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Who were the first Malagasy, and what did they speak?¹

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1. Introduction

In this chapter I investigate the way Malagasy may have split off from other Austronesian languages, and the sociopolitical circumstances under which this may have happened.

Malagasy is an Austronesian language spoken in a variety of dialects in Madagascar. It is a member of the South East Barito (henceforth SEB) language subgroup, the members of which² are predominantly spoken on the eastern shores of the Barito River in South Borneo (Dahl 1951; see Map 1). This region is considered the original homeland of Malagasy.

Map 1 may appear somewhere here. Caption:

“Map 1. The Malagasy homeland and the location of East Barito languages in South Borneo.”

Malagasy underwent influence from Malay and Javanese, the hegemonic languages *par excellence* in insular South East Asia (henceforth ISEA), as well as of Sanskrit. In fact, the Sanskrit loanwords in Malagasy can be shown to have been borrowed via Malay and Javanese, and not directly from a source in South Asia. Malagasy also borrowed from Austronesian languages close to South Borneo homeland: it has loanwords from South Sulawesi languages (Adelaar 1995), and from Ngaju (Dahl 1951), which is spoken west of the Barito River (Map 1).

Map 2 may appear somewhere here (or further down). Caption:

“Map 2. The Indian Ocean region including East Africa, Madagascar and East Asia.”

Malay, Javanese and Sanskrit loanwords testify to the fact that already very early onwards the Malays and Javanese were passing on to other peoples in ISEA Indic cultural influences that had been transformed by their own local cultures. This must already have happened on a large scale around the time that ancestors of the present-day Malagasy people began to migrate to East Africa, which was possibly in the 7th century AD³, if not earlier (Map 2). Malay loanwords also enable us to see that the ancestors of the Malagasy were not only in touch with Malays in Borneo but also with Malays from Sumatra, They were so for a considerably long time, starting from before the first migrations to East

¹ My research into the linguistic history of Madagascar is supported by a Discovery Grant (DP120100390) from the Australian Research Council. I wrote this chapter in late 2013 during my stay as a Fellow-in-Residence at the NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, Wassenaar, Netherlands). I would like to thank the NIAS for hosting me, Bernard Sellato (CNRS, Aix-en-Provence) and Tom Hoogervorst (Royal Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Leiden) for their useful comments on previous drafts of this chapter, and Chandra Jayasuriya (cartographer at Melbourne University) for providing maps. All mistakes in the final version are my own responsibility.

² These members are Ma'anyan, Samihim, Dusun Malang, Dusun Witu and Bayan. Paku is sometimes also included, but it has a slightly different phonological history (Dahl 1977, Mahdi 1988).

³ See Adelaar (1989:32). Kumar (2011:92) argues that the migrations could have taken place several centuries earlier. While this remains a possibility, the 7th century AD is still a more likely date given that (1) the Malagasy migration is linked to the rise of Srivijaya (for which there is no evidence prior to the 7th century AD), (2) the settlement of Madagascar by SEB speakers must have begun in the 8th century AD (Wright and Fanony 1992), and (3) Buddhism was particularly strong in ISEAS in the 6th-8th centuries AD (as shown in this chapter).

Africa and continuing until after the Portuguese made their appearance in the Indian Ocean region (16th century AD; Adelaar 2009). Some Malay loanwords in East Madagascar have a Muslim signature, indicating that Islam may have been introduced from ISEA to this part of the island; other loanwords are from South Sulawesi languages, showing that there was a certain measure of inter-insular contact and ethnic integration going on across ISEA, which can easily be missed by those who limit themselves to historical evidence based on written records (Adelaar 1995a). These loanwords give us a glimpse of ISEA and Madagascar as parts of an interconnected world.

An intriguing question remains what the Malagasy homeland in Borneo looked like from a geographical, social, and political perspective. We also do not know how and under what circumstances SEB speaking people ended up in East Africa. Were they members of ethnic communities that can still be identified today, such as the Ma'anyan and Samihim, or had they already acquired a separate identity prior to their impressive migration(s) across the Indian Ocean?

There is probably no definite answer to the last question, but if we rephrase it as a linguistic one, we may be able to throw some light on the matter: did these migrants speak an early form of one of the SEB languages still extant today, or had they already formed a separate speech community? The direction of the answer may help us to determine the social position of the early Malagasy people vis-à-vis the Malays. If, upon their departure, they spoke an early form of one of the current East Barito languages, one may surmise that they were recruited as a sort of subordinate labourers from local traditional communities that existed at the time (Adelaar 1995a; Kumar 2011), and this conceivably happened under force. On the other hand, if they had already begun to have their own SEB dialect in Borneo, they may have formed a group that was distinct from other SEB speaking societies, and they may have co-existed in a symbiotic relationship with Malays. The interaction with these Malays might have been on a more egalitarian basis, or at least, it might have been on a basis under-emphasizing the actual power relation involved (see below, Section 3). In both scenarios, they may have been employed as crew members on Malay ships.

In an endeavor to find answers to these questions, I will investigate two issues. First, what can the linguistic information we have about Malagasy and other SEB languages tell us about the time when Malagasy became a separate language? Was it before or after the early Malagasy went to Africa? And second, what historical information do we have about the homeland of the early Malagasy in South Borneo? How does it fit in with the hypothesis that they already had their own language before migrating to East Africa? And with the idea of a symbiosis between local Malay rulers (this time in South Borneo) and some of the surrounding indigenous peoples? I will address these issues in Sections 2 and 3. and I will end with a conclusion in Section 4.

2.0 Proto-Malagasy was already a separate speech form in Borneo: linguistic evidence

While this is not an altogether obvious issue, there are strong indications that when Malagasy speakers were still in South Borneo, they already spoke a distinct dialect. Malagasy was probably not just an early form of one of the extant SEB languages, which after the migration(s) to East Africa underwent post-migratory changes that can generally be ascribed to contact with languages in situ. Linguistic evidence for this is given in the following sub-sections 2.1 and 2.2.

Unless specified otherwise, the Malagasy data in this chapter represent the Merina dialect, which is currently spoken in the central highlands of Madagascar and was the basis for the development of standard Malagasy. Ma’anyan is taken as default sample language for SEB, as it is the only SEB language that is sufficiently documented for comparative use. It is spoken east of the Barito River in the Central and South Kalimantan provinces of Indonesian Borneo.

2.1 Reflexes of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian *y in Malagasy and Ma’anyan

Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (henceforth PMP) had a consonant *y, which must have been a velar fricative.⁴ In SEB languages, this *y became either *y or Ø (that is to say, it was lost). In Ma’anyan the *y reflex has remained y, but in Merina and most other dialects of Malagasy it evolved further into z. A schematic representation of the changes looks as follows:

PMP *y > Proto SEB *y > Ma’anyan y, Malagasy z (y in some vernacular dialects)
 Proto SEB Ø > Ma’anyan Ø, Malagasy Ø

This creates the impression that *y developed in parallel ways in both languages, but this is not entirely the case: while they both reflect *y or Ø, they differ in the way these two reflexes are distributed in their respective lexicons. Compare Table 1, showing some of the different reflexes of PMP *y found in Malagasy and Ma’anyan. (In the glosses below and in the following pages, “id.” stands for “same meaning as previous word”).

PMP *y	Ma’anyan <i>j</i>	Malagasy <i>z</i>	(Malay)	(Javanese)
*yatus ‘hundred’	<i>jatuh</i> ‘id.’	<i>zàtu</i> ‘id.’	<i>ratus</i> ‘id.’	<i>atos</i> ‘id.’
*suyuq ‘to order’	<i>huyu</i> ‘id.’	---	<i>suruh</i> ‘id.’	(<i>suruh</i> ‘id.’ < Malay)
*təyas ⁵ ‘quick, fast’	---	<i>tèza</i> ‘firm, durable; <i>təras</i> ‘hardwood’ hardwood’	---	---
PMP *y	Ma’anyan Ø	Malagasy <i>z</i>	(Malay)	(Javanese)
*quyat ‘nerve, tendon’	<i>uat</i> ‘id.’	<i>ùzatrā</i> ‘id.’	<i>urat</i> ‘id.’	<i>ot-ot</i> ‘muscle’
*bəyat ‘heavy’	<i>wəʔat</i> ‘heavy’	<i>vèzatrā</i> ‘id.’	<i>brat</i> ‘id.’	<i>a-bot</i> ‘id.’
*yabun? ‘hazy, dim, vague’	<i>awun</i> ‘barely audible (voice)’	<i>zàvunā</i> ‘fog’	<i>rabun</i> ‘dim (vision)’	<i>awun-awun</i> ‘fine rain, dew’
*yumaq ‘house’	---	<i>zùma</i> ‘cave’	<i>rumah</i> ‘house’	<i>omah</i> ‘id.’
PMP *y	Ma’anyan Ø	Malagasy Ø	(Malay)	(Javanese)
*baqəyuh ‘new; recently’	<i>waʔu</i> ‘recently’	<i>vàu</i> ‘id.’	<i>ba(ha)ru</i> ‘now’	<i>wau</i> ‘recently’
*suyut ‘to recede’	<i>uut</i> ‘to drink’	<i>ùtrā</i> ‘to massage’	<i>surut</i> ‘to recede’	(<i>surud</i> < Malay)
*pəyi ‘stingray’	<i>pahi?</i> ‘id.’	<i>fài</i> ‘id.’	<i>pari</i> ‘id.’	---
*dayaq ‘blood’	<i>ira</i> ‘id.’	<i>rà</i> ‘id.’	<i>darah</i> ‘id.’	(Old Javanese) <i>rāh</i> ‘id.’
*yasəŋ ‘to breathe’	<i>aheŋ</i> ‘spirit, thought’	<i>àinā</i> ‘life; breath’	---	---
*bəyas ‘uncooked rice’	<i>wəah</i> ‘id.’	---	<i>bəras</i> ‘id.’	<i>uwos</i> ‘id.’
PMP *y (no instances)	Ma’anyan <i>j</i>	Malagasy Ø		

TABLE 1. Ma’anyan and Malagasy reflexes of PMP *y in word-initial and intervocalic position

⁴ It is usually represented as *R in the comparative-linguistic literature.

⁵ Blust (online) labels this as a Proto-Western Malayo-Polynesian etymon and reconstructs it with an apical *r; however, the Malagasy evidence favours a velar fricative *y instead.

On the whole, Malagasy has more *y reflexes than Ma'anyan.⁶ The different ways in which these languages reflect *y and Ø are a strong indication that they had already become different dialects before Malagasy speakers left Borneo. They are most likely the result of borrowing between different SEB dialects in an early stage of their divergence: apparently, some SEB varieties changed PMP *ɣ to *y, and others lost *ɣ altogether. Through continued contact among these varieties, and (possibly) motivated by sociolinguistic differences between them, some varieties ended up with two reflexes of *ɣ. This apparently also happened in Ma'anyan and Malagasy. Since they have a different distributional outcome, and the outcome must be the result of language contact within the SEB area in Borneo, the most likely conclusion is that they had already become different dialects before the migration(s) to East Africa took place.

In Malagasy, the different distribution of z and Ø reflexes cannot be explained by the presence of Malay or Javanese, the two main languages that influenced Ma'anyan and Malagasy (and kept influencing the latter even after the migrations). Borrowing from Malay is excluded because this language has maintained r, which is a very different reflex from *y/z or Ø. Borrowing from Javanese is also impossible: although this language does have Ø for *ɣ, the corresponding Javanese words have structures that are totally different from their Malagasy and Ma'anyan counterparts. Finally, the different distribution of *y and Ø reflexes can hardly be explained as post-migratory influence from Austronesian languages other than Malay or Javanese, given the unlikelihood of such influence to have reached Malagasy in its East African evolutionary stage (Adelaar in press).

2.2 Reflexes of borrowed *s in Malagasy and Ma'anyan

In the history of SEB languages, PMP *s became *h. This *h was maintained in Ma'anyan but lost in Malagasy, as follows:

PMP *s	>	Proto SEB *h	>	Ma'anyan h
			>	Malagasy Ø

In both languages, this change and loss also affected early loanwords from Malay (and possibly other languages), but continued borrowing from these sources were the cause that s was eventually re-introduced into the Ma'anyan and Malagasy phoneme systems. As a result, both Malagasy and Ma'anyan have “recent” Malay loanwords maintaining Malay s, and “earlier” Malay loanwords showing Ma'anyan h and Malagasy Ø for it. (Note that while relative age is the most obvious explanation for the fact that *s was lost in some loanwords and maintained in others, another important explaining factor may be frequency of usage and level of adaptation of these loanwords).

Whereas both languages share this overall pattern, they do not always maintain *s in the same loanwords, and Malagasy tends to maintain *s more often than Ma'anyan. These differences suggest that both languages borrowed their Malay loanwords independently. Observe the list in Table 2, which is not exhaustive, of Malay loanwords containing s that ended up in Malagasy and Ma'anyan:

⁶ This observation is based on the total inventory of *ɣ reflexes in both languages. It is not based on the list presented in Table 1, which is not exhaustive and therefore not critical.

Malay	Malagasy	Ma'anyan
<i>S</i> : <i>sadia</i> 'already; admittedly' (<Sanskrit <i>sādhya</i>) <i>sambaw</i> 'cargo ship'	<i>S</i> : <i>satria</i> 'because' <i>sambu</i> 'ship, large boat'	<i>S</i> <i>sadia</i> 'already' <i>sammaw</i> 'celestial ship'
<i>S</i> : <i>sakay</i> 'subject' (< Sanskrit <i>sakhāy</i> -, accusative form: <i>sakhāyam</i>) <i>gasiṅ</i> 'spinning top' <i>salah</i> 'wrong' <i>sisā</i> (< Skt <i>śeṣa</i>) 'remains'	<i>S</i> : <i>sakaiza</i> 'companion' <i>hasinā</i> 'spinning top' <i>salasala</i> 'wrong' ---	<i>H</i> <i>hake</i> 'stranger; Muslim' <i>kahiṅ</i> 'spinning top' <i>hala</i> 'wrong' <i>sisā</i> 'remains'
<i>k-asih</i> 'love' <i>sakit</i> 'sick, ill' (?)	<i>asi</i> 'veneration' <i>sahir-anā</i> 'worried, in trouble'	<i>ahi</i> 'compassion' <i>hakit</i> 'difficult'
<i>S</i> : <i>sunṅay</i> 'river' <i>sampay</i> 'until; (orig. 'to hang')	<i>Ø</i> : <i>uni</i> 'river' <i>ampi</i> 'enough'	<i>H</i> <i>hunṅey</i> 'river' <i>hampe</i> 'until'
<i>S</i> : <i>sayaṅ</i> 'sad' <i>sədikit</i> 'a bit' <i>soal</i> (< Ar <i>su'āl</i>) 'case, issue' <i>mahesa</i> (< Skt <i>mahiṣa</i>) 'buffalo'	(no corresponding forms) --- --- --- ---	<i>H</i> <i>hayaṅ</i> 'sad' <i>hadikit</i> 'a bit' <i>hual</i> 'case, issue' <i>eha</i> 'animal'

TABLE 2. Malagasy and Ma'anyan reflexes of *s in Malay loanwords

These instances of historical reflexes of Malay *s* form a pattern that is reminiscent of the distributional pattern of reflexes of PMP **ɣ* in Ma'anyan and Malagasy. It suggests that borrowing of these instances constituted separate events in both languages. However, this outcome could in principle also be the result of continued influence from Malay on Malagasy after its speakers had migrated to East Africa. As such, it is less critical evidence than in the **ɣ* case: although the relatively large number of Malay loanwords containing *s* in Malagasy is likely to be due to a higher exposure to Malay of an early form of Malagasy when it was still spoken in Borneo, it can hypothetically also be ascribed to borrowing from Malay into Malagasy after its speakers had left Borneo.

2.3 Reflexes of PMP **ti* in Malagasy and other SEB languages

In SEB languages in Borneo, PMP **t* has become *s* before a following **i*. In Merina and other Malagasy dialects, **t* has become an affricate *ts* (and sometimes *s*) when occurring in this position. It is obvious that these manifestations of **t(i)* are historically part of the same sound change, as follows:

PMP **ti* > (early SEB) **tsi* > modern SEB *si*
> Merina *tsi*, (*si*)

On the face of it, this development is strong evidence for the inclusion of Malagasy in the SEB subgroup, but it is disqualified by the fact that it did not take place in the dialects of West and South Madagascar. This indicates that it had not yet taken place in Proto Malagasy, and hence also not in Proto SEB (Adelaar 2013). It appears that the **ti > tsi, si* change is not a shared innovation but rather the result of a parallel development (Dahl 1951; Adelaar 2013). Interestingly, this sets off Proto-Malagasy against the SEB languages, which all exhibit *si*. Compare the following SEB lexical data reflecting PMP **ti*, which are taken from Hudson's (1967) wordlists. They are held against corresponding Proto SEB etyma as well as Merina and South Sakalava forms (of which the former have undergone the developments in question, and the latter have not). Note incidentally that the change also took place in Dusun Deyah⁷, which does not belong to the SEB subgroup but to the Central-East Barito branch, of which it is the only member:

Proto SEB **tiliŋ* 'to fly': Merina *tsidinã*, South Sakalava *tili*, Ma'anyan *sidiŋ*, Samihim *s<um>idiŋ* Dusun Deyah *sambiliŋ*, Dusun Malang *minsidiŋ*, Dusun Witu *samidiŋ*, Paku *samiliŋ* 'id.'

Proto SEB **witik* 'ant': Merina *viſikã*, South Sakalava *viſike*, Samihim, Ma'anyan, Dusun Deyah, Dusun Malang, Paku *wisik*, Dusun Witu *usik* 'id.'

Proto SEB **punsɪ* 'banana': Merina *akũndru afũntsi* 'banana species', Dusun Deyah, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan *punsɪ*, Paku *punši* 'banana'

Proto SEB **t<in>aʔi* 'guts': Merina *tsinài*, Skl *tinài*, Dusun Deyah, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Paku *sanaʔi* 'guts', Dusun Malang *sanai* 'belly'

Proto SEB **bitih* 'calf of leg': Merina *viſi*, Ma'anyan *wisis*, Samihim *wisih* 'id.'

Proto Malagasy **i *tikaN* '1st person plural inclusive topicalized nominative pronoun': Merina *isika*, Tanala *itsika*, TSK *intsika* (with nasal accretion); compare also some reflexes derived from Proto Malagasy **tikaN* (without topical marker): TDR *tika(ŋe)*, Mahafaly *tika* (Adelaar and Kikusawa 2014:492-493).

There are some other Malagasy/SEB word pairs reflecting PMP **ti*, but they are less representative because available cognates are limited to Malagasy and Ma'anyan:

Proto SEB **timpun* 'to collect': Merina *tsìmpunã*, South Sakalava *tìmpu*, Ma'anyan *simpun* 'id.'

Proto SEB **wuti* 'grain': Merina *viſi* 'wart', Ma'anyan *wusi* 'grain'

In all these pairs, SEB languages (and Dusun Deyah) systematically exhibit *si* and Merina has *tsi* (*/si*), whereas South Sakalava has retained *ti*. As it is retained in some of the Malagasy dialects, I assume that it was also retained in Proto Malagasy.

Another development that seems diagnostic for sub-grouping Malagasy with the SEB languages but actually is not because it never took place in the southern and western Malagasy dialects is the change from PMP **li* to *di*. In contrast to the **ti > tsi/si* change, this change is absent in Dusun Deyah, and it took place in only part of the Paku cognates.⁸ Consider the following instances:

⁷ A language currently spoken along the Tabalong River in the northern part of South Kalimantan Province (Indonesian Borneo).

⁸ In this respect it is interesting to note that unlike Hudson (1967), Dahl (1977) and Mahdi (1988) did not classify Paku inside the SEB core group. (Note also that Paku reflects historical schwa and final **a* as *ɔ*, in contrast to a corresponding *ɛ* in Ma'anyan, Samihim, Dusun Malang and Dusun Witu).

- Proto SEB **kali* 'to dig': Merina *hàdi*, South Sakalava *hàli*, Dusun Malang, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Samihim, Paku *ɲadi* (<- *N-* + *kadi*) 'id.'
- Proto SEB **tali* 'rope': South Sakalava *tàli* 'to plait', Merina *tàdi*, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Samihim, Paku *tadi* 'rope'
- Proto SEB **lipen* 'tooth': Merina *nifi*, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Samihim, Paku *dipen* 'id.'
- Proto SEB **lime* 'five': Merina *dimi*, South Sakalava *lime*, Dusun Malang, Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Samihim *dime*; compare also Paku *limə*
- Proto SEB **tiliŋ* 'to fly': Merina *tsidină*, South Sakalava *tìli*, Ma'anyan *sidiŋ*, Samihim *s<um>idiŋ*, DM *minsidiŋ*, Dusun Witu *samidiŋ*; compare also Dusun Deyah *sambiliŋ*, Pak *samiliŋ* 'id.'
- Proto SEB **kulit* 'skin': Merina *hùditră*, South Sakalava *hùlitse*, Ma'anyan, Samihim *kudit* 'id.'
- Proto SEB **lite* 'sticky substance': Merina *diti*, South Sakalava *liteke* (with unexplained final syllable) 'gum, raisin', Dusun Witu, Ma'anyan, Samihim, Paku *dite?* 'sticky rice'.

Various other instances occur but their reflexes are limited to Malagasy dialects and Ma'anyan only. What all instances clearly demonstrate is that SEB languages in Borneo and northern, central, and eastern Malagasy exhibit *di*, whereas South Sakalava and other other southern and western Malagasy dialects have maintained *li*. And again, as *li* was maintained in some Malagasy dialects, it must also have been present in Proto Malagasy.

Although the changes from **ti* to *tsi/si* and from **li* to *di* are shared by all SEB languages in Borneo, the above phonological divergences between southern and western Malagasy dialects and other SEB languages show that they had not yet taken place in Proto-Malagasy. If this contrast between Proto-Malagasy and other SEB languages already existed in Borneo, it would imply that the current SEB languages in Borneo had already begun to diverge from Proto Malagasy in the homeland, before the migration(s) of Proto Malagasy speakers to East Africa. In other words, it would imply that the latter had already acquired a separate dialect. This is certainly a possible scenario. However, it cannot be proven beyond reasonable doubt, as it is still possible that at the time of the migration(s) in the 7th century, the **ti* > *tsi/si* and **li* > *di* changes had only just started to spread in SEB languages in Borneo, and that they had not taken their full course in all SEB languages in Borneo until after the migration(s). In Madagascar the changes only affected the eastern and central Malagasy dialects, and (more recently through relexification) the northern dialects, leaving the western and southern dialects largely untouched (Adelaar 2013). In short, the current different reflexes of **ti* and **li* in SEB languages in Borneo and in Malagasy dialects add to the overall impression that Malagasy had already become a separate dialect before the migrations, although they do not provide hard evidence for it.

2.4 Person markers in Malagasy, and the lack of it in Ma'anyan

In the history of Malagasy there are two person markers, *ra-* and **i*.

The prefix *ra-* occurs with kinship terms, some dialectal personal pronouns, some common nouns with a human reference, and (very frequently) names. It adds a notion of respect to some of the resulting derivations. The following examples show the occurrence of *ra-* in kinship terms:

reny 'mother' (< **ra-* + SEB **ine* < PMP **ina* 'mother')

rahavavy ‘sister (of a woman)’ (< **ra-* + SEB **aka* ‘older sibling’+ SEB **wawey* ‘woman’ < PMP **aka* ‘older sibling’ + **babehi* ‘woman’)’
rahalahy ‘brother (of a man)’ (< **ra-* + SEB **aka* + **laki* ‘man’ < PMP **aka* + **laki* ‘man’)’
raivo ‘sister who is neither the youngest nor the oldest’ (< **ra-* + SEB **iwo* ‘halfway’; cf. Malagasy *ivo* ‘middle’, and Ma’anyan *iwo* ‘half’)’
ravinanto (Comorian Malagasy) ‘child-in-law’ (< **ra-* + SEB **winantu* < PMP **b-in-antu* ‘id.’)’
rafozanã ‘parent; parent-in-law’ (< **ra-* + Malay *moyaŋ*, (Malay dialects) *puyaŋ* ‘ancestor(s)’ (Adelaar 1992:109, 200)

Examples of *ra-* prefixed to personal pronouns in regional Malagasy forms are (Adelaar and Kikusawa 2014):

Tandroy Malagasy *rahu* (< *ra-* + **ahu*) ‘1st person sg.’
 Tandroy Malagasy *rehe* (< *ra-* + **iha*) ‘2nd person sg.’
 Tandroy Malagasy *re* (< *ra-* + **iye*) ‘3rd person sg.’
 South Sakalava *rie, ri* (< *ra-* + **iye*) ‘3rd person sg.’
 South Sakalava *rahai* (< *ra-* + **ahai*) ‘1st person plural exclusive’

Common nouns with a human reference include the following ones:

rafotsy ‘term of address for old lady’ (< **ra-* + *fũtsi* ‘white’)’
ranonã ‘what's-his-name’ (< **ra-* + *ànuna* ‘thing, whatchamallit’)’
 North Malagasy *ramatoa* ‘Madam, Mrs.’ (< **ra-* + *matùà* ‘eldest child’)’

Examples of personal names with *ra-* are for instance *Ranavàlonã* and *Radàma* (names of Malagasy royalties in the nineteenth century) and *Razafintsalàma, Rajàonã* (names of Malagasy linguists).

Interestingly, this prefix is also used with European roots, as in *ramusè* ‘sir’ (< French *monsieur*), *ramulè* ‘donkey’ (< French *mulet*), *bitrũ, rabitrũ* ‘rabbit’ (< English), suggesting that it is still productive. It also appears in the following form containing a concatenation of personal prefixes. In it, the fossilized persona marker *-z-* (see further below) is directly prefixed to the root, whereas *ra-* has a more peripheral position, showing that the latter is more productive and recent than the former:

razàndry ‘(respectful term of address for younger sibling or to any younger person)’ < (**ra-* + SEB **hi* + *àndri* ‘younger sibling’ < PMP **si* + **a(N)ji* ‘younger sibling’)’

The person marker **i* is realized as *i-*, *y-*, *z-*, *iz-*, *ia-* in the various forms of Malagasy, and it is a reflex of the PMP person marker **si*. It often occurs with 1st person nominative pronouns (with which it originally formed a ‘topicalized’ subseries (Adelaar and Kikusawa 2014), kinship terms and some common nouns with a human reference. Examples are:

(1st person nominative pronouns:)

Proto Malagasy **i ahu* ‘1st person singular’ > Merina *zàhu*, Taisaka *iàhu*, Tankarana *izàhu*
 Proto Malagasy **i tikaN* ‘1st person plural inclusive’ > Merina *isika*, Taisaka *intsika*

Proto Malagasy **i ahai* ‘1st person plural exclusive’ > Merina *izahàì*, Taisaka *iahài*, (16th century Malagasy in Arabic script) *yahai*

(kinship terms:)

PMP **si* + (Dravidian) **appa*: ‘father’ (Adelaar 1992:104 + footnotes 149 and 150) > Proto

Malagasy **i+ape* > **yape* > Merina *zàfy* ‘child, descendant’, *àfi* ‘grandchild’⁹

PMP **si* + **anak* ‘offspring’ > Proto Malagasy **i+anak(ã)* > **yanak* > Merina *zànakã* ‘offspring’

PMP **si* and **ama* ‘father’ > Proto Malagasy **i+ama* > (dialectal) *zàma* ‘mother’s brother’

PMP **si* and **a(N)ji* ‘younger sibling’ > Proto Malagasy **i+andi* > **yandri* > Merina *zàndry* ‘younger sibling’

(common noun with a human reference:)

**i(a)* + *tùvu* ‘unmarried’ > *zatùvu* ‘a youth’

**i* + (French) *monsieur* ‘sir; mister’ > *ise* ‘you (used between men)’

PMP **si* is maintained in Ma’anyan as *hi*, a person marker occurring before personal names (e.g. *Hi Gayuhan*, a character in Ma’anyan folk stories). It does not occur in other positions (Adelaar personal fieldwork notes). In other SEB languages, the occurrence and role of PMP **si* reflexes is not well documented. It is therefore still unclear whether the difference in application scope between **i* in Malagasy and *hi* in Ma’anyan is due to an expansion of the original role of **i* in Malagasy, or a reduction of the original role of *hi* in Ma’anyan. However, what is clear is that Malagasy **i* and Ma’anyan *hi* are retentions reflecting an earlier PMP **si*. In contrast, *ra-* is an innovation. It does have corresponding forms in western Indonesian languages such as Javanese and Balinese (*ra-*), Malay and Batak (fossilized *da-*) and, on first sight, even Fijian (*ra-*), but these are in all likelihood spread through borrowing or (in the case of Fijian) an independent development. In South East Asia, *ra-* and *da-* only occur in some languages spoken in the western part of Indonesia and Malaysia, and among the SEB languages, only in Malagasy. In Malagasy (and in Balinese), *ra-* must be a loan morpheme from Javanese (Adelaar 1995b, 2010). It occurs in all Malagasy dialects, although its distribution varies somewhat from one dialect region to another.

Given this spread, it must already have been part of Proto Malagasy. Furthermore, as the Javanese language and culture played a major role in the early history of South Borneo, and only a minor role in the history of Madagascar, the borrowing of *ra-* from Javanese into Proto Malagasy is much more likely to have happened in South Borneo than in Madagascar.

2.5 Evaluation of the linguistic evidence

The linguistic evidence collected above confirms that Proto Malagasy must already have started to develop as an own entity before its speakers moved away from South Borneo and crossed the Indian ocean to settle eventually in Madagascar.

Not all of the evidence is equally decisive. The most critical piece of it is the different distribution of PMP **y* reflexes in Ma’anyan and Malagasy, because the different phonetic ingredients for this distribution were already present in the East Barito area, but not later in East Africa. Almost equally strong evidence is the presence of the originally Javanese *ra-* prefix in Malagasy. As stated above, Javanese political, cultural and linguistic influence has been a salient factor in the history of South Borneo ever since

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□ The semantic change from ‘father’ to ‘child’ and ‘grandchild’ is not easy to explain: maybe **apa* was originally a reciprocal kinship term used between a father and his children ?

the foundation of the kingdom of Banjarmasin¹⁰, if not from before that time. It is in this very region¹¹, and hence at a time well before the migration(s) of Proto Malagasy speakers to East Africa, that *ra-* must have been adopted by some speakers of SEB. Such morphological borrowing is rather unlikely to have happened after the migrations, even if Indonesia and Madagascar remained in contact. Finally, the maintenance of PMP/SEB **ti* and **li* in Proto Malagasy and the fact that the Malay consonant *s* occurs more often in Malagasy loanwords than in Ma'anyan ones support the theory that Proto Malagasy had already taken an independent course from other SEB languages before the migrations. However, they remain circumstantial evidence at best because ultimately it cannot entirely be excluded that they are the possible outcome of post-migratory developments.

3. Malagasy as a separate speech form in Borneo: the historical context

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, if Malagasy was already a distinct speech form before the migrations, chances are that its speakers were in a relatively equal relationship with Malays; in contrast, if it was not yet distinct, subordination of its speakers to the Malays is more likely, all things being equal. Having a distinct speech form would suggest that they already formed their own community and had taken some distance from their traditional society, which implies a certain amount of acculturation to Malay society. If the relationship was relatively equal in terms of social hierarchy and stratification (and not, say, one of slave versus slave owner), one would understand why there are so many Malay, Javanese and Sanskrit elements in Malagasy, which include not only words, but also the Javanese honorific prefix *ra-*, an indicator of respect and social status. One would also be able to put into perspective the fact that the 7th-century Old Malay inscriptions from South Sumatra and Bangka Island (see Map 2) include a few lines in an unknown language that seems to represent a form of SEB (Aichele 1936; Dahl 1951:158; Adelaar 1989:35-36). Yet, I am not going as far as Kullanda (2009) or Beaujard (2012), who both argue that this language is evidence for a prominent role of the Malagasy in Indonesian maritime history before they disappeared to Madagascar. Even if this unidentified language turns out to be an early form of Malagasy (which is likely), it does not justify such a far-reaching conclusion, for which there is no correlating historical and ethnographic support. A more likely scenario is that there was a symbiotic (but still asymmetric) social relation between Malays and early Malagasy people, comparable to the one that existed between the Malays and surrounding Orang Asli groups during the heydays of Malacca (15th and early 16th century AD; see further below).

Historical information about South Borneo is scarce. Most academic research has concentrated on post-colonial times, and for the pre-colonial past we basically only have the 'Banjar Chronicles' (*Hikayat Banjar* in Malay), which are the chronicles of the city of Banjarmasin. While this document is a valuable historical source, it is essentially concerned with legitimizing the rule of the Sultanate in Banjarmasin in the 16th century, meaning that a true representation of historical facts is somewhat subordinated to this socio-political cause. As such, it should not be read uncritically and taken as faithfully

¹⁰ Nowadays, Banjarmasin (or Banjar, as it is also called) is a metropolis in South Borneo. It used to be the centre of a sultanate, and before that, of a Hindu kingdom, in the past. As explained further below, this centre changed its name and location a number of times. Unless indicated otherwise, in what follows "Banjarmasin" stands for the current metropolis as well as for its predecessors in other locations in South Borneo.

¹¹ It is worth noting here that the oldest Indic inscriptions in ISEA were also found in Borneo, in Muara Kaman, close to Kutai Town in East Kalimantan. They date from ca. 400 AD (Dahl 1951:368). Although Muara Kaman is not in South Borneo, it is relatively close to it.

representing historical facts. However, it should neither be rejected as a piece of fiction but interpreted as the reworking and manipulation of actual historical facts in order to meet the political ends of legitimizing a ruling dynasty. The most insightful study of the 'Banjar Chronicles' along such an interpretation was published by Hans Ras (1968). He drew attention to the following points, often ignored in other studies¹²:

1. Toponyms cannot be taken on face value simply because they can be used again in different areas. The Banjar Chronicles mention Tanjung Pura as an old Malay settlement, the establishment of which preceded Banjarmasin and its associated court locations (see below). It is often identified with a coastal town of the same name in West Borneo. However, in the Banjar Chronicles, Tanjung Pura seems to refer to a town in South Borneo (see Map 1). According to Ras (1968:187-192), it may be identified with the current town of Tanjung, a land-locked town which is situated northeast of Banjarmasin and may have lost its importance because the royal court had been shifted to places closer to the coast - most likely for economic reasons. On the other hand, the town of Tanjung Pura in West Borneo must be a more recent settlement that was given the same name as the historical Tanjung Pura in South Borneo (see Map 1).¹³

2. The coast line of South Borneo was radically different in the past and has been subject to rapid change throughout the Quaternary.

Expanding coastlines in South Borneo are due to the augmentation of alluvial material brought along by the large rivers running through this area. Ras (1968:196-200), who was a geologist as well as a philologist, referred to Soekmono (1957) and Van Bemmelen (1949) to argue that the coast of South Borneo was originally split by a gulf. It ran almost 200 km into the interior, covering an area which is currently crossed by the Barito River and several other large rivers and consists of tidal wetlands. It would have provided access to the sea to Tanjung, the town that had a key role in the foundation history of Banjarmasin. Obviously, recurrent and heavy siltation constituted a major problem to the then flourishing trading ports and court capitals. In order to maintain access to the sea, these settlements often had to move closer to an ever expanding coast. These court removals are a constant theme in the Banjar Chronicles, although in the story they are usually ascribed to politics and intrigue rather than to natural events. Nevertheless, Ras' claim of a gulf extending almost 200 kilometers into the current interior of Borneo *in historical times* is a rather bold one and needs further verification.

3. Like toponyms, ethnonyms cannot always be taken on face value. According to the Banjar Chronicles, the Banjarese royal family descends from a *Kaling* founding father. *Kaling* is the Banjarese Malay pronunciation and orthography of the Malay word *kəliŋ*, nowadays an appellation for (South) Indians. Ras doubted that the founding family was of South Indian descent and argued that they originated from Java. This is indirectly supported by Damais (1964)¹⁴, who investigated the original meaning of *kəliŋ*. He argued that a contamination must have happened between the Indian ethnonym *Kaliŋga*, which referred to people from the Coromandel coast, and a native Indonesian term *kəliŋ* designating foreigners in general, sometimes including Javanese. Europeans must have

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□ See Knapen (2001).

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□ This is not unlike the history of many European place names which were used again in regions where Europeans established themselves later on, as in Northern America, Africa or Australia.

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□ For some reason this source was not used by Ras (1968).

conflated both forms, which resulted in a single term *kəliŋ* designating South Indians in particular. This designation was then taken over in some Indonesian languages, eclipsing the original meaning of the word *kəliŋ* (Damais 1964:103-104). This sort of historical confusion is also observed in the use of various European ethnonyms: one recalls the original meanings of words like ‘Russians’ (historically referring to Swedes) and ‘Dutch’ (related to the adjective *Deutsch* with which Germans refer to themselves). So, using the Banjar Chronicles is not only a matter of retrieving historical information from a manipulated text: it also requires understanding facts that were accurate in the past but have become obscure through semantic change affecting their signifiers. This text should not be taken literally but can still be used as an invaluable source of information about things that happened in the past and are still remembered, albeit in a distorted way. It does contribute to an investigation into the origins of the Malagasy and their language. It mentions various historical facts, but as far as indications of time are concerned, we have to do with narrative time rather than chronological time. For instance, the story and genealogical list suggest a limited time span of maybe four centuries (cf. Knapen 2001), which ends with the establishment of the court in Martapura. However, it is likely that this is the result of a temporal compression, especially concerning the earliest events. The span involved was most likely much longer. The fact that the term *Kaling* refers to Javanese people, as suggested by Ras (and supported by Damais) has a direct bearing on chronology. It corresponds with a distinct period in Chinese historiography (6th to 8th century AD) in which the Javanese were referred to as *Holing*, which is most likely a Chinese rendering of **kəliŋ*. It was apparently a period in which Buddhism (rather than Hinduism) was in the ascendant in Java. In other words, could it be that the founding fathers of Banjarmasin and its precursors were in fact Javanese (and possibly Buddhists) who moved to Borneo between the 6th and 8th century? If yes, it would correspond rather neatly with the estimated migration period of the early Malagasy. The latter probably left in the 7th century AD (Adelaar 1989): at any rate, archeological evidence in Madagascar shows that they arrived there no later than the 8th century AD. It would also fit in with the occurrence of Buddhist inscriptions elsewhere on Borneo Island, in the Sambas region (West Kalimantan) (Griffith 2014), and in Sanggau (West Kalimantan) and Brunei Darussalam (Machi Suhadi [1989:112-114]; Sukarto K. Atmodjo [1994:1-8]). Griffith (2014:148-149) estimates the inscriptions in Sambas to be at least from the mid-ninth century AD, with an earlier date in the first half of the eighth century AD as a possibility. He considers these and other inscriptions in Java, Bali, Sumatra and Borneo, as a clear written testimony to the fact that the Indonesian archipelago was an integral part of the Buddhist world at the turn of the second millennium AD (Griffith 2014:185-187).

The Banjar Chronicles also mention that Banjarmasin and its precursors were founded at the expense of Tanjung Pura, which was an even earlier establishment. According to Ras, Tanjung Pura was an outpost of Srivijaya, and it was more distinctly Malay than Banjarmasin. The latter became very Javanese in style, even if the Banjarese language has remained a Malay dialect. Ras’ speculation that Tanjung Pura must have been located in an area upriver from Negara Dipa (the earliest precursor of Banjarmasin) rather than in West Borneo fits in with the fact that we find in Malagasy a strong influence from Malay and, to a lesser extent, from Javanese and Sanskrit. The different extent of influence that Malagasy underwent from Malay and Javanese somehow reflects a situation in which Malay was more prevalent, but Javanese was making inroads in a sociolinguistic setting in which SEB speakers and Malays were interacting. Either Malay or both Malay and Javanese must have contributed Sanskrit vocabulary to Malagasy before the migration(s) to East Africa.

The presence of the Javanese was already apparent in the earliest period in the Banjar Chronicles, and may even predate the time span covered by this text. The Javanese were important trading partners for polities in South Borneo because of their position directly opposite of South Borneo across the Java Sea. The Banjar Chronicles suggest a Javanese influence on politics and economic life, especially with reference to pepper production. Ras and Van Bemmelen's accounts of shifting coastlines match a situation in which the court in Negara Dipa was initially located in a region downriver from Tanjung and was subsequently moved three times to locations further downriver (to wit Amuntai, Banjarmasin and Martapura) in response to these natural events (Map 1). However, as noted above, the extent of Ras' use of expanding coastlines to explain early Banjarese history is somewhat speculative and should be handled with caution awaiting further research into the geography of South Borneo.

The historical accounts of SEB peoples themselves are of limited use in search of their early history. The Ma'anyan place their original homeland in the Nan Sarunai area near Amuntai (Nan Sarunai literally stands for the mouth of the Sarunai tributary). Since Amuntai was the seat of the court before it moved to Banjarmasin and Martapura, there must have been a much closer contact between Ma'anyan and Banjarese in the past. The account of this earlier Ma'anyan homeland runs parallel to certain passages in the Banjar Chronicles referring to events in the 16th century AD. However, it is not clear to what extent the Ma'anyan account is coloured by 'feedback' from the Banjar Chronicles.¹⁵ Furthermore, the leaving of the Nan Sarunai homeland by the Ma'anyan is a fairly recent affair. It does not give us much certainty as to where they may have lived in the preceding centuries.

The identity, role and status of the ancestors of the early Malagasy migrants before they left South Borneo remains uncertain. Nevertheless, rather than war captives or forced labour they may have been a section of the SEB speakers who cooperated with local Malays and began to acculturate to them in a similar way as the Orang Asli (*Bidadari*) people once did in the Malay peninsula. Some of the Orang Asli groups were economically and politically in a symbiotic relationship with the local Malays. They were loyal to the ruler of Malacca, contributing to the welfare and safety of his kingdom up to the 18th century (Andaya and Andaya 2001:44-49, 81, 87). The Malays in Malacca were most likely also assimilating Orang Asli into their community. A similar symbiotic relationship between Malays and some of the early Malagasy people in South Borneo would explain the participation of the latter in the maritime expeditions of the former, and the likelihood that the few lines in an unknown language occurring in the oldest Malay inscriptions represent early Malagasy. In the Malay peninsula, conversion to Islam of the Malays apparently had a contrary effect on their relationship with the Orang Asli. It must have had a similar effect on the relationship between Malays and SEB people in South Borneo. For the latter, abstention from pork and alcohol must have been an initial impediment to conversion, as these ingredients are essential in traditional Ma'anyan rituals.

Sellato (2013) gives a very useful insight in the various ways in which the native peoples of Borneo must have interacted in the past. He distinguishes three main types of traditional populations in Borneo in terms of social organization, economic systems,

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□ Ma'anyan historical accounts sometimes include references to Madagascar and Malagasy migrations. Such references are no doubt the result of academic feedback on traditional history.

ethno-cultural identities and location relative to the coast. They are the Malays, Dayak and Punan.¹⁶ The Malays lived in Borneo's 'outer ring', that is to say, in places close to the coast (although not exactly on the coast for security reasons) or at economically strategic places where rivers meet. They initially formed trading posts which would develop into local kingdoms later on. They controlled the trade between the world outside Borneo and the island's interior. Ultimately, the coastal Malay kingdoms used to be under the authority of Javanese kingdoms such as Demak. They also tended to exercise control over the Dayak who lived more inland although they were not always able to do so. The Dayak usually lived more inland (the 'middle ring'): they produced rice and were basically self-sufficient but were also engaged in trade with the Malays, who provided them with certain luxury goods. Being more numerous than the Malays, they were potentially more powerful than the latter, but in practice they were often divided among themselves. In some cases Dayak groups were able to form impressive political federations, controlling large territories, subordinating other groups and even making slaves, but they never developed these federations into kingdoms. Some Dayak groups underwent strong influence from the more cosmopolitan Malays, who were under Indian cultural influence and would eventually adopt Islam. Dayak traders operated as middlemen between the Punan and the Malays. The Punan are nomads who live even further into the interior (the 'inner ring' and traditionally collect forest products. Via the Dayak and Malays these products would find their way to the world outside Borneo.

According to Sellato, in the remote interior Dayak and Punan groups were independent and paid no tribute. In the middle courses of main rivers, strong Dayak societies developed political bonds with Malay kings and became their vassals. In lower river regions, some Dayak groups participated in the formation of coastal kingdoms. Some other groups in these regions would end up under the kingdom's control and their territories became part of the kingdom's land: they became *sərah*, which Sellato translates as 'dependent'; however, the word also carries the notion of surrendering and most likely refers to tributaries. The term is Malay: Banjar Malay has a dialectal form *sarah* (same meaning), which was also adopted with the same meaning into Ma'anyan. Malagasy has a corresponding term *sàra* 'payment; cost, price', the meaning of which is reminiscent of the tribute to be paid as a consequence of dependency or surrendering rather than the dependency or surrendering itself. People who had given in to the kingdom's control in this way would gradually assimilate to Malays (and eventually become Muslims).

Sellato's model of a Dayak / Malay interface, especially in the middle courses of main rivers, provides a very good setting for the Malagasy homeland. It also provides a scenario that is more convincing than one involving a master-slave relationship. Early Malagasy society may have contributed more actively to the formation of the Banjarese kingdom, and part of it (that is, the part that did not migrate to east Africa) may also have surrendered to it and eventually merged with it at some stage. In this context it is worth noting that recent human genetic tests have shown that the Malagasy are genetically closer to the population of Banjarmasin than to the Ma'anyan (Brucato et al. submitted).

4. Concluding remarks

¹⁶ For the sake of simplicity, this term is used here in its wider application as a cover term for all traditional nomads in Borneo.

For want of historical records and archaeological data, the linguistic and literary history of Malagasy and the traditional Malay literature of South Borneo are invaluable sources for a better understanding of early relations between India and South Borneo. They help us to understand some of the circumstances under which the early Malagasy left their native land and sailed all the way across the Indian Ocean to East Africa. They give us a glimpse of the level of Indic influence via (Buddhist) Śrīvijaya and (Buddhist and Hindu) Javanese courts on the civilization and intellectual development of Indonesia in the 7th century AD. They also give a glimpse of the impact that Indic religious and political ideologies used to have on governments in ISEA. Indic concepts of power and a related administrative terminology were introduced to the Malays and Javanese in the early centuries of the Common Era; some of this heritage was passed on to the early Malagasy and even survived in the Merina kingdom in the 19th century AD (Ottino 1983; Beaujard 2012).

There are various early developments that set off Malagasy against other SEB languages, leaving the impression that Malagasy had already become a separate dialect before its speakers migrated to East Africa in the 7th century and implying that there already was a separate Malagasy speech community in Borneo. Especially indicative of this early separate development are the reflexes of Proto Malayo-Polynesian **ɣ* and the acquisition of a polite person prefix *ra-*. Proto Malayo-Polynesian **ɣ* has two reflexes in all SEB languages, but the distribution of each of these reflexes in Malagasy is different from that in other SEB languages. The Javanese respect marker *ra-* was adopted into Malagasy but is absent in other SEB languages.

SEB languages have been exposed to Malay and Javanese for far much longer than Malagasy. The exposure of the latter to influences from other Indonesian languages became rather limited after the migration(s) of its speakers to East Africa. Considering the geographical constraint imposed on this event, the Malagasy language and culture still exhibit a remarkably high level of Malay and Javanese influence, including some vocabulary and cultural elements that are ultimately of Indic provenance. This influence is explained best by a symbiotic model of co-existence between the early Malagasy and Malays living in their direct vicinity before the migration(s) to East Africa. These early Malagasy were probably already much further on the way to assimilation to Malay language and culture than other SEB societies. This model explains more than a scenario involving the participation of early Malagasy as forced labour, and it also fits in better with the general traditional patterns of ethnic co-existence and cultural assimilation in Borneo and elsewhere in Indonesia.

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