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## **Why Shift? Focus on Sabah and Sarawak**

In West Malaysia, three racial groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian form the bulk of the Malaysian population and their languages are widely used. However, in East Malaysia, there also exist many other ethnic groups. Their languages and dialects are being threatened by dominant languages which have become the *lingua franca* in the urban communities of Sabah and Sarawak. This paper reviews studies conducted by both local and foreign researchers on language shift and maintenance in East Malaysia and discusses the reasons for language shift in minority communities.

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### **1. Introduction**

The term language shift was coined by Fishman (1964) to describe a speech community's lack of habitual use of its heritage language. This generally occurs due to competition from a regionally and socially more powerful (or numerically stronger) language. In essence, language shift occurs when "a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one" (Fasold, 1984, p. 213). Because the constant pressures that come from political domination and economic change are often cited as the reasons for language shift (e. g. Borchers, 2007), the domains of the home and religion are often the last bastions of survival for beleaguered languages (Gal, 1978).

Among the earlier studies on minority groups in West Malaysia (commonly referred to as Peninsular Malaysia) are those by David (1996) on the Malaysian Sindhi community, Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin (1998) on the minority Javanese community in a semi-urban village called Sungai Lang in Malaysia, David and Faridah Noor (1999) on the Portuguese community in Malacca, David and Naji (2000) on the Malaysian Tamils, David and Nambiar (2002) on exogamous marriages and out-migration as factors causing language shift

among the Catholic Malayalees of Kuala Lumpur, David, Ibtisam Naji and Sheena Kaur (2003) on the Punjabi Sikh community in Selangor, David (2003) on the Pakistani community in Machang, Kelantan.

Given the complexity and fragility of the linguistic ecology (cf Muhlhausler, 1998) of East Malaysia, it is surprising as Martin (1992) notes in relation to Borneo in general that so few indepth studies have been carried out to investigate the language usage patterns of the multilingual people. Asmah (1992) explains that research in language shift is important, especially at the present time when the linguistic communities in Sarawak are undergoing changes in their use of language arising from the Malaysian language policy. This paper looks at reasons for language shift in some of the indigenous communities in East Malaysia i. e. the states of Sabah and Sarawak by considering the interactions between global and local factors vis-à-vis the wider linguistic, socio-economic, political, education, religious and psychological environments (as laid out by Muhlhausler, 1998 and Edwards, 1992).

## **2. East Malaysia Demography**

Malaysia's diverse ethnic composition is a reflection of its rich and eventful history. Archeological records say Sabah was peopled at least 30,000 years ago whereas evidence of the existence of the human race in Peninsula Malaysia dates between 3000 BC and 2000 BC. There is evidence of human migration from southwestern China around the same time. Malaysia had witnessed waves of early immigration during the pre-colonial period resulting in a number of groups having a legitimate claim to indigenous status. On that count the Orang Asli in the Malay Peninsula, the Dayaks of Sarawak, the various ethnic groups in Sabah that include the Dusun (or Kadazan), Bajau, Murut and other groups, the Malays both in Sabah and Sarawak as well as the Peninsula are the indigenous peoples of Malaysia.

While in Peninsula Malaysia the Malays, Chinese and Indians make up the largest ethnic groups, the ethnic distribution in Sarawak and Sabah is different. The population of Sarawak is 2.24 million people whilst Sabah has approximately 2.45 million people (Bulan, 1998). There are 33 ethnic groups in Sarawak and Sabah and the Ibans form the largest group followed by the Chinese, Malays and Bidayuhs. There are smaller groups like the Kayans, Kenyahs, Lun Bawang, Kelabits, Penans and Punans (collectively known as the Orang Ulu) and the Melanau. There are still smaller groups like the Berawan, Bisayah, Kedayan, Kajang Baketan, Sian, Ukit, and Penan. As early as 1842, in a Code of Law which Brooke promulgated on February 2, 1842, clause 275, reference was made to the Dayak and 'Dayak tribes' presumably referring to all the tribes as opposed to the Malay or the Chinese. The 1991 census put the figures in Sarawak as follows: Iban (29.8), Chinese (28%), Malay (21.2%), Bidayuh (8.3%), Melanau (5.7), other indigenous groups (6.1%) which comprise all the other indigenous groups, and others (0.9%). See the Population Census, Vol. 1, Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur (1995). The Malaysian defini-

tion for the term 'Dayak' is provided by Article 161 A of the Malaysian Constitution whereby 'Dayak' refers specifically to two native groups in Sarawak, namely the Ibans or Sea Dayaks and the Bidayuh or Land Dayaks. Following the passing of the interpretation (Amendment) Bill 2002 at the State legislative assembly in Kuching, Sarawak on 6 May, 2002, the Bidayuh communities were no longer to be referred to as 'Land Dayak' – the terminology given by the Brooke and Colonial administration in the olden days. Today, the Land Dayak prefer to be known as Bidayuh. In their dialect 'Bi' means 'people' and 'dayuh' means 'land'. The other, indigenous groups in Sarawak apart from the Malays and Melanau are referred collectively as Orang Ulu. Today, the Dayaks make up about 50% of the population with the Iban at 29.8% constituting the largest ethnic group in the state.

In Sabah, the estimated 37 different indigenous ethnic communities make up 84.8% of the population of 1.4 million and in the old days of Sabah or North Borneo, the many ethnic communities were known by tribal names such as Gonsomon, Momogun, Tobilung, Tangara, Tatana and others. Evans (1992, cited in Jeanett Stephen, 2000) states that at that time in North Borneo, there were two sets of ethnic communities: the Muslim ethnic community who referred themselves to as 'Sama', and the non-Muslim ethnic communities who referred to themselves by using tribal names. The arrival of the Brunei sultanate dominating North Borneo gave rise to labels such as 'Bajau' (who are Muslims) and 'Dusun' (who are mostly non-Muslims). The Dusun usually describes himself generically as a tulun tindad (landsman) or, on the West Coast, particularly in Papar as a Kadazan (Rutter, 1929, cited in Jeanett Stephen, 2000) Lasimbang and Miller (1990) used the term 'Kadazan/Dusun' and Reid (1997, cited in Jeanett Stephen, 2000) used 'Kadazandusun' (p. 1250). In the 1980 Census, those who were not Chinese or Indians were listed as simply 'pribumi'. On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1989, in his keynote address at a symposium on the standardization of the Kadazan dialects, Datuk Joseph P. Kitingan as President of the Kadazan Cultural Association stressed that '...as far as our ethnic identity is concerned, we have already resolved what we should call ourselves'. This was based on the unanimously – endorsed label 'Kadazan' by representatives of the various tribal groups at the first congress of the United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO on 6 August 1961). Reid (1997, cited in Jeanett Stephen 2000) reported that the 1961 UNKO congress had given rise to staunch advocates of the label 'Dusun' and the dissatisfaction gave rise to the *Dusun lo tud* Association in 1960 and the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA) in 1967. The USDA's resolute action in maintaining the label 'Dusun' was further proven when they held a separate Harvest festival celebration in 1989 and in so doing threatened Kadazan nationalism by asserting two instead of one Kadazandusun community (Reid; 1997, cited in Jeanett Stephen, 2000). On 24 January 1995, the Kadazan and Dusun communities witnessed another historical agreement between USDA and KCDA in which the ethnic names or labels of 'Kadazan' and 'Dusun' were officially known as the 'Kadazandusun' representing the community, and the language as the 'Kadazandusun' language. Since 1999 the acronym KDM has been repeatedly

used to signify the grouping of three communities namely, Kadazan, Dusun and Murut as one group. (Tan, 1997).

The official language in East Malaysia is Bahasa Malaysia with English as a strong second language especially in the urban areas (Gill, 2002). In Sarawak, *Bahasa Sarawak* is widely spoken in non-official situations whereas in Sabah, *Bahasa Sabah* is commonly used often for interethnic communication as compared to other dialects or languages.

There is no latest figure to show how many dialects spoken by the ethnic minorities in Sabah and Sarawak have actually become extinct. Burkhardt's (2006) seminar paper on the Berawan-Lower Baram Languages showed that languages that belong to the Berawan subgroup are spoken in four communities: Long Terawan, Batu Belah, Long Teru and Long Jegan. They are generally spoken by the elders in the community. The younger generation on the other hand do not use the Berawan languages as many of them have contracted exogamous marriages or prefer speaking either Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Sarawak or English.

### 3. Reasons for Shift

Jeanett Stephen (1999) investigated the roles of Ethnic Community Broadcasting (ECB) in Kadazandusun language maintenance. Radio Malaysia Sabah (RMS) has several ethnic languages currently aired over its airwaves namely Bajau, Kadazan, Dusun and Murut. Based on the feedback and response of the ethnic broadcasters of both the Kadazan and Dusun slots, the roles of ECB in the maintenance of the Kadazandusun language are to:

- i. serve as a medium which provides institutional support of the dialects of Kadazan and Dusun
- ii. serve as an alternative to the normal route of language learning (e. g. books and classes)
- iii. disseminate information on the cultural and traditional aspects of the Kadazandusun community to its younger generation in the mother tongue;
- iv. serve as a forum for language use in programs where listeners, young and old, use the indigenous language when they call in during radio phone-in shows.

Radio Malaysia Sarawak (RMS) and Cats FM, two private radio companies also have several ethnic languages aired and are regarded as one way of maintaining the hereditary dialects which are not taught in schools. Of more interest the last few years is how efforts are being made to maintain the Bidayuh dialects by mixing them in the radio announcers' speech. Rensch, et al (2006: 18) stated that the Bidayuh lyrics in songs are influential in teaching reading and spelling in Bidayuh, as well as disseminating Bidayuh words to the younger generation. In newspapers too, Kadazan-Dusun has been used in the *Sabah Times*, and in Sarawak beginning from 1 March 2006, *Utusan Borneo* provides a weekly column for news in Iban. There is no Bidayuh used in any

of the local newspapers in Sarawak. However, the Catholic News, the monthly Catholic Church Bulletin printed by the Archdiocese of Kuching has 10% of news reports written in the various Bidayuh dialects (Dealwis, 2008).

However, it remains a debate whether the initiative to empower these languages through mass media is effective. This is because some studies have shown that despite this initiative, the indigenous languages are still dying a slow death. For example, Lasimbang et al's (1992) study of the use of the mother tongue among coastal Kadazan children in Sabah shows that the national language, Bahasa Malaysia is slowly replacing Kadazan as a *lingua franca* among the coastal Kadazan. The main reason is due to the pressure felt from Bahasa Malaysia which is used in all official domains and is the medium of instruction in school. Like the Iban language of Sarawak, the Kadazan language has become less significant to the younger generation as there is no economic value attached to it. According to Rensch et al (2006: 21), the younger generation of Bidayuh prefer to use Bahasa Melayu and English at work and at home because they believe that their dialects are less useful as they lack the industrial and scientific concepts necessary to express complex and life needs in the scientific and industrial society in their present time. Dundon (1989: 412) said that:

'It is shameful and sad that more and more of our youths today, particularly those families who live and work in town, do not know how to speak Bidayuh. These people will gradually lose their culture.'

Among the frequently cited causes of language shift are migration, industrialization, school language, urbanization and higher prestige associated with the new language (Fasold, 1984). A review of the studies done in East Malaysia will provide insights into the shifting patterns of language use among the ethnic minorities in East Malaysia. A number of macro-level reasons such as urbanization, increased mobility and education are recognized as being significant in hastening the process of language shift among the ethnic minorities. At the micro level, individuals from minority groups often succumb to the social pressures of the majority groups during social interaction and hence shift their pattern of language use according to the available *lingua franca*.

### **3.1. Macro Level of Language Shift**

In this section, the migration and economic change, urbanization and improved transportation and communication, and school language and government policies are discussed, with regards to language shift.

#### **3.1.1. Rural–Urban Migration and Economic Change**

Rural–urban migration is a common phenomenon among the younger generation of ethnic communities in East Malaysia. They do so in search for jobs, incomes and a better life, in the absence of those things in the village (Minos 2000, p. 154). They will come to bigger towns like Kuching, Sibul, Miri in Sarawak and Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau in Sabah besides Singapore

and West Malaysia. When this happens very often they will adopt the language of the majority in their daily lives and their children born in these places are often more comfortable with the dominant languages used such as Malay or English rather than their mother tongue. The use of the hereditary language is often left to the older generations who remain in the villages (Minos 2000).

The impetus for language shift to occur among the ethnic minorities in East Malaysia is related to rural–urban migration which encourages the use of the language of the new environment and the consequent loss in proficiency in the original mother tongue. In the case of the Bidayuhs of Sarawak, migration involves moving from their ancestral homes in the rural Bidayuh Belt to cities. Therefore, when communicating with fellow Bidayuhs very often the educated Bidayuhs in the towns tend to use English and the less educated Sarawak Malay or Bahasa Malaysia (Dealwis and David, 2005). Notwithstanding the fact that Malay is the official and national language, this is not surprising, given that English is seen as a language of prestige.

Pressures from dominant languages in the linguistic environment in the urban areas have also caused language shift to occur. When a minority group in the urban area is surrounded by a more powerful group, pressures from the dominant group may restrict the use of the minority group's language to the home domain only. Tengku Zainah (1978) informed that the younger generation of Orang Miriek (Jati Miriek) chose to speak Sarawak Malay dialect and be identified as Sarawak Malays because they wanted to gain acceptance by other urban Sarawak Malays whom they considered as more superior. In another study of the same community, Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan (1992) discovered that the younger generation of *Orang Miriek* has a negative attitude to their heritage language because Bahasa Miriek was associated with being rural.

Generally speaking the ethnic minorities are economically not as well-off as the Malays, Chinese and even Indians in Malaysia. By coming to the urban areas and getting better jobs than their fore-fathers who had worked as farmers and fishermen, the ethnic minorities are slowly breaking the cycle of poverty. Many have become petty traders, selling their vegetables, fruits and other consumer items in the markets. The majority of these petty traders are women who have taken the initiative to supplement their families' incomes. Today with the pro-*Bumiputera* government, many members of the younger generation are highly educated and professionals. With better socio-economic status and urbanization more pressure is placed on the use of prestige languages which enhance status and aid mobility. Due to the economic value of English and Bahasa Malaysia as the official languages much emphasis is placed on encouraging children to master these languages. In fact many of the children are enrolled in Chinese schools where they learn Mandarin because their parents feel that having knowledge of Mandarin would help them to secure jobs in the private sector. At least 10 percent of Chinese school enrollment in Sarawak are non-Chinese and the figure is increasing each year (Borneo Post, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2008). The main reason for language shift for ethnic minority dialects in the

urban areas in East Malaysia is the pressure of Bahasa Malaysia which is the official language of Malaysia, English and Mandarin. These languages are perceived to have economic value.

### **3.1.2. Government Policies on Education**

Changing education policies over time as a result of colonisation and then Malaysianisation (as a result of nationalism) have affected the medium of instruction, which to some extent tends to influence the language habitually used. The language used by the multilingual speakers of East Malaysia is also controlled by the question of which language/dialect is available to the speaker. Those who have been educated only at primary level or lower secondary level are likely to have access to Malay only whereas those educated to higher levels, or through the English medium system that was in place in Sabah until 1970's and in Sarawak until 1980's will have access to English as well.

The education policy allows only Malay to be used as the medium of instruction for all subjects until 2003 when Mathematics and Science were taught in English. Since 2007, Iban and Kadazan are taught in certain schools in the two states leading to Form Five examinations (PMR), which is the secondary school-leaving examination. Furthermore, there exist Chinese schools in Sabah and Sarawak but no Tamil schools. The other minority languages are not given government recognition although there are radio broadcasting services for some of the minority dialects. Due to this and also because there are so many minority groups with very small populations, many of the dialects of minority ethnic communities are no longer much used. However, there is no record of the number of dialects in Sarawak that have totally disappeared (according to an interview with an officer at the Sarawak Museum in Kuching). Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution of 1957 gives provision for the pupil's own mother-tongue (POL) to be taught in schools if the parents so desire and if there are at least 15 students to make up a class. A few play schools using Bidayuh dialects have been initiated by UNESCO in Bidayuh areas but the project has received mixed responses from the rural Bidayuhs. Interviews with some Bidayuh parents revealed that many Bidayuhs prefer their children to master English, and Bahasa Melayu so that they could compete with other races when seeking for jobs. Moreover, there are 29 Bidayuh dialects and no one common Bidayuh language (Dealwis, 2008).

In fact, studies have shown that with better education (i. e. possessing tertiary education degrees), the indigenous groups have shifted to English instead of maintaining their hereditary language as reflected in the patterns of language usage among the Kelabit particularly those educated Kelabit working in the towns along the coast in Sarawak (Martin and Yen, 1992). In the preliminary survey of the 51 Kelabit respondents with Kelabit spouses, 70% of the respondents use the Kelabit language with their children. The remaining 30% used English. The higher prestige of the English language makes it a choice in the homes of educated minority groups such as the Kelabits.

Another factor which has caused language shift among minority groups in East Malaysia is when the language or dialect spoken is not given official status and recognition. In discussing the marginalisation of the Iban language leading to its disuse by the younger generation, Ariffin Omar and Teoh (1992) show that the cause of language shift is the lack of recognition and status given by the government, despite the Iban language being spoken by about 60% of the population of Sarawak. Community members are shifting from the use of the Iban language because there is also a lack of commitment to develop Iban as a medium of communication and education, while campaigns to promote Bahasa Malaysia are intense.

Because of the dominance of the national language today, younger members of the Iban community have shifted away from Iban and even play language games in either Bahasa Malaysia or English. In a study on Jako Keluang, a form of language game in Iban, Teoh (1991) discovers that the language game is only known by a few elderly Iban at Kapit and Kanowit, and none of the younger generation know the game.

### **3.1.3. Religious Conversion and Definition of Malay**

Feeling ashamed of one's heritage language is a major attitude problem that has caused language shift among the younger generation of Orang Miriek in Miri, Sarawak. Bahasa Miriek is associated with being poor, uneducated and rural whereas Bahasa Sarawak is spoken by the Malays in Miri town who have better socio-economic status. In order to be identified as Malays, the Orang Miriek who are also Muslims have shifted to Bahasa Malaysia Sarawak. The issue of being teased by members of the dominant group and the backwardness associated with the minority group not only makes the younger generation of Orang Miriek take on a Malay identity but this is also the case with other ethnic groups who have converted to Islam. As the commonly held definition of Malay is one who practices the Islamic religion, has a Malay way of life and uses the Malay language, non-Malay Bumiputeras who are Muslims often adopt Malay culture and identity. When this happens, their children will shift to Malay because they have taken Malay names and joined Islamic activities where their peers are mostly Malays. A number of the Bidayus for instance who are generally described as 'a Christian race' (Minos 2000) have converted to Islam or 'masuk Melayu' (become Malay). According to Chang (2002) there are about 300 families out of 10,750 Bidayuh families in the Kuching Division who have converted to Islam. This shows that about 3% of the Bidayuh population in the Kuching Division has already embraced the Islamic faith. Therefore, Bidayus who have converted to Islam, mostly through intermarriages with Muslims adopt the Malay culture and adopt other Malay identity markers such as wearing *baju kurung* (Malay dress), speaking Malay and eating Malay food (see also David, 2003 on the Pakistani community taking on a Malay personae). Conversion to Islam also causes some minority ethnic communities to take on Malay identity.



### 3.2. Micro Level of Language Shift

In this section, the micro level of language shift is discussed. The micro level elements are:

- i. exogamous marriages
- ii. no common ground for a common language
- iii. location
- iv. close/dense networks
- v. attitude towards their language and other languages

#### 3.2.1. Exogamous Marriages

Exogamous marriages are common among the educated ethnic minorities and are a factor that leads to language shift. In the case of the Kelabits, the relatively low percentage transmission of Kelabit to offspring appears to be one of the major factors in an on-going language shift away from Kelabit. In their study as earlier stated of 51 educated Kelabits, Martin and Yen (1992) show that 39% had Kelabit spouses whilst the remainder 61% had non-Kelabit spouses. Even in marriages where both spouses were Kelabit, the Kelabit language was the main means of communication between the spouses in only 85% of such marriages. In contrast, in exogamous marriages, the major language of communication between spouses was English in 65% of marriages with Malay being used in 15%. However, among all respondents irrespective of whether they had contracted endo or exogamous marriages only 33% used Kelabit, whereas 45% used English and 14% Malay.

Yet another small community the Telegu community in Kuching, Sarawak tend to contract exogamous marriages (David and Dealwis, 2007). These marriages even started with the first generation i. e. G1s who married Tamils and this pattern of exogamous marriages was noted among G2, who contracted such marriages not only with Tamils but also with Malayalees, Chinese and Dayaks. The shift is not subtractive bilingualism because they shifting towards other languages i. e. English and Malay, which are empowering languages in context. One is a national language whilst the other is the international language. This contrasts with other studies like Haugen (1969) and Gal (1979) where the Norwegians in America and the Hungarians in Oberwat experienced subtractive bilingualism shifting away from their ethnic languages to English and German respectively. Both Malay and English have already gained a foothold and have even encroached into the domain of the family, the very last bastion of mother-tongue maintenance. These findings and reasons are also seen in David and Nambiar's (2003) case study of 50 Catholic Malayalees in Kuala Lumpur.

In the case of the Bidayuhs, the Bidayuh normally lose out to their non-Bidayuh spouses in terms of the main language spoken at home. Minos (2000; 162) stated that due to exogamous marriages of Bidayuhs with other ethnic groups, other languages such as Sarawak Malay, Bahasa Melayu, Iban Chinese and English are slowly replacing the Bidayuh dialects at home. Ting and Campbell (2005), examined language used in an extended Bidayuh family dis-

covered that Sarawak Malay was the main language used because the matriach and patriach were unable to understand each other's Bidayuh dialects. In mixed marriages between Ibans and Dayak Bidayuhs since Ibans are generally more dominant than the latter in terms of population size often the Iban language will be used at home.

### 3.2.2. No Common Ground for a Common Language

The Bidayuh, also known as Land Dayaks is one of the main indigenous ethnic groups that have settled in southwest Sarawak and the adjacent areas of west Kalimantan. They are found mostly within the Kuching and Samarahan divisions. The term 'Bidayuh Belt' was coined by Dundon (1989) to mean areas in Kuching and Samarahan where the majority of the Dayak inhabitants are Bidayuhs; in the four districts of Lundu, Bau, Serian and Kuching Rural. Although it is a community of about 160,000 people, they are divided linguistically into four dialect groups and the Biatah are in the Kuching area, the Bau–Jagoi are in Bau, the Selako–Larra are in Lundu and the Bukar–Sadong are in Serian.

One reason for language shift among the ethnic minorities is because of variations in the language spoken as there is no common Bidayuh code (Nais, 1989; Dundon, 1989 and Minos, 2000). The problem among Bidayuhs is that there are more than twenty dialects which are grouped under four main dialects based on districts as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Villagers and Dialects Spoken by the Bidayuh according to District

Name of District	Number of Villages	Dialect Spoken
Serian	126	Bukar–Sadong
Kuching	84	Biatah/ Penyua/ Bipuruh
Bau	43	Bau–Jagoi
Lundu	41	Salako Lara

Source: Nais (1989)

Every village within a dialectal group has its own distinctive style and way of talking. These distinctions can be analysed by their phonological, syntax and semantic features. Phonological variations include accents. Variations of lexical items also exist. Rubber is called *jotu* in Bau, *daduo* and *potok* in the Jagoi dialect, and *potok* in the Biroih and the Krokong dialects (Dundon, 1989).

The codes may be distinguished by the use of different sentence constructions. Consider this phrase, 'I want to eat rice', which is expressed as *aku an man tubi* in the Biatah dialect, *oku raan man tubi* in the Bau–Jagoi dialect, and *aku era maan sungkoi* in the Bukar Sadong dialect. Across the dialects, some words may also carry different meanings. For example *bisaki* in the Bi-

atah dialect means 'how', however in the Bukar–Sadong dialect, it means 'making love.'

Hence, the Bidayus face a problem when they interact with other Bidayus. Although they are from the same ethnic stock, the language variations make it hard for them to communicate. The Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates (Dealwis, 2008) have to communicate across dialect groups using Sarawak Malay or Bahasa Melayu because of the variations in their Bidayuh dialects.

### 3.2.3. Close/Dense Networks

It is not only the Bidayus who do not understand one another because of the many dialects spoken, even among the Ibans themselves, a neutral code has to be used when addressing the Ibans from Remun in Serian District. According to Cullip (2003: 60), the Remun Iban of Sarawak speak a dialect of Iban which is said to be unintelligible to other Ibans. As a relatively small and linguistically isolated group the multilingual Remun are facing strong macro pressure which could be expected to lead to language shift to Bahasa Iban. This is occurring in many villages, however in the core Remun settlement of Kampung Remun micro level factors are operating to maintain the use and inter-generation transmission of Remun in the village. This phenomena of language maintenance has been noted in other studies of close and dense networks, such as that of Milroy (1980) and Li Wei (1994).

### 3.3. Attitudes

Ultimately, the attitude and characteristics of the members of the ethnic minorities towards their heritage languages and their view of other languages also determines language maintenance or language shift, despite other larger social factors such as language policies and societal expectations (see David, 2008).

Bibi Aminah, Abang Ahmad Ridzuan (1992) attempt to address the issue of the shift of the Miriek language among the Miriek community in the Sarawak coastal town of Miri and its environment. The Orang Miriek appear not to be proud of their hereditary dialect and this explains their shifting patterns of language use. They have shifted from the use of Bahasa Miriek to Bahasa Malaysia because of their negative attitude towards their hereditary dialect. According to one informant in Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan's (1992) study:

“Some of young people do not want to speak Miriek because they are ashamed to speak in bahasa kuno (primitive language). The Malay language is more modern so they want to learn and use that only.”

Tunku Zainah (1978, p. 31) also reported that some of the Miriek speakers she met described their language as: “useless” and “silly.” According to her, the functional use of the Miriek language was restricted. People from other speech groups usually had no need to learn the language and instead used the local lingua franca, Sarawak Malay for everyday interaction. The Orang Miriek learnt to speak Sarawak Malay not only to be able to communicate with mem-

bers of other groups, but also to gain prestige. Sarawak Malay is not a school language but due to its association with Malay culture, it is perceived to have a high status by the Orang Miriek (Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan, 1992). Hence, the language is only used at home because it has lower functionality outside of the home domain.

It is possible to argue that the negative perception of their heritage language is exacerbated by the new larger community working in the oil fields. The Orang Miriek (Jati Miriek), who are thought to be the original inhabitants of the Miri area (Tunku Zainah, 1978, p. 24 cited in Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan, 1992) are not proud of their hereditary language as a result of other migration to their residential sites and due to their exposure to other communities and languages. Prior to the coming of outsiders to Miri in the early 1900s, the Orang Miriek lived in isolated villages along the river in the Miri area. They were farmers and fishermen. With the opening of the Miri oilfield at the end of 1910, large numbers of immigrants from other parts of Sarawak started to come to the area. These people set up temporary houses within the area of the *Orang Miriek* settlements and within a short time the immigrants outnumbered the *Orang Miriek* (Sarawak Gazette, 1981). At one time the community spoke only *Miriek* but today the younger generation has shifted to local Sarawak Malay.

Wanting to please and accommodate speech partners is another characteristic of members of a community which over time cause shift. Although the Bidayus claim they are proud of their dialect. Dealwis and David (2007) find that they shift codes in order to accommodate to the language choices of others. The rural Bidayus knowing that the researchers were new in the locality were quick to welcome outsiders by using a neutral code, mainly Malay. It was different with the Ibans in the rural areas who instead welcomed one of the researchers using the Iban language and expected him to speak Iban too.

The attitude of the ethnic minorities towards their own heritage dialects is also a crucial factor determining their choice of code used in the various domains. Ethnic broadcasts and the teaching of Iban and Kadazan as Peoples Own Language (POL) in schools show that efforts are made at state level to maintain the local dialects. Nevertheless, since there are so many minor ethnic groups with a population of less than ten thousand such as the Berawan, Kelabit, Kajang, Penan, Mangkaak it is expected that such speakers will eventually shift to more dominant languages in the country. The prestige of English has always made educated Malaysians, including the educated ethnic minorities of East Malaysia, shift from their hereditary languages which have no official recognition and economic value. David's (1996) study of the Malaysian Sindhi community reveals similar trends among the educated Sindhis as with the Malaysian Malayalees (Govindasamy and Nambiar, 2003; Nambiar, 2007). Among the educated young the use of the hereditary language has not only declined in the home domain but also in the friendship domain where English is used during social interaction, even among members of the same community.

#### 4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

From the review of studies conducted on language use among the ethnic minorities in East Malaysia, it can be summed up that ecological factors influence the growth and survival of minority languages in the two states. The following macro variables represent macro pressures on language use patterns among the ethnic minorities:

- i. migration and economic change
- ii. urbanization and improved transportation and communication
- iii. school language and government policies
- iv. religious conversion and definition of Malay

Other factors include small population size and existence of many dialects within each ethnic community. At the micro level, factors affecting language use are:

- v. exogamous marriages
- vi. no common ground for a common language
- vii. location
- viii. close/dense networks
- ix. attitude towards their language and other languages

After Sarawak and Sabah became part of Malaysia that was formed in 1963, the local languages in these two states have been marginalised by the wide usage of Bahasa Melayu in official domains such as education and government mass media. The economic value and prestige of English as a global language has also made it a language choice among educated Sarawakians and Sabahans both at home and at the workplace. Due to the numerous ethnic groups, exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in the two East Malaysian states. The issue of comprehensibility is important in such marriages which cross language boundaries and often dominant languages are used to communicate.

The Malaysian legal definition of a Malay is a person 'who habitually speaks the Malay language, practices a Malay way of life and profess the Muslim faith' (cited in David 2003: 52). Under the Malaysian Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia. In practice, all non-Malays who marry Malays must convert to Islam and practice the Malay way of life. The ethnic boundaries of such marriages have dissolved fairly easily in Sabah and Sarawak as in other parts of Malaysia because of the attendant advantages of being a member of this larger host society, given the affirmative action policy of the government to the Malays. The Indian-Muslims in Kuching, for instance speak Sarawak Malay and practice the Malay way of life. (David and Dealwis, 2008) Language shift can also be due to the choice of ethnicity which can be seen as a strategy enabling a small minority, otherwise a relatively powerless group, articulate their economic and political interests and become assimilated as members of the larger majority group.

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### *Čemu pomak? O Sabahu i Sarawaku*

U zapadnoj Maleziji većinu stanovništva čine tri rasne skupine: Malajci, Kinezi i Indijci, a njihovi su jezici u širokoj uporabi. Međutim, u istočnoj Maleziji postoje i mnoge druge etničke skupine. Njihove jezike i dijalekte ugrožavaju dominantni jezici koji su postali *lingua franca* u gradskim zajednicama Sabaha i Sarawaka. Ovaj članak daje pregled istraživanja domaćih i stranih istraživača o jezičnome pomaku i jezičnom održavanju u istočnoj Maleziji te razmatra razloge jezičnoga pomaka u manjinskim zajednicama.

Key words: Sabah, Sarawak, Malaysia, language assimilation, language death  
Ključne riječi: Sabah, Sarawak, Malezija, jezična asimilacija, izumiranje jezika