

THE DUTCH LANGUAGE IN MALUKU UNDER THE VOC

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The history of Dutch as a foreign language in Indonesia begins at the moment the first Dutchmen entered the Indonesian Archipelago at the end of the 16th century. The main port of the VOC was originally on the island of Ambon, but even after the foundation of Batavia in 1619, Maluku remained one of the most important VOC centers in the East Indies.¹

In 1607, only two years after the Dutch conquest of Ambon and victory over the Portuguese, a school was opened by the VOC Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge (1606–08), who aimed to create a real Dutch colony in Maluku, with Dutch as the official language of communication. With Johannes Wogma as the first Dutch-Indian schoolmaster, this school was intended primarily for those Ambonese children who had been converted to Catholicism by the Portuguese. Since they had been taught in Portuguese, these children now had to be instructed in the main principles of the Protestant Church by means of the Dutch language. The fifteen schoolboys had to learn the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Articles of Faith in two different foreign languages, Dutch and Malay.² In the beginning, the results of this school were not very satisfying, and attendance was poor. Nevertheless, in order to promote Dutch as the official language in Maluku, the VOC merchant Steven Coteels proposed to buy a considerable number of ten-year-olds and give them an appropriate Dutch education within the walls of the VOC fortress of Ambon. In this way it would be possible to prevent the

¹This article is based on K. Groeneboer, *Weg tot het Westen; Het Nederlands voor Indie 1600–1950; Een taalpolitieke geschiedenis* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993), chapter II.2.1.

²Letter, J. Wogma to Heren XVII, 14-8-1608, in J. A. Grothe, *Archief voor de geschiedenis der oude Hollandsche zending*, vol. 5, *De Molukken, 1603–1624* (Utrecht: Van Bentum, 1890), p. 7.

use of their own indigenous Ambonese dialects and of the lingua franca Malay—as well as Portuguese (widely used in Southeast Asia as a lingua franca) as a means of communication among themselves.³

For the first schools in Maluku, the small schoolbook *AB boeck* was compiled in 1611, printed by the VOC in Amsterdam. This was a booklet of 14 pages, with the title *Sourat. ABC. Akan meng ayd'jer anack boudack/seperti deayd'jern'ja capada segala manusia Nassarany: daen berbagy sombahayang Christaan* [Book to teach the alphabet to the boys, as it is taught to all Christians, with some Christian prayers]. It was written by the VOC merchant Albert Corneliszn Ruyll especially for the Indian situation “in the Malay language ... in order to introduce the Dutch alphabet to the Indian youth.” A sequel of this schoolbook, also written by Ruyll, appeared in 1612 with the title *Spieghel vande Maleysche tale* [Mirror of the Malay language], published by the VOC and printed in “Amsterdam, by Dirrick Piettersz op 't Water in de witte persse.” Although the title is somewhat misleading, this book can be considered the oldest extant text for teaching Dutch as a foreign language. However, a real text for this purpose had not yet been developed, and this schoolbook was meant not just to teach the Dutch language but also to function as a key to Christianity, as the full title makes very clear: *Spieghel vande Maleysche tale, inde welcke sich die Indiaensche ieugt Christlijck ende vermaeckelijck kunnen oeffenen; Voleerlijcke t'samen-spraecken ende onderwijsinghen in de ware Godt-saligheyt tot voorstandt vande Christelijcke religie; Met een vocabularium van de Duytsche ende Maleysche tale dienstich voor alle lief-hebbers der selver* [Mirror of the Malay language, which the Indian youth can practice in a Christian and joyful manner; Sincere dialogues and teachings in the true salvation of God in order to strengthen the Christian religion; With a vocabulary of the Dutch and Malay language for anyone who likes to make use of it]. The first 60 pages are an adaptation of the “vraegh-boecxken van Sa: Aldegonde” [question booklet of St. Aldegonde]⁴ and consist of a collection of edifying and moralizing dialogues, little poems, and stories, with the Dutch text on the left and the Malay text on the right

³Letter, S. Coteels to Ileren XVII, 24-7-1614, in Grothe, *Archief* 5: 41.

⁴Ph. Marnix van St. Aldegonde, *Cort begrijp der voornaemste hoofdstucken der Christelijcker Religie ghestelt: Vraghe ende antwoordischer wijze tot nut ende voordeel der teere aencomende jonckheyt ende stichtinghe aller Christenen in 't gemeyn* (Amsterdam: Ottho Barentsz Smient, 1599).

side of the pages. The additional eighty pages of Dutch–Malay vocabulary is an adaptation of the Dutch–Malay dictionary *Spraeck ende woord-boeck* of Frederick de Houtman⁵ published in 1603, which had originally been used in Ambon as material for teaching Dutch as a foreign language. Later, other bilingual publications, like Ruyll’s Dutch–Malay edition of the Gospel of Matthew published in 1629,⁶ were also used as teaching materials.

When the first clergyman Caspar Wiltens (1615–19) arrived at Ambon in 1615, he also tried to stimulate the use of Dutch in the Ambonese schools but was disappointed with his lack of success, because—as he reported—the Ambonese were not clever enough and far too lazy.⁷ As Wiltens saw it, one of the reasons for the poor results of the Dutch school education was the Ambonese aversion to using Dutch as the medium of instruction because it was proving even more difficult to learn than Latin. Moreover, they noticed that Dutch soldiers or VOC employees always preferred to speak Malay on the few occasions in which they communicated with the Ambonese.⁸ For this reason, Wiltens soon decided to change the medium of instruction. Dutch was no longer used as the language of school and church, but was—for lack of a widely spoken Ambonese language—fully replaced by Malay.

In 1617 it was reported that the school had already been closed down for some time. For this reason the outgoing governor of Ambon, Adriaen

⁵F. de Houtman, *Spraeck ende woord-boeck: Inde Maleysche ende Madagaskarsche talen met vele Arabische ende Turcsche woorden: Inhoudende twaalf tsamensprekinghen inde Maleysche ende drie inde Madagaskarsche spraken met alderhande woorden ende namen ghestelt naer ordre vanden A.B.C. alles in Nederduytsch verduyts* (Amsterdam: Jan Evertsz. Cloppenburch, 1603).

⁶A. C. Ruyll, *Het Nieuwe Testament, dat is het nieuwe verbondt onzes Heren Jesus Christus, in Nederduitsch ende Maleisch naar der Grieksche waarheit overgeset: Jang Testamentum Baharu, artin’ja: jang d’jand’ji baharu dari Tuhanku Jesu Christi, bersalim kapada bassa Ilulanda daan bassa Malaju, seperti jang adillan bassa Gregu* (Enkhuizen: Jan Jacobsz. Palenstein, 1629).

⁷C. Wiltens quoted in F. Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indien: Vervattende een naauwkeurige en uitvoerige verhandelinghe van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten* (Amsterdam: Van Braam, Onder de Linden, 1724–26), 5 vols., vol. IV-2, p. 36.

⁸Letter, C. Wiltens to Church Council Amsterdam, 1616, in Grothe, *Archief* 5: 73.

Block Martensz (1614–17), proposed that his successor Steven van der Haghen (1617–18) “import” to Ambon the entire school of schoolmaster Jan van den Brouck in Jakarta, where Block Martensz had to his astonishment seen native boys speaking and writing Dutch in such a perfect manner, as if they were of Dutch origin. Furthermore Block Martensz proposed to “import” from Holland thirty to fifty Dutch boys per year in order to mix them with the Ambonese boys in the school. In this way it would be possible to introduce the Dutch language as a general means of communication in Ambon into a real Dutch colony and to convert the whole colony into a Christian society.⁹

Sebastiaan Danckaerts, who worked as second clergymen in Ambon in the years 1618–22, regretted the decision of his colleague Wiltens to use Malay as the language of instruction. He thus renewed the attempts to make Dutch the language of instruction in school and church, apparently with some success, according to his report on the lessons given by schoolmaster Thieleman Teunisz:

already after a period of three months of profound and diligent study the pupils showed a remarkable change and an amazing progress, especially in writing abilities, such as nobody could have hoped for, although they still made some mistakes and their pronunciation still remained to be improved.¹⁰

The governor of Ambon, Herman van Speult (1618–24) was very much content with the results of this Dutch language education, for in his opinion the Malay language spoken on Ambon was too poor to preach the Christian gospel. Only the Dutch language could serve this purpose and therefore Dutch had to be taught at school. Van Speult strove to spread the Dutch language among the Ambonese youth, and so to strengthen the bonds between the Ambonese and the Dutch. In this way, mutual understanding, trust, and loyalty could be created through the use of Dutch. Furthermore, the abolition of Malay could also help to de-

⁹Letter, A. Block Martensz to S. van der Haghen, 6-11-1617, in Grothe, *Archief* 5: 92.

¹⁰S. Danckaerts, *Historisch ende grondich verhael, van den standt des Christendoms int quartier van Amboina, mitsgaders van de hoope ende apparentie eenigher reformatie ende beternisse van dien (Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 6 [1859]:105–136 [first printed in 1621]), p. 131.

crease the influence of the “Mohammedans” in the region, since Islam was preached in Malay throughout the archipelago.¹¹

It remains uncertain whether or not Van Speult’s goal was shared, for Danckaerts’s vision of Dutch language education was somewhat different. His goal was to teach Dutch in order to enable the youth to read all kinds of Dutch religious writings, in the absence of Christian writings in Malay. Once the pupils were provided with a thorough knowledge of the Protestant religion through Dutch, they would be able to teach the principles of this religion to the whole of the indigenous population, using either their own mother tongue or the widely known Malay language. To this end, Danckaerts encouraged the pupils to practice both Dutch and Malay as much as possible, because the real Christianization of Maluku would have to be done through Dutch.¹² One may conclude that, from the very start, the main language of instruction in practice must have been Malay, and that the teaching of Dutch as a foreign language only took place because Dutch was the official language of the Bible. For the indigenous people, knowledge of Dutch mainly had to serve their education in the true Christian faith, and by doing so to “bind” them forever to the Dutch. The Dutch language was thus only an instrument. The real binder was to be religion, not language.

Yet, the results of instruction in Dutch remained problematic. Indeed, it was reported in 1627 that the school at the fortress in Ambon was attended by 60 pupils, all of whom showed a reasonable knowledge of Dutch, although their pronunciation remained rather poor. At the same time it was reported that in most of the other schools in Maluku—16 on Ambon and 18 on the surrounding islands, with a total of 1300 pupils—the language of instruction was not Dutch at all, and most lessons were given in Malay. After an inspection of the Maluku schools in the year 1631, Danckaerts reported that the pupils were able to read and say their prayers in Dutch at only a few schools.

Only at the fortress the boys were taught some Dutch, but in most other schools the language of instruction was mainly Malay, although some of the pupils showed also some skill in reading Dutch.

¹¹J. Mooy, *Geschiedenis der Protestantsche kerk in Nederlandsch-Indie* (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1923), pp. 300–301.

¹²Danckaerts, pp. 132–133.

However, the need for more Dutch in the schools was widely expressed by the schoolmasters, as were their strong wishes to “Dutchify” the indigenous youth.¹³ Of the total of 590 schoolchildren on Ambon in 1631, only 110 at the two schools located near the fortress were being taught some Dutch—that is to say, the children memorized the Christian Prayers and the Articles of Faith first in Malay, then in Dutch. The other children were educated only in Malay.¹⁴ Clergyman Helmichius Helmichez (1630–34) reported in 1633 that the number of schools was increasing and that more than 1200 schoolchildren were being taught in Malay. By this time, learning Dutch was no longer considered useful; at the same time, the use of Malay as the language of instruction was also being questioned. Because Malay was not an indigenous language in Maluku, clergyman Helmichius and his Ambonese colleague Justus Heurnius (1633–38) both pleaded for the use of an indigenous language as medium of instruction. Since knowledge of Malay as a lingua franca was rather widespread in Maluku, it was finally decided in 1634 to use both Malay and one of the indigenous Maluku languages as media of instruction.¹⁵

After this first period, Dutch language education no longer existed in Ambon and the other islands in Maluku. In 1635, the number of members of the “Dutch parish” at Ambon totaled only 34 and the number was no longer very likely to increase. In 1660, the use of Malay was reported to have increased in schools and that the children no longer had any knowledge of Dutch. Thereafter, the only mention of Dutch language teaching dates from 1662, when a certain master Arnold Bertrand opened a “Dutch school” on Ambon.¹⁶ In 1665, however, the VOC administration in Batavia formally decided no longer to encourage the use of Dutch in Maluku.¹⁷ Not only was Dutch considered to be far too difficult a language to become a widespread means of communication, but it would also be far too expensive to provide Dutch schooling on any large scale.

¹³Valentijn, vol. III-1, p. 46.

¹⁴J. A. Grothe, *Archief voor de geschiedenis der oude Hollandsche zending*, vol. 6, *De Molukken*, 1625–1638. (Utrecht: Van Bentum, 1891), pp. 144–145.

¹⁵Grothe, *Archief* 6: 240, 253, 265, 291–293, 316.

¹⁶Valentijn, vol. III-1, pp. 60, 62.

¹⁷*Realia: Register op de generale resolutien van het Kasteel Batavia 1632–1805*, pt. 1 (Leiden: Kolff, 1882), p. 25.

On the Banda Islands in southern Maluku, the first school was opened in 1622 on the small island of Ai. It included a boarding house for pupils who came from the other Banda Islands. In 1623 a school opened on the island of Lontor (Big Banda) and in 1624 another on the small island of Roen. By August 1624 there were three schools in existence, with a total enrollment of almost 300 children—40 percent of whom were so-called “Company children” (whose fathers were European) and 60 percent children of “Mardijkers” (Christianized slaves who had gained their “merdeka” [freedom]). The school at Ai had 100 internal and 40 external pupils, the Lontor school 100 and the Roen school 45 children. The official language of instruction at school was Dutch, and it was hoped that by spreading the knowledge of Dutch in Banda, “the Malay language, as considered being too poor to preach the gospel, in course of time would be abolished completely.”¹⁸

Not totally in agreement with these hopes were the school regulations accepted one year later (in 1625), in which it was prescribed that the Malay children should get their school education in Dutch but that they also should learn the main articles of the Christian faith in Malay. This gives the impression that Dutch was not the only language of instruction, and that Malay was functioning at least as a second language of instruction. This impression is supported by the fact that the Church Council of Banda in 1625 complained about the total lack of schoolbooks: only one sample of Danckaerts’s Malay translation of the *vraechboecksken van Aldegonde* [question-booklet of St. Aldegonde] and his Malay dictionary¹⁹ had been received, although many copies were needed for the schools.²⁰ Because of this, the VOC administration in Holland decided at the end of 1626 to send a considerable amount of instructional material to the schools in Banda and elsewhere in the Dutch Indies, including pencils, paper, ink, psalm books with music notes, and Dutch *AB-boekxkens*.²¹ But by 1635 the number of schoolchildren in Banda appears

¹⁸Report, Church Council of Banda 20-8-1624, in Grothe, *Archief* 5: 212.

¹⁹C. Wiltens and S. Danckaerts, *Vocabularium, ofte Woort-boeck, naer ordre vanden Alphabet in ’t Duytsch–Maleysch, ende Maleysch–Duytsch* (’s-Gravenhage: Hillegrand Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1623), 135 pp.

²⁰Grothe, *Archief* 6: 23, 32.

²¹Heren XVII, 28-10-1626, quoted in A. Algra, *Bataviase scholen en schoolmeesters in de 17e eeuw (De Christelijke Onderwijzer* 21 [1938]: 283–287, 297–300), p. 283.

to have dropped drastically, and a total of only 157 children was reported, 103 boys and 54 girls.²²

In the course of time—as had been the case in Ambon and the surrounding Maluku islands—Malay began replacing Dutch as the language of instruction in the Banda schools as well, even more so since Malay schoolbooks had become increasingly available. At the same time, the Europeans' initial aversion to Malay evaporated as their knowledge of the language increased. Only in Banda did the Dutch language still play a certain role, because of the relatively large number of Europeans present there, the so-called *perkeniers* [spice-plantation holders]. Clergyman F. Valentijn, who served in Ambon in the years 1685–95 and again in 1707–13, reported that “the best influence of the European presence in Banda was that almost all of them, even the black or mestizo [Eurasians], could speak Dutch well enough to sing the Psalms in the language on Sunday.”²³

The choice of Malay as the language of instruction in the Maluku schools had simply been a practical one and did not have much to do with the principle of preaching the gospel in the mother tongue of the people. Of this principle, Valentijn wrote “And as far as the language to use is concerned, it is learned from the Bible itself, in Paul's 1 Corinthians 14: 2, 4, 9, 14, and especially verse 19, that one should not preach in a foreign language, but in a language understandable to the parish.”²⁴ Among the different indigenous languages and dialects that were present in Maluku—and the situation became even more complicated with the large ethnic movements in the beginning of the 17th century—Malay was chosen as the language of instruction in school and church largely for practical reasons, since it had already come to function as a *lingua franca* in Maluku before the Dutch presence there. As the language of Christianity, of the schools, and partly also of the VOC administration in Maluku, Malay spread widely—mainly at first among the indigenous Christians—finally leading to the extinction of several original indigenous Ambonese languages. Because of this, the Malay dialect spoken in

²²Grothe, *Archief* 6: 309.

²³F. Valentijn, quoted in J. C. Neurdenburg, *Van welke taal moeten de zendelingen in de Molukken en inde Menahasa zich bij de verkondiging des Evangelies bedienen? (Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendingenootschap* 2 [1858]: 172–194, 279–308), pp. 288–289.

²⁴Valentijn, vol. III-1, p. 37.

Ambon can at least partly be regarded as one result of the language policy of the VOC: “Schools, sermons, and company directives reinforced the development of Malay, one might say the expansion of Malay, a lingua franca, into the mother tongue of the Christian Ambonese.”²⁵

In retrospect, the VOC’s language policy, aimed at strengthening the position of Dutch in Maluku, proved a complete failure. At first, Dutch had been promoted mainly to eliminate the use of Portuguese—the language of the enemy and of Catholicism—since Dutch was seen as the path to true faith. Moreover Dutch was seen as the route to political self-preservation: through the Dutch language, mutual understanding and trust could be created. This at least applied to the Christian portion of society; knowledge of Dutch among the indigenous “heathens” or “Mohammedans” was seen as a danger to the colony. As a result of the language policy of the VOC, the lingua franca Malay gave rise to a widely spoken Ambonese Malay, while Dutch was already no longer used in church or school by the middle of the 17th century. However, Dutch was still used as the official government language, mainly as a written medium by VOC officials in VOC offices, and partly as an oral medium by those VOC employees, soldiers, and sailors who had mastered the language, fewer than half of them being of Dutch origin. Dutch became to a large extent a language only used by men of European descent and by a handful of indigenous Christians closely linked with VOC activity.

After the initial attempts to promote Dutch as a lingua franca in lieu of Malay, Dutch almost died out in Maluku. Two centuries would pass before renewed attempts were made during the second half of the 19th century to promote its use again in Maluku, with somewhat more success than in the days of the VOC. However, the VOC language policy had already gone bankrupt: inadvertently and unintentionally, Malay emerged victorious. This was of course not entirely surprising, in light of the relatively small and heterogeneous group of Europeans among the indigenous populace and of the primarily commercial nature of the VOC.

²⁵J. T. Collins, *Ambonese Malay and creolization theory* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Palajaran Malaysia, 1980), p. 13.

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