

Studying Concepts at NIAS. *NIAS Nytt*. No 2 Copenhagen University, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

## STUDYING CONCEPTS AT NIAS

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-An intercultural and interlinguistic study of concepts for conflict and conflict handling in Malay and Swedish During December 1993 Prof. Asmah Haji Omar from the university of Malaya at Kuala Lumpur and I came to NIAS in order to jointly work on concepts for conflict and conflict handling in Malay and Swedish.

The dark wet and somewhat gloomy but also somewhat cosy atmosphere of Copenhagen in December turned out to be conducive to our efforts. In the mornings, we were able to discuss conceptual analysis and semantic fields while struggling with the buttering of sandwiches at the Nordic College (where we were staying) and enjoying the benefits of the Copenhagen system of public transportation. Once safely arrived at NIAS, we started to learn how to enter our insights into the local computer resources.

Our work is a part of a larger interdisciplinary project, carried out in cooperation between the university of Göteborg, several Malaysian universities and NIAS, which bears the name "Culturally determined models of conflict and conflict resolution". In this project, linguists, anthropologists, historians and peace and development researchers from Sweden and Malaysia are trying to understand the nature of conflict and conflict resolution in Sweden and Malaysia through a comparison of the two countries and their cultures. The job of the linguists in the project is to try to throw light on the role of language and communication for conflict and conflict resolution.

There are three substudies with a focus on language and communication in the project:

- (i) Concepts of conflict and conflict resolution in Malay and Swedish
- (ii) The academic seminar as an arena of conflict and conflict resolution.
- (iii) Conflict and conflict resolution in a business setting.

In the other disciplines, studies are carried out on attitudes, types of mediation and negotiation, shariya courts, local politics, women in industry and historical development. Over and above the disciplinary studies, a volume drawing together results from the different disciplinary studies is also under way.

The work Professor Asmah and I did in December fell within the first of the three mentioned substudies "concepts of conflict and conflict resolution" in Malay and Swedish. Here we are looking at different ways in which concepts of conflict and conflict resolution are codified linguistically. We have chosen to study three types of linguistic and semantic structuring:

- (i) Semantic fields (a group of words which have common semantic features)
- (ii) Meaning potential (an in-depth lexico-conceptual study of one or several words)
- (iii) Metaphors and proverbs

With regard to all three types of structuring, we try to find both differences and similarities between Swedish and Malay, which we then try to explain or, at least, to motivate in different ways. Let me mention some examples. In studying semantic fields, we found that Swedish seems to have more words for different kinds of battles (träffning, skärmytsling, batalj, slag etc) and for kinds of fighting (fäktas, boxas, envig, duellera, etc.) than Malay. Since many of these words are slightly obsolete in present-day Swedish, we believe that they are a consequence of the fact that Sweden has a more war-like past than Malaysia. We also found that Malay has more words than Swedish for verbal quarrel (berkelahi, bergaduh, bersangketa, bertengkar, berbabil, berbalah) but so far we have no totally convincing explanation for this.

In studying metaphors, we found that strong emotions in Malay are centered in the hati (liver) while in Swedish they are usually thought to derive from the hjärta (heart). We hope to have our comparative study finished in 1994.