Translation as an Instrument in Descriptive Linguistic Research. Tricks Played on and Pitfalls Encountered by Field Linguists: A Case Study of Urak Lawoi'[1]

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Abstract

Translation is an all too easily accepted instrument in linguistic field research. Linguistic researchers use translation and translators in order to find, compare and get acquainted with the words and grammar of their target language[3]. During the research, as long as a field language is used, translation is part of the research method. In researching a language which origins and superficial appearance are close to languages well-known to the researcher, the inclination he might feel to translate an apparent cognate in the target language with their phonemic lookalike in these languages he knows is understandable. This disposition might even be enhanced when, out of necessity, these languages are used as field languages during the research. However, when a field language closely related to the dialects or languages researched is used, and precisely when the lingual nature and traditions of ethnic groups with a divergent world view or with a different cultural awareness are the subjects under research, the researcher should consider the fact that these two last factors will have an impact on the use of language within its relation to the cultural and natural world of its speakers: their language describes *their* world, not *our* world or even *the* world. Therefore, in order to understand not only the semantics of the language of a group under study but also its deviant referential socio-psychological and cultural cadre, the instrument of translation must under certain conditions be abandoned to make place for a more holistic and even intuitive descriptive approach.

The conditions described above may be exemplified in the research I conducted on Basa Urak Lawoi'[4] and the description of the language that I completed recently (De Groot 2012). Due to their isolated history, the language of the Urak Lawoi' is based on, describes and conveys a reality that is quite different from that of speakers of other Malay languages and that of any researcher venturing into their midst. The proximity of Urak Lawoi' to other Malay languages therefore is in some cases a bonus to the researcher who speaks and understands Bahasa Malaysia or Bahasa Indonesia[5], although equally often it forms an obstacle for the correct understanding of its relation to truth and reality in the linguistic-philosophical sense. This paper will propagate reflection on whether, in situations as the described, the instrument of translation in general and the instrument of comparison with related languages in particular should be parts of the right method to go about linguistic research, or whether these instruments should be as much as possible dropped.

Keywords: Descriptive linguistic research, Malay languages, philosophy of language, sociolinguistics, translation, Urak Lawoi'

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[4]   Urak Lawoi' language
[5]   Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia are the mutually intelligible national languages of Malaysia and Indonesia respectively. Both have developed naturally and through language planning from the erstwhile standard dialect of Malay, Riau-Johore Malay.

การแปลในฐานะเครื่องมือวิจัยทางภาษาศาสตร์เชิงพรรณนา การพลิกแพลง และหลบเลี่ยงทางภาษาซึ่งประสบโดยนักภาษาศาสตร์: กรณีศึกษา อูรักลาโว้ย

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บทคัดย่อ

การแปลเป็นเครื่องมือที่ใช้กันทั่วไปในงานวิจัยภาษาศาสตร์ทางภาคสนาม นักวิจัยด้านภาษาศาสตร์อาศัยการแปลและผู้แปลเพื่อค้นหา เปรียบเทียบ และสร้างความคุ้นเคยกับคำและไวยากรณ์ของภาษาเป้าหมาย ระหว่างทำการวิจัย ในช่วงเวลาที่ยังใช้ภาษาภาคสนามการแปลจะยังเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของวิธีการวิจัย ในการค้นคว้าภาษาที่มีต้นกำเนิดและลักษณะที่ดูเหมือนจะใกล้เคียงกับภาษาที่นักวิจัยรู้จักดี ความโน้มเอียงที่อาจจะทำให้รู้สึกว่าควรแปลคำที่เกี่ยวเนื่องในภาษาเป้าหมายด้วยคำพ้องเสียงในภาษาที่นักวิจัยรู้จักแล้วย่อมเกิดขึ้นได้ ความโน้มเอียงอันดังกล่าวนี้อาจยิ่งทวีขึ้น หากภาษานั้นเป็นภาษาที่กำลังใช้อยู่ในระหว่างการวิจัยภาคสนาม อย่างไรก็ตาม เมื่อใช้ภาษาภาคสนามที่มีความสัมพันธ์เคียงคู่กับภาษาหรือภาษาถิ่นซึ่งกำลังค้นคว้า และเมื่อสภาวะ กับประเพณีแห่งการใช้ภาษาภายในกลุ่มชาติพันธ์ุที่มีโลกทัศน์ผิดแผกแตกต่างและที่มีความคิดเห็นทางวัฒนธรรมที่ไม่เหมือนกันเป็นหัวข้อของการวิจัย นักวิจัยจะต้องคำนึงว่าประเด็นสองประการสุดท้ายจะส่งผลกระทบต่อการใช้ภาษาภายในความสัมพันธ์ของภาษากับโลกธรรมชาติและวัฒนธรรมของผู้ใช้ภาษา ซึ่งใช้ภาษาเพื่ออธิบายโลกในความเข้าใจของเขา ไม่ใช่โลกของเราหรือแม้แต่โลก ดังนั้น เพื่อที่จะไม่เพียงแต่สามารถเข้าใจอรรถศาสตร์ของภาษากลุ่มชาติพันธ์ุที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่ได้ แต่ยังเข้าใจบริบทการอ้างทางจิตวิทยาสังคมและทางวัฒนธรรมด้วยเช่นกันเครื่องมือการแปลคงต้องสละเงื่อนไขบางประการ เพื่อที่จะเอามาเปลี่ยนเป็นวิธีการแบบองค์รวมหรือเป็นวิธีการแบบสัญชาตญาณ

งานวิจัยที่ผู้วิจัยได้ศึกษาค้นคว้าภาษาอูรักลาโว้ย และการพรรณนาภาษาที่ออกมาเป็นผลงานของการวิจัยเรื่องนี้ (De Groot 2012) สามารถเอามาใช้เพื่อยกตัวอย่างเงื่อนไขดังกล่าวนี้ได้ เนื่องจากมีประวัติอันโดดเดี่ยว ภาษาของชาวอูรักลาโว้ยจึงมีพื้นฐานมาจากการเล่าเรื่องและถ่ายความหมายเฉพาะที่เกี่ยวกับความเป็นจริงที่แตกต่างจากความเป็นจริงของผู้พูดภาษามลายูชนิดอื่นๆ และของภาษานักวิจัย ความใกล้เคียงของภาษาอูรักลาโว้ยกับภาษามลายูอื่นๆ อาจเป็นประโยชน์ต่อนักวิจัยที่เข้าใจภาษาอินโดนีเซียหรือภาษามาเลเซียได้ แต่ในขณะเดียวกันก็อาจเป็นอุปสรรคต่อการทำความเข้าใจความสัมพันธ์ของภาษากับความเป็นจริงและสัจจะในความหมายด้านปรัชญาภาษา บทความฉบับนี้จะแพร่อาโลกนะว่า ในสถานการณ์ดังกล่าว เครื่องมือการแปลทั่วไปและโดยเฉพาะเครื่องมือการเปรียบเทียบกับภาษาใกล้เคียงควรจะเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของระเบียบวิธีการทำวิจัยที่ถูกต้อง หรือว่าไม่ควรจะนำเครื่องมือดังกล่าวนี้มาใช้ในการทำวิจัยโดยเด็ดขาด

คำสำคัญ: การวิจัยภาษาศาสตร์พรรณนา, ภาษามลายู, ปรัชญาภาษา, ภาษาศาสตร์เชิงสังคม, การแปล, อูรักลาโว้ย

Introduction

Data for this paper were collected mainly during qualitative (socio-) linguistic field research conducted in the years 2010/12 by method of interview. I questioned 62 native Urak Lawoi' speakers on matters of language, culture, social relations, citizen status, folklore, oral tradition, social history, religion, beliefs, living conditions, cultural adjustment, fishing methods, preferred foods and social contentment. For different reasons (continuity, checkability, linguistic prowess, outspokenness) the interviewees were of as different age and social background as possibly achievable in a close-knit monocultural society as that of the Urak Lawoi'. Interviewees included 84 year-old, 34 year-old and 20 year-old fishermen, two traditional religious leaders in their sixties, a vice-village head in his early forties, a 70-year old man who spent a third of his life in a Burmese gaol for fishing in the wrong territorial waters, three new-born Christian ladies (28, 35 and 45 years old), some older schoolchildren, and descendants of legendary Urak Lawoi' leader To' Kiri (between 35 and 50). The 62 Urak Lawoi' interviewed by me live on the islands of Phuket, Lanta and Lipe. Interviews were mostly conducted in Thai, which most Urak Lawoi' under 60 years old speak fluently and most elders speak sufficiently well to be able to communicate without difficulties. On the island of Lipe some of the interviews were partly conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, as through labour and trade the Urak Lawoi' there have frequent contacts with the Malaysian territories of Langkawi and Perlis and have learned Bahasa Malaysia as a trade language which some prefer over Thai.[6] As my proficiency in Urak Lawoi' grew during the research, its vocabulary became part of the field languages used. During all interviews information was recorded with both pen-and-notebook and Sony MP3 IC Recorder.

Collected linguistic data were transcribed when necessary, analyzed and when possible compared with older sources (e.g. Amon 1986, Thailand Bible Society 1998) to prevent misinterpretations. In case of doubt about any subject, back-up information was provided at all times by the Urak Lawoi' community of Ko Sire, Phuket, the group who live closest to my home.[7] Historic information collected through my interviews with Urak Lawoi'

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[6]   Malaysian is also preferred over, or at least spoken in a greater proportion than Thai during the Urak Lawoi' religious services at the 'Hope of Lipe' Church during service.

[7]   Everything within my power has been done to prevent misinterpretation, but Thavisak is far from complete in her 1986 description of Urak Lawoi', while the translation of the New Testament in Urak Lawoi' (1998) is, according to Urak Lawoi' who have read (parts of) it (e.g. To' Moh Juy Pramongkit of Phuket, Mr. Suthin Thalayluk of Lanta), notoriously artificial. The members of the Urak Lawoi' community of Yuban (Laem Tukkae, Ko Sire, Phuket) proved invaluable in this respect.

elders (under whom traditional religious leaders To' Moh Marasi Thalayluek of Lanta and To' Moh Juy Pramongkit of Phuket, and first generation inhabitant of Lipe Labu Hanthalay), is supported by older research (CORIN and Prince of Songkhla University 1999; Wongbusarakum 2002 and 2007).

My inquiry into the nature and usage of the Urak Lawoi' language was instigated by my findings in the field while studying the language and trying to learn and describe it in a descriptive/comparative linguistic manner, using among other means the instrument of translation as a means to assess its phonology, morphology and syntax. Urak Lawoi' is a language with an indigenous (non-borrowed) vocabulary that is strictly used for things and concepts found in the traditional immediate surroundings of the Urak Lawoi' people; surroundings in which language is meant to be an unambiguous means of communication and description of the world and the things in it as cultural outlook has determined those to exist. For things and concepts outside that established reality, loan words are readily adopted and used. Every language has loan words, but Urak Lawoi' has many loan terms for things and concepts that other languages usually describe in indigenous terms.

Apart from adopting loan words from the languages of their surrounding cultures, original Malay words for concepts that didn't feature prominently in the Urak Lawoi' world had changed in meaning during the long years of their relative isolation. Both the loaning of terms after contact with alien civilizations, and the adaptation of meaning of indigenous Malay terms tell us about the way the Urak Lawoi' people's perception of their living environments. If we reason that language doesn't only explain reality, but also makes reality, and that this observation is a foremost cause of why speakers of one culture don't perceive reality in the same way as speakers of another, we may conclude that translation - which is considered one of the basic instruments in linguistic research - doesn't always serve us well when we use this instrument as a means to translate a culture, a perception of reality, or a world which stands far from our own into our own terms. While certainly not trying to discredit the instrument of translation in linguistic fieldwork as a whole, this paper aims to determine the limits of its use in linguistic field contact with cultures which indigenous world-view is different from our own.

Urak Lawoi' and the Urak Lawoi'

Urak Lawoi' is a Malay language[8] spoken by the people of the same name, of which the majority has settled on the islands of Phuket, Lanta, Bulon, Lipe, Adang, and others along the Andaman coast of Thailand. From the second half of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century the Urak Lawoi' foraged along the east coast of Sumatra, living on their boats and in semi permanent shelters. From this earliest known homeland they crossed the Strait of Malacca to British Malaya, to arrive a couple of decades later in Thailand's Adang Archipelago, from where they populated many of the other Thai islands in the Andaman Sea (De Groot 2012, Wongbusarakum 2002). Nowadays the Urak Lawoi' have renounced their semi-nomadic way of life, but all aspects of it are still reminisced in their language.

When the Urak Lawoi' were still seafarer-gatherers, their visible world consisted of their families, their boats, their semi-permanent dwellings, beaches, the sea and the sea's currents, crests and creatures. Their spiritual world was populated by spirits (UL: hatu), that manifested themselves in different forms and were fitted with different attributes. Unlike that of other Malay peoples, the concept of the Urak Lawoi's spiritual world hardly changed through Indianization and was until very recently never influenced by Islam or missionaries of other religions. Indeed, for a long time the Urak Lawoi' managed to steer clear of all outsiders. This cultural isolation and the alternative development of identity it provoked had an impact on the Urak Lawoi' language, for as a consequence of their separate advancement their use of the Malay language relates to a reality which is rather different from that experienced by other Malay peoples. Through their way of life the Malay of the Urak Lawoi' was conserved and adapted in a natural way to fit their own specific beliefs, society and perception of the world.

The heterogeneous Malay language

The Malay language is heterogeneous; it consists of many varieties and dialects. On an international scale we can discern four distinct Malay-based national languages: Indonesian, Malaysian, Singapore Malay and Brunei Malay, respectively called Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa

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[8] Malay languages are a group of Austronesian languages indigenously spoken in the Malay Peninsula, Eastern and Southern Sumatra, the Riau- and the Lingga archipelagos. The national languages of Malaysia and Indonesia are also considered Malay languages. Some Malay languages are mutually easily intelligible, while others are to a lesser extend.

Malaysia/Bahasa Melayu[9], Bahasa Melayu[10] and Bahasa Melayu Brunei. These four national languages are closely related, but still distinct from one-another in several aspects. On a national scale, various dialects of Malay are spoken in three of the four countries mentioned above. Examples are Kedah Malay, Terengganu Malay and Kelantan Malay in Malaysia (and through immigration in Singapore), and Riau Malay, Bengkulu Malay and Jambi Malay in Indonesia, but there are many more varieties. Malay languages have loaned from, among others, Sanskrit, Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, Tamil, Dutch and English. Often even the Malay of a single individual cannot be considered with one standard, as code switching is common under speakers of two versions of Malay, such as a local and a national variant. Outside Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, dialects of Malay are spoken by ethnic Malays in neighboring Thailand (Pattani Malay and Satun Malay) and Burma (Bokpyin Malay). Malay is a trade language on Tawi-Tawi in the Philippines. In Yemen and Sri Lanka live groups of Malay immigrants called Javar, still speaking a Malay dialect. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands, which belong to Australia, have been settled by Malay speaking people in 1826. Christmas Island, also a territory of Australia, has a population of Malay settlers, as well.

Apart from the basically coast and island dwelling Malays of the aforementioned territories, different groups of sea people of Malay ancestry can be found in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Burma. Commonly these sea people are simply called Orang Laut in Indonesia, where they mainly live in the Riau Archipelago, but they are known under other names as well. Sea people call themselves Moken, Moklen (Burma and Thailand), Urak Lawoi' (Thailand) and Bajau Laut (Singapore). While the languages of these sea people are closer (e.g. Urak Lawoi') or further (e.g. Moken) related to other Malay languages, their Malay roots are evident.

Despite their heterogeneity, the Malay languages are easily recognized as such, and in rather a lot of cases they are to a more or to a lesser extend mutually intelligible. Also culturally, the Malay people share many characteristics. All over Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Burma the Malay are Muslims, produce batik, watch wayang plays and hold kite flying contests. A much larger difference lies between mainstream Malay cultural beliefs and the cultural beliefs of the Malay sea people. Although the Malay are a coastal people who know how to exploit the ocean, they live in on-shore villages, keep

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[9]   The national language of Malaysia was officially called Bahasa Melayu from 1986 until 2007.

[10]   The Malay spoken as the National Language in Singapore, called 'Bahasa Melayu', hardly differs from Standard Malaysian
Malay (Bahasa Malaysia/Bahasa Melayu)

gardens and rice fields, and eat an approximately equal amount of land animals and fish. The sea people, on the other hand, originally lived exclusively on their boats, possessing no permanent land dwellings. Almost a full hundred percent of their food came from the sea. They could sail great distances and were excellent navigators, swimmers and divers, but they had hardly any knowledge at all of anything that was on land.

The visible world of the Urak Lawoi': Perception of experience and reality

As within a culture a language is the vehicle and the means of acquirement and perception of truth and falsehood, as well as a people's primary standard of measure of the world and the order of things, the Malay of the sea people is different from that of other Malay people. Unlike the Malays, sea people live at sea. They build no houses and raise no cattle. They don't know cows, sheep, pigs or horses. They eat no meat, no fruit, no vegetables found on land, no rice, and they drink no cow's or goat's milk. They know not of carts, roads, mountains and valleys, or of wild land animals. They have fewer contacts with neighbors, as distances at sea are obscure, and they are usually mistrusted by land-dwellers. Boats are, due to restrictions in acquired techniques, too small to hold whole families. Bonds with parents and grandparents are weaker than on land. Even though highly trained and adapted to an existence at sea, sea is not man's primary natural habitat, and life is more perilous than on shore. The *ladang* and the *sawah* play an insignificant role in the lives of the Urak Lawoi', but the ocean offers the same amount and quality of food as that which can be grown. Teak and redwood are not readily available as building materials, but the lighter wood of beach growing tree species offers adequate construction material for boats and temporary shelters. In the lives of land dwelling Malay people the sea is a place that can be used to find food, but it often is also the place where evil resides. For the Urak Lawoi' most evil comes from land[11]. Although it is acknowledged that the sea can be a perilous place, food and trading materials come from the deep. Where land dwelling Malays usually have problems swimming, the Urak Lawoi' are in constant contact with the sea and learn to swim and dive at an early age. The undersea world has no secrets for them and everything under water has a function and a name.

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[11] An example for this notion is the annual placak or (in Thai) loy ruea event described above. During this ceremony all evil and sin that has accumulated in people during the last year is symbolically collected in the form of wooden effigies, cut fingernails and hair, and put into a model boat made of leaves and light wood, which is then ceremonially lowered into the sea.

The Urak Lawoi' have a year that is divided in periods that are marked by rituals. Urak Lawoi' rituals are mostly based on expressing gratitude to spirits and appeasing them in order for nothing bad to happen. Offerings are made to the spirits of their boats, and the spirit of the sea. Other cultural and natural objects are also protected by spirits. When Urak Lawoi' people eat their meals, they offer as much as they can spare to the spirits who guard the hills, the forests and the sea. Most important of all spirits is the spirit of the sea, called Tuhat Lawoi'. Tuhat Lawoi' is the guardian of the Urak Lawoi's main food source, and a ritual in honour of this spirit is organized in every seventh lunar month of the year. The village priest, or To' Moh uses incense and food that is offered by the community to lure Tuhat Lawoi' towards the people, and then pushes the offerings in a decorated model boat toward him.

One of the most important ceremonies in Urak Lawoi' culture is an event called *'placak'* ('the floating'). During the placak festivals, held in May and November, a boat model is launched into the sea for multiple purposes. First of all with this offering tribute is given to the ancestors, who even after death hold an important influence over the Urak Lawoi'. In addition to this, the *placak* symbolizes an official request to be forgiven by the spirits of all animals that were killed for food during fishing and foraging. During the *placak* ceremony the animal spirits are guided back to their origin. Thirdly, all bad things that have happened during the past six months are symbolically put on board of the vessel: a new start is made. The placak boat is made of nipa palm leaves. When it leaves for the ocean a variety of foods, packages of cut hair and nail clippings, figurines and wooden dolls can be discerned. The presence of the To' Moh, the spiritual leader, in every stage of the placak ceremony is important. He supervises the organization of the ceremony and the construction of the boat. In addition to this, he acts as the medium via whom the Urak Lawoi' are able to speak with their ancestors' spirits, as he is the only Urak Lawoi' who can actually speak with the departed.

A smaller, more personal celebration is the 'Puja Tuhat Perahu' ceremony. The 'perahu' or boat is one of the most prized possessions of the Urak Lawoi'. Dates of worship may be determined by the boat owner, and many ceremonies like this may be held in one year. Offerings include multi-grain pastry that is made from 7-color glutinous rice, liquor, syrup, plain water, dried rice kernel and betel nut. Smelly foods and raw meats are excluded in this ritual, only sweet foods are allowed. During another ceremony, the 'patat jerai' ceremony, the Urak Lawoi' visit the graves of their family members to remember them and honor their spirits.

The Urak Lawoi' language is an instrument of communication that has developed along the same lines as Malay for ages, but has split off almost as soon as the Urak Lawoi'

took to the sea while the rest of the Malays decided to stay on land. The fracture occurred gradually, but as time passed took on ever greater proportions as the new reality called into being by their changing way of life called for alterations in semantics and creation of new vocabulary. Now, Urak Lawoi' does not only differ from other Malay languages in a socio-cultural sense, but also semantically, metaphysically and epistemologically, and it displays these differences in its vocabulary, syntax and other linguistic features. The Malay of the sea people has undergone changes that other Malay languages have not, and has, on the other hand, kept linguistic notions and perceptions of pre-modern reality that other Malay languages have lost.

The Urak Lawoi' language is a perfect tool to describe the visible world of the people who use it. Words for underwater species, sea currents, and types of waves, types of shelters, coastal shapes, clouds, rain, winds, directions, islands, reefs, sea - and coastal birds, sunsets, flotsam, and beaches are precise, and different kinds of them are tightly classified, while other words in Urak Lawoi' combine comparable lexical meanings that are usually differentiated by the Malays on land[12]. Words for equipment, housing, land-geographical features, land animals and any modern concept are often loaned, though not only from Standard Malay; English, Thai and at least in one case Dutch via Netherlands Indies Malay are other languages from which loans have been derived.

Urak Lawoi' daily chores differed from those of the Malay land dwellers. One often woke up in the damp, chill morning air on a boat or a beach where a fire was not always available. Firewood was scarce, and as being wet was almost a condition of life, making fire was not always an easy option. Only in situations where warmth was extremely necessary, like in child birth, a fire was prepared and lighted at the right moment. To bear a child, therefore, in polite Urak Lawoi' means *'dudu? de? api'*, literally 'sitting at a fire'. This is a far cry from the modern Standard Malay word 'melahirkan' ('to give birth to') of which the root *lahir* is derived from the Arabic loan 'zahir' 'to become clear'.

A word for a land feature such as a high mountain was not exactly necessary in Urak Lawoi'. Mountains were seen in some places, but never experienced, never climbed. They just lay there dooming up in the distance. Much bigger dooming things were rain- or thunder clouds. The word 'gunung' was therefore used for these features in Urak Lawoi'. Unchangeable land features of any sizeable height were all called 'buke?' (both 'hill' and 'mountain' in Urak Lawoi' but only 'hill' (bukit) in Standard Malay).

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[12] A clear example is the word 'tanah', meaning 'earth' or 'sand' in Urak Lawoi'. In Standard Malay the meanings of 'sand' and 'earth' are differentiated: 'tanah' means 'earth', and 'pasir' means 'sand'. The conclusion here is that in the reality of the Urak Lawoi' earth is always sand, and sand is always earth.

Dogs have been companions of the Urak Lawoi' for a considerable time. They were with the Urak Lawoi' on their boats when they came sailing from Sumatra and beyond. A dog is called 'asu' in Urak Lawoi'; an old Austronesian word also kept in Javanese (*'asu'*) and Tagalog (*'aso'*), but not in Standard Malay where it changed to the more modern *'anjing'*. Cats, on the other hand, are only very recent additions to the Urak Lawoi's world. They are called *'miǝw'*, analog to Thai *'mɛɛw'* (the official word for 'cat') or *'miaw'* (children's language or affectionate: 'cat'), both onomatopoeic constructions. From the late introduction of a word for 'cat' into the Urak Lawoi Language we can conclude one thing: Dogs are useful animals, also for sea people, but cats are very difficult to keep aboard small boats. They are extremely effective in keeping vermin at bay in fixed land-based house-holds, though.

The examples above illustrate the mirroring of daily life into language. Known things are named, but sometimes with words that are used for other things in culturally different, yet linguistically related societies. Words for things that have been known to exist for a long time are old and original, while words for newer discoveries or revelations are loaned. With the change of society after the Urak Lawoi' entered Thailand from Malaysia in the 1910's, and for a second time when they started to permanently live ashore in the 1950ies, their language was ready for a makeover.

Regular sound correspondences between Standard Malay and Urak Lawoi'

To understand how society affects the change of language, we should be familiar with the regular sound changes which have led Urak Lawoi' pronunciation away from the received Malay standard[13]. Sound alteration is a natural phenomenon that occurs when a dialect 'splits off' from a mother tongue and gradually becomes a language[14]. We should be able to recognize a Malay word and its ultimate Urak Lawoi' derivative when we hear it, in order to concentrate on changes in meaning rather than changes in sound:

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[13] The historic Malay - Bahasa Malaysia/Bahasa Indonesia continuum, now in both countries designated as 'Bahasa Baku' (Standard Language)

[14] The criteria for which lingual systems can be considered related dialects and which can be counted as related languages are very vague. There are different theories about how high the percentage of cognate words should be between 'dialects', 'related languages' and 'unrelated languages', but as with Malay the use of the word 'languages' has been implemented despite the very high occurrence of cognates between those languages, let us here not concentrate on facts superfluous to the present study.

In Urak Lawoi', diphthongization has occurred before alveolar fricatives or stops (*s and *t) in final syllables. Final *fricatives and *stops have been glottalized. Final *nasals have changed into their corresponding homorganic voiceless stop (except if the final syllable started with a *nasal). Homorganic *nasal/voiceless plosive combinations have been reduced to single plosives. On the other hand, where Standard Malay had a homorganic nasal-voiced plosive combination, Urak Lawoi' lost the plosive. Final *l has become n. Allophones of the Malay trill *r have been formed (r, ɾ and ɾ). [ʤ]   in clusters with homorganic nasals has become [j]. Homorganic clusters in Malay have been reduced to single consonants in Urak Lawoi'. Some minor other changes have taken place. Just to give the reader an idea of the extend of the regular sound changes between Standard Malay (SM) and Urak Lawoi' (UL), examples are shown below (to indicate that UL, and not SM is the deviating language, the Proto-Malay (PM) forms are given when known:

SM	takut[15]	UL	takoiʔ	PM	*takut	(afraid)
SM	laŋit	UL	laɲiʔ	PM	*laŋit	(sky)
SM	asap	UL	asaʔ	PM	*asəp	(smoke)
SM	duduk	UL	duduʔ	PM	*duduk	(to sit)
SM	tikus	UL	tikuih	PM	*tikus	(mouse)
SM	atas	UL	ataih	PM	*atas	(above)
SM	bukan	UL	bukat	PM	*bukən	(no, not)
SM	daun	UL	dawot	PM	*daun	(leaf)
SM	buruŋ	UL	buruk	PM	*buruŋ	(bird)
SM	bintaŋ	UL	bitak	PM	*bintaŋ	(star)
SM	asiŋ	UL	asik	PM	*asiŋ	(strange)
SM	malam	UL	malap	PM	*ma-lə(h)əm	(night)
SM	muntah	UL	mutah	PM	*mu(n)tah	(to vomit)
SM	bintaŋ	UL	bitak	PM	*bintaŋ	(star)
SM	mimpi	UL	mipi	PM	*mimpi	(to dream)
SM	ləmpar	UL	lipəː	PM	*ləmpər	(to throw)
SM	ləmbu	UL	ləmu	PM	*ləmbu	(cow)
SM	mandi	UL	mani	PM	*mandi	(to bathe)
SM	sənja	UL	səɲa	PM	*sənja	(twilight)

In at least one case, a Standard Malay voiced plosive has in Urak Lawoi' been altered to its corresponding homorganic nasal:

| SM | tidur | UL | tinuk | PM | *tidur | (to sleep) |

Final [-ar] in Standard Malay corresponds with [-ə:] in Urak Lawoi':

| SM | ular | UL | ulə: | PM | *ulər | (snake) |

Final [-is] in Standard Malay has become [-ih], and sometimes [eh] or [Kh] in Urak Lawoi':

| SM | bətis | UL | bətih | PM | *bətis | (thigh) |
| SM | habis | UL | habih | PM | *habis | (finished) |

Final [-l] in Standard Malay has become [-n] in Urak Lawoi':

| SM | mahal | UL | mahan | PM | mahal | (expensive) |
| SM | jual | UL | juan | PM | -- | (to sell) |

Finally, a sound change from close back rounded vowel [u] to open-mid back rounded vowel [ɔ] in closes syllables is evident:

| SM | gunuŋ | UL | gunɔŋ | PM | *gunuŋ | (mountain) |
| SM | bunuh | UL | bunɔh | PM | *bunuh | (to kill) |

Though this sound change does not occur in open syllables or before stops:

SM	batu	UL	batu	PM	*batu	(stone)
SM	pəɲu	UL	pəɲu	PM	*pəɲu	(tortoise)
SM	buruŋ	UL	buruk	PM	*buruŋ	(bird)
SM	tahun	UL	tahut	PM	*tahut	(year)

Traces of affixation in Urak Lawoi'

Modern Standard Malay exists by affixation. Numerous affixes create derivatives of nouns and verbs which may alter meanings of words altogether (as the famous Malay word pair tinggal ('to stay') - meninggal (altered with the verb forming prefix meN and meaning 'to pass away'), but mostly convey slight alterations in meaning such as adding transitivity or iterativity in verbs, or nominalization in nouns. In Urak Lawoi' affixation is unproductive, but petrified affixation can be found in certain words. Consider the following examples:

Prefix tər-:

| SM | tərbaŋ | (to fly) | UL | trɔbak |

Prefix bər-:

| SM | bəranak | (give birth) | UL | brana' |

Prefix pǝN:

SM   pǝlabuhan   (harbour)   UL   pǝlaboh

Prefix mǝN:

SM   mǝɲaɲi   (to sing)   UL   mǝɲaɲi

There are no remnants of suffixation in Urak Lawoi'. Words that in Standard Malay not only differ in meaning, but also in form, become homophones with different meanings in Urak Lawoi':

SM   kawan   (friend)   UL   kawat
SM   kawanan   (flock)   UL   kawat
SM   tunaŋ   (become engaged)   UL   tunaŋ
SM   tunaŋan   (fiancée)   UL   tunaŋ

From the examples above it can be concluded that Urak Lawoi' is, despite its differences with Standard Malay, still a Malay language, and that the Urak Lawoi' are a Malay people. Culturally, the Urak Lawoi' and the modern Malay are about as different as possibly can be.

Results of cultural diffusion: Influence of other languages in Urak Lawoi'

Loan words tell us about the original character of a language. For concepts natural to the language, no loan words will usually be introduced, except when it is necessary in a social context[16]. Loan words are indicators of social and technological development of the speakers of the language in a certain era. In Urak Lawoi' there are many loan words. Most loan words retain the same meaning as in their original languages. Here are some examples from this category:

Loan words from Thai (TH); loaned from around 1910 - present time:

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[16]   For example in England after the Norman invasion, when etiquette favored Normandic words for foodstuffs that had previously been assigned Britannic names (cow - beef; sheep - mutton; pig - pork).

TH	rooŋrian[17]	(school)	UL	roŋrian
TH	fajfåa	(electricity)	UL	fayfa

Loan words from Standard Malay (SM); loaned from around 1880 - 1920

SM	kopi	(coffee)	UL	kopi[18]
SM	lotɛŋ	(loft, attic)	UL	lotɛŋ

Loan words from English (EN) via Standard (Malaysian) Malay (SM); loaned from around 1880 - 1920:

EN	engine	SM	enjin	UL	ijen
EN	stocking	SM	stokiŋ	UL	sətukin

Direct loans from English (not loaned from English in Standard Malaysian Malay); loaned from around 1880 - 1920:

EN	motorboat	UL mutuboiʔ
EN	hammer	UL hama

Loan from Dutch via Netherlands Indies Malay (NIM); loaned before 1900:

DU, NIM	duit	(coin, penny)	UL, duwiʔ (money)

We can surmise that during the time of the Islamization of the Indonesian archipelago (13th through 16th century) the Urak Lawoi' had already become a people more or less out of contact with the other Malays. Islam didn't reach them. This is not only obvious nowadays, as we perceive a negligible influence from Islam in Urak Lawoi' society, but also when we compare Arab (AR) and Persian (PE) loan words in Standard Malay (SM) with their counterparts in Urak Lawoi':

SM kubur	(AR: grave)	UL jiraiʔ
SM kahwin	(PE: to marry)	UL bəkapok

On the other hand, a number of Sanskrit loan words exists in Urak Lawoi', indicating that during the period of Indianization the Urak Lawoi' still formed an integral part of the general Malay community:

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[17] Thai language examples are transcribed in the IPA

[18] Although 'kopi' is not an original Malay word: From Arabic qahwah, via Turkish kahve, via Italian caffe, English and Dutch formed coffee/koffie, which, when eventually loaned, by a regular f-p sound change in loan words became kopi in Malay. Urak Lawoi' then loaned the word from modern Standard Malay.

SK	rūpa	(picture)	UL rupa
SK	rāsā	(taste)	UL rasa
SK	dōsa	(sin)	UL dusa

Perceived and true history of the Urak Lawoi' people; impact of historic awareness

Apart from what can be reconstructed from loan words and other loan phenomena, the record of Urak Lawoi' history that is truly known is very short. It doesn't expand further than around a hundred years ago when, according to legend, a man called To' Kiri led the Urak Lawoi' from Aceh to their present domicile on the Thai islands in the Andaman Sea. Most of the legend is highly apocryphal, but the story is of enormous importance for the understanding of how the Urak Lawoi' see themselves, their history and the world they come from.

The Urak Lawoi' oral tradition tells us that some generations ago, around the beginning of the 20th century, the Urak Lawoi' migrated from Aceh in the then Netherlands Indies to the Thai islands in the Andaman sea via British Malaya. According to this legend their leader, a man named To' Kiri, was a Muslim from Aceh. He was an outsider who came to the Urak Lawoi's help. The legend has been recorded in books and on a brass plaque which can be found on the north side of Lipe Island, near a number of graves. One of the graves is that of the legendary figure To' Kiri himself (De Groot 2011). Through the fact that the legend has now been widely accepted as the 'official history' of the Urak Lawoi', the story has been validated by the Thai as well as by the Urak Lawoi' of Thailand, although there is no evidence at all that the Urak Lawoi' came from Aceh and that To' Kiri was an Acehnese man. Urak Lawoi' has no Acehnese loan words - a strange thing when one realizes that Urak Lawoi' has loaned from every other language it came into contact with, and the name 'To' Kiri' looks definitely more like a derivative from a Malay name than an Acehnese appellation[19]. Although To' Kiri died relatively recently (in 1949), in the last few decennia he has become even more legendary than he already was during his lifetime. To' Kiri has a religious shrine devoted to him in every Urak Lawoi' village. In this shrine his effigy is kept, either made out of clay or out of wood, which is offered flowers and water daily. To' Kiri is

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[19] The word 'to?' is a cognate of 'datuk', 'datok' - 'grandfather' or '(honorary) leader'; 'Kiri' could perhaps be derived from 'giring' - 'to lead people or animals'. In Acehnese the title 'datuk' would be 'teuku', a far less acceptable cognate, while the word 'kiri' has no meaningful cognate at all in Acehnese.

considered a political as well as a spiritual leader, and he has been attributed magical powers. To' Kiri could summon fish to swim into his nets by singing or calling out to them, and he had a superior sense of direction when he led the Urak Lawoi' people from Aceh via Malaysia to the Thai islands in the Andaman Sea. Also, To' Kiri could speak to the weather and calm storms.

The legend tells us a lot about the way the Urak Lawoi' wish to remember their heroic journey across the Straits of Malacca. The Urak Lawoi' are a coastal people. They do navigate, but not by stars. The Urak Lawoi' remember gulf streams, winds, and even the smell of seawater, by which means they determine their course. Moreover, from the middle of the Straits of Malaca, both sides of the channel are easily visible. And from the northernmost point of Sumatra it is possible to navigate to Ko Rawi by setting course for Pulau Perak, a high rock squat in the middle of the widest part of the straits and visible from the coastal waters of both the Thai and the Indonesian side. The journey of the Urak Lawoi' from Aceh to British Malaya and on to the Thai islands was a rigorous decision, but hardly a very daring feat. For the Urak Lawoi', seamen amongst whom have since traveled the distance to Indonesia, Burma and even India many times, a trip from Sumatra to Malaysia or Thailand doesn't amount to much. Yet To' Kiri is seen as a magical person whose effigy is worshipped in shrines.

As a matter of fact, after their arrival on the Thai islands in the Andaman Sea, the ship building skills of the Urak Lawoi' declined. Stories of inter-insular travel in home-built ships outside the Adang and Tarutao archipelagos, and away from the always visible Thai mainland and the Malaysian island of Langkawi from between 1910 and 1975 are scarce, and on rare pictures from that period we see Urak Lawoi' fishermen precariously balancing in small, sleek rowing craft. Are these the boats that were used to transport a whole people from Sumatra to Southern Thailand? If we want to have an answer to that question we'll need to look at the boat models that are used in the ceremonies of the *Placak or Loi Ruea* festivals, performed on the nights of full moon of the 5th and the 11th lunar month[20]. The boat models let down into the water with aboard of them the sins of the people are models of elaborately designed ships, large enough to support cabins. If indeed once these were the types of craft the Urak Lawoi' traveled in, the legend of To' Kiri becomes more   supportable. Another indication for the size of Urak Lawoi' ships may be concluded from the two words that exist in Urak Lawoi' for 'vessel', 'craft'. The word *'pərahu'* means 'sailing or rowing craft; boat', while the word *'kapan'* means '(non-Urak Lawoi') ship'. The legend of To' Kiri speaks specifically of *'pərahu'* that were used for the journey.

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[20] See note 8 and above

As we have seen, more reliable information on how long the Urak Lawoi' have been a sea people, and where they actually come from can be derived from information obtained by comparative linguistic research. But for the Urak Lawoi' themselves, their relationship with To' Kiri and their Acehnese origins are beyond discussion. The legend is an integral part of their religion, as To' Kiri is the central figure of their worship. The question whether there was an Urak Lawoi' community before To' Kiri is largely regarded as irrelevant. Also the magical side of To' Kiri's personality is not doubted. The Urak Lawoi' leader had power over the weather and the sea and all that was in it. The fact that To' Kiri died relatively recently, and that today people are still alive who have met him personally (including both his daughter and his granddaughter) does not alter the fact that he was magic in the eyes of the Urak Lawoi'.

The invisible world of the Urak Lawoi'; Perception of the unknowable

The sea is a place that has to be tasted and smelled in order to be navigated. The deep is not only inhabited by fish and crustaceans, but also by spirits that have to be prevented to come ashore by magical objects hung from posts at the beach; when at sea, these spirits have to be mellowed by small offerings of yellow rice. The *to' moh* is the only person who is legitimately able to speak with the creatures of the other world. Other people who do so are probably up to unspeakable evil, such as sending a snake to bite a competitor in love or in business. Singing to or calling out to fish in order to lure them into one's net is the best way to secure a good catch. Life is a cycle determined as much by bagat[21] trips as by seasons, months and weeks. Every inanimate object has a spirit that has to be appeased from time to time, Boats, weapons, fishing gear and also houses are inhabited by spirits. In order to clean oneself and one's community of evil and sin, twice a year a boat model must be left floating at sea: Aboard the model must be the symbols of sin accumulated during the last six months of everyone within the community. These are some of the basic beliefs of the Urak Lawoi'. These beliefs are not symbolic, like many beliefs in the West have become. For the Urak Lawoi' there is no difference between belief and justified true belief, or 'truth' in a western sense. Belief is reality for the Urak Lawoi'. When talking to Urak Lawoi' consultants, even when they are half Thai, or educated, or both, the natural flow with which the conversation touches the knowable as well as the unknowable, sometimes in one single sentence, makes this researcher realize the fact that Urak Lawoi' reality is a far cry of what people in westernized societies have come to accept as truth.

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[21] Bagat - UL: seasonal foraging trip

There are large areas in the world where the sea is more than a week's travel away. Large air ships have been designed to transport people over distances of tens of thousands of kilometers in less than a day. Phuket is a long way, but Bangkok is ten times as far. And I'm from a place that's ten times as far as Bangkok. The sea there is cold, and there are no banana trees.

My truth for the Urak Lawoi' is just as weird and farfetched as the truth of the Urak Lawoi' is for the casual observer. Our truths are not only mirrored in our languages, but also in our way of thinking. Even if we would speak one and the same language, our truths would still clash. In some cases it would cause me great trouble to convince an Urak Lawoi' that the world really works like it does according to my knowledge (seeing that it turns around the sun and all). In other cases he would be annoyed by my obvious ignorance of what he sees as common knowledge that even a child would acknowledge as fact.

Theoretical and field semantics

As proposed by Alfred Tarski in 1944, semantics come in the form of truth definitions (or T-theories). In any language a truth definition is a predicate such as 'is T', that is true of all true sentences (s) in that language. In order to develop truth definitions that are materially adequate and formally correct, 'T' should apply to all (and only the) true sentences of a language, and should be unshakably founded. (Tarski 1944). This materially adequate and formally correct 'Convention T' entails that a truth definition for any translation into a target language is materially adequate if it contains all instances of the following formula:

(T)   X is true if, and only if, p

A translation was, in Tarski's ideas, just a change in the name of the sentence (X) under scrutiny, which provided the same information on that very sentence. The sentence 'p' would remain unchanged.

In this formula. X would be replaced by a source-language sentence and p by a translation of that sentence in the target-language. The fact that Tarski uses the notion of meaning under the cloak of translation in his analysis is a lucky incident. The necessity that p translates into X is one of the factors that secure the material adequacy of Tarski's truth definition. If we analyze the truth definition, we see the following: Assume that X is true. Then, since p is a translation of X, p must have the same truth value as X, and must be true as well. Therefore, (T) is true, so [X = T] is true, and as p and X have the same truth value, [p = T] must also be true. Therefore, (T) applies to all and only the true sentences in source-language as well as target-language

Tarski himself already doubted that his formula would work in practice. According to him, natural languages didn't possess the required precise semantic or syntactic properties for his translation theorem. Tarski could disprove his own formula with a simple liar-sentence:

S is not a true sentence.

In this case:

S is a true sentence only if S is not a true sentence.

Tarski had touched upon a problem that had kept linguists and other field researchers flummoxed and agitated for a long time and a great deal. Though we can confuse ourselves and our systems by constructing liar sentences, we might get even more mixed up by trying to actually translate a sentence 's' into a sentence t, or: to translate from a source language into a target language. As to Tarski's doubt about natural languages possessing precise enough semantic and syntactic properties to be translated accurately into each other: Even when natural languages would have these properties and a watertight system within a language would exist, an even greater linguistic abyss is formed by the fact that those properties are far from the same in each language, and that they don't only differ in a syntactic and semantic sense, but also in a semiotic way.

Language as a tool to describe truth

Philosophically speaking, language is used to convey messages, which are normally logical, as language consists of logical building stones. What is expressed by language is not necessarily connected to the truth though; not even one's own perceived truth: Even single words or short phrases can exhibit the distinction between imaginative and expressive usage of language. Moreover, many of the most common words and phrases in any language have a literal, or descriptive meaning that refers to the way things are perceived, and an emotive meaning that expresses associations and feelings, either positive or negative, about those things. These are the natural functions of ordinary language: the description of reality and the conveyance of feeling. But along the way, we unintendedly mix up these two functions, and convey feelings along with information (and even force our feelings upon our conversation partners).

If we want to assess the validity of deductive argumentation and the reliability of inductive reasoning, it is helpful to eliminate emotive meaning where and whenever we can. It isn't easy to remain emotively neutral, and one could argue that an emotively neutral argument often lacks the charm and character of our natural conversation, but it is still

worth the effort, because it makes it easier to understand what is truly meant and said. This doesn't imply that emotive meaning can always be completely eliminated, even between speakers of the same language. There are discrepancies between one speaker's perception of reality and the related interpretation of lingual utterances and the other's. Between speakers of different languages - who have either found a third language in which they are both conversant, or of which one has gained sufficient fluency in the other's to be able to converse on a sufficient level, confusion caused by cultural misunderstanding of emotive meaning in language is far more difficult to eliminate.

What counts for reasons to misinterpret emotive meaning, counts doubly so for the interpretation of culturally charged meaning. Language is a culturally defined instrument of communication. Speakers of different languages in different cultures use different labels for concepts. These labels are in fact nothing more than cultural conventions. There seems to be no reason why a dog is called 'anjing' in Indonesian, 'măa' in Thai, and 'asu' in Urak Lawoi'. But if we look deeper, we will find out that the concepts between the labels cause different emotions in the speakers of theses languages. For Moslem Indonesians, an anjing is a filthy animal, for Buddhist Thai a 'măa' is a cute pet, for Animist Urak Lawoi' an asu is a valuable companion.

In every language, concepts are divided into groups of objects and terms that belong together. Confusions between concepts in the same group are common, but concepts in different groups are usually easily recognizable. An example is the subject of colours. There are several shades of blue-green that in one culture would be called 'blue', and in another would just as happily be classified under 'green'[22]. Other cultures have different names for 'light blue' and 'dark blue', whereas in other cultures these colours are merely considered variations of one. A whale is biologically not a fish, and for instance in English and French this is recognized in its name ('whale', 'baleine'), but speakers of Indonesian, Thai and Dutch call the animal a fish ('ikan paus', 'plaa waan', 'walvis' - 'ikan', 'plaa' and 'vis' meaning 'fish'). Even people of these nationalities who know that the beast is a mammal call it a fish, because their language classifies it under 'fishes'. No effort is taken, however, to change the word for whale. Obviously, the animal has too much in common with fishes to be granted full lexical mammal status. On the other hand, there is no one who would seriously confuse a dog with a cat, even though a lot of the physical features of these two kinds of animals are more alike than those of a whale and a fish: Cats as well as dogs have four legs, one head and one tail, but there is never any confusion as to which animal is which.

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[22] Tagalog speakers possibly did not distinguish between blue and green until the coming of the Spanish in the 16th century. The words for both colors in Tagalog are loans from Spanish (asul TG - azul SP and *berde TG - verde SP*).

A long standing connected debate is whether language reflects culture or nature. It is easy to claim that all our labeling is done according to culture, while all concepts pertain to nature. Each culture may label concepts as it pleases, but these concepts are completely formed and dependent on the laws and regulations of nature. In fact by believing so, we are lulled into a false sense of security. Of course, words like 'dog' or 'whale' are names given to the concepts of natural beings, but what to think of other, less easily to define concepts? If we look up the concept 'good' in an English - Indonesian dictionary, we find the following dozen meanings: 1. baik; 2. budiman; 3. susila; 4. enak, sedap; 5. utuh; 6. manis; 7. setia; 8. lumayan; 9. layak; 10. cakap, pintar; 11. senang; 12. rukun, berbahagia. If we now take the Indonesian-English dictionary and look up the concept 'baik' (the first translation in the English-Indonesian dictionary), we find: 1. good, fine, kind; 2. healthy; 3. yes, all right; 4. well, carefully; 5. respectable; 6. as good as.

These entries show that concepts as 'good' (but the same game could be played with all other concepts) are not natural concepts like a dog or a whale or a cat. There is no one-to-one translation possible. John Locke already made us realize this in volume three of his 'Essay concerning human understanding' (Locke 1690). Words simply don't have exactly the same meaning in one language as they have in the other. Meanings overlap and twist around in circles while the words in which they're caught are faithfully used in the culture of which the language is a part. In the end, through linguistic overlaps, omissions and discrepancies, this means that speakers of one culture don't perceive reality in the same way as speakers of another.

As concepts conveyed in words are used and reused by speakers of multiple generations in different cultures, the semantics of a language are formed. When cultures come into contact with alien societies, language is often enriched, not seldom with words that convey the same meaning for a concept as a word that already exists in the original language. In Indonesian we can find couples such as orang (MA), manusia (SA) and insan (AR); binatang (MA) and hewan (AR), and perahu (MA) and kapal (TA). The loan words often have a slightly more exalted meaning than the originals. An *orang* is a man, a *manusia* is a human being and an *insan* is a believer; a *binatang* is a wild animal, but a *hewan* is domesticated. A *perahu* is a small boat, but a *kapal* is a big ship. Emotive as well as culturally charged expression is helped by these distinctions brought about by loan words. As culture and language are enriched, reality changes with each addition, removal or change of a concept. Thus, language and culture coexist in a delicate equilibrium. Every time culture changes and language is adapted, reality is altered.

Malay reality and Urak Lawoi' reality

The Malay world is mainly represented in Malaysia and Indonesia. Most Malays nowadays carry a passport of either of these two modern nations. Malays hold all kinds of jobs and offices; they are not only fishermen and tourist guides, they are also farmers, policemen, governors, businessmen, professors, public servants and actors. The roots of Malay culture lay deep in the past and have been recorded since the Kedukan Bukit inscription (683 AD) (Coedès 1930). Malay culture is heavily influenced by Islam, although pre-Islamic elements coexist with Islamic beliefs and traditions. The Malay language is the Malay culture's instrument of communication. It is full of references to Malay history and to Malay culture, which is a literary culture traditionally organized in kingdoms and sultanates, that existed with agriculture as an economic basis. Today's Malaysian Malays are a leading political power in their country, while the Indonesian Malays are ethnic majorities in several provinces, notably Jambi, Riau, Kepulauan Riau, Bangka-Belitung and Bengkulu. Malays drive cars, watch television, travel by air, own computers, have insurance and play football.

The Urak Lawoi' live only on several islands in the Andaman Sea that belong to Thailand. Most Urak Lawoi' now have Thai citizenship. Many of them are bilingual Urak Lawoi' and Thai speakers. Most Urak Lawoi' are either fishermen or tour guides. The roots of Urak Lawoi' culture are traceable to up to a hundred years ago when looking at historical sources. Their ultimate origin can only tried to be established through comparative linguistic methods. Urak Lawoi' religion is mainly animistic, with very small groups of recently converted Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. The Urak Lawoi' are a marginalized people, who until recently were completely self-supporting, but are now under pressure by the infringement of the tourist industry and project development on the islands where they live. The Urak Lawoi' language has no literary tradition, and its oral tradition is dying out because of Thaiification of their way of life, language and education. Some Urak Lawoi' are small land owners and some own boats and/or houses. The Urak Lawoi' may play football every once in a while, but they own no cars or computers, don't travel by air and certainly have no insurance. The sea is still an all-important feature within the life of the Urak Lawoi', and their whole way of life is intertwined with its proximity.

Conclusion

We have seen that language doesn't only explain reality, it also makes reality. Through language, we acquire assumptions and presuppositions for the thought processes we meet and enter into throughout life. Growing up in a culture and using its language doesn't make

us realize that the thought processes of other peoples are not the same as our own, because we haven't learned other languages yet. At the time we enter puberty and receive our first taste of our second language when learning English or Chinese, we often consider the sounds and expressions of our second language as strange. Later this changes as we become accustomed to the hitherto unknown linguistic features of the new language. We realize that the country where English is spoken is slightly different than ours, and that speakers of English might be a bit weird, but generally amiable fellows. When thinking of a foreign people, we inadvertedly take the sound of its language in consideration when we want to pinpoint its strengths and weaknesses. The businesslike sound and structure of English, the orderly romanticism of German, the emotions felt in French and the strong poetry in Spanish. For languages outside our own hemisphere we need some more experience, but after learning one or two truly exotic languages, we get a feeling for them, too: The adaptive relaxedness of Indonesian, the acute alertness of Chinese, the humour and sensitivity of Thai… Of course, these are feelings normally not shown by linguists, but it is difficult to rid oneself of them, for at the core of these feelings is the hard notion that through their different semantic concepts and culturally determined use of their vocabulary, the world looks different in the eyes of speakers of other languages.

Translation is a tool that has been exhaustively used in linguistic research. The first explorers wrote down lists of translated words they procured from the first language consultants: other travelers, 'native' contacts and lovers. In the 20th century, when linguistic fieldwork started to become a discipline in its own right with people as Saussure, Boas, Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss as figureheads, an era started in which the academic discipline of linguistic field research eventually came of age. Although field researchers already realized that for the study of an exotic language it was evidently necessary to live with the people whose language one was describing, most researchers didn't leave home without their western notions of how a language was, or even should be structured. Somehow, was thought, all languages have a common denominator, a generative system - call it grammar -with which everything in the world can be explained in any language. Ultimately this might be the case, but in linguistic fieldwork it is not so much the question whether something can be expressed, but rather how it is expressed.

Fieldworkers still traditionally start with the translation of word lists when beginning a new linguistic research. When researching a dialect or a language closely related to a language that is already known to the linguist, the word list usually contains the cognates he hopes to encounter in a column next to the field language - if the related language not already happens to be the field language. Later, with the help of his grammar notes, the field linguist feels quite certain that he has pinpointed the notions relevant for the language

under study. A thing that is hardly ever realized is that, while the language description might be correct, the language is not yet fully understood by the field linguist.

Because the concepts known to the researcher and those understood by his consultants are culturally bound, perception of them may differ greatly and reality may be perceived in a completely dissimilar manner.

Linguistic features not present in related languages are just a minor point of interest in the comparison of two related languages that are spoken by peoples with a completely different outlook on reality, but can offer an interesting insight here: Urak Lawoi' uses fully developed question particles, whereas Standard Malay only knows the rudimentary and non-compulsory '-kah' suffix to indicate a question. Do the Urak Lawoi' need a question particle more than other Malays? Can in this way be proven that having question particles is better, or worse, than having no question particles? A linguist who would have used his translation skills to analyze the form of the question particle would eventually have realized what he was looking at, but probably not until after a few mistranslations. Looking at the feature from a more structural point of view, a field researcher might be more open to Urak Lawoi' reality, which needs loud speech with easily recognizable, sometimes harsh sounding clipped syllables for communication over open stretches of water (The Urak Lawoi' are known to have shouted from Lipe to Adang, over a distance of 3 miles of ocean). A question particle is an excellent feature in a language that needs plenty of emphasis when spoken in its natural environment.

Translation helps the linguistic field researcher when he is totally ignorant of whatever feature in the language he is beginning to describe. Long word lists will help him to make himself understood to his consultants in a very basic way. Grammar notes will help him pinpoint the more specific features of the language under study. But when a basic understanding of the language under research has been reached, word lists and grammar notes can best be discarded, and replaced by a notebook for idioms, sayings and proverbs - to begin with. Proverbs are hard, if not impossible to translate, but they provide a perfect insight in the cultural roots of a people. After proverbs, the road to understanding a language will driven by intuition. Even when researching languages that are very close to a researcher's mother tongue or second or third language, the language under research should tried to be picked up like a child picks up its mother language; naively and intuitively. Then there will be a shout of joy once one realizes that a 'gunung' is not a mountain, but a huge cloud in Urak Lawoi', that 'dudu$^?$ de$^?$ api' doesn't mean 'to sit by the fire', but 'to give birth', and that it is naturally so called because a fire is such a luxury thing at sea. It must be ignited on shore to give a woman who's with child warmth. Hundreds more of these expressions, combined with oral literature, help the researcher better understand the reality in which the Urak Lawoi' live in, when their words reveal their concepts.

In linguistic descriptive research it is considered as an ideal situation when both field worker and consultant are fluent or even conversant in a lingua franca, in which all questions can be asked and problems presented. In the case of the Urak Lawoi' and me there were even two common languages in which Urak Lawoi' consultant and researcher could communicate in different grades of transparency: Thai and Malay (Malaysian/ Indonesian). The possibility of the use of Thai was in this case convenient and practical for me, while knowledge of both Indonesian/ Malaysian instigated the writing of this paper. While jotting down words and sentences, and mentally translating and comparing Urak Lawoi' with the national language versions of Malay, the overall concept of the Urak Lawoi' language and its relation to reality became apparent. After a while, when it became clear that Urak Lawoi' reality was too far at distance with Thai reality or even with the reality of other Malay peoples, translation as an instrument for the research was basically dropped - although in cases it still proved necessary for some very obscure concepts. After the vehement adherence to translation had become more relaxed, the research project seemed to have gained an extra dimension. In easily retraceable Malay words, the Urak Lawoi' sketched a world with which other Malay speakers were unacquainted, and proved that their version of the Malay language was exclusively tuned to describe that world and to live in it.

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Language abbreviations

AR   Arabic
EN   English
NIM   Netherlands Indies Malay ; the lingua franca in the Netherlands Indies
MA   Malay
SP   Spanish
TA   Tamil
TG   Tagalog
TH   Thai
UL   Urak Lawoi'