore, Portuguese was soon allowed as a language to be used in church services and schools in Batavia and churches were built for the Portuguese-speaking inhabitants[33].

Preaching and education had to be supported by written texts. In the 17th and 18th centuries, several Christian (Protestant) religious and moralistic works were translated into Portuguese for Batavia's population, or composed for this target group in particular[34]. Kloosterboer lists twelve such Protestant texts, of which the last was published in Colombo in 1778[35]. Most notable is the translation of the Bible by João Ferreira de Almeida, the first Portuguese Bible translation worldwide in a period when the climate of the Counter-Reformation would have made such a venture impossible in Portugal itself.

Almeida (c. 1628-1691), probably born in the district of Mangualde, converted to Protestantism in the 1640s in Malacca and went on to study theology, passing his final exams for becoming a minister in Batavia in 1656. He lived for some years in Ceylon and Southern India, but he spent the greater part of his adult life in Batavia. Of the numerous texts he wrote or translated, several were a harsh criticism of Roman Catholicism, while he also produced edifying works such as a translation from Spanish of Aesop's fables, printed in Batavia in 1672. As a basis for his Bible translation he relied on versions in Latin, Spanish, French and Italian. Later he learned Greek and probably Hebrew, but it is uncertain to which point he translated from the original texts. It took ages before his New Testament was printed and the Old Testament (a translation which he left unfinished) was only published in Batavia in two volumes in 1748 and 1753.

The eminent philologist Teófilo Braga, in his quest for the roots and development of the Portuguese language and culture, considered Almeida's Bible "the greatest and most interesting document to study the Portuguese language of the 17th century"[36] and presumed that due to Ferreira de Almeida's long stay abroad and his humble origins, the language he used was very close to that of the povo, the ordinary people[37]. Swellengrebel, on the other hand, thinks it was the written language of the 17th century, so not really a rendering of "popular" or "spoken" Portuguese[38].

Either way, it is certain that the povo, the ordinary people in Batavia, used a quite different sort of Portuguese, and Almeida's Bible was hardly understood by the Asian community in Batavia. The use of Portuguese as contained in Almeida's Bible by the ministers in their church services in all likelihood constituted a serious obstacle in religious communication between the clergy and churchgoers. The local preacher Manuel Morgapa, who used creolized Portuguese in his church services, was far more popular than his colleagues who stuck to the language of Almeida's bible[39].

The Portuguese language of Batavia went through a process of further creolization, as is obvious from the 1780 published and commented upon by Benjamin Teensma[40]. This fragment was taken from a Dutch – Malay – Portuguese dictionary, aimed at newcomers and published in Batavia under the title *Nieuwe Woordenschat uyt het Nederduitsch en het gemeene Maleisch en Portugeesch*. A mastery of Batavia-style Portuguese was thus

31 Kees Groeneboer, *Weg tot het Westen. Het Nederlands voor Indië 1600-1950*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993, p. 49, n. 34. Betty Litamahuputty, "Portuguese Influence on Languages in Indonesia, Its Rise and Fall" in Maria Johanna Schouten (ed.) *A Ásia do Sudeste. História, cultura e desenvolvimento*. Lisbon: Vega, 1998, pp. 68-86.

32 B. N. Teensma, "De eed op het kerkhof. Een Maleis-Portugees verhaal uit 1780" *Indische Letteren*, s.l., 1, 1986, p. 102.

33 Heuken, 2000, p. 98, Niemeijer, 2000, p. 85, De Haan, 1922, vol 1, pp. 48-65.

34 Collins, *Ibidem*, pp. 262-263.

35 Wilhelmina Kloosterboer, *Bibliografie van Nederlandse publikaties over Portugal en zijn overzeese gebiedsdelen*. Utrecht: Bibliotheek Rijksuniversiteit, 1957, pp. 112-114.

36 "*O maior e mais interessante documento para se estudar a língua portuguesa no século XVII*" in *Manual da história da literatura portuguesa*, p. 350 *Apud* Lopes, *Ibidem*, p. 178.

37 In *Manual da história da literatura portuguesa* (1875), p. 350 *Apud* Lopes, *Ibidem*, p. 178.

38 Swellengrebel, J. L., *In Leydeckers voetspoor. Anderhalve eeuw bijbelvertaling en taalkunde in de Indonesische talen. 1820-1900*. Vol. I. The Hague, 1974, p. 10.

39 J. L. Swellengrebel, *João Ferreira de Almeida. Um tradutor português da Biblia em Java*, translated from the original into English: A Portuguese Bible translator in Java (1972) by Elizabeth Tammerick. JUERP, 1972, p. 11.

40 Teensma, *op.cit.*

still considered to be a useful asset for Dutch people living in this city in the second half of the 18th century. But this language had already begun to decline. In 1706, Valentijn counted 36 native schoolmasters in the city, 35 of whom used Portuguese as the language of instruction; in 1779, of the 20 schoolmasters 14 taught in Portuguese[41].

Shortly thereafter, the Portuguese language vanished quite abruptly from the stage. The last Portuguese-speaking minister was appointed in 1807 and within a couple of years there were no other functionaries who were versed in Portuguese[42]. The relegation of this language in favour of Malay was related to changes in the composition of the population in the Napoleonic era. After 1796 no new slaves arrived from South Asian regions where Portuguese was spoken; slaves now came from Malay-speaking zones in insular Southeast Asia. There were also new arrivals of French and English citizens, for whom Portuguese was a new language. Furthermore, links with important Portuguese-influenced zones in Asia such as Ceylon and Malacca were severed.

Another factor may have been the demographic and social decline of the Mardijkers. This term was now rarely used, just as "mestizos" had become obsolete at the end of the 18th century, and was replaced by "inlandsche christenen" (native Christians) or "Portuguese", although they seldom had Portuguese ancestors and had retained little or no familiarity with the language. A stigma deriving from their ancestors' status as slaves remained attached to the "Portuguese" group[43].

A different situation, although equally paradoxical, occurred in Eastern Indonesia, where Portuguese surnames were (and are) common among members of Eurasian communities. Some members of these "Portuguese" or "serani" (Christians, from "Nazarene") communities played a role as cultural and linguistic mediators. For centuries after the departure of the Portuguese as traders, parts of the population continued to display habits reminiscent of the Portuguese, as noted, for example, by the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace in the 1850s and more recently by Ambassador Pinto de França and contemporary travellers[44].

CASES

1. Batavia women and the Portuguese language in the VOC period

Portuguese being the lingua franca of Batavia in the 17th and 18th centuries, a minimal command of that language was indispensable for Dutch merchants and administrators. They learnt it by various means, but without doubt, women were instrumental in the process. The women in Batavia had quite diverse origins, but only a few of them were of fully European stock. This was a regret of the VOC, which, especially in the first decades of Batavia's existence, attempted to intensify the European demographic and cultural presence and understood that the role of women, as mothers and educators, was indispensable in this. The population policy implemented (which included shipments of female orphans from Holland to Batavia, at the request of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen) was doomed to fail. Most VOC functionaries married women who were born in Asia, belonging to Portuguese-speaking communities of (descendants of) slaves.

It was through these women that the men learned some of the customs of the "Asian" culture. It was not the regional culture of the hinterland of Batavia (Javanese and Sundanese) because the VOC, owing to fears of a revolt, did not allow the people of those zones to live in the town, but the specific way of life of Batavia and other VOC-dominated cities, such as Malacca and Colombo. It was a result of the encounter of people of diverse Asian, but also European and African origins in extraordinary circumstances.

The women marrying Dutch functionaries obtained the status of Europeans and their households were considered to be Dutch. The Dutch lifestyle in the 17th century is often assumed to have been frugal, thrifty and ascetic, but this was certainly not the case in the VOC households of Batavia. In line with what was usual in the Asian environment, Dutch households lived a life of luxury and especially the ladies of leisure in Batavia contrasted with the industrious housewives in Holland and the other Dutch provinces of the time[45]. Stories about the ladies of Batavia have come to us, in particular, through the reports of the traveller Nicolaus de Graaff: "These women, in general Dutch but also Kastise and Mistise, in particular in Batavia, for the greater part are so glittering, so haughty, so frisky and vain... they let themselves be served, like princesses, and some have many male and female slaves in their service [...] and they are even so lazy that they would not lift a hand for anything or they call immediately one of their male or female slaves, and if these do not react fast enough they call them *poete rastade*, *poete de negre*, or *fili de poete*, or *fili de katsjor*..."[46]. These last expressions are examples of the creolized Portuguese those ladies used, in this case abuse towards their underlings. When in European company, also according to De Graaff, they often used the apparently Portuguese expression of *nokke save* ("I don't know"). De Graaff deals in *extenso*, and in a denigrating and derisory way, with

41 Groeneboer, *Ibidem*, p. 56.
42 Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 92.
43 Bosma and Raben, *Ibidem*, pp. 56-57.
44 Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago;:The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise: A narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*. New York: Dover Publications [1869], 1962; António Pinto da França, *A influência portuguesa na Indonésia*. Lisbon: Prefácio, 2003. [Edition in English published in 1970].
45 See Leonard Blussé, "The Caryatids of 17th Century Batavia: Reproduction, Religion and Acculturation under the VOC" in *Strange Company; Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*. Dordrecht / Providence: Foris, 1986, pp. 156-171; Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia- European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983; Jean Gelman Taylor, "Women as Mediators in VOC Batavia" in Sita van Bemmelen, Madelon Djajdiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, and Elly Touwen-Bouwsma (eds.), *Women and Mediation in Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992, pp. 249-263.
46 De Graaff, 1930 [1703]: pp. 13-14.

their language use and with their lifestyle and morals. Such scathing or condescending discourses about women who in a colonial setting pertained to the dominant side was typical for many European authors through the centuries, as has been analysed for example by Ann Stoler[47].

Notwithstanding their limitations, these women should be considered interpreters on behalf of their husbands, as they rendered the local Asian world intelligible to them, including that major vehicle of communication, the Portuguese language.

2. Interpreters as intermediaries: Manado

The history of the region of Manado, in North Sulawesi, provides some cases of interpreters who, due to their function, devoted themselves to activities beyond linguistics.

The Portuguese presence in Manado was flimsy, but in an indirect way the Portuguese of the early modern period have been important for this region until today. In the 16th century, Portuguese ships passed the coast of northern Sulawesi on some of their journeys to and from the Maluku Islands and in the period 1563-1569 Portuguese missionaries converted several thousand Manadonese to Christianity. No more Portuguese visits of any importance to the zone are recorded. However, in the collective memory of the population nowadays, the Portuguese occupy a place of prominence and prestige. Many of the inhabitants, along the coast but also inland, boast about their presumed Portuguese ancestors, and several old ruins and objects are identified as being Portuguese, while in reality they were constructed by the Spanish and the Dutch.

The Spanish, with their main base in Manila, had a particular interest at that time in obtaining regular rice supplies from the Manado region, and for assistance in their contacts they relied mostly on people from the Maluku Islands and the Philippines (the so-called Papangans) with some real or perceived European ascendancy. Probably this was also the background of the interpreter, referred to as a "Portuguese", who accompanied the Franciscan missionary Blas Palomino to Manado in 1622 – on a visit in which both were stabbed to death by the local population[48].

Around 1650, the VOC became the dominant European power in this region. Coastal places, such as Manado and Amurang, expanded with new arrivals of groups of *mestizos* and Mardijkers who had a special legal status under the Dutch regime. Whereas in Batavia and elsewhere in the western archipelago the language of these "intermediary societies" in the 17th and 18th century was a creolized Portuguese, the Manado *burgers* (literally "citizens"), like those in other parts of eastern Indonesia such as the Maluku Islands, spoke Malay, although with numerous Portuguese elements in it. In the Manado zone these people were called Orang Borgo, a denomination clearly derived from the Dutch *burger*. However, folk etymology today traces this term back to the Portuguese language. Even surnames of Orang Borgo which are clearly of Dutch, English or local origin are presently often labelled as Portuguese.

Some of these Borgo served in the VOC period as interpreters, or, in Dutch, *tolken*. The Governor of Ternate, Robertus Padtbrugge, who was in the region around 1679 to conclude treaties with the inhabitants, needed a lot of patience, not least because of the multiplicity of languages among the inland population."The meetings have taken place in Malay with the interpreters, who transmitted the [proposals] to the village chiefs. [...] [B]ecause the village chiefs did not know how to write, each of them took four interpreters as witnesses."[49]. In fact, it was the interpreters who were the key persons and thus the powerful elements in this process. The tolk or interpreter became an official function in the Manado region and was in reality the omnipotent intermediary between the VOC functionaries and the population. Governor Padtbrugge records cases of abuse by these men, especially their personal enrichment through various forms of deceiving the population. He expressed the hope that before long interpreters will be superfluous, when the VOC functionaries themselves would have sufficient knowledge of language and customs[50]. This pious wish, however, did not materialize, and – with some intermezzos – the function of the tolk as mediators between the local population and VOC superiors became embedded in the administrative framework in Manado. They provided the Dutch with valuable information but abuse of their position was virtually inherent to their job.

47 Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley, UCP, 2002. Also see the critical comments by Marijke Barend-Van Haeften and Hetty Plekenpol on the new edition of De Graaff (Leiden, 2010) pp. 7-9; 40-44.

48 Stokman, 1931, p. 537.

49 Padtbrugge in Godée Molsbergen, 1928: p. 54.

50 Padtbrugge in Godée Molsbergen, 1928: p. 62.

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