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Invitation to contribute to an edition project at ALAL (Asian Languages and Linguistic)

Literacy and vernaculars in Southeast Asia
[Multilingualism and standard languages in Southeast Asia]

Dear Colleagues,

South-East Asia is a huge linguistic area known for multilingualism and linguistic diversity; however, with the formation of modern, independent states, like in most other areas of the world, national standard languages (and varying language policies) have been introduced which diminish the use of smaller nonstandard languages. Furthermore, global languages such as English, Malay and Chinese are not only used as non-standard *linguae francae*, but are increasingly transmitted in L2 education as indispensable tools for every modern society. This change from 'natural' language learning out of practical necessity to 'organised' L2 education in global and national languages naturally removes functional domains from the smaller languages which are substantially weakened or given up.

It seems that the existing literature on the matter either describes national policies of learning standard languages or the situation of minority languages. This special issue would like to collect information on 'how exactly' the linguistic situation of (urban) multilingual speakers represents itself today, and which directions the development seems to take (language maintenance or shift). This endeavour does not distinguish between autochthonous minorities and (relatively) more recent allochthonous groups which arise due to increased migration movements since the 20th century, or 'dialects' which are 'integrated' into a new standard language (and possibly given up) – leading to "superdiversity", the "roofing over" by standard languages, and then, to a decrease of linguistic diversity. Such language planning also interferes with well-established convergences between contact languages which are now separated again through independent standards (e.g., Malay/Indonesian vs. Spoken Malay vernaculars; Singaporean English vs. Standard English).

Such developments are closely connected to the cultural changes in the last decades, with mass media, mixed marriages, wider communicative needs, especially the importance of literacy and globalised communication – areas where smaller languages cannot thrive.

For various reasons, such developments may clash with "cultural identities" which are often correlated with smaller-language competence, and therefore may trigger efforts of "language preservation" which, however, cannot ultimately override the practical communicative needs of the modern society. In the case of languages with a strong basis outside of the area in question (e.g., among overseas Chinese), a switch from vernaculars to a foreign standard may be observed, thereby preserving the cultural identity to some degree. In many cases, the language simply can no longer serve to verify group identity – but they may give rise to ethnolects (varieties of a larger language spoken by a specific group).

This special issue will provide an array of descriptions of local developments in order to compare the ways this linguistic transition takes place (or not), and which circumstances accelerate or decelerate such developments. It will document for South-East Asia what has been described extensively for, e.g., European minority languages (and dialects).

I hope that the edition could be done during 2023, appearing in 2024. Please contact me by email, if you think about contributing. I will ask for an abstract within a month or so. – Looking forward to receiving your proposals!

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Proposed outline for abstract/paper

1. Background.
 - 1.1. Linguistic situation
 - 1.2. Minority situation
 - 1.3. Educational situation
 - 1.4. Linguistic theory
2. Material, method, aims
 - 2.1. Data being used
 - 2.2. Methodology
 - 2.3. Aims of the study
3. Analysis
 - 3.1. Language maintenance/shift
 - 3.2. Sociolinguistic aspects
 - 3.3. Education
 - 3.4. Identity, preservation efforts, language attitudes
4. Conclusions/Outlook
 - 4.1. Language vitality
 - 4.2. Attitudes
 - 4.3. Language shift; ethnolects, sociolects, ...
5. References