

## Malay PERGI ‘go’ and Sanskrit MĀRGA ‘way’

Malay verb *pergi* (*e* = “schwa”) ‘go’ pertains to the basic vocabulary, being an ordinary item in classical texts and Malay dialects. In the Indonesian word-count dictionary it is included into (approximately) the first 25%.<sup>1</sup>

As far as I know there occurred no discussion about its etymology, it is not attested as a loan-word in dictionaries. However, it seems to come from the Sanskrit *mārga* ‘way’. The latter word is found in an Old Malay inscription of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in the straightforward physical sense (the way from one place to another), later the word was lost from the standard vocabulary, but in Sumatra *marga*, *merga* still exist denoting social groups on the basis of the same territory (Malays) or of the clan affiliation (Bataks), as a genealogy is interpreted being the ‘way’ from the past to the present.

In languages of Java – Bali area the verbs meaning ‘go’ are expressed by root morphemes non-cognate to the Malay verb: Jav. *lunga*, Sundanese *indit*, Madurese *èntar*. The etymon of *pergi* is absent in the Austronesian Comparative Dictionary,<sup>2</sup> unlike other Malay verbs of directed motion, as *datang* ‘come’, *sampai* ‘reach’, *undur* ‘retreat’, *turun* ‘go / come down, descend’ etc.

In Javanese we have *mergi* ‘way’ (*margi* as its variant), being the synonym of formal register (*krama*) to the plain register word *dalan* (*ngoko*). In Balinese, with its many loans from Javanese, especially for the formal register, the similar synonymy is represented by *mergi* and *jalan* (Bal. *jalan* and Jav. *dalan* are both reflexes of PAN \**zalan*, the Balinese reflex is identical with that in Malay, not in Javanese).

Jav. *mergi*, *margi* easily comes up to Sanskrit *mārga* ‘way’. The change of final *-a* > *-i* is a common device in building formal register synonyms to words of plain register: Jawa > Jawi ‘Java’, as well as *nama*, *nami* ‘name’, *sama*, *sami* ‘same’, *suwarga* > *suwargi* ‘paradise; the late (one)’ from similar Sanskrit loans. The reduction to “schwa” in the first syllable (*a* > *e*) before consonant clusters is quite usual: Old Jav. *parnah* > New Jav. *pernah* ‘place, location’, Skr.-Old Jav. *maharddhika* ‘eminent; extraordinary’ > New Jav. *merdika* ‘independent; not in the service’. The consonant cluster is sometimes reduced to a simple consonant: *Setu* < Arab. *sabt-u* ‘Saturday’. Similar vowel reduction occurred in Malay: *merdéka* ‘independent’, *perlu* ‘must; necessary’ < Arab. *fard-u*

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<sup>1</sup> Muhajir et al. Frekuensi kosakata Bahasa Indonesia. Depok: Fakultas Sastra Univ. Indonesia, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Austronesian Comparative Dictionary // <http://www.trussel2.com/acd/acd-s.z.htm> (compiled by Robert Blust et al.).

‘duty, obligation’, *serba* ‘whole, all around’ < Skr. *sarva* ‘whole, every’.

The change of the initial consonant *m-* > *p-* is also accountable. Initial *m-* in a number of New Javanese verbs is a vestige of the Old Javanese verbal affix *m-* (a prefix as a variant of the infix *-um-*), which has lost productivity in New Javanese, along with its re-interpretation as another affix, viz. *N-*, represented by alternating consonants *m-*, *n-* etc, according to the first phoneme of the verbal base. The prefix *N-* is very productive, and *m-*verbs produced originally from words with initial vowel or the liquid /l/ are reinterpreted as derivations from words with the onset voiceless labial occlusive *p-*. So Old Jav. *mulih* ‘to come back’, derived from the root *ulih*, has become the source of the verb *pulih* ‘recover’, the verb *mlayu* ‘run’ has issued roots *playok-* as the base of the verb *-playok-ake* ‘let run’ and *playon-* as a base of the verb *-playon-i* ‘run after’ (so.). Such reverse derivation is also applied to loan-words. The aforesaid *merdika* has brought forth the root *perdika* as a part of *perdikan* ‘so./st. not taxable’, Skr. *maṇḍapa* ‘open hall’ was transformed into New Jav. *paṇḍapa* (id.).

There is a reason to suppose the conversion (transposition) of the noun *mergi* to the verb *pergi* in the colloquial language, Javanese or Malay (the latter using the prefix *N-* instead the standard Malay *meN-*). The motivation of dropping the prefix *m-* could be on the analogy of other verbs of directed motion, which for the most part are root verbs.