

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY IN SRI LANKAN MALAY – A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE UNIVERSALS

S. L. Kekulawala

0. Introduction

0.1 Sri Lankan Malay

The term *Sri Lankan Malay* (SLM) is used in this paper to refer to the mother tongue of the members of that Sri Lankan community, referred to as 'Malays' in the Census Reports of Sri Lanka, but better known in popular Sinhala parlance as the 'jā' or 'jāvo'.¹

0.2 The Malays of Sri Lanka

According to the Census Report of 1971 which provides us with the latest statistics available, the total number of Malays of Sri Lanka is 41,615. The same report shows that the majority of the Malays

1. The present paper is part of a larger project designed to cover the grammar and lexis of SLM. Field research for this purpose, begun a few years ago, is being carried out intermittently, as time permits, in the course of a busy teaching and administrative schedule. Using basic techniques of linguistic field work, I have been working with a number of informants, eliciting linguistic data. Formal elicitation sessions were held, usually once a week, sometimes twice; there have been many unavoidable interruptions however, and occasionally it has not been possible to hold a session for a number of consecutive weeks. The corpus so far collected and checked, consists of more than five thousand entries. An entry, as construed for this purpose, may be a single word, a phrase or a sentence; the latter comprises both isolated sentences and connected discourse in context. The data, presented in this paper, though generally valid for speakers of SLM, is particularly so for those of the Colombo and Hambantota districts, particularly the latter, a native of which has been my most recent informant.

I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express my gratitude to the authorities of the Vidyalaankara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka (presently the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka) for supporting the present research by the offer of a grant from the University Research and Publication Fund, in 1977; and to my informants, the late Al-Haj M. Farooq Doray, retired Inspector of Police and Examiner in Malay for the Department of Examinations, Ministry of Education who initiated me into the linguistic delicacies of SLM, tempered with both historical and cultural information; Mrs. Fawziya Brabe and Mr. T. M. Laif, both undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya. To Mr. T. B. Ratnayake, Deputy Commissioner of Examinations, Department of Examinations, Ministry of Education, I owe a special debt of gratitude for acquainting me with my very first informant, at a time when I was desperately looking for one.