

Cross-cultural encounters of Italian travellers in the Malay world

A perspective on the languages spoken by the local populations

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the encounters that Italian travellers, explorers, and traders had with the peoples of the Malay world at the turn of the century. In particular, it focuses on the linguistic descriptions and observations made by Italian explorers of the languages spoken in the places they visited and included in their travel writings. In addition to the pioneering work of Pigafetta, the Italian scribe who followed Magellan on his voyage around the world and produced the first "Italian-Malay vocabulary" in 1521, other linguistic descriptions and observations were made by Giovanni Gaggino, a merchant who compiled an Italian-Malay dictionary in Singapore, Odoardo Beccari, a naturalist who offered reflections on the Malay spoken in Borneo, and Celso Cesare Moreno, a ship captain and adventurer. Elio Modigliani, in his travels to Nias, Enggano, Mentawai, and the Batak country, provided detailed information on the local languages spoken in these islands in North and West Sumatra, while Giovanni Battista Cerruti, an explorer and ship captain who visited Singapore, Batavia, and the Malay Peninsula, commented on the languages, as did Emilio Cerruti, who travelled to the Moluccas and Papua. This paper focuses on how these languages were described and perceived by these nineteenth-century Italian travellers. It concludes that these explorers were all united by a common necessity, namely the importance of speaking local languages in order to be able to interact with the people they met on their travels. Malay, in particular, was always viewed positively as an international language, a powerful tool for communicating, learning, and interacting with others, and a beautiful language. Conversely, the other minority languages were seen as poor and simple, but still a powerful tool to overcome barriers and lay the foundations for intercultural communication.

KEYWORDS

Italian travellers, travel writing, Malay, Indonesian languages, Malay world.

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ANTONIA SORIENTE | DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v25i2.1679.

INTRODUCTION

The interactions and cross-cultural encounters of Italian travellers in the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay world during the nineteenth century were very limited compared with other European colonial countries. Nevertheless, a number of Italian explorers, geographers, ships' captains, admirals, and merchants did visit the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula at the turn of the twentieth century, and provided detailed descriptions of the places and peoples, and commented on the relationship between the self and the other. In this period, after the major European powers had already established control over several parts of the Indo-Malay Archipelago, Italy belatedly tried to become a part of this geopolitical framework (A. Di Meo 2022: 161), attempting to obtain territorial concessions in places such as Sumatra and Papua by dealing directly with the various sultans and local kings. These attempts had as their objective the establishment of a penal colony for inmates accused of brigandage who could be employed to develop Italian colonial settlements and to expand the country's commercial networks in the Pacific. These Italians were initially viewed positively by local populations because they were seen as helping to counterbalance the dominance of the Dutch and English colonizers in Southeast Asia. While these attempts had little success, they nonetheless provided an opportunity for Italian explorers to widen their views.

As was usual for their times, these travellers produced detailed descriptions of the visited places, mentioning cultural, geographic, demographic, and religious issues pertaining to the peoples encountered. The natural world, the exotic wildlife, and the climate were also objects of these descriptions. The representations and observations of the places, peoples, lands, and environments, despite being motivated by commercial and power-related reasons, were always done in a comparative manner as a way to reflect on the self and the other. These Italian travellers, explorers, and traders engaged in a genre, most of the time non-fictional, where they recorded their experiences and provided detailed accounts of their journeys in Italian. This literature comprised reports, letters, and books, and had the objective of becoming guides and sources of information to be shared with other travellers and to let the "world" know of foreign lands and cultures. This body of literature in Italian, largely unknown, has become the subject of recent studies (see Di Meo 2021, 2022; C.J. Vecoli and F. Durante 2014) and has attracted the interest of editors who have recently published new editions of classics, such as O. Beccari's (2020) *Nelle foreste del Borneo*, or lesser-known accounts, such as E. Modigliani's (1993) *L'isola delle donne*. The range of publications is wide and covers reports made by numerous travellers and explorers that will not be covered in this contribution. Reflecting on the publications mentioned here allows us to interpret this period of Italian history beyond its national borders but within the broader perspective of global history, a more inclusive approach that sees interconnectivities as crucial. As well explained by S. Conrad (2016: 5), global history's "concerns are with mobility and exchange, with processes

that transcend borders and boundaries. It takes the interconnected world as its point of departure, and the circulation and exchange of things, people, ideas, and institutions are among its key subjects [...] where phenomena, events, and processes are placed in global contexts.”

Here, only the publications or travel writings regarding Italian expeditions that contain information, descriptions, or comments of the languages spoken by the “foreign” population will be considered. The focus will, therefore, be the reflections made by Italian travellers on the languages spoken by the peoples encountered during these travels and how the interactions could take place thanks to the knowledge of the foreign languages. In particular by analyzing the written sources of these travel accounts produced by Italian travellers at the turn of the nineteenth century, this article explores how these languages were described and how they were perceived by these Italian travellers; in other words, it tries to understand how languages were considered as a crucial tool in the relationship between the self and the other, but also how they were considered an important tool to describe foreign lands and peoples.

The methodology used to address the issue is the close reading of the historical accounts written in Italian and seen in the light of transnational history. This reading can provide an interpretation of how, in these accounts, the languages were viewed as a useful tool to enable cultural communication at a time when the intensity of connections and the frequency of border-crossing exchanges were so significant. In particular, the works of Gaggino, Beccari, Moreno, and Emilio Cerruti are scrutinized to observe the reflections that the authors make on the use of Malay as a language of intercultural communication in Singapore, Aceh, Borneo, Moluccas, Papua, et cetera, whereas Modigliani and Giovanni Battista Cerruti describe in different ways the local languages spoken by the Nias, the Mentawai, the Enggano, and the Sakai. It is interesting to note that the travellers considered Malay, the “Italian of the East”, as the lingua franca spoken across the archipelago and as a powerful means of communication, able to allow global cultural and commercial exchanges and strengthen diplomatic relations with local rulers, whereas the local languages were mostly viewed as strange, harsh, and difficult.

ITALIAN EXPEDITIONS IN THE MALAY WORLD

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, people from different origins on the European continent were connected thanks to this waterway to Southeast Asia, allowing the expansion of colonial empires. While Italians were a small fraction of these interconnections, they nonetheless contributed to the idea of globalization that is nowadays booming “as the key to understanding the present, the need to go back in time and explore the historical origins of this process” (Conrad 2016: 1). These connections and the increased mobility that resulted produced entanglements and networks that created systems of interaction and exchange that were recorded, among others, in travel reports written by Italian explorers in Southeast Asia and the Malay world.

A. Brunialti (1897: 212-213), already at the turn of the nineteenth century, was aware of these entanglements and was the first Italian scholar to reconstruct the explorations of Southeast Asia made by Italian travellers seen in a perspective of political and colonial history. He provides details of the presence of Beccari, Cerruti, and Moreno in his reports of the Italian colonies and stresses the importance of learning from the peoples of Asia. He mentions the important role played by Felice Giordano (1825-1892), who was sent to Borneo by Admiral Carlo Alberto Racchia (1833-1896), and who made agreements with the Sultan of Brunei, and subsequently also went to Papua (commonly referred to as New Guinea at that time). Lovera di Maria (1836-1903) was sent to undertake a tour of the world on the ship, *Vettor Pisani*, with the objective of following up on the explorations of Odoardo Beccari in Borneo, while L.M. D'Albertis (1841-1901) was sent to New Guinea, visiting both the inland and the coast, and collecting a large naturalistic collection for the British Museum. D'Albertis also had the task of buying the islands of Banguay (Banggi) in Borneo, while Lovera de Maria not only visited New Guinea but also went to the Kei and Aru islands. Brunialti comments on the lands, on peoples, and on external powers. He says (Brunialti 1897: 318) that, in comparison to New Guinea, Borneo was considered far more difficult to access, with a very hard terrain, hot weather, and inhabitants who were difficult to deal with. Added to these challenges was the strong presence of the major colonial powers on the islands, providing few possibilities for Italy to make major inroads. If in reports produced by Brunialti and by the explorers such as Racchia, Lovera de Maria, and D'Albertis very little is said regarding the languages spoken by the local peoples met during their encounters, more detailed information is found in Gaggino, Moreno, Beccari, Modigliani, Emilio Cerruti (who visited the Moluccas), and Giovanni Battista Cerruti. Their remarks will become the focus of this paper. At different levels, these travellers, none of them with a specific linguistic background, were aware that cooperation across borders, interconnections, and interactions was possible through the use and knowledge of local languages.

MALAY, THE "ITALIAN OF THE EAST" AND THE DICTIONARY OF GIOVANNI GAGGINO
 Among the histories of these encounters is Giovanni Gaggino (1846-1918). He was a trader and a merchant who, in 1884, wrote an Italian-Malay dictionary, followed by a practical manual of conversation, claimed by the author to be a valuable tool for any traveller visiting and trading in the Malay islands needing to interact with the locals. The dictionary was dedicated to His Highness Maharaja Abubakar (1833-1895), the King of Johor,¹ who

¹ Sultan Abubakar of Johor was known for his diplomatic skills and for being the first Malay ruler to travel to Europe. His first travel to England was in 1866 but in his following trips he became a lifetime friend of Queen Victoria; he became an anglophile and was passionate and enthusiastic about European habits, ideas, and tastes. His travels that brought him also to Italy where he visited the King and the Pope, became the topic of many Malay fictional and non-fictional accounts that made His Highness very popular (A.R.T. Abdullah 2011).

was awarded a number of titles by Italian and other foreign authorities. In his foreword addressed to His Highness, Gaggino (1884) expresses his idea of communication and his awareness that this tool can bring people closer together, and establish a communion of interests and friendship in a reign such as that of the King of Johor, who was enthusiastic about the development of civilizations. This dictionary, declares Gaggino, was not a scientific product but played the role of bringing peoples of different cultures into communication, allowing the explorer to understand the other. F. Surdich (1990) in his detailed biography of the Italian trader, based on his publications such as Gaggino (1884, 1900, and 1907), as well as on unpublished diaries, emphasizes the fact that Gaggino is a great defender of those who travel, who know the world and hope to enrich themselves, and mocks those who spend their time sitting around enjoying their wealth without being open to new experiences (Surdich 1990: 149). Gaggino and his family were convinced that speaking foreign languages was crucial in establishing meaningful contacts and expanding their trading connections. Gaggino himself was able to speak several languages from a very early age. Surdich stresses the fact that Gaggino made observations on the languages wherever he travelled. In an unpublished notebook Gaggino for instance, notices that in Lombok the local population speaks a “corrupted” version of Malay (Surdich 1990:170).

Gaggino was born into a family of traders and he was related to another merchant who spent part of his life in the Malay Peninsula, Giovan Battista Cerruti (1850-1914). He was sent to England as a young boy to learn English and later to the Far East to learn Chinese and Malay. At the age of 20 he boarded one of his family’s merchant ships on its way to Singapore, already considered a strategic place located between the Pacific and Indian Ocean, and between the Middle East and the Far East, and a place of intense trade (Surdich 1990: 150). Gaggino was one of 42 Italians who decided to move to Singapore, given its importance as a crossroad of cultures and the trade of important goods, and a central hub of what he called “the Malay islands”. In Singapore he worked as an English and Malay interpreter for the Italian merchants who traded with the Malays, but he also established his own trading company and obtained the concession of Tioman Island (Surdich 1990).

Despite the fact that Gaggino’s dictionary (1884) was considered of limited scientific value by scholars such as A. Teeuw (1961: 20) and A. Bausani (1970: 23-24), it nonetheless served a valuable role in helping to mediate between cultures and it is valuable for the interesting hints that Gaggino, as a man of his times, makes of the colloquial Malay language that he was most well acquainted with. Gaggino’s value was also noticed by Angelo De Gubernatis, the great man of letters, Indian philologist, and great supporter of those Italian travellers such as Marco Polo, who decided to open themselves to understanding the wider world. De Gubernatis, in the preface to Gaggino’s report of the Yang Tse Valley (Gaggino 1901), emphasizes Gaggino’s capabilities as an interpreter and cultural mediator beyond being a successful entrepreneur, and praises his capabilities as a ship’s captain, and as a man of

open views when engaging in new discoveries of lands and peoples after his successful travels in the Malay Archipelago. Furthermore, Gaggino always stresses the fact that the experience of living about a quarter of a century in the Malay world greatly enriched him and taught him to appreciate diversity and to consider other peoples as brothers. Gaggino (1884) is very empathetic towards the people that he deals with and often demonstrates his appreciation of Malay customs and of the language, following the same trend set several centuries prior by the Italian scribe Antonio Pigafetta, who wrote the first Italian-Malay dictionary in his report of Magellan's circumnavigation of the world. The Italian scholar Bausani (1972) also writes that Pigafetta, during this trip around the world in 1519-1522, considered Malay as "an international language" given the fact that his main informant, the Sumatran slave Henrique who was travelling on the same ship, could communicate with peoples in the Moluccas and the Philippines, very far away from his place of origin. Pigafetta, as with Gaggino later, shows that his interest was not only to conquer other lands and find places in which to trade, but that he was also interested in the local communities and their languages. Pigafetta's descriptions of Moluccan society are of considerable ethnological interest (Bausani 1972: 14) and include an annotation of the 400 entries of this dictionary. His valued consideration of the language is also demonstrated by the fact that he required a detailed translation of his interaction with the people with whom he dealt, such as the King of Tidore, who was known for his metaphoric language in describing his sadness on parting with Pigafetta and his friends when they finally left Tidore (Bausani 1972: 49-50).

Returning to Gaggino's dictionary published in 1884, the writing system used to transcribe the Malay words and expressions follows Italian orthographic rules. As is well known, the phonetic system of Italian and Malay is quite similar, and therefore Gaggino (1884: 3) in his brief description of the language says that Malay might be described as the "Italian of the East", given that it is so "natural and simple" and has few grammatical variations.

Gaggino (1884) transcribes the Malay words using the Italian orthographic system to allow fellow Italians to easily interact with the local population. To do so, he does not include the voiceless velar stop /k/ and the semivowels /y/ and /w/. The voiceless velar stop /k/ is always represented by *c* because Italians have the convention to use the voiceless palatal stop /tʃ/ and the voiced palatal stop /dʒ/ only when the consonants *c* and *g* are followed by the vowels *e* and *i*. When the consonant *c* is followed by *a*, *o*, and *u* it corresponds to the voiceless velar stop /k/. Conversely, to obtain the voiceless velar stop with *e* and *i* Italian uses the convention to use the digraph *ch*. Gaggino therefore uses these conventions to write the words in Malay. For the same reason, since the Italian orthographic system misses symbols such as *j* for the palatal stop /dʒ/, it generally represents it employing the consonant *g* followed by the vowels *e* and *i*. Similarly, the consonants *c* and *j* in the Malay/Indonesian orthographic systems when followed by *e* and *i* are indicated only with *c*. The consonant *g* represents both the voiced velar stop /g/ and

the voiced palatal stop /dʒ/ when it is followed by the vowels *e* and *i* (see *giantan* = *jantan* 'male'). The semivowel is marked by a sequence of vowels: *uaiang* = *wayang* 'theater'. Gaggino makes use of consonant clusters in words that the standard orthographic system writes with a medial schwa, such as *bruthang* = *berhutang* 'to have a debt', *scarang* = *sekarang* 'now', *brapa* = *berapa* 'how much', and *slimot* = *selimut* 'blanket'.

It is interesting to note that Gaggino, despite the fact that he was not a linguist, also provided some typological features of the language, such as its feature of presenting bisyllabic words, and the absence of declination, conjugation, and gender relations. He also mentions the use of the reduplication of words to mark plurality of nouns and classifiers, even though he misunderstands their function. In a rather iconographic way, he says that the way to count animals is by their tails: *Cucing sepulu ekor* = *Kucing sepuluh ekor* 'ten cats' translating the classifier dedicated to animals, *ekor*, with its lexical meaning failing to understand its grammatical one.² Gaggino is unaware of the fact that in this case *ekor* is not used in its lexical meaning as 'tail', but in its grammatical function of a classifier for animals. Despite this misunderstanding, Gaggino, unlike other travellers of the time who had a feeling of superiority towards the "other", never makes any derogatory description of the language or of the people of the Malay islands.

Gaggino, who lived in Singapore but also travelled in other parts of the Malay world, does not explicitly say where he collected his data or who his informants were, but it is clear that most of the material comes from the Malay in Singapore in its colloquial variety, which he must have also met during his travels in the Malay world that nowadays includes Indonesia. Strangely, Gaggino did not always hear the glottal stops /ʔ/ in the final position and also the velar nasals /ŋ/. In his dictionary the glottal stops /ʔ/ are sometimes marked as *c* like *tidac* = *tidak* 'not' and *hendac* = *hendak* 'will, want' but often the words end in an open syllable, such as *capa* = *kapak* 'axe'. Occasionally, he marks codas with an accent on the vowel, such as in the examples *tucan ciocò* that corresponds to *tukang cukur* 'barber' and *rumà orang sachè* that corresponds to *rumah orang sakit* 'hospital'. It is obvious that in the Malay variety he was acquainted with, the standard Malay high vowels /u/ and /i/ are lowered to /o/ and /e/. Actually, there is no consistency in his writing. For instance, in the same page we can find examples of the same word with or without the velar nasal: *tucon* = *tukang* 'skilled workman', and *untong* = *untung barang* 'profit goods' or *utang* 'debt' and *gunting* 'scissors'. Generally, the velar nasal /ŋ/ in the intervocalic position is not marked or probably not heard and marked by *h*: *tanhan* = *tangan*, 'hand', *bun-ha* = *bunga* 'flower', and *tin-ha* = *tengah* 'medium, in the middle'. The inconsistencies to mark the velar nasal are also for the palatal nasal /ɲ/. The same word *punya* 'have'

² Malay and Indonesian classifiers are used together with ordinal numerals and have the objective to indicate the specific class to which they belong. The most widespread and general classifiers distinguish the nouns in three large classes of persons (*orang* 'person'), things (*buah*, literally 'fruit' for inanimate nouns), and animals (*ekor* 'tail').

is written as *punia* and *pugna*. The palatal nasal is written in the Italian way using the consonant digraph *gn* and is probably inaudible. The schwa in the first syllable is always marked with the vowel *a*: *tampat* = *tempat* 'place'; *cadei* = *kedai* 'store'; *handac* = *hendak* 'want, will'; *capala* = *kepala* 'head'; *camuliaan* = *kemuliaan* 'dignity'; *catacutan* = *ketakutan* 'fear'.

Further proof that most of the lexical material was collected in Singapore is the occurrence of many borrowings from English, such as *warrant* 'arrest', *regent* 'regent', *engeni* 'engineer', *card* 'card', *napchin* 'napkin', *Indian rubber* 'Indian rubber', *boi* 'boy, young servant', *brush* 'brush', *cauch* 'sofa', *gel* 'jail'.

Given the inconsistencies found in the dictionary, it is likely that Gaggino himself listed the words. He makes typical mistakes made by those who elicitate data and write them without counterchecking. It is also possible that some mistakes are due to typos arising from an inability to distinguish *n* from *u* when those have to be transferred from handwriting to typewriting. An example is *maucò*, which corresponds to *mangkok* 'bowl' where the *u* has been erroneously typed in place of the letter *n*. The same may have happened with *r* erroneously written as *n*, in the example *mantua* = *mertua*³ 'in-law' or *guiagni* = *nyanyi* 'sing', *umu* = *ungu* 'purple', and *cuncia baic* = *cuaca baik* 'good weather'. Sometimes, Gaggino uses an apostrophe after the first consonant *s*, such as *s'aputangan* = *saputangan* 'handkerchief', *s'aribu* = *seribu* 'one thousand', *s'aratus* = *seratus* 'one hundred', and *s'ablà* = *sebelah* 'on the side'. The function of this apostrophe is unclear though it might be that Gaggino interpreted the initial *s* as a prefix as in the case *se-ratus* 'one hundred' but unfortunately it is marked in this way each time *s* is followed by the vowel *a*, such as *s'alada* 'salad'.

Some interesting lexical and syntactic features of colloquial Malay are displayed in the example sentences (1), (2), and (3) that follow⁴ (Gaggino 1884: 123-124). In (1) and (2) the *punya* construction occurs. In this construction, the possessor precedes the possessed thing such as in the example: *engkau punya kopi* 'your coffee', replacing the usual sequence where the possessed thing is followed by the possessor as in the example *kopi kamu* 'your coffee'. This is one of the main features of Colloquial Malay that here is also represented by the periphrastic causative construction with *kasih* in sentence (3) in place of the use of the suffix *-kan*, and, also in (3), the occurrence of the polyfunctional lexeme *sama* in the meaning of preposition 'with, by', or of the meaning of 'same'.⁵

³ It is worth noting that in Minangkabau the word for 'in law' is *mentua*. Having Gaggino collected his data in Singapore, it is likely that in this case the letter *r* is erroneously written as *n*.

⁴ The example provided are taken from Gaggino 1884 and are followed by the correspondent sentence in Standard Malay.

⁵ The eight features that Colloquial Malay, also defined as vehicular/contact varieties of Malay have in common according to Alexander K. Adelaar and D.J. Prentice (1996) are: 1. Possessor-*punya*-possessed construction; 2. plural pronouns with the element *orang* following the singular; 3. *ter-* and *ber-* as the only productive prefixes; 4. the verb *ada* to indicate progressive aspect; 5. prenominal *ini* and *itu* in function of determiners; 6. the verb *pergi* used as the preposition 'towards'; 7. periphrastic causative construction with *bikin* and *kasih*; 8. use of the multifunctional preposition *sama*.

1. *Taro sidichit susu dalam ancau pugna copi.*
Taruh sedikit susu dalam engkau punya kopi.
'Put some milk in your coffee.'
2. *Boi dimana lu punia tuan?*
Boi dimana lu punya tuan?
'Hey boy, where is your master?'
3. *Tuan ini wuoctu bangun, Tuan suda bilang sama saja casi bangun sama tuan pucul lima.*
Tuan ini waktu bangun. Tuan suda bilang sama saya kasi bangun sama tuan pukul lima.
'Master, it's time to wake up. You told me to wake you up at five.'

In (1), (2), and (3), some interesting sociolinguistic comments can be made in relation to the use of pronouns and pronoun substitutes. In (1) the second personal pronoun *engkau* 'you' is used to talk to foreigners whereas in (2) the *lu* 'you', a loanword from Hokkien, is used to talk to a servant. Sentences (2) and (3) reveal master/servant, unequal power relationship typical of colonial times where the master talks to his servant calling him *boi*, an Anglo-Indian term used to address lower-level people and of the informal pronoun *lu*, whereas the servant, in order to be formal avoids the use of the second person personal pronoun to address his master using the allocutive *Tuan* 'Master.'

The dictionary is organized by semantic fields and comprises entries based on topics, such as pronouns and demonstratives, relatives, indefinites, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. When Gaggino talks about verbs he engages in a typological description highlighting that verbs do not mark person and gender and do not have tense markers. He says that the present tense is simply represented by a verb without any mark, with the verb in its usual form: *saja macan = saya makan* 'I eat', but the present as a habitual action can be marked by an adverb such as *sediacala = sediakala* 'always', and the future with *lain cali = lain kali* 'another time/next time'. The past tense is represented according to Gaggino by simply locating the forms *keo* (?),⁶ *suda* 'perfective marker', *lalu* 'then', *abis* 'finished'. The future is formed by preceding the verb by *mau* 'want', *buli = boleh* 'can', *nanti* 'later'. It is interesting to notice that Gaggino's intuitions about the lack of tense in Malay verbs were correct albeit his mistakes in the meaning of temporal adverbs and modal verbs. Gaggino mistakenly uses *lain cali = lain kali* 'another time' in place of the future marker, of the temporal conjunction *lalu* 'then', in place of the perfective marker and gives the wrong interpretation to the modal *buli = boleh* 'can' as a future marker. Other mistakes are obviously typos. He probably copied examples that were handwritten from the current orthographic system and therefore made mistakes in his transcription according to the Italian system. For example, he writes *hari ragia* 'big celebration, the day of Aid El Fitr'⁷ instead of *hari raja = Hari Raya* assimilating *ragia* that he generally uses to refer to kings to the term for 'big'.

⁶ It is unclear what *keo* means.

⁷ Idul Fitri in modern Indonesian.

If we look at the data organized by semantic fields, these include time expressions, days of the week, weather terminology, names of months and moon phases, nature elements, natural places, religion and divinities, names of winds (very specific for his expertise as a man of sea and for possessing ships), numbers, terms that have to do with humankind, kingship terminology, body parts, common tools, home appliances and ornaments, clothes, food, countryside and town terminology, architecture, then moving to more abstract terms, such as human qualities, emotions, and life circumstances. Jobs and other commercial terminologies are listed together with school terms, musical instruments, animals, titles, minerals, personal names, and names of countries. To the list of terms in random semantic blocks, elements of conversation on basic communicative functions are listed following generic headings, such as: go and come back, ask for directions, the weather, the time, age, health, and life needs. Follow some basic conversation issues and statements, negations, et cetera, and activities, such as trading or going in the sea. In this section, Gaggino (1884: 137) provides interesting terminology related to the sea but the very following section contains numerous maritime terms such as *calafato* = *calpati*, *paca* 'caulk' Gaggino (1884: 145) displayed in alphabetic order.

Before proceeding towards measurements, Gaggino writes half a page about Singapore, an island located at the tip of the Malacca Peninsula with a population that Gaggino says that according to 1881 census is of 139,208 inhabitants, and he mentions its dimensions and its founder, Stamford Raffles (Gaggino 1884: 148). It is unclear from where Gaggino obtained these data. Talking about weights and measures, he notes these especially for length measurements such as *giuncal* = *jengkal* 'a span distance between the tip of the thumb and any other finger' that corresponds to a *plumpang* = *pelempap/telempap* 'a palm's breadth', but that in the European shops only the English measures are used. As far as coins are concerned, Gaggino talks of the Mexican dollar of 100 cents and weights that are based on the units of the *tahil* 'the Chinese tael' and *catti* 'catty'.

In the middle of the book a sequence in Italian alphabetic order is followed by terms in Malay and a transcription in Jawi. A very short note describes the Arabic writing that is considered to be "easy" and exactly like speaking. It is alphabetic so what is important is noting the letter in the correct position and then writing from right to left, says Gaggino. In this he differs from other Italians such as Beccari (1902) who considered Jawi as inapt to represent all the Malay consonants and vowels. It is not clear who wrote the Jawi words or whether Gaggino himself was able to do this. Given that Malay words in Latin orthography present typical mistakes made by those who do not have a training in linguistics and lexicography, and there is a lack of consistency, these mistakes were most likely noted down by Gaggino and then copied. This explains the typos in the writing of the *n* instead of *u*, occurring in many instances, while the inconsistencies in noting the velar nasals and the glottal stops are written with mistakes. It is not explained anywhere how the Arabic version of Malay words is written down and by whom, including synonyms

when provided. Luigi Santa Maria expresses the same doubts about Gaggino's effort to reproduce Jawi characters in what he calls "approximative" Italian transcription. Gaggino makes obvious mistakes when he transcribes for instance *unggu* 'purple' as *ugu*⁸ (Gaggino 1884: 335) and *gagak* 'crow' as *gaja*⁹ (Gaggino 1884: 199) - a crow becomes an elephant! says Santa Maria (1980: 146). Nevertheless Santa Maria (1980: 146) implies that Gaggino's assistant was not that competent in Jawi and therefore he wrote consonants that made perfectly sense for Arabic but not for Malay. Santa Maria goes further saying that Gaggino (or maybe his assistant) might have simply copied Swettenham's (1894) first edition of the Malay-English dictionary. Despite the mistakes in the phonological field, Gaggino's dictionary's value lies, according to Santa Maria, in the lexicographic and semantic material that gives access to many interesting issues of the Malay society in Singapore.

Given that the vocabulary is organized from the perspective of an Italian, it tries to provide the instruments for basic knowledge of Malay for Italian people. Gaggino provides interesting data on navigation and on the names of ships' communication, which shows his personal interest, but very little space is given to the description of typical fields, of terms of address for instance, or of more culture-specific issues of Malay. Of course, Gaggino, as a non-linguist, did not possess the instruments necessary to build an exhaustive lexicographic work. The objective that Gaggino hopes to achieve, and which he mentions at the end of the book, is to provide an opportunity to his fellow Italians to make themselves understood and to be able to communicate with the Malays.

MALAY, THE "ITALIAN OF THE EAST" AND ODOARDO BECCARI

The same concept of Malay as the "Italian of the East" adopted by Gaggino is provided by Odoardo Beccari (1843-1920), a great naturalist who visited the island of Borneo three times and whose reports and books provide a description of the natural environment of the island and its botanical diversity, together with a detailed social picture of the ethnolinguistic diversity of the island of Borneo and of the Malay multicultural town of Sarawak (Beccari 2020: 30). At times, his descriptions break out of the borders of botanical analysis and express his human experiences in Borneo and its linguistic variety. The Italian naturalist together with other colleagues who shared these adventures with him, such as Giacomo Doria (1840-1913), Enrico Alberto d'Albertis (1846-1932), and Luigi D'Albertis (1841-1901), remained spiritually bound to the Malay world until their deaths. In his travels to Borneo between 1865 and 1868, Beccari took detailed notes and kept diaries which, persuaded by the Ranee Margaret Brooke of Sarawak, became a book published in 1902, with the title *Nelle foreste di Borneo; Viaggi e ricerche di un naturalista*. This was later translated into English in 1904 with the title *Wanderings in the great forests of Borneo*. The role of Margaret Brooke, the wife of the second White Raja of Sarawak, Charles Anthony Johnson Brooke was crucial for the publication of Beccari's (1904) book given her special position in

⁸ *Unggu* 'purple' for instance is written in Jawi *alif-gim-waw* اڠر instead of *alif-nga-gaf-waw* اڠڠو.

⁹ *Gagak* 'crow' is written in Jawi as ڠاڠه instead of ڠاڠه.

the London society where she had returned after living in Sarawak. Despite the separation from her husband, her experience in Borneo had been very important and became the source of her biography *My life in Sarawak* published in 1913. A woman of great culture and sensibility, Margaret Brooke used all her connections to give prestige to Sarawak and was always very sympathetic to people such as Beccari for his passion for Borneo's rich natural diversity and for his deep interest in the people who inhabited the island. Bound by a deep friendship to Beccari, she visited him several times in Italy and finally persuaded him to overcome his scientific inactivity and gather all his notes to write a book about all his fascinating discoveries in Borneo (Beccari 1902) long after his first trip in 1865.¹⁰ Prior to the publication of the book, Beccari wrote several letters to his friends in Italy, mainly Doria and Giglioli,¹¹ and published a report in which he notes the high linguistic variation of all the people encountered: Malay, Melanau, Dayak, Kanowit, Tanjung, Kayan, Sigalan, Bukitan, Punan, Sekapan, Ukit, Penan, Punan Tana, and Kenyah, each with different social and cultural habits and speaking different "dialects", some of them now lost and replaced by those of more powerful tribes (Beccari 1868: 240). In his 1902 book (reprinted in 2020), he made several observations on the Malay language spoken in the area. He says that Malay was a lingua franca in the Far East and that it was the most commonly spoken language by Europeans in their communication and their trade with the locals in Malacca and across the Malay Archipelago, extending all the way to the Moluccas. Its influence even extended up to the maritime cities of China and the Philippines, Japan and Oceania, and is considered indispensable for communicating in the Far East. He notes that Malay belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian languages and has an ancient origin, having absorbed over many centuries many elements from other cultures, such as Sanskrit, especially with respect to emotions and moral ideas of a higher level. He highlights the phonetic similarities between Sanskrit and Malay, despite the great differences from the point of view of the grammar (Beccari 1902: 30). Contact with Islamic beliefs led to Malay adopting the Arabic writing system and later interactions with Europeans such as Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and English served to enrich the language with many lexical elements from these languages. The reason for the adoption of the orthographic Latin system for writing Malay words lies, according to Beccari, in the fact that Arabic could not express the phonetic structure of Malay, which is better expressed by Latin characters. Beccari's judgement is based on the fact that some Malay sounds are not represented in the Jawi and Arabic alphabet and in particular, Jawi cannot represent all the vowels.¹² Most probably, from Beccari's perspective, the Latin system and the

¹⁰ A great number of publications contain biographic notes on Beccari's life. See <https://portal.cybertaxonomy.org/flora-malesiana/node/235#biography>.

¹¹ For detailed information on Beccari's letters, see E.H. Giglioli's publications in *Nuova Antologia* 21(1872): 119-160; 22(1873) 658-709; 23(1873): 194-225; 24(1873): 835-866; 25(1874): 163-192; 27(1874): 420-463; ser. 2, 2(1876): 802-822; 3(1876): 147-163, 333-363.

¹² Although Beccari is not an expert, he seems to be aware of the problems of the Jawi writing system that are still debated by today's scholars, such as E. Ulrich Kratz (2009) who calls it "defective", Annabel Teh Gallop (2015) who refers to it as to a "tradition of inconsistency",

phonetic structure of Malay are much closer to Italian and are not necessarily connected to Islam. By using the Italian orthography, Malay can be easily read by Italians who are not acquainted with the Arabic writing.

Malay is considered the “Italian of the East” for its sweetness of sound and its harmony. The grammar is easy and the pronunciation of words very natural for an Italian, to the point that makes it easy to speak and master (Beccari 1902: 31). Beccari goes further, saying that any Italian is able to make herself/himself understood, albeit with a very limited knowledge of the language, especially in light conversation or in interactions with traders. Especially for Italians, the consonants and the vowels are very similar to Malay.

As far as consonants are concerned, they have their equivalents in Italian except for the velar nasal /ŋ/ noted with the digraph *ng*, in initial, medial, and final position and whose nasal pronunciation is a nasal “made with the nose”. Beccari shows the difference in the final position, using examples of minimal pairs such as *hutan* ‘forest’ and *hutang* ‘debt’, whose difference is only in the final nasal sound. He also makes observations on the different systems used by different colonizers that produce different transcription for the same word. The Dutch use the *tj* digraph to indicate the voiceless palatal stop, whereas the English use the *ch* digraph. For this reason, the same word is written as *kuxing* in French, *kutjing* in Dutch and *kuching* in English, an Italian would write *kuccing*. To avoid strange pronunciations, Italians are encouraged to keep the *h* in order to pronounce the aspiration, to use *k* instead of *c* and the semivowels *y* and *w* to reproduce the sounds that otherwise would be pronounced strangely (Beccari 1902: 32).

MALAY AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SULTANS: MORENO AND EMILIO CERRUTI

Celso Cesare Moreno (1830-1901) was an extraordinary explorer, often described as a citizen of the world, who lived in the Sultanate of Aceh and established very good relations with Sultan Ibrahim of Aceh, and married Fatima, one of the Sultan’s daughters. This was probably the Sultan’s attempt to make strong ties with a foreign power to defend the Sultanate from invasion by the Dutch (Di Meo 2022: 162). Moreno was known to be a polyglot, able to speak many European languages and Malay, and he was able to convince the Sultan that Italy would buy an island to establish a colonial settlement there and develop commercial relations. Giovanni Faldella (1846-1928), an author and journalist who wrote about the Post Unification period in Italy, reports in many sections of his book (Faldella 1962: 118-124) on the competence of Moreno of speaking different languages. He emphasizes how King Vittorio Emanuele was very keen on Moreno and enjoyed asking him to speak in the many languages he knew (Sanskrit, Arabic, Malay, English, Burmese, Greek, Albanian, Syrian, Armenian, Chinese, Japanese) and to hear the many accents of the human voice which Moreno’s versatility was able to reproduce. One

and Jan van der Putten (2019).

anecdote says that Moreno was tested by the king and asked to tell him what he knew about a random point on a map. The place was Sumatra and Moreno is known to have been able to praise the richness and the strategic position of Sumatra in the East, similar to Cuba in the West, his special position as a son-in-law of the Sultan of Aceh and how important it was to have an Italian colony in the island of Weh. C. Yriarte, a French journalist and a regular contributor to the French *Le Figaro*, had the opportunity to meet Moreno and he wrote about Moreno's cosmopolitan views and his desire to buy the island of Weh in Sumatra to give Italy the chance to form an empire. When Yriarte (1867) talks of Moreno, he highlights the fact that he was a real man of the world, able to follow the habits of the peoples with whom he interacted, eating with them and also eating what they ate, worshiping as they worshipped, and mentions that he did not disdain polygamy. He was able to have good interactions with the people of Aceh, considered at the time to be very hostile but who turned out to be very amicable towards him thanks to his attitude (Vecoli and Durante 2014: 80). Unfortunately, Moreno's proposal was turned down by the Italian navy and all that remains of Moreno's time in Aceh today is the memory of his cosmopolitanism and his ability to speak many foreign languages.

Emilio Cerruti (1860-1875) played a role similar to other Italians in concluding diplomatic agreements, strengthening commercial networks, and obtaining territorial concessions in Southeast Asia, mainly in the Moluccas and New Guinea. As with Moreno, he played a role in identifying a strategic place beyond the Dutch sphere of power to establish a penal Italian colony in Southeast Asia (Cerruti 1872). Originally residing in China where he ran a trading house in Ningbo, he made several trips to the Malay Archipelago, visiting Java, the Moluccas, and Papua. Thanks to his ability to speak Malay he was able to deal directly with local rulers and in particular signed agreements with the rulers of Kai and Aru (Di Meo 2022: 164). During his stay in Salawati in New Guinea, he was able to learn Malay and obtained from the Sultan of Salawati, sovereignty over the Raja Ampat Island of Batian. These agreements were made in exchange for local rulers obtaining an annual pension from the Italian government and the preservation of private property. In several historical reports mentioning Emilio Cerruti, his competence of the Malay language is emphasized.

ETHNIC MINORITIES OF THE MALAY WORLD AND THEIR LANGUAGES

Giovanni Battista Cerruti (1850-1914) (not to be confused with Emilio Cerruti who visited the Moluccas), was an explorer and ship's captain from Savona in Italy who, during his trips to Asia, stopped in Singapore, Batavia, and Malaysia, the main locations where the events of his book, *Nel paese dei veleni e tra i cacciatori di teste* (1906) (in the country of poisons and among the headhunters) take place (Surdich 1977). After several trips to trade spices and other tropical goods places, he also started to undertake mining explorations that allowed him eventually to participate in the exhibition of Torino in 1884 and of Milan in 1906. He finally died of an infection on the island of

Penang in 1914. His book was subsequently translated into English (1908) and is of particular interest because Cerruti lists Sakai words that are of great anthropological and linguistic value because they relate to the ethnic minority of the Sakai, an indigenous people of peninsular Malaysia, in Perak (*orang asli*) (see G. Soravia 1995). Cerruti's work (1904) makes a big contribution to the study of the language of *orang asli* and of their classification within the Austroasiatic language family (A. Soriente and G. Creta 2021). It is interesting to note that Cerruti, despite being a non-linguist, was able to state that Sakai does not belong to the Malayic languages, despite the fact that a contemporary linguist such as Trombetti had claimed a common origin of all the languages. In his memoir he declares himself able to communicate in Malay and that he is keen to establish a good relationship with the Sakai, who some Malays describe as ferocious and dangerous (G.B. Cerruti 1908:19). Cerruti considers it very important to learn their language, which he describes as being composed of "short and strongly accented words" (G.B. Cerruti 1908: 32) and seldom related to Malay. Nevertheless, his judgement is definitely Eurocentric and colonial when he considers the language as "poor and strange" (G.B. Cerruti 1908: 58) and as being characterized by rough and broken phrases.

The first difficulty to be met with is the incredible poverty of their language which impedes the communication and development of an idea [...] The Sakai language is, as I have said, very poor indeed, so much so that it is impossible to form a long phrase or keep up the most simple conversation because there are no means of connecting the various words one with the other. (G.B. Cerruti 1908: 156).

An idea is expressed by a single word, or perhaps by three or four words together, so that a great deal of practice, attention, and also a special study of the mimicry that accompanies and explains these terse vocal sounds is required, to enable one to follow the thought process.

Cerruti is able to recognize that most words used by the Sakais are monosyllables and they are "coughed out". He explains "and the way in which these accents are shot out from the lips would make a foreigner decide at once that the best method of translating their talk would be by a volley of shots" (G.B. Cerruti 1908: 157). This volley of shots probably refers to phenomena of laryngealization of some sounds of Austro-Asiatic languages (M. Jenny and P. Sidwell 2015). As also mentioned in Soravia (1995: 211), Cerruti continues with similar speculations when he adds that this language does not allow for an organic discourse, since it lacks combining linkers and lacks verbal forms. With a word the idea is only simply referred to, but then it is very important to accompany it with mimicry and much practice. As a non-linguist, Cerruti makes typological reflections (Soriente and Creta 2021), but also mentions names of linguists such as Schmidt who had published in 1901 an article on Sakai and its classification in the Khmer languages family and Trombetti to whom Cerruti had sent the book. Cerruti continues with his Eurocentric vision when he says that the Sakai dictionary is very soon exhausted because its words are only necessary to express the basic needs. According to Cerruti it is

impossible to express those metaphoric images typical of Oriental languages (G.B. Cerruti 1908: 157 also mentioned in Soravia 1995: 211). He continues by denoting the language as being poor and “primitive”, similar to their habits and technology, and also refers to the lack of songs. “This poor language that seems to be composed of short coughs does not even lose its roughness in song” and he laments the fact that extemporaneous ballads are simply eroding and will soon disappear. Cerruti, similar to other people of his time, thinks that the savages can be elevated thanks to the contact with high culture: “the Sakai, in spite of his semblance to a wild man of the bush, savage, suspicious and superstitious as he is, is susceptible of rapid intellectual progress whenever the right means are used in his favour, and towards that end” (Cerruti 1908: 182). These comments notwithstanding, Cerruti is very empathetic towards these people whom he continues to call “savages” until the end, but who have nonetheless taught him the values of goodness and simplicity, uprightness, honesty and common sense, and a great love of nature.

Another traveller who engaged with inland populations in today’s Indonesia is Elio Modigliani (1860-1932), a very prolific explorer who provided linguistic data on the places he visited in several parts of Sumatra. He was an anthropologist, zoologist, botanist, and explorer, who produced an enormous archive of written records, including travel reports, private letters, articles, books rich in detailed ethnographic, botanical, and scientific material that always shows his empathetic approach towards the populations he visited. These populations gave him detailed information on the Sipora (Mentawai language), Nias, and Enggano languages and plenty of examples of the Toba-Batak language. Modigliani, who always displays deep emotional involvement and empathy, is known to have made serious preparations before starting his trips, through studying, doing field research, and always fully participating in data collection (G. Monaco 2020: 14). Unlike many travellers at the time, Modigliani does not show the usual attitude of describing the objects of his research in derogatory terms and always tries to be objective, considering that he was wealthy enough to be able to finance his travels without seeking additional revenue. According to Monaco (2020: 17), ideologically he was not obsessed with racist or colonial ideologies and he often sided with the natives, although in several cases he also appears to have cheated them. The study and description of the languages was an important factor that allowed him to feel close to the populations that he was studying. In one of his contributions (Modigliani 1898), written after visiting the Mentawai Island of Sipora, he introduces a list of more than 700 words in the Mentawai language. He clearly addresses linguists by making a disclaimer, saying that he never studied to become a linguist and that his aim is simply to help the readers of his reports and books understand some words of each population visited. To him, learning something of other people’s languages is the best way to make yourself understood and break down the barriers between cultures. The comparative dictionary that completes the visit to Enggano (Modigliani 1894) is a demonstration of this. Modigliani tries to respond to the critique offered by A. Pleyte (1894) a Dutch scholar who reviewed Modigliani’s works

who accuses the Italian explorer of using an imperfect system of orthography, referring to the Italian transcription of the words. Modigliani forcefully explains that he uses the Italian transcription system to reproduce the 546 Italian words in Malay, Nias, Toba-Batak, and Enggano, Italian transcription that, according to him, best reproduces Malay words. If he had not done so, no Italian would have been able to read any Malay word, had it been written following the Dutch system. Modigliani repeats that he is not a linguist, nor a philologist or geographer, but simply an observer who notes and tells as accurately as possible what needs to be told, responding again to the accusation made by Pleyte that this comparative dictionary is useless from a scientific point of view. And it should be noted that despite his criticism Pleyte says it is nonetheless very useful as a tool for establishing communication with the people that speak those languages (Modigliani 1898: 260-262).

In his *Viaggio a Nias*¹³ (Travel to Nias), Modigliani (1890) dedicates a full chapter to describe the language, exactly four pages (650-653) to talk about the grammatical features of a passage from the Bible translated into the Nias language, taken from H. Sunderman (1883), and then eleven pages (654-664) to provide a list of Italian words (about 1,100) in alphabetic order. It is not clear on what foundations this collection of lexicographic material was done, although Modigliani refers to Sundermann (1883), the German missionary who lived for many years on the island, translated the Bible into the Nias language and made a Nias-German dictionary (1905). Going through the dictionary provided by Modigliani (1890) we can see that even a basic word related to the body parts such as 'ear' *orecchio* in Italian, is missing, but terms related to cultural items abound. When he talks about the alphabet, he says that Nias has some consonants not shared by Italian: the velar stop /k/ and /g/ indicated as *ch*, the palatal nasal /ɲ/ *gn* and the semivowel *w*. As far as vowels are concerned, Nias differentiates them between simple and nasalized vowels that are marked in writing with a diacritic (˘). The same diacritic is used also for some consonants. These very slight differences in some sounds might produce according to Modigliani, ambiguities that are considered very difficult to grasp by a beginner. Given the examples provided to distinguish the sounds through minimal pairs, where often the German language is taken as an exemplification, it is clear that Modigliani refers to Sundermann (1882). The short text taken from the Bible and translated into the Nias language allows Modigliani to make an analysis and a description of every single word and to show how the language works.

It is interesting to note Modigliani's comments about the language. The Nias language is very rough and sharp on the ear at first hearing, but then once the ear is attuned to the sound it becomes easier to understand its construction. It is very rich in its lexicon and has very complex grammatical

¹³ *Viaggio a Nias* by Modigliani (1890) is the foundation of a recent book written by another Italian traveller and scholar, Vanni Puccioni (2013), who, following the tracks of Modigliani, wrote *Tra i tagliatori di teste. Elio Modigliani: un fiorentino all'esplorazione di Nias Salatan - 1886* (then translated in Indonesian in 2016 and in English in 2017.)

and syntactic expressions that prevent anybody from fully understanding it. Quoting Sundermann (1882), who said that the main difficulty lies in the combination of clauses, and the differentiation between Status constructus and Status absolutus, Modigliani tries to provide examples of the two Statuses. Status constructus is applied to genitive and accusative with an alteration that affects the subordinate word. For this reason in the phrase *omo nama* 'the house of father' the letter *n* is inserted between the two nouns *omo* 'house' and *ama* 'father'. Status constructus implies that any addition, subtraction, or omission and alteration of a letter in a word might mean the opposite of everything according to Modigliani. Status absolutus does not imply any change in the words that are therefore independent. Major differences occur between the north and south dialects of the Nias island. The total absence of written sources is one of the main reasons why the Nias language is unknown and misunderstood. In an attempt to make the language understood to Italian readers, Modigliani says that compared with Italian, Nias has all the consonants except for /p/. Nias people cannot pronounce /p/ because of the special shape of their vocal cords. As a result, they say *fulo* instead of *pulo* 'ten' when they hear Malay words that they then want to pronounce à la Nias, and *finang* instead of *pinang* 'areca nut'. The same occurs in Madagascar and Timor. In other alphabets the /f/ is often a missing consonant, such as in Makassar.

Modigliani's *L'isola delle donne* (The women's island) (1894) is an ethnographic description of the explorer's experience in the island of Enggano, which he visited after Nias. Unlike the book on the Batak population *Tra i Batacchi indipendenti* (Among the independent Bataks) (Modigliani 1892), where no special section is dedicated to the language but plentiful of examples are provided in Batak, in the Enggano book Modigliani has a full chapter, Chapter XVII (Modigliani 1894: 263-281), dedicated to the language. He mentions various Dutch authors that worked on the language before him and provided wordlists, and makes several comments on the lexicon. In comparing those wordlists with his own data, Modigliani laments the lack of standardization and comments on the fact that each writer uses a different orthographic system. This results in the fact that often the same words are written in different ways by different scholars. The only exception is in the class of numerals where the number for 'two' is written in the same way in all the lists (Modigliani 1894: 263). His main reference for the Enggano language is the dictionary compiled by two officials of the Dutch government, O.L. Helfrich and J.A.J.C. Pieters (1891), who visited the island several times and whose dictionary were considered to be the best study of the language. In their data the consonants *s* and *g* are missing in the consonant system of Enggano but Modigliani does not fully agree on this, because although he does not find any word with *s*, he finds words with *g* in each position. He also claims that the only word where *s* occurs, *lako aisje* 'night' mentioned by the Dutchman R. Francis (1874-1877), is for Modigliani a mistake because the word for night is *coáhia*.¹⁴ What is very interesting in this section

¹⁴ Actually *lako aisje* and *coáhia* do not seem so far from each other. What seems to be a sequence of two words in Francis is written as a single word by Modigliani without an initial syllable *la*.

is to observe the comparative list of 547 Italian entries (including the entries for 25 numerals) that are translated in colloquial Malay (called vulgar Malay), Nias, Toba Batak, and Enggano. Some of the Toba Batak words are provided by Professor Van Dissel from Delft but the orthography is Modigliani's.

The Enggano language is very hard or harsh, says Modigliani, because there are many aspirations, *c* and *ch*, but it is not as bad as one observer suggests, comparing the sound of the language to the howling of a dog. Anybody can become used to it just like any other language after hearing people speaking, though at the beginning foreigners seem to hear a majority of sounds, such as *h* or *k*. Modigliani then mentions J. Walland's (1864) comments that compare Enggano to Javanese in its difference between high and low language levels. The low version is used when the Enggano people speak to each other and the high level is used when they address a foreigner. It is also not allowed to use the low variant to address an old person. However, Modigliani does not agree with this view and says instead that the difference he notices is between the north and south dialects. The southern variant has a "softer" pronunciation and the main difference is in the alternation of labials and liquids, between the occurrence of /p/ in place of /f/, of /b/ in place of /m/, of /l/ in place of /d/ or eventually /r/. Modigliani, despite the fact that he is always sympathetic to the local cultures in Sumatra, seems to have the same view of other explorers and foreigners that see the local languages as expressions of poor cultures. He says that the language is extremely "poor" and often the same word has various meanings, creating ambiguity. Modigliani, from his Eurocentric perspective, does not see as he should, that if the same word has various meanings, it is probably because the reality in that language has many nuances that a foreigner is not capable of seeing. From the wordlist that follows the description of the language, Modigliani makes some interesting observations on the numeral system that appears to be quinary (or pental) as, according to him, it is based on five and all the other numbers derive from those. The basic numbers are from 1 to 5 whereas 6 *cachine* is a contraction of 1 and 5 (*cáic* + *alime*), and 7, 8, and 9 are a composition of the first five numbers. He says that the number for 10 *cahafúlo* is a loanword from Malay *sapulo*, probably borrowed through trade. According to D. Boewang (1854) who wrote a report on the Enggano island, the original way to say 10 is based on the reduplication of the numeral 4 followed by 2: *apa apa adúa*,¹⁵ which means $4+4+2 = 10$. From 10 to 19, the numbers are clearly influenced by Malay, and derive from the juxtaposition of *cahafúlo* 'ten' and the numbers from one to nine. For 20, an indigenous form *taccá* is employed. Originally *taccá* refers to 40 coconuts divided into 20 pairs. For this reason, says Modigliani, *taccá* is now used for 20. All the other numbers are based on *taccá*, so on multiples of 20. The number 30 is produced by indicating 1, 20, 10 *cáie taccá cahafúlo*.

The correspondence $s > h$ is very common in Indonesian languages.

¹⁵ It is interesting to notice that the examples taken from Boewang were collected in a different place from Modigliani's because the numerals display the /p/ in place of /f/ and Boewang does not employ the semivowel /w/.

After these comments on the lexicon, Modigliani shifts his attention to accent and orthography. In the dictionary, Modigliani (1894: 265), explains that those words separated by a full stop are words used for the same meaning and the number 2 is used to mark reduplication; the orthographic system is the Italian one. The vowel /o/ and nasal velar consonant /ŋ/ transcribed by the digraph *ng* are in italics when they have the sound of /ø/ and the nasal velar /ŋ/, said by Modigliani to be used as nasal sounds. The *ch* digraph followed by the vowels *e* and *i* corresponds to /k/ and when it is aspirated is /h/. The wordlist is in alphabetic order and completed by the numerals from 1 to 20 and then their combinations up to 1,000.

The detailed descriptions of Sakai by Cerruti and of Mentawai, Nias, and Enggano by Modigliani reveal the genuine interest of these Italian travellers in enabling their fellow Italians to become acquainted at different levels with the languages of the peoples they encountered in their expeditions. Their comments and the ways in which they describe the languages, albeit not necessarily scientific, do provide foundations to understand the basics of these languages, mainly through phonological and lexical material. Learning other people's languages is the best way to make oneself understood and break the barrier between cultures. Some more sociolinguistic comments also show that Modigliani not only engaged with other Dutch and German officials and missionaries in the description of linguistic features but also tried to connect these languages to their speakers and to Italian readers through the use of the Italian orthography. Modigliani is especially interested in the language variety found in his travels and for this reason he provides comparative wordlists where this language variety can be observed. The detailed ethnographic description of people, habits, culture, objects, and behaviour can only be conveyed through the use of local languages. Albeit some of their comments are biased, it is clear that Modigliani and other travellers are convinced that only by using the terms in the original language, can information and knowledge of the said culture be transmitted. Knowing the other's language is the only way to establish communication and mediate between different linguistic social and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

Italian interest in expanding its commercial networks in Asia, together with attempts to establish penal colonies in some parts of the Malay Archipelago at the end of the nineteenth century, were ultimately unsuccessful. While Italy never became a major colonial power, those explorers, adventurers, and merchant ships' captains who experienced social exchanges with the populations of Malaysia, Brunei, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Moluccas, and Papua (in general what is today's the Indonesian Archipelago) were all connected by a common necessity, namely the importance of speaking local languages to be able to interact. These Italians were part of a global network where interconnections, mobility, and exchange in the Malay world were possible thanks to some knowledge of the Malay language. Malay was always viewed in positive terms

as an international language, a powerful tool to communicate with the other, to learn and to interact. It was considered a beautiful language and praised by Pigafetta in 1521 as being the “Italian of the East” for its sweet sound, and later by Gaggino and Beccari. It was also claimed to be a fundamental tool to understand the other and eventually establish communication as demonstrated by Gaggino in Singapore, by Beccari in Borneo, and by E. Cerruti in the Moluccas. Unlike Malay, the other minority languages were viewed as being poor and too simple, for example by Cerruti in relation to the Sakai and by Modigliani in relation to Nias, Enggano, Mentawai. Notwithstanding this sometimes eurocentric view, these explorers were all stimulated by the idea that knowing these languages was the best way to understand other cultures and enrich themselves, to overcome the barriers between cultures and realize these intercultural encounters as a basis for communication. Even though all these explorers claimed not to be linguists, they indeed embodied what a real linguist should be, anticipating what is considered the gift of a real field worker:

What makes a good field linguist is someone who has an interest in understanding other languages and cultures, and enjoys working with people. The qualities of patience, humility, humour and the ability to think laterally also help to make a good fieldworker. A good ear, a knack for seeing patterns and a respect for data – even obsession – without losing sight of the big picture are other abilities that also serve the field linguist well. (F. Meakins, J. Green, and M. Turpin 2018: 4).

In conclusion, beyond being “field linguists”, these authors’ attention to the foreign languages encountered in their travels signal that the need of communication, interaction, and interconnectivity was felt to be crucial. Seen in the perspective of global history, the experiences of these travellers and their observations demonstrate that languages are an important tool for this communication to take place. For centuries the Malay language has served as an international language connecting people across a very wide expanse of the Malay Archipelago and what is today’s Indonesia, allowing exchanges, engagements, entanglements, and networks within and beyond borders and becoming a tool to make its speakers part of the global world. The role of Malay as a world language has been highlighted by several linguists in post-colonial times. James T. Collins (2018), for instance explains how the history of Malay language is indeed long and glorious and how this language is among the most important of Southeast Asia and has played a relevant role in the world’s economy and cultures, becoming the main player in the global network of civilizations and economy for at least two thousand years.

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