

## NEW TERMS IN A DEVELOPING LANGUAGE: THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

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Twenty-five years ago the Malay language could hardly be used to write even a simple science book for schools at secondary level. It was a vernacular language deficient in terminological and lexical specialisation.

Today the situation has completely changed. During the 25 years that have elapsed since Malaya obtained its independence in August 1957, the language has undergone an unprecedented "restoration" process during which its vocabulary was revolutionised and brought up-to-date by the addition of learned terminologies and new words drawn and adapted from English and other languages.

It is a process not entirely new to the language, for since very early in its history, Malay has been constantly enriched by contact with other languages, thus raising it above the other local and regional languages to the status of a lingua franca of Southeast Asia.

The turning point came when both the people and the government in the country realised the importance of the language in playing the role of a common medium of communication in an independent multi-racial Malaya.

This realisation led to the establishment in July 1956 of the Balai Pustaka, a language and literature department under the then Federal Department of Education, Federation of Malaya. In September 1965, the name Balai Pustaka was changed to its present one, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), (the Dewan). In 1957, a provision in the Federal Constitution stipulated the status of Malay as the nation's national and official language.

The responsibility of enriching and promoting the growth of the language was entrusted to the Dewan. In 1959, the Dewan acquired the status of a corporation under the Ministry of Education.

The terms of reference defining the Dewan (the Language and Literary Agency) are:

1. to develop and enrich the national language;
2. to promote literary talents, especially in the national language (now Bahasa Malaysia);

3. to print or publish or assist the printing or publication of books, magazines, pamphlets, and other forms of literature in the national language as well as in the other languages:
4. to standardise the spelling and pronunciation, and to coin appropriate terminologies in the national language; and
5. to compile and publish a national language dictionary. (Monolingual Kamus Dewan published in 1970; Bilingual Kamus Dwibahasa published in 1979).

In 1972 Malaysia reached an agreement with Indonesia on a common spelling system, and the Indonesian-Malaysian Language Council (MBIM) was formed on 23rd May 1972. In 1973 attention was drawn towards the standardisation of scientific terms between the two countries.

In 1975 the Dewan published "Pedoman Umum Pembentukan Istilah Bahasa Malaysia" (General Guidelines for the Formation of Malay Terminologies) from which is taken much of the material in this paper.

In Malaysia a permanent Committee on Bahasa Malaysia has been established - its members include linguists and experts in various disciplines from the five local universities, Ministries and other Government Departments - to be responsible for the standardisation of the national language.

It should be emphasised that all the terms are coined by Terminology Committees consisting of experts in their respective fields of knowledge. Most of them are members of the various faculties at the local universities. Most of the Dewan's publications and translations have relied very heavily on the new terms, particularly the specialised ones, coined by the various Terminology Committees.

The new terms have been coined according to certain rules which are both linguistically and practically pertinent to the purposes of enriching the vocabulary of the national language.

Of course the rules cannot be very rigid because problems do occasionally crop up. Certain minor divergences from the rules are tolerated when necessary.

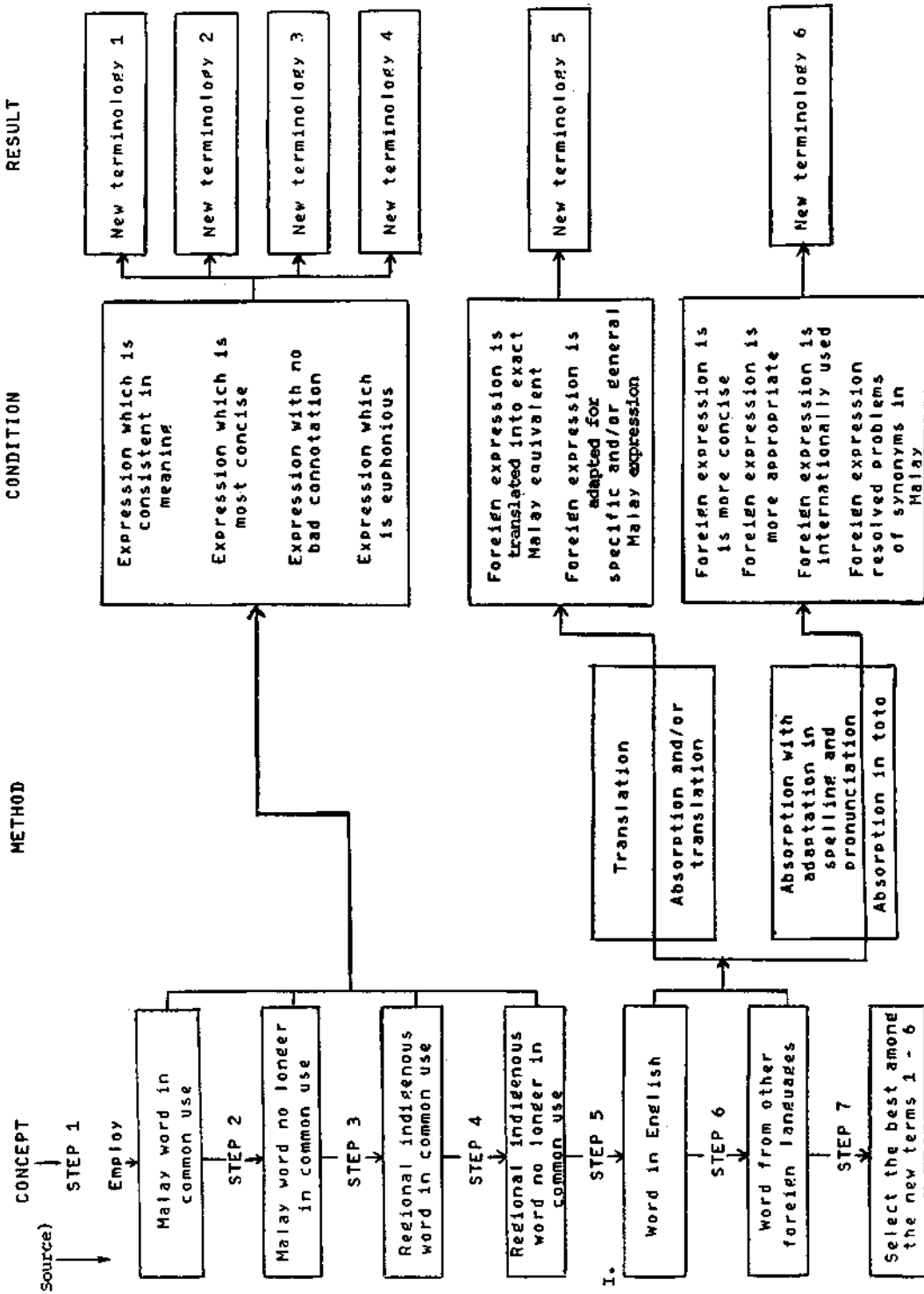
How the new terms are developed I shall try to illustrate with the help of the chart: A Schematic Procedure for the Formation of Terminology (see below).

To date the Dewan has in its term bank 250,000 terms from the various disciplines taught at the local universities.

To further enhance the development of terminology the Dewan is utilising a computer to expedite the collection, compilation, standardisation, storage and retrieval of terminologies.

The minimum target by 1985 is to add another 350,000 terms to make a total of 600,000 terms in view of the fact that beginning in 1983, all first year courses in the local universities will be conducted in Bahasa Malaysia.

A SCHEMATIC PROCEDURE FOR THE FORMATION OF TERMINOLOGY



## SOURCES OF NEW TERMS

I. (Many of the new terms have not been directly translated from other languages. That is to say, only their equivalents in Malay were coined. A very important function of the Terminology Committees has been to standardise certain terms and words in Malay, and wherever possible native words are preferred, as in STEPS 1, 2, 3, 4) e.g.

gaya	-	style
tapak	-	site
suhu	-	temperature
satah	-	plane (Mathematics)
calon	-	candidate
lapor	-	report
dening	-	yoke (not the figurative meaning)
labur	-	invest
dermaga	-	wharf
gambut	-	peat

II. (In comparison with the other foreign languages, English has become a great source of the new terms in Malay. However, many words of Arabic, Sanskrit, Portuguese and Dutch origins are to be found, as in STEPS 5, 6) e.g.

pengerusi	-	chairman
perusahaan	-	industry
botol	-	bottle
ekologi	-	ecology
struktur	-	structure
psikologi	-	psychology
aerial	-	aerial
bank	-	bank
sabda	-	cabda (Sanskrit) - to command
rel	-	rail (Dutch)
enjin	-	engine
sarjan	-	sergeant
akhir	-	akhir (Arabic) - the end
delta	-	delta
rangkaian	-	network
segitiga	-	triangle
agen; ejen	-	agent
kasus; kes	-	case
geografi	-	geography
linguistik	-	linguistics
radio	-	radio
radar	-	radar
matematik	-	mathematics
(ilmu kira-kira; ilmu hisab)		