

Keeping Kirinda vital: The endangerment-empowerment dilemma in the documentation of Sri Lanka Malay¹

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The diasporic Malay communities of Sri Lanka were brought to Sri Lanka through various waves of deportation from Indonesia by the Dutch and British colonial powers. Though lacking official identity, the Sri Lanka Malays (SLM) are characterised by a unique mixed language of trilingual base, often referred to as Sri Lanka Malay creole. In the past, pressure from the country's dominant languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English), as well as negative stigma associated with their own 'creole', has led to different degrees of attrition in the SLM communities. Most recently, a new tendency can be detected: the desire to acquire standard Malay, the national language of Malaysia. From the point of view of language preservation, the tendency of shift towards a standard variety can be seen as yet a higher degree of endangerment for the SLM; at the same time, within an ethnography of empowerment such a shift could mean acquiring a useful economic tool while still preserving their identity in assuming a global Malay one. This paper explores the tension created by these different linguistic ideologies and offers possible resolutions for the field linguist.

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1. Outline of the dilemma

In the documentation of an endangered speech community, the tension between dealing with endangerment by documentation and preservation, and addressing empowerment of the linguistic minority, is a common one facing the linguist. This paper examines this dichotomy, using as illustration the situation of the Malay communities of Sri Lanka and their language, and the shift that is currently taking place in two of the communities which ironically is a result of revitalisation attempts.

The diasporic Malay communities of Sri Lanka were brought to Sri Lanka through various waves of deportation from Indonesia by the Dutch and British colonial powers. Though lacking official identity, being grouped together with other minority groups under the label ‘Muslims’, the Sri Lanka Malays are characterised by a unique language of trilingual base, often referred to as Sri Lanka Malay (SLM), in which Sinhala and Tamil grammar and colloquial Malay lexicon merge (Smith et al. 2004; Ansaldo 2007). While different degrees of loss of this vernacular have occurred in recent years in favour of the country’s dominant languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English, most recently a new tendency can be detected in at least two of the SLM communities: the desire to acquire the standard Malay variety that is the national language of Malaysia, which allows them to gain a useful economic tool while still preserving their identity by assuming a global Malay one.

In exploring the motivations underlying such a shift, we analyse an important dilemma characteristic for the field of documentary linguistics. The tendency of shift towards a standard variety is obviously yet a higher degree of endangerment for the SLM varieties and may thus be perceived as negative from the point of view of the preservation of linguistic diversity. However, within an ethnography of empowerment that aims at creating conditions for the recognition of minority voices, such a tendency would call for encouragement. We consider the responsibility of the documentary linguist in the management of such a dichotomy created by these opposing thrusts, which are underlined by the different ideologies of linguistic human rights and linguistic citizenship, and we conclude with two recommendations, one relating to theory and the other to practice, with respect to the dynamics of endangerment and empowerment.

2. The Sri Lanka Malays and their language

The Malay diaspora in Sri Lanka were brought to Sri Lanka largely through various waves of deportation from Malaysia and Indonesia by the Dutch and British colonial powers. While the community based in the district of Slave Island may well have been there during Portuguese rule (until 1656), the bulk of

SLM trace their ancestry to exiled nobility and political dissenters, slaves, and soldiers during Dutch rule (1656-1796), and the continued importation of slaves and soldiers for the garrison during British rule (1796-1948) (Hussainmiya 1986). The Malays now constitute some 0.24% of the population of Sri Lanka, numbering approximately 46,000.

Their linguistic variety is known as Sri Lanka Malay (SLM),² and as far as the realm of linguistics is concerned, it is a precious variety for studies of language contact, language evolution as well as cultural creolisation. It has been traditionally considered a creole or mixed language: it is referred to as a creole in an early account by a historian (Hussainmiya 1986) which had a high impact factor in the community itself, and is listed as Sri Lankan Creole Malay in *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005). Unlike its better-known Caribbean creole counterparts however, SLM – together with a very few other varieties of the region (e.g. Baba Malay, Cocos Malay) – is typologically in a unique position of providing us with an environment in which no Standard Average European acrolectal variety is involved in the dynamics of contact. Evolving in an environment with the main adstrates being Sinhala and Tamil, the languages involved in the formation of SLM varieties come from three distinct language families: Austronesian, Dravidian and Indo-European. As such it can shed light on issues of universality and specificity in contact-induced language change (Ansaldo 2007). Sociolinguistically, the relationship between the three language groups involved in its evolution was of an altogether different type than the better-known scenarios of exploitation/ slavery/ intermarriage etc. This feeds directly into our current theories of typologies of language contact.

Moreover, SLM appears to comprise perhaps some five different varieties, as distinguished through historical as well as linguistic investigations conducted in fieldtrips in 2003 to 2006;³ communities vary in their socioeconomic and educational status, and their linguistic repertoire and

² Apart from an unpublished MA thesis by Bichsel-Stettler (1989), SLM until very recently had been only very briefly described, by Hussainmiya (1986), Adelaar (1991) and Saldin (2001), the former two based on small-scale studies, and the latter on personal knowledge. For more recent work, see e.g. Smith et al. (2004) and Ansaldo (2007).

³ Fieldwork undertaken in February and December 2003 and January 2004 in Colombo, Hambantota and Kirinda was partially supported by a National University of Singapore Academic Research Grant R-103-000-020-112 for the project *Contact languages of Southeast Asia: The role of Malay* (Principal Investigator: Umberto Ansaldo, 05/2001-12/2003). Current research, from the end of 2004, which included fieldtrips in January and July 2006, is funded by the Volkswagen Stiftung's initiative for the Documentation of Endangered Languages (DoBeS) for the project *The documentation of Sri Lanka Malay: Linguistic and cultural creolisation endangered* (II/80 155) (Project director: Umberto Ansaldo; Co-investigator & project manager: Lisa Lim; Collaborators: Walter Bisang and Thiru Kandiah; PhD researcher: Sebastian Nordhoff; Aug 2004 –2008).

communicative practices (see Table 1, adapted from Ansaldo 2007).⁴ While they all identify themselves as Sri Lankan Malays, there is also a strong sense of identity and separateness for each of the different communities (SLM community p.c. 2003-2006). Their linguistic variation provides an excellent case study for understanding how different social situations are responsible for different structural developments from more or less one and the same original language. In this paper, we focus on what may be considered two poles in the SLM communities: those of Colombo and Kirinda. The various SLM communities face different degrees of endangerment depending on their locality and network, as will be shown in the following sections; the former may be considered most endangered, the latter most vital. However for different reasons, both communities witness degrees of shift towards Standard Malay.

Table 1: Sri Lanka Malay communities

Community	Characteristics
1. Colombo	Middle-upper class community in capital city; restricted usage of SLM in old-middle generations; common Sinhala (and some Tamil) competence; English fairly fluent to native speaker competence; standardising in Malay; no SLM in younger generation
2. Slave Island	Lower class community in a poor district of Colombo; strong Tamil influences; no English
3. Kandy & other Upcountry	Middle-lower/rural class communities in the central hill country area; SLM in old-middle generations, and in some younger generation; Sinhala competence; some English proficiency, especially in younger generation
4. Hambantota	Community on the south coast, traditionally heavy Sinhalese-speaking area; SLM in old-middle generations; often trilingual with Sinhala and Tamil; limited English
5. Kirinda	Poor fishing community on southeast coast; SLM dominant in all generations; fully trilingual with Sinhala and Tamil, especially in middle-younger generations; English limited to a few individuals

Considering the typological diversity involved in the formation of SLM, the variation between geographical areas and the current multilingual ideologies of

⁴ In previous scholarship, the Colombo dialect, meant to represent SLM as a whole, is the one usually described, though variation between the different communities is briefly acknowledged (Saldin 2001); the issue of variation is addressed in current analysis (see e.g. Ansaldo et al. 2006). The high degree of variation in a speech community such as SLM, which in fact comprises a number of smaller communities in different geographical areas, can be accounted for by at least two factors: (a) the relation with network type; and (b) diffusion and linguistic openness (Foley 2005).

the environment, the significance for general linguistics is in contributing to a better understanding of, at least, two areas: (i) language change, particularly contact-induced typological shift; and (ii) dynamics of language transmission and negotiation in polylectal contact situations. In this paper, we engage with aspects of (ii) relating to issues of language ideology and language choice.

However, while a linguistic variety's status as a creole or contact language (or standard language) may, as outlined above, be precious in an academic exercise, such a classification in fact has a significant impact on the type of shift that may occur as well as its speed. It is a fact that a community whose language is a creole or contact language is usually a community that has seen displacement at some point in their history; such displacement often means that the community (a) faces a lack of territorial rights, (b) makes some identification with a more remote community perceived as from their origins, and (c) has a less coherent and robust identity (LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985; Errington 2003). Furthermore, one may argue that contact languages are particularly endangered, given their marginalisation amongst languages in general and endangered languages in particular (Garrett 2006:178).⁵ Finally, as also noted in Garrett (2006:180f.) and as will be shown in the case of SLM, the awareness of speaking a 'corrupt' or 'broken' variety, as is often implied in the current definition of creole languages, may lead to a perception of their linguistic variety as not being 'good' enough to maintain and further strengthens a community's desire to move away to a more standard variety.

In sections 3 and 4, we will show how these risk factors apply to the case of the SLM communities: how, within their country, their language and culture lack rights and prominence; how they find greater support and interest from a more remote motherland; and how their linguistic variety, classified a creole or described as just an ungrammatical dialect of Malay, is perceived as less worth acquiring compared to another variety. All these put together lead unsurprisingly to a shift towards a standard variety.

3. SLM: Endangered by definition

As the language of a minority group, Sri Lanka Malay has never been a language for public discourse in the country. Shortly after independence, the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 was introduced, which has been amended through subsequent provisions and constitutions through to 1988. In the current constitution, both Sinhala and Tamil are national and official languages,

⁵ In spite of this, this present project documenting SLM is the first DoBeS project documenting a 'creole'.

languages of administration, legislation and the courts. English is officially the link language and remains the *de facto* language of rule (the business of government continues to be carried out in English, with the drafting of legislation being in English, although the law states that the Sinhala version should take preference). It is seen as an important key to advancement in technical and professional careers. Where education is concerned, either of the two national languages serves as medium of education; though English was once the medium of instruction in schools, in particular the mission schools, this is no longer the case, not since 1972.

SLM was once widely spoken as a home language for generations (Hussainmiya 1986), with the community being at least bilingual in SLM and Sinhala, if not multilingual, with English and Tamil. Based on observation and interviews in 2003-2006, however, we note that the situation has changed, largely as a consequence of the more recent language and educational policies mentioned above. In the cosmopolitan Colombo community, where the level of education is high, Sri Lanka Malay parents and grandparents with the resources make the conscious decision to speak to their children in English at home (Salma Suhood Peiris, p.c. Feb 2003, Jan 2006; T.K. Azoor p.c. Jan 2006; also attested to in Saldin 2001:26; Lim & Ansaldo 2006), in order to provide them a resource recognised as requisite for communication and advancement internationally; this is particularly true of the Colombo community – which ironically is the community which would have the resources to promote and maintain SLM – which as a general pattern displays a clear shift to English from SLM in the home domain. As a result, the community typically shows strong linguistic vitality in SLM in the oldest to middle generations and rapidly decreasing linguistic competence (to nil) in the vernacular in the young generation. SLM is seen now to have a mere fifth position in the community, after Sinhala, Tamil, English and Arabic (the last in the religious domain) (T.K. Azoor, President of the Conference of Sri Lanka Malays, p.c. Jan 2006). In short, as a consequence largely of these language and education policies in Sri Lanka, SLM in this community is no longer a home language for the younger generation of Sri Lankan Malays, and is thus considered an endangered language.

In sharp contrast is the speech community of Kirinda, which comprise 4% of the 46,000 SLM population, who still have SLM as a dominant language. Relatively isolated as a small fishing village on the southeast coast, with a dense and multiplex social network, with low education and employment levels, they exhibit strong maintenance of SLM. The children of Kirinda (ca. 200) are said to be the only children to be native monolingual speakers of a variety of SLM (T.M. Muhaj Hamin p.c. Dec 2003); thus this speech community is the only fully vital community of Sri Lanka Malays in which a young generation of

speakers of a SLM variety as first language can be found.⁶ In initial investigations (Ansaldo 2004, 2005a, b, c; Ansaldo & Lim 2005), the variety of Kirinda has been found to be structurally distinct from other SLM varieties: Ansaldo (2007) describes its nominal case system, a striking feature considering the rarity of complex morphological marking in contact languages in which a rare case of split is occurring, developing a new coding for object marking from a morpheme originally used for dative-like functions. Lexically and grammatically, there seems to be a stronger influence of Sinhala and Tamil, and trilingualism in SLM, Sinhala and Tamil is very common in all generations (Ansaldo 2007).

4. When revitalisation means shift

The fact that SLM is an endangered linguistic variety has in fact been recognised by the community in recent years, and as a response to this, there are current thrusts within the SLM community in language revitalisation.⁷ This has been initiated in particular in the Colombo community, who can be seen to be more linguistically aware, as well as to have the inclination and resources. On their own steam, members have, for example, published books on their identity and language (e.g. Saldin 2001, 2003), as well as books comparing SLM with Standard Malay (Saldin 2000; Thaliph 2003) and Malay primers (Emran Deen 2001). The ‘revitalisation’ taking place is not however of SLM itself, due to a combination of two general phenomena.

Constituting such a small fraction of the Sri Lanka population, however, the Malays possess low social capital within their own country at the official level, no longer having an official distinct identity as Malays, being grouped together with the Moors⁸ as ‘Muslims’. Nonetheless, their own social identity is extremely vibrant: there is the Sri Lanka Malay Confederation (SLAMAC) which is the umbrella organisation for a large number of social and cultural groups, including, for example, the Sri Lanka Malay Rupee Fund, and the Conference of Sri Lanka Malays (COSLAM) which has branches in all the communities around the island, which are extremely active in the organisation of regular social, cultural, commemorative and fund-raising activities and initiatives. However, in spite of this, the community’s perception of their own

⁶ Though the Upcountry communities are reported to show similar vitality (Sebastian Nordhoff p.c. Jan 2006).

⁷ The awareness and ‘revitalisation’ activities pre-date this project’s commencement and our arrival on the scene.

⁸ The Moors are Tamil speaking people of Middle Eastern (Arab) descent who arrived in Sri Lanka via south India.

language is less positive, viewing it as a creole or an ungrammatical dialect of Malay (e.g. Thaliph 2003; Colombo SLM community, p.c. 16 Aug 2006).⁹

In contrast with the status the community has in their own country, greater recognition is attained instead from Malaysia, in at least two significant and related thrusts:

- (a) One of the objectives of Malaysia's Institute of Malay Language & Culture is "to get in touch with Malays in different parts of the world and teach them the real Malay" (T.K. Azoor p.c. Jan 2006); one of the realisations of this is the organisation of language classes in the Standard Malay of Malaysia (Bahasa Melayu).
- (b) The Malaysian High Commission in Sri Lanka has in recent years demonstrated interest in and strong support for the SLM community, and provides aid in terms of student scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Malaysia, as well as in job market openings; one of the requirements of the latter is competence in basic Malay. Before the setting up of (a), the previous First Secretary's wife also "endeared herself to the Malays" by taking it upon herself to run two classes in Standard Malay (COSLAM 2005).

With these two phenomena above working together, it is not surprising then that it is with Malaysia that the SLM community seek support and find their identity, and the choice in the revitalisation process is consequently not for Sri Lanka Malay but for Malaysia's Standard Malay. After the two pioneering courses in Standard Malay, eight of the best students underwent a teacher's training course in Malaysia, and now conduct regular classes in Bahasa Melayu for the community.¹⁰ Most recently (6 August 2006), in the Hari Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language Day) organised by the community in Colombo, activities such as essay-writing and oratory contests were conducted for both SLM and Standard Malay.

In Kirinda itself, these revitalisation efforts taking place in Colombo have trickled down in a different form. Obviously there is no need for the Kirinda community to be concerned about their language being endangered, vital as it is; thus there is in fact no need for any kind of revitalisation. However, the increased prominence of Standard Malay of Malaysia in the SLM discourse has

⁹ It has also become clear to us in discussions and discourse that in many cases the community does not make a very clear distinction between SLM and Standard Malay. One of the local publications mentioned above, a textbook presented in Standard Malay with Sinhala, Tamil and English, is intended to "help Sri Lankan Malays to study their mother tongue in its internationally recognised form" (Emran Deen 2001:foreword).

¹⁰ It should be noted that recent encounters between StdM-speaking Colombo Malays and other SLM speakers ensued in a lack of mutual intelligibility.

led to the Kirinda community becoming even more explicitly aware of the differences, and is leading to language shift. As of January 2006, plans were underway for Standard Malay to be taught in the village school as a subject, to children who in fact are native speakers of SLM, as well as to be used as a default language of discourse, for example, in the signs (e.g. ‘no shouting’; ‘show respect’) displayed around the school (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, b).

The rationale is not difficult to understand, of course; it repeats itself every day in every minority community that wishes to join the global world. The belief is that the acquisition of Standard Malay will not only provide cultural capital such as available written material for education, but, more importantly, increased economic and political capital, to plug into the global economy and direct their trajectory in social space upwards (after e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1984). As the president of the Conference of Sri Lanka Malays explains, “Our educational upliftment is very very important. Because at the end of the day, the economy is what matters... If you are economically in a strong position, well, everything else looks after itself.” (T.K. Azoor, p.c. Jan 2006).

The knee-jerk reaction of the linguist involved in endangered languages is not immediately positive. (a) The choice of Standard Malay in the Colombo community as the language for revitalisation will mean new generations regaining a competence in a Malay variety which is in fact not their ‘own’ Sri Lanka Malay variety. The perception that Standard Malay exposure may help in slowing down the attrition of SLM is quite strong in the community; this perception, albeit a commonly observed one, is unfortunately a mistaken one, and the sensitive relationship between standard and local varieties within the contexts of endangered minorities needs to be paid attention to. (b) The choice of Standard Malay in the Kirinda community as a school subject – where the school is an important domain for primary socialisation in the village – can have a significant impact on the use of and attitudes towards SLM.¹¹ There was also the implicit suggestion that Standard Malay could eventually be used as a language of instruction; in such an event, such subtractive bilingualism (see e.g. Lambert 1978), viz. the use of a language as a medium of education which is not the vernacular of the children, can have a negative effect on the learning of the additional language and on other skills, as has been shown in many studies, and such an interdependence (see e.g. Cummins 1979) between the languages should be paid attention to in such a context. The linguist needs, however, to look

¹¹ We see a parallel with the successful annual Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore, first launched in 1979 and meant to support the bilingual education policy: this led swiftly to a shift in most domains, in particular the home, from the other Chinese languages to Mandarin, and subsequently to a generation of children not being able to understand their grandparents (see e.g. Lim 2006).

beyond their immediate concern for the linguistic variety for a more balanced appreciation of the situation and a perhaps more appropriate response to it.

5. But is it empowerment?

A number of factors makes a community vulnerable, as outlined in Hyltenstam and Stroud (2005), which Ansaldo and Lim (2006a) formulate as a Vulnerability Index, namely, low visibility, lack of political recognition, cultural stigma, low educational capital, and health. By these indices, except perhaps that of health, the Malays in Sri Lanka, in particular those in rural locales such as Kirinda, can be classified as vulnerable communities within their local context, and consequently in need of empowerment. Combined with this is the fact that the SLM community may be seen as a displaced one, as mentioned in section 1, and to a certain extent faces a lack of territorial rights.

In an ethnography of empowerment (Delgado-Gaitan 1994, 1996), a researcher is urged to intervene in advocating and creating conditions for the recognition of minority voices. In most cases this is interpreted along the traditional lines of linguistic human rights (LHR)¹² and the empowering of the minority language. The LHR paradigm, amongst other things, endorses an ethno-linguistic stereotyping in the form of monolingual and uniform identities, and forces a group of speakers to work actively to differentiate themselves from other, by claiming unique linkages of language and identity so as to gain political leverage in the competition for scarce resources; this however exacerbates problems of linguisticism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1986) that motivated the rights paradigm in the first place (Stroud & Heugh 2004:197). The LHR paradigm also works on a very local perception of relevant language delimited by national territorial borders (*ibid.*:202).

If however we take the view of language not as a discrete construct that can be owned or lost by a community, but rather the view of language articulated in terms of linguistic citizenship (LC) (Stroud 2000; Stroud & Heugh 2004), where language is all at the same time a semiotic resource for the (re)construction of agency and self-representation, an economic resource and site of political and economic struggle, a global resource to address local-global concerns, and an intimate resource as the foundation of respect for difference on a global level, then the ensuing response is different. In the LC paradigm, the community is served by its linguistic resources – which comprise pluralist alternatives reflecting the reality of the linguistic market, and, consequently,

¹² We wish to make clear that we do not at all oppose the moral imperative behind the linguistic human rights paradigm, but suspect that LHR is not always the best means for the empowerment – socially, politically and economically – of a linguistic minority (after Stroud & Heugh 2004). See Stroud & Heugh (2004) for a critical overview of LHR.

negotiable multiple, diverse and shifting identities – and is not restrained by its language. Individuals and speech communities choose to empower themselves in what they see as the best possible way with regard to existing power relationships, including, for example, the *they-code*, pragmatic *we-code*, adopted standard *we-code* (see Kamwangamalu 2004 and Djité 2006 for details on these concepts).

With the conscious shift from SLM to Standard Malay then, the Malay communities of Sri Lanka can be seen to be achieving two ends: (i) they not only gain a useful economic tool, but (ii) also manage to preserve and represent their subject position through an *assumed* global Malay identity (see Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004 on types of identity) which is recognisable through an empowered linguistic identity, and recognised by the Malay ‘homeland’, fulfilling the prediction of displaced communities identifying with a more remote community. In these respects, we have a shift towards a variety in which cultural and economic functions of language come together. In other words, within the view of linguistic citizenship, the shift is seen as the acquisition of a resource on the semiotic, economic and global fronts. This outcome of globalisation may thus be seen as a resource – rather than a threat – by enabling a minority group to gain access to better education and enhanced political self-representation (Ansaldo & Lim 2006a, d).¹³

6. Reflections on responsible routes

The two points that we end this paper with we hope will become points for discussion and future action, the first related to linguistic theory, the second to documentation practice.

That linguistic varieties which are classified as ‘creoles’ are doubly endangered is a point that is worth reiterating. Such a seemingly objective linguistic classification (see e.g. DeGraff 2003 and Ansaldo & Matthews 2006) has profound implications for the responses of the community itself to its own language; this we hope to have shown clearly in the case of the Sri Lanka Malays’ desire to ‘re-acquire’ another Malay variety due to the fact, amongst other things, that it is perceived as the more standard, ‘real’, ‘good’ language, as opposed to their own ‘creole’ variety. Such were the reactions of members of the community; what also stood out was how pleased – almost relieved – and proud they were to be reassured of the fact that theirs was not a creole in the

¹³ The reality is however more complex than this: while the urban communities benefit more immediately and greatly from the shift to a more global variety, the addition of another linguistic variety does not necessarily address the problems of lack of higher education, economic mobility and political representation that the more peripheral communities face (for a discussion on this, see Ansaldo & Lim 2006e).

layman's understanding of something associated with being a 'broken' language, but a linguistic variety in its own right.¹⁴ The lesson to be learnt here is caution in academic exercises of classification without sober consideration of the potential impact of our theoretical declarations on the speakers of that linguistic variety. This also calls for a reinterpretation of the notion of 'creolisation', devoid of historical stigma associated to it (see Ansaldo & Matthews 2006).

The account of a linguistic fieldworker being faced with a minority community shifting or wishing to shift to a more powerful, usually standard, linguistic variety is not a new one, nor are the dilemmas that arise in such a situation, and it is with an attempt to responsibly manage such dichotomies that we close this paper. The age of the 'innocent anthropologist' should be long over: there cannot be pressure from external researchers on a community to maintain their variety in the name of linguistic diversity and linguistic human rights, certainly not at the expense of their potential (economic) empowerment by means of another variety which would subsequently replace the former (see also e.g. Ladefoged 1992). As pointed out by Matras (2005:227f.), linguists cannot presume that every community wishes its language to be salvaged by a linguist. At the same time, it is not the fieldworker's place to determine that what is required is a shift of orientation from the advocating of linguistic human rights via one language to the promotion of mobility and standard in a community via another, in order to empower the community and maintain its (economic) vitality. Neither can the axiom be just a passive one, in which linguistic fieldworkers document an endangered language all they want,¹⁵ so long as the endeavour, and the ideology and attitudes that accompany it, do not stand in the way of the community's empowerment, regardless of language choice. We would argue in fact that, even if our brief as linguists is academic and 'scientific', as documentary linguists in particular we cannot avoid a significant social brief. In this sense, the burden of responsibility,¹⁶ implicit though it may be, must also be to provide the community in question with as much objectiveness and clarity as there can be in the issues pertaining to linguistic variation, multilingualism, acquisition, 'standards', imperialism, shift,

¹⁴ These views have been observed in the course of our fieldwork, and were noted, in particular, in the various responses of the audience at a talk given to the SLM community in Colombo (Ansaldo & Lim 2006c).

¹⁵ In no way do we mean to undermine the field of documentary linguistics; on the contrary, we are active participants in it, who also believe that, in the face of endangerment, shift and the search for economic empowerment, documentation is the stopgap measure, with one of the aims being that the material documented may one day be reclaimed by the community.

¹⁶ In this sense we take a more pro-active stand than that suggested by e.g. Matras (2005), and one more akin to e.g. Tsunoda (2005:225f.), although we do acknowledge that the potential of this depends ultimately on the community's receptiveness to such initiatives.

and so forth, and all their real-life implications,¹⁷ such that the community themselves can make as informed and as enlightened a decision as possible about their language choices. Then whatever impetus may follow from this is what we support, whichever languages it may occur in.

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¹⁷ This would be accomplished through, for example, talks or presentations given and articles written for the actual community in question (e.g. Ansaldò 2006; Ansaldò & Lim 2006c) and not just for circulation within the academic community, which should provide clarity in (i) linguistic issues and (ii) the fact that the choices to be made lie with the community itself. Ladefoged's (1992) call is for linguists to lay out the facts concerning a given linguistic situation, in his case, to a government who could then assess the situation for a decision.

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