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Newton Goes East: Natural Philosophy in the First Malay Grammar (1736) and the First Malay Bible (1733)

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Abstract

George Henrik Werndly's work in Malay grammar, literature, and Bible translation can be understood and explained in the context of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century natural philosophy, especially natural philosophy in the spirit of Newton. The Dutch natural philosopher Lambert ten Kate, who was deeply influenced by Isaac Newton, is one of the main channels through which the ideas of the natural philosophy tradition reached Werndly. Ten Kate had applied the methodologies of natural philosophy to linguistics in ways that inspired Werndly to follow the same approach in his grammar of Malay.

Keywords

natural philosophy, Georg Werndly, first Malay Bible, first Malay grammar

I. Introduction

David Clark was an example that I wanted to follow when I was a young honorary translation advisor in the UBS (Asia-Pacific): an excellent scholar, a gentle man, witty in a very self-relativizing way, and a translation consultant with respect for translators, their languages, and their cultural worlds. In many ways, David, you resemble the great Swiss scholar and Bible translator George Werndly, the topic of my article that I offer you as a tribute.

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The *Maleische Spraakkunst* (1736), the grammar of Malay written by the Swiss pastor, Bible translator, and professor George Henrik Werndly, has found wide recognition as the first standard grammar of Malay (Mahdi 2002).¹ Teeuw (1961, 15) writes that Werndly's grammar "completely overshadowed" earlier grammar sketches of Malay that were made in the context of wordlists and lexicographic studies by Ruyl (1612), Roman (1674), and van der Vorm (1703). Teeuw describes Werndly's grammar as "the first more or less detailed description of the Malay language and, although conceptually tied to the linguistic notions of the time, nevertheless in this context completely up to date."

Werndly's grammar is written in Dutch, with the full title of *Maleische Spraakkunst Uit de eige schriften der Maleiers opgemaakt Met eene Voorreden Behelzende eene inleiding tot dit werk En een Dubbeld Aanhangsel van twee Boekzalen van Boeken in deze tale zo van Europeërs als van Maleiers geschreven* (Malay grammar based on the Malays' own writings: With a preface comprising an introduction to this book: And a double appendix of two bibliographies of books in this language written by both Europeans and Malays). The richly annotated Malay bibliography, the Malay *Boekzaal* (library), is the first ever survey of Malay literature, a corpus of sixty-nine Malay writings of different genres that functioned as the empirical basis for his grammatical description and his standardization efforts.

The European *Boekzaal* appendix forms a critical survey of all printed or handwritten Malay books by European authors or translators known to Werndly, including a detailed and critical discussion of Malay Bible books since Ruyl's first Gospel of Matthew of 1639. It also contains an annotated bibliography of all printed and unprinted dictionaries and grammatical sketches of Malay known to Werndly.

These two appendices laid the foundation for the study of the history of Malay linguistics and Bible translation in Malay. The grammar and the two appended volumes give a window on Werndly's views of language, linguistics, Malay language, Malay literature, and Bible translation. Werndly shared many of these views with his predecessors van der Vorm and Leijdecker (sometimes also spelled Leidekker) but he reformulated, transformed, and modernized them in terms of the new and exciting developments in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century natural philosophy.

¹ Waruno Mahdi (Max Planck Institute Leipzig, Germany) kindly sent me a copy of his paper "The First Standard Grammar of Malay: George Werndly's 1736 *Maleische Spraakkunst*" (2002), much to my benefit, as can be seen from the many references to Mahdi 2002.

Werndly inherited a grammatical treatise on Malay from van der Vorm (1703), in manuscript form, which he rewrote and expanded after he realized that the grammatical work of van der Vorm needed to be updated, given the new insights in the study of grammar in Dutch linguistics: “because I first intended to follow the text of D. van der Vorm . . . but, having begun the work, and comparing this grammar with other grammars written in Dutch, I found that I had to change many things” (Werndly 1736, lxv).²

Werndly also inherited the unfinished Malay Bible from Leijdecker, who had started the work, and from van der Vorm, who had continued it. Werndly played a key role as a translator and reviser in the final redaction of this first Malay Bible, begun by Leijdecker in 1691 at the request of the council of elders of the Dutch Reformed Church in Batavia (Jakarta) and published in 1733. This Leijdecker Bible would become the standard Malay version for many generations to come, held in high esteem, especially in eastern Indonesia, and it saw regular reprints well into the twentieth century (Swellengrebel 1974, 173–202).

I will argue that Werndly’s work in Malay grammar, literature, and Bible translation can be understood and explained in the context of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century natural philosophy, especially natural philosophy in the spirit of Newton. The Dutch natural philosopher Lambert ten Kate, who was deeply influenced by Isaac Newton (see Salverda 2001), is one of the main channels through which the ideas of the natural philosophy tradition reached Werndly. Ten Kate had applied the methodologies of natural philosophy to linguistics in ways that inspired Werndly to follow the same approach in his grammar of Malay.

First, I will discuss the ideas of natural philosophy and the impact of these ideas on the scholarly study of language in the early eighteenth century. The second topic is the relation between Werndly’s grammar and natural philosophy, especially as applied to linguistics by Lambert ten Kate. Finally, we look at the impact of these ideas on the first Malay Bible.

2. Natural philosophy

Natural philosophy was the term used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the systematic study of the world based on precise observations, measurements, experiments, instruments, and mathematics. The aim was to distil the abstract principles, laws, or rules behind observable phenomena, laws that could be captured in exact mathematical language, ideas

² All translations of direct quotes from Werndly and others are mine.

programmatically expressed in the title of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687).

A typical representative of the Newtonian school of thought in the Netherlands was Lambert ten Kate (1674–1731), a pious Mennonite who inherited his father's corn business. Noordegraaf and van der Wal (2001, 13) write in their introduction to their splendid facsimile edition of ten Kate's *Aenleiding tot de kennis van het verhevene deel der Nederduitsche sprake* (Introduction to the knowledge of the exalted part of the Dutch language), which was printed by the brothers Wetstein in Amsterdam in 1723, the same brothers who would print the first Malay Bible of 1733,

Ten Kate was an adherent of eighteenth-century inductive, functional rationalism, according to which reason is used for discovering and explaining the laws of language (Peeters 1990b, 154–55; Verburg 1998 [1952], 337 ff.). His method can be characterized as inductive and empirical. As it appears, this is a reaction to Cartesianism, partly on religious grounds. The background to ten Kate's views is to be found in the Newtonian approach then reigning supreme in the Netherlands (cf. Peeters 1990b; Jongeneelen 1992, 210; Noordegraaf 2000, 49–50). It comes as no surprise, then, that ten Kate's linguistic method has recently been characterized as Newtonian linguistics (Salverda 2001).³

Ten Kate compared large amounts of data from Icelandic, Dutch, Gothic, Old High German, Old English, Modern High German, and Frisian. But where his predecessors had compared Germanic wordlists on the basis of meaning correspondences between words, switching around letters of words in an *ad hoc* fashion to show common roots, ten Kate compared languages on the basis of systematic sound correspondences (Noordegraaf and van der Wal 2001, 9).

Ten Kate (1723, 1:13) called standardization “beschaving der talen” (civilization of languages) and his ideal was to civilize the Dutch language, meaning to develop a standard variety of Dutch that would unite all Dutch citizens as the language of the state, the church, the Bible, and the school.

3. Natural philosophy and Werndly's Malay grammar

George Henrik Werndly was born in 1694 in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1717 he arrived in Batavia or Jacatra (present Jakarta) to begin his work as a pastor employed by the VOC, the Dutch East Indies Company. In 1729 Werndly travelled to the Netherlands with the manuscript of the Malay

³ This section on Lambert ten Kate is based on Noordegraaf and van der Wal 2001.

Bible. He had worked the previous six years in Batavia on the final version of the Malay translation and was given the assignment to go to the Netherlands to oversee the process of transforming the manuscript into a printed Bible (Gonda 1937). This Leijdecker–Werndly Bible was printed between 1732 and 1733. Werndly used his time in the Netherlands also to read the work of Dutch grammarians, including ten Kate, and to write his grammar of Malay. In 1737, ready to return to Batavia, Werndly received an invitation from the king of Prussia offering him a professorship in Lingen to teach Malay and other oriental languages. He accepted the offer but after a few years in Lingen, Werndly could no longer resist his desire to go back to Batavia, where he died in 1744 (Swellengrebel 1974, 18; Gonda 1937).⁴

In his grammar Werndly weaves four explicit references to, and precise quotations from, ten Kate's *Aendleiding* into the fabric of his argumentation, showing the direct influence of ten Kate. In many other places, ten Kate's work is implicitly present. An example of a direct quote of ten Kate's work in Werndly's grammar can be found on page xlv of the preface to the grammar, where Werndly describes the five varieties of Malay that Malay grammarians distinguished: *Bahasa Djawij*, *Bahasa Dalam*, *Bahasa Bangsawan*, *Bahasa Gunong*, and *Bahasa Katjokan*. Werndly calls them *stylen* (styles) and glosses them in Dutch as *boektaal* (literary language, *Djawij*), *hoftaal* (court language, *Dalam*), *de taal der groten en edelen* (the language of the leading and noble classes, *Bangsawan*), and *boerentaal* (*Gunong*), literally "language of the mountains," because in this volcanic archipelago the farmers lived on the fertile slopes of the volcanoes, far away from the coastal fortified port cities, associated with the rulers and the wealthy, and also far away from the influence of the *mengeltaal* (mixed language, *Katjokan*) of the port cities.

Werndly's description of the Malay styles derives from earlier descriptions of Malay which he slightly adapted. Leijdecker wrote a letter to the church council of Batavia on 15 November 1697 with a passage about Malay varieties that comes very close to Werndly's passage. The letter of Leijdecker was partly published by Valentyn (1698, 13) in his book *Deure der Waarhyd*. Leijdecker writes in his letter that "this Bahasa Katjokan is not homogeneous but highly variable, not only relative to the various islands and peoples, but also relative to the variety of people by whom it is spoken."

In modern terms, these varieties of Malay are sociolects (acrolects, mesolects, and basolects). That is, they are socially stratified linguistic varieties

⁴ See Gonda (1937) for the life and works of Werndly, including Werndly's lesser-known inaugural speech (in Latin) when assuming his professorship in Lingen, the first chair in Malay Studies.

of Malay, ordered from the highest variety (acrolect: *Bahasa Djawij*) to the lowest (*Bahasa Katjokan*, Bazar Malay). The lowest variety, Bazar Malay, is the spoken, unstable Malay of the common person in the streets and in marketplaces; it is Malay as a second language, partially mastered by its speakers and riddled with words and patterns from their various first languages, with extensive code mixing and code switching. This gave (and gives) Malay basolects a strong regional or sometimes even local character.

Werndly (1736, xlv) explains the complicated sociolinguistics of Malay by applying the framework developed by ten Kate for Dutch sociolects to the Malay data: “which I will continue to explain with the words of Lambert ten Kate, in his *Aanleiding tot de Kennisse van het verhevene deel der Nederduitsche sprake*, in the XI Redenwisseling, I verhandeling, page 334, where it says this: ‘To the service of this Declination I divide the style in three ways, as 1. solemn or elevated 2. the elite or polished 3. the common.’”

The direct quote from ten Kate continues for almost two pages detailing the social and linguistic criteria that should be applied in a sociolinguistic analysis of Dutch. After the lengthy quote, Werndly applies this framework of ten Kate to Malay. When Werndly (1736, xlvi) discusses the lowest variety, he writes,

The fifth, if that must be counted a style at all, and not, with *Lambert ten Kate*, be rejected as a style, is called Bahasa Katjokan. . . . and must be understood as the vulgar spoken language of the street. This is called a mixed language, because it is cobbled together from many languages, not approved by the Malays, being so variable as there are places and speakers, being adapted to and contaminated with the mother tongue of every speaker. This language is also called Bahasa Bazar, or Bahasa Pasar, that is market language.

Although ten Kate is mentioned by name and quoted in three other places in Werndly’s grammar, this is the only place where he quotes him so extensively. The reason for this is that for eighteenth-century Dutch grammarians, whether influenced by Newtonian empiricism or not, the central question that drove their research was: what is a good basis for standardizing Dutch in such a way that it can be used as a tool of political unification, as a shared language of government and church in an otherwise highly diverse young nation, linguistically, socially, religiously? Ten Kate and Werndly tried to answer this question on a scientific basis in the spirit of Newton: by observation, inductive generalization, precision, and rationality.

The question of what was proper standard Latin had been around for centuries, and the criteria of Quintilian (ca. 35–100 C.E.) had made it all the way to the Latin school tradition of the schools that educated ten Kate and

Werndly: *ratio* (the rules or order of a language based on *analogia* and *etymologia*), *vetustas* (antiquity of usage), *auctoritas* (the language of canonized writers with immense authority), and *consuetudo*, the established *usus* or language use of the educated upper layers of society (de Bonth 1998, 12–14). Ten Kate and his pupil Werndly adopt these criteria but apply them in a novel way. Ten Kate explicitly outlines a procedure that ranks these classic criteria in scientific weight and operationalizes these concepts in a rational manner, according to the principles of natural philosophy.

In operationalizing the Quintilian criteria, the new empirical and critical mindset comes to fruition. For example, rather than using impressionistic or anecdotal evidence for the criterion of *vetustas*, ten Kate developed a methodology that avoided *ad hoc* arguments, by a systematic comparison of paradigms and word lists of Germanic languages and dialects to reconstruct the oldest form, the proto form. *Vetustas*, then, is developed by ten Kate into an early stage of the comparative method that would be perfected in the nineteenth century and lead to the discovery of the Indo-European language family (Jongeneelen 1992).

This led ten Kate to a much better understanding of the relationships among languages than his contemporaries or predecessors, for example, in his distinguishing between contact-based similarities among languages and similarities based on genetic relationships among languages. Likewise, Werndly has a good grasp of the way that Malay relates to other languages. He not only distinguishes between genetic relationships and contact-based relationships but also makes a key distinction between borrowing and the insertional code switching found in bilingual speech. Werndly argues against the idea of one of his colleagues, the Rev. Visscher, that Malay was genetically related to Semitic languages, for example as a daughter of Arabic: “Finally, many words from Arabic have been borrowed by Malay since the conversion to the religion of Islam. This seems to me the cause of the mistaken idea that it is a daughter of the Arabic language” (1736, 3).

But Werndly (1736, 56) agrees with another scholar, Adriaan Relandt, that the language of Madagascar, an island off the African coast, is genetically related to Malay because the words that the Madagascar language (Malagasy) shares with Malay have systematic sound correspondences (“houdende deze gemene zetregel”), just as he calls Javanese and Malay sister languages.

These insights had an immediate effect on his translation work: words that Malay had borrowed from other languages, adapted to Malay pronunciation and incorporated in the lexicon of the Malay literary tradition (e.g., *Allah* from Arabic) could be used freely in the Malay Bible as belonging to the Malay language (just as all languages have many borrowed words).

But insertional code switches—the non-Malay words that bilingual speakers of unstable and highly variable basolects inserted in their speech, from Portuguese, Dutch, or whatever first language they spoke—could not be used in the Bible (e.g., *Deos* or *Baptista* from Portuguese), as some seventeenth-century Bible translators had done (e.g., Brouwer, Valentyn).

Another innovation by ten Kate in the spirit of natural philosophy and with visible consequences for Werndly's work is the recognition of the spoken form of the language as primary, as the basis for developing a writing system. The oral form was a fascinating sound dimension that could be studied in terms of the laws of natural science and begged to be researched in order to find the articulatory and acoustic laws governing language as speech.

In Werndly's discussion of Malay spelling and speech sounds (Werndly 1736, v, 26), the influence of ten Kate is shown in his attention to the articulatory and acoustic qualities of Malay speech sounds, based on Werndly's own observations. He divides Malay consonants of the Jawi alphabet, using ten Kate's articulatory framework, into *lipletters* (labial sounds, e.g., *ba*, *wau*, *mim*), *gehemelte letters* (made at the hard and soft palate, *djim*, *ja*, *khaf*, *nja*), *tand-letters* (dentals, *tza*, *dza*, *tla*) and *tong letters* (linguals, sounds where the tongue shape as grooved, lateral, or curved plays a key role in their acoustic quality: *ra*, *dlad*, *sjin*). Werndly (1736, 22) quotes ten Kate, who analysed the Dutch sound spelled *ng* as a single sound, a velar nasal, that should not be written with two letters in a scientific spelling of the language. Werndly sees a parallel with the Malay velar nasal /ŋ/ that was customarily spelled as *ng* by Dutch writers of Malay.

Werndly not only faced the task of analysing the speech sounds of Malay, he also had to deal with the Jawi script, the traditional spelling of Malay based on Arabic letters, partially adapted to the needs of writing Malay. His grammar had a pedagogical purpose—to introduce foreigners to proper Malay, with its complex and rich derivational morphology, its sound system, literary traditions, and Jawi script. This meant that he had to make a transliteration table that translated the Jawi letters and writing conventions into Roman letters, a bridge for his readers to cross over to the Jawi spelling, which he knew to be the authoritative ancient writing system of the Malay world.

Werndly devotes considerable attention to the rich and complex derivational morphology of Malay. Mahdi (2002, 13–14) notes that Werndly (1736, 81–84) had a surprisingly good grasp of what modern linguistics calls conversion. Conversion refers to changes in word class that are morphologically unmarked, that is, not registered in the form of the word, a typologically salient feature of Austronesian languages that have high

degrees of categorial flexibility. Werndly (1736, 81–84) describes such conversions (calling them *verandering* “change”) in terms of his (probably Arabic-based; see Mahdi 2002) division of words into three major categories: nouns, verbs, and particles (= function words from closed grammatical word classes). Lexical roots (Werndly calls them *wortelwoorden* “root words”) in Malay that may cross from one of the three *hoofdrangen* “main parts of speech” into one of the others include, according to Werndly, the noun *karana* “reason,” which may also function as a conjunction “because,” verbs like *tahu* “to know” that may change into adjectives (*orang tahu* “a wise man”), and verbs like *puji* “to praise” that function as both verb and noun in Malay.

Finally, the new empirical mindset of the natural philosophers is visible in the way Werndly presents evidence for his grammatical rules, especially in the domain of syntax. Mahdi (2002, 19) writes,

One remarkable general feature of the treatment of syntax is that Werndly illustrates the rules he formulates with quotations from Classical Malay manuscripts. . . . These are particularly the Hikayat Iskander, Hikayat Indera Putera, Hikayat Kalilah dan Daminah, Mahkota Segala Raja-raja, . . . Silsilat as-Salatin (i.e., Sejarah Melayu), Kuda Perunggu, and the Hikayat Isma Yatim (p. LXVIII).

The empirical, experimental, and critical mindset of natural philosophy did not imply a radical departure from, or a disrespect for, the scholarly traditions that had formed natural philosophers in their schoolboy years at the Latin schools. Rather, it created a more open and selective interaction with those traditions. Both ten Kate and Werndly assume and apply notions, models, and terminology from the *ars grammatica* of Latin and Greek that they were taught at the Latin school. Rather than using the Latin terms, ten Kate and Werndly use Dutch calque translations (as was customary among Dutch grammarians in a spirit of linguistic nationalism), but they often put the Latin or Greek term in brackets or in a note. Ten Kate starts his chapter on the word categories or parts of speech of Dutch with the remark that it is unnecessary to sum up “de Algemeene Deelen eener Reden (*Partes Orationis*)” (the common parts of speech; 1723, 321) for those who have had a proper education at school.

In this Latin school tradition a grammar has four main parts, *orthographia*, *prosodia*, *etymologia*, and *syntaxis*, a structure dating back to antiquity, especially to Quintilian, Donatus, and Priscian, whose works had been extremely influential throughout medieval and humanist times (Bakker and Dibbets 1977, 18, 113). Werndly’s grammar follows this structure. The

introduction to the grammar states that it has three main parts, *Spelling*, *Woordgronding*, and *Woordvoeging*. In the footnote he explains these terms as *Orthographia*, *Etymologia*, and *Syntaxis*.

The orthography chapter ideally had four parts in the Latin school tradition (Bakker and Dibbets 1977, 17). The first three dealt with the name, the writing symbol, and the sound of the letter, based on the three aspects of the *litera* or letter: *nomen* “name,” *figura* “symbol,” and *potestas* “(sound) force.” The term “letter” denotes both the sound and the writing symbol. The fourth part deals with groupings of letters, both as syllables and in sound groups (vowels, consonants, *liquidae*, *mutae* [non-sonorant consonants]).⁵

Werndly’s chapter on *Spelling* or *Orthographia* follows this traditional structure, with three subsections, on the *naam* (name), *gedaanten* (form), and *kracht* (force) of the Malay letters, and a fourth section on the groupings of Malay letters in syllables and sound classes.

Although both ten Kate and Werndly were raised in the Latin school tradition, they also knew about and appreciated alternative grammatical traditions with roots in radically different language families, alternative traditions that, according to Mahdi (2002, 3), subverted the notion that the Latinist distinctions had universal validity. Werndly had been exposed to Semitic languages, both Hebrew and Arabic, and was aware of these alternative grammatical traditions. For example, Mahdi points to Werndly’s treatment of Malay parts of speech that takes a tripartite division into word classes as starting point, i.e., nouns, verbs, and particles, rather than the division into nine or ten word classes of the Latinist tradition as reflected in early modern grammars of Dutch, including the grammar of ten Kate (Mahdi 2002, 2). The Arabic grammatical tradition distinguished three major parts of speech (nouns, verbs, particles), ever since the book of grammar, *Al-Kitāb fī an-naḥw*, by the Persian scholar Abu Al-Baṣri (also known as Sibawayh, ca. 760–796), perhaps influenced by Aristotelian tripartite traditions of categorizing words (Versteegh 1997, 36, 76; Versteegh 1977). Mahdi (2002, 13) suggests that Werndly may have inherited the Arabic tripartite division from D. van der Vorm, who received it from the Malay scholars that formed his sources. Since Werndly explicitly mentions that he updates van der Vorm’s work with the newer insights from Dutch linguistics (Werndly 1736, lxxv), Mahdi concludes that Werndly’s subdivisions of the three main classes into ten subclasses “must have been the result of Werndly’s subsequent updating” (2002, 13).

⁵ *Mutae* is an ancient classical subgrouping of consonants based on sonority distinctions, not on voiced or voiceless. *Mutae* are consonants with a low sonority (non-sonorants in modern terms, e.g., p, b, k) contrasting with sonorant consonants such as nasals (m, n) and *liquidae* (l, r).

Werndly also uses Malay grammatical terminology, derived from Arabic grammatical traditions, and adds Dutch translations of these Arabic-Malay terms. For example, he divides his grammar in four parts: *'imlâ* "spelling," *tatsrif* "morphology" (Dutch *woordgronding*), *nahhuw* "syntax" (Dutch *woordvoeging*), and *ilmu si'ir* "poetry" (Dutch *dichtkunst*; Werndly 1736, 87, 131, 146, 196).

Werndly refers to Malay-language consultants with the Dutch term *Maleise leermeesters* (Malay masters), a term conveying respect for a teacher (1736, 264). He mentions two of them by name, Johannes Hekbol and Paulus de Monte, because they went with him to the Netherlands to correct the final version and the proofs in the run-up to the final printing by the Wetstein brothers in Amsterdam.

In the *Maleische Boekzaal*, the appendix on Malay literature, Werndly again mentions Hekbol as a Malay consultant who helped him to understand aspects of the Malay literary traditions. Werndly respected not only his Malay teachers but also their cultural heritage and its literary expression, including their religious literature, such as Malay commentaries and glosses of the Arabic Quran. At the end of his long overview of 69 Malay manuscripts from the rich and diverse literary tradition, he writes that he has just begun to explore a fragment of that rich literature and invites others to contribute to the expansion of the Malay *Boekzaal* by collecting and annotating Malay manuscripts. By doing so, "it will become increasingly clear that the Malays are not uncivilized people but that language and scholarship blossom among them" (Werndly 1736, 356).

4. Natural philosophy and the first Malay Bible

4.1 Language, style, and spelling of the first Malay Bible

The impact of natural philosophy on the first Malay Bible is both direct and indirect. Indirectly the impact came via Werndly's grammar, which followed the standardization agenda and methodology of ten Kate in the spirit of natural philosophy. Werndly corrected and revised the Malay Bible of Leijdecker and van der Vorm in terms of the rules of grammar, style, and spelling that he had laid down in his *Maleische Spraakkunst*. In doing so, he is a typical representative of the early eighteenth-century scholars who wanted a Bible in the high Malay style of the nobles and religious scholars, spelled consistently and in a language that followed the rules of morphology and syntax. They wanted a clean break with the old ways in which seventeenth-century VOC translators had translated Bible books. Werndly quotes a report written by a committee at the request of the church council

of Batavia to evaluate the Bible translation work of Pastor Valentyn, and that report reflects the same critical spirit: “That the language used therein, with the exception of some words, is of the old way can be seen continually in the bad Orthographia, often in the incorrect Etymologia, and here and there from the wrong Syntaxis.”

The report was signed by Pet. van der Vorm, Hermannus Kolde de Horn, and Corn. van der Sluis, Batavia, 8 November 1706. Their expert opinion weighed in strongly. The phrase “in the old way” used in the quote of the committee report refers to the seventeenth-century translations with their many grammatical and stylistic errors, their inconsistencies, bad spelling, and exegetical errors caused by using Dutch versions as the base text for the translation rather than Hebrew and Greek source texts. They did not want to see any insertional code switching from foreign languages, as used in the *Katjokan* basolects of Malay in the Bible (as earlier translators had done, to enhance understandability). They wanted proper written Malay, morphologically and syntactically well formed, without bad grammar. That is why Werndly collected Malay manuscripts containing the proper, written, courtly, and educated styles. They formed the data from which he extracted the laws of Malay grammar and style, by observation, precision, and inductive generalization.

Werndly knew very well that the Leijdecker translation that he was revising and completing would face serious problems of understandability. In a letter of 9 July 1734 to the church council of Batavia, he responds to the stinging criticism by his colleague Rev. Serruus “that the many Arabic words that occur therein could not be understood in Ambon, and that 80 years at the very least would be needed before the people of Ambon would learn those words.” Werndly’s defence is that Ambonese speakers for whom Malay is not their first language do not know enough Malay and will have problems not just with Arabic-based Malay words but with Malay words in general. Many in his intended audience would lack the knowledge of the Malay language, for which he, Werndly, could not be blamed: his assignment was a Bible in Malay.

Werndly’s grammar tried to set a new standard, not just for the Bible and the churches, but also for schools, government officials, law, and business contracts. This is clear from his dedication of the book to the Board of the East Indies Company (VOC) where he pointed out to the Board, who financed the costly printing of his magnum opus, that the archipelago had dozens of languages but that Malay had moved beyond her borders to become “the common and established language to interact with strangers.” Moreover, Malay was not just a spoken lingua franca but had a written tradition that made it fit to be the language of government and diplomacy,

as can be abundantly observed in the orders of the Government of the Indies that are announced in many places in that language, and are posted everywhere in written form. This is furthermore evidenced by the exchange of letters which is maintained by successive governments of the Indies with many indigenous kings, royal persons, and nobles. (Werndly 1736, 3)

In fact, the standardization agendas of ten Kate for Dutch and Werndly for Malay are closely related. Ten Kate wanted to complete the standardization of Dutch demanded by a still young republic, originally a loose federation of independent political entities united in their struggle to gain independence from the king of Spain but increasingly maturing in the direction of an integrated nation-state. Werndly lived in a time when the loose VOC thalassocracy (Mahdi 2002) developed towards an emerging land-based colonial state that needed a standard form of Malay, a standard based on scientific knowledge as understood by natural philosophy, that could be used in the whole archipelago, for church, Bible, school, and government. Bible translations and government regulations written in local, highly unstable forms of basolect Malay would have the short-term advantage of enhanced local understandability, but would lack global understandability in the emerging colonial state. And their instability meant that these basolects changed very quickly over time, making them obsolete after a few decades. This instability was also painfully visible in the spelling of older Malay translations by Europeans who followed local pronunciations, an approach to spelling based on an impressionistic mix of Dutch and Portuguese spelling conventions, applied by each translator in his own way.

This broad standardization agenda explains the many pages Werndly wrote about the Malay sound system, Jawi spelling, and its Latin transliteration. Unfortunately, the spelling system devised by Werndly, building on the earlier spelling systems devised by Leijdecker and van der Vorm, was “bristling all over with diacritics” (Mahdi 2002, 10) and tried to retain various features of the Arabic-based Jawi script in their Latinization. This made their Latin spelling unnecessarily complex; for example, they introduced positional variants of letters (Swellengrebel 1974, 173). Werndly also introduced two graphemes unknown to Latin-based spelling systems: a high comma to represent Jawi *alif* and the medial form of the Arabic letter *ayn* in his otherwise Latinized spelling of Malay words of Arabic origin (Mahdi 2002, 7–10).

The decision to aim for the style of classical Malay writings that originated in scribal cultures and archaic scribal genres made the understandability problems of the Leijdecker Bible even greater than they already were because of its unnecessarily complex spelling. It was not only the influence

of ten Kate that brought Werndly to the decision to derive his “laws” of Malay grammar from the written acrolect varieties of Malay and to follow those standardized rules in the Malay Bible. Ever since the first vernacular Bibles appeared during the Reformation era, the problem of what kind of Dutch or German or French linguistic varieties should be chosen for the Word of God was solved by the decision to use the written language and style of official government communication as the basic model, called *plakkatentaal* or *kanselarijtaal* (chancery language—the language of official communication) in Dutch (de Kooter 2018, 168) and *Canzeley Sprache* in German (van der Louw 2006, 59). The reasons to choose this chancery variety were, first of all, that these varieties were relatively the least tied to specific places or regions, and second, that they had a rather solemn written style that was associated with authority. Since God spoke in “His Word,” that word had authority as a written proclamation of a heavenly government. When Luther wrote about the need to use understandable language, the common German language, he did not mean spoken, local, or regional linguistic varieties of German but the written, “high” chancery variety of German:

Ich brauche den gemeinen deutsche Sprache. . . . Ich rede nach der sächsichen Canzeley welchen nachfolgen alle Fürsten und Könige in Deutschland. Alle Reichsstädte und Fürstenhofen schreiben nach der sächsichen und unsers Fürsten Canzeley, darum ists auch die gemeinste deutsche Sprache. (*Tischreden* I, quoted in van der Louw 2006, 59–60)

[I use the common German language. . . . I speak according to the Saxon Chancery that all majesties and kings in Germany follow. All the towns of the empire and royal courts write according to the Saxon Chancery of our kings, that is also why it is the most common German language.]

This Reformation tradition of adopting the high written, supraprovincial, and administrative style of government writings left Werndly no choice but to adopt the style of the only more or less standardized and authoritative writings available to him: scribal writings that emerged in the contexts of courts and mosques. Ever since Ruyl’s Gospel of Matthew in Malay (1637), the authorities of state and church had sided with those Bible translators that tried to use the written acrolect Malay variety for which the standard term was “Malay language as it is used in the books of the Malays.” There was some opposition to that position, with Valentyn (1698) as the most outspoken critic of the choice of “High Malay,” but the authorities did not agree with him and refused to finance the printing of his Bible translation (Werndly 1736, 224).

4.2 Natural philosophy and biblical scholarship in the first Malay Bible

So far, we have examined the effects of the methods and spirit of natural philosophy on the target side of the translation, in the spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and style of the Leijdecker Bible. But it was not only in the host or target aspect that Werndly wanted a clean break with the ways of the seventeenth-century European Bible translators. He also wanted the scientific and systematic method of natural philosophy applied to the analysis of the Hebrew and Greek languages, literature, and exegesis. Just as the authorities of church and state (VOC Board) had supported Werndly in his language and standardization programme, his insistence on solid methods of dealing with the Hebrew and Greek sources found wide support. For example, the Church of Batavia had appointed a committee to evaluate the translation work of Valentyn after Valentyn had submitted his manuscript for printing in 1706. Werndly quotes from the very critical report of the committee, who refused the manuscript: “The above-mentioned translation follows the Dutch Authorized Version completely and totally, without any signs that the source text has been consulted or followed” (1736, 224).

Werndly makes very clear that the Hebrew and Greek source texts should be the base text, as part of a careful translation procedure that he outlines as follows:

The drafts were made by D. van der Vorm and me, and we applied this procedure. First, we read the source texts in Greek or Hebrew, with the Latin translations of Arias Montanus and others, and then the Dutch translation, and after that the Malay translation proposal and when we saw no problems in the Malay translation, we used it in our draft. But when we noticed a problem, even the smallest and very minor issues, we consulted the Aramaic, Syriac, and especially the Arabic versions. In this process the LXX translators and the Persian versions were sometimes also useful. And then the High German of Luther and Piscator, the French, English, and sometimes the Spanish versions, besides the ancient Dutch versions. Next, we read what had been written by the scholars about these places in the *Biblia critica* and the *Synopsis criticorum* by Polus, adding some special authors, both ancient and contemporary, to discover the proper sense of these words. . . . Also, I always noted in my *Concordantia* of Trommius in what way we had rendered a word in order to use one and the same Malay word, if possible, later on for the same word in the source text; and thus I drafted the translation, and brought it into our meetings. (1736, 257–62)

Interestingly, Werndly sums up the exegetical and translational tools that the team used: the ancient versions, the Reformation versions,

the compendia of scholarly opinions of Polus⁶ and the concordance of Trommius.⁷ Trommius's concordance was a key tool to implement the ideal of consistency and precision in the translation. The laws, patterns, and rules of the Hebrew and Greek sources (as discovered within the methodological framework of natural philosophy) were ideally followed in the translation where possible. Naturally, this made the Malay text more difficult and stylistically strange in the eyes and ears of native speakers.

5. Conclusion

Ten Kate was inspired by the late eighteenth-century spirit of natural philosophy embodied by Newton, an empiricist spirit of discovering the laws of nature by observation and experiments, and formulating these laws in precise, preferably mathematical, ways, a spirit of critically comparing one's own empirical findings with the received wisdom accumulated in vast libraries.

When Werndly set himself to the task of editing van der Vorm's grammatical study of Malay to make it available in print, he studied the works of ten Kate and other Dutch linguists and realized that the art of grammar writing had made huge progress. Thus the spirit of Newton travelled eastwards to infuse the first academic grammar of Malay, with appendices on Malay literature and poetry, now recognized as the foundation of Malay studies, and to lay a scholarly foundation under a standardization programme that would shape the first Malay Bible.

Although the standardization programme begun by Leijdecker and van der Vorm and finished by Werndly in the spirit of natural philosophy led to a Bible translation that was difficult to read and understand, the underlying basic choices guided all subsequent standardization efforts, of both colonial and postcolonial political and cultural elites:

The same enforcement of that "High Malay," likewise strictly held free of any European influence, characterized official language policy after 1918, as carried out through the Balai Poestaka (spelled Balai Pustaka since 1948). Throughout the period of Indonesian national resurrection—so too in the subsequent period of independence—the language of spontaneous public discourse had been


⁶ Latinized name of Matthew Poole. Werndly refers to the *Synopsis criticorum* that appeared in various editions after 1669. Poole's work (in five volumes) was well known in the Low Countries. Poole also included learned opinions of Catholic and rabbinic exegetes.

⁷ Abraham Trommius (Trom) made a concordance of the Dutch Authorized Version, the *Statenvertaling*, in 1691 that gained immense popularity and saw many reprints and editions.

forms of “Low Malay” known as “Modern Malay” (cf. Drewes 1932), but the standard grammars, e.g., Koewatin (1910), Alisjahbana (1949), and Moeliono and Dardjowidjojo (1988), were all essentially based on “High Malay.” Hence, Werndly’s Malay grammar became the first in an unbroken tradition of a “High Malay” standard being enforced in an environment of unofficial or spontaneous use of “Low Malay” by the speech community. (Mahdi 2002, 22)

The tradition of Bible translation in a form of standard written Malay that was not tied to local varieties and could function in all parts of the vast archipelago, as a common treasure shared by the millions of Malay-speaking Christians, has also been continued until the present day. To help overcome understandability problems, Bible translation work in local varieties of Malay would appear in the nineteenth century to complement rather than replace Bibles in standard Malay, for example, a New Testament in Surabaya Malay, printed in 1834, and the Gospel of Matthew in Ambon Malay, printed in Haarlem, the Netherlands, at the expense of the Scottish Bible Society (Swellengrebel 1974, 176). These translations are closer to spoken forms and prioritize understandability by the less educated.

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