

National Language Planning and Language Shifts in Malaysian Minority Communities

Speaking in Many Tongues

EDITED BY DIPIKA MUKHERJEE
AND MAYA KHEMLANI DAVID



AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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March 2011
The Editors

Foreword

For the individual bilingual, languages co-exist in his/her repertoire but, for the multilingual society, languages do in fact compete for registers, for power, for acceptability, for social status.
Kaplan & Baldauf (1997: 236)

People do not own languages; languages own people.
Ruqaiya Hasan (2007) *Conference on World Languages*, City University of Hong Kong

The above statements – the first from the most comprehensive overview of language planning to date, the second from one of the world’s leading proponents of language as a product of social life – serve as sober warnings to anyone tempted to believe that language is just another national resource manageable via top-down controls over supply and demand. Language is indeed a resource, as can be seen from the huge income that English language teaching and English medium education generate for many anglophone nations or by the explosion in Mandarin studies that has accompanied the rise of the Chinese economy. But it is a uniquely complex resource, bound up not only in economic possibilities but also in individual and group identity. Further, it crucially affects the way we approach problems, including language problems. We do not have to accept a strong version of the Whorf-Sapir theory on linguistic relativity to accept that our language acquisition constrains our access to information and shapes our preference for particular sociopolitical discourses. Thus it is no simple task to manipulate language to effect social change. And it is no easy matter to escape the hold our language repertoire has over us.

Visitors to Malaysia such as myself – brought up in a mainly monolingual environment and struggling to pick up other languages in years well beyond the much debated ‘critical age of acquisition’ – cannot fail to be impressed by the ease with which locals mix and switch codes with each other, seeming to know by instinct which language to start with for politeness and which to change to for eliciting information or negotiating a deal. But scratch below the surface and we begin to

uncover layers of complexity that belie the ease with which multilingualism appears to be maintained.

Many Malaysian families do indeed switch effortlessly among three or more languages, not necessarily because they need to but because they can. However, a great many youngsters, particularly in rural areas, still struggle to be comprehensively literate in more than one language, while their parents may face agonising decisions about which school to send them to according to its medium of instruction. The postcolonial system of national and national-type schools, reinforced by a provision for “pupils’ own language”, represents an admirable attempt to support multilingualism in a country that has yet to achieve the status of an economically developed nation. Nevertheless, leaders of the Tamil community are increasingly worried about the economic prospects of Tamil-educated pupils, while the future of Bidayuh looks very bleak. Status, corpus and educational planning in favour of Malay have yielded undeniable achievements, as is evident from the extensive use of the language in universities, parliament and law courts. Yet most new graduates find themselves assigned either to government or to private-sector employment according to their language background; many official bilingual documents continue to be translated into the national language from English drafts rather than the other way round; and it is still common to find witnesses exercising their right to a court interpreter even though they are supposed to have been educated in Malay, together with English as a ‘strong second language’ – either of which may be admitted in court.

It is in this hard and complex reality of language use, rather than the theoretical elegance of language policy, that *National Language Planning & Language Shifts in Malaysian Minority Communities: Speaking in Many Tongues* is rooted. It thus constitutes a fascinating and invaluable contribution to the field of language planning.

While acknowledging the good intentions of much of the official policy, which envisions bilingualism (*nation-building* Malay plus *nation-developing* English) for all, together with Mandarin, Tamil or one of the larger East Malaysian languages as a trilingual option for the minority, the researchers use local-scale empirical evidence to contrast the commonly repeated description of a society as 60% Malay, 25% Chinese, 7% Tamil and 8% ‘other’. They depict a sociolinguistic picture of shifting multilingualism, where language preference is by no means directly related to ethnic identity and where increasing numbers of Malaysians subvert official policy by opting out of state education. Marshalling an impressive array of micro-level research, the contributors eschew generalised theories of language shift in favour of case studies that show how educational level, religion, employment prospects, marriage, generation and gender combine to influence language choice at the family level.

Covering both East and West Malaysia, poor and affluent Malaysia, they reveal a society in which many speech communities face a choice *between* Malay and English and are experiencing a consequent move away from their traditional first language.

Complexity of language use in Malaysia mirrors the complexity of discourse about language, as several of the researchers in this volume show. The recent controversy about the teaching of mathematics and science in English, for example, drew out a range of nuanced debates. It had Chinese and even some Malays torn over whether to back English, Malay or Mandarin medium instruction. It pitted Indians who saw English as a tool to improve their children's chances in the job market against those who saw Tamil medium instruction as vital not only for their cultural identity but also for their educational attainment. Parents wanting essentially the same things for their children reached very different conclusions about how to achieve them, and many educators were similarly divided.

The fact is that in Malaysia's language policies and its debates about language policies, we can see almost every dilemma faced by postcolonial multilingual polities, and this is precisely why we should continue to pay close attention to the way different groups of Malaysians deal with these dilemmas, without jumping to easy conclusions.

After reading this book, should those of us who favour diversity (whether this implies Malaysians' right to resist anglophone globalisation or their right to maintain local-level speech communities) feel pessimistic or optimistic about the picture presented? There are plenty of reasons for leaning toward the former conclusion. Unlike in neighbouring Indonesia, Malaysia's national language policy still falls short of generating nationwide pride in the Malay language across all communities – indeed, many Malays themselves remain sceptical about the educational and technical capacity of their mother tongue. Yet if Malay is still to achieve its full sociocultural and economic potential, the other side of the coin is not necessarily rising standards of English. While it is all too easy to compare current standards of mass-English with the days before 1970 when a much smaller middle class spoke the language extremely well, there is considerable evidence to support the view that overall proficiency is on the decline. This was the rationale for the partial return to English medium instruction in 2003. Squeezed between Malay and English, other languages struggle for adequate allotment of financial resources and a share in the full range of sociolinguistic registers. Meanwhile, the overarching aim of a unified national identity still seems far away, despite renewed government emphasis on “1Malaysia”.

Nevertheless these case studies also give us reason for optimism. We find stories of communities that have lost much of their language but none of their cultural identity. There are accounts of a high tolerance

for mixed language and mixed identity. Above all, there is evidence of the boundless pragmatism of speech communities, which maintain various patterns of multilingualism that are partly shaped by Malaysia's language policies but also partly by differential and flexible responses to them.

Professor Richard Powell
Nihon University, Tokyo

Introduction

Language Policies at Variance with Language Use in Multilingual Malaysia

Dipika Mukherjee and Maya Khemlani David

Introduction

Most research focuses on government-determined language policies. However, it is important to evaluate language choices and language use by the common man, too, as inconsistency between the two can lead to unrest. Language planning and policy has never been an easy task for those involved in it. Whatever planning or policy is specifically utilised in choosing the national language or official language, the consequences are crucial because they affect not only a few individuals but the entire nation. The selection process is a crucial imperative, for it involves social and political factors. It must be noted that whatever language is chosen or selected, it must serve a variety of functions: it must be a language that is unifying, separatist, prestigious and has frame-of-reference function (Holmes 2001).

Language planning and policymaking is also complicated, for it includes the regular patterns of choice, beliefs about choices, values regarding varieties or variants of particular languages, and also the efforts made in order to change the choices and beliefs of others (Spolsky 2004). When studying speech communities and their actual language practices, one often finds inconsistencies between nationally planned language policies and language use. Therefore it is vital for policymakers to be in touch with the linguist; the linguist should in any case be actively involved when choosing the national or official language of a country.

Language Planning and Language Policy (LPLP) is a problem in many multilingual and multicultural developing countries. With the people's diversity in language and culture, national unity has been a commonly sought objective. It has been a known fact that in some countries, national unity leading to economic development can be the result of language policy. However, there have also been a number of

problems about building national identity and national unity as a result of choosing a particular language as the national language.

Problems and issues related to language planning have been evident in countries like the Philippines, Canada and Malaysia. Major languages competing for dominance in one country create problems in the choice of the national and official language(s). For instance, in the Philippines, problems in choosing the national language arose when Pilipino, a Tagalog based language, was declared the national language with the aim of unifying the Filipinos through a national language. However, it has not really achieved this goal because it has resulted in speakers of other major languages – particularly the Cebuano language – objecting to Tagalog as the national language. According to Atty. Faelnar (cited in Avila 2007), this has only disunited the country, going against the original aim of fostering a sense of nationhood and national unity through the use of a national language (see Pobre in Avila 2007). It is evident that in a country with a multilingual population, choosing one language as the national language is fraught with dangers.

Canada, on the other hand, has started to evaluate the importance of languages other than English and French being used in the country and wants them to be recognised and be given equal importance. This has led to the recent appointment of Bernard Lord to review government language policies (*Canadian Press* 2007). This task is undertaken with a view to recognising the existence and importance of these other languages and to help foster better relations and unity among people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the country. In the US, the San Francisco Police Department has recognised the importance of languages other than English in its new language policy (“Language Access Services for Limited English Proficient Persons”), which stipulates how police officers should deal with people who speak limited English.

It is evident that language can play an important role in achieving nationhood, national identity and national unity, provided that the language is accepted and used by the populace. This introductory chapter provides a quick overview of the language policies in Malaysia, and the rest of this volume will examine language use by different speech communities in that country. In this way, the reader is provided with both a top-down and bottom-up perspective.

Language planning in Malaysia

Language policies are often intended “to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes” (Cooper 1989: 45); i.e., language policies are

intended to influence language use. The reasons for language choices in language policies could be social, educational, political or economic. Education has always been an important variable in language planning initiatives, for it is one of the sectors where the implementation of language policy normally starts. Students in schools, colleges and universities are taught using the national language as the medium of instruction, and people are encouraged to use the language in different domains of communication.

Implementing a language policy requires certain processes, starting from selection, codification and elaboration, and ending with securing acceptance of the language (Holmes 2001). A language policy needs to be overt and to be known to the public and must not be controlled or manipulated by a few groups of people. Introducing the language policy without the awareness of those who are affected by them sends a message to the public that they are not seen as legitimate equal partners (Shohamy 2005).

In Malaysia, language policies have changed over time due to political and economic developments in the country and also due to globalisation. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual country with a population of 26.64 million (as of 2006; Department of Statistics, Malaysia, website). The population of Malaysia comprises three major ethnic groups: 1) Bumiputera (Malays and other indigenous groups) 65.1%, 2) Chinese 26.0%, and 3) Indians 7.7% (Census 2002, Department of Statistics). The three major ethnic groups speak different languages and practise different cultures. Because the country is so culturally and linguistically diverse, language policies have been formulated to promote national unity among people through the use of a common language. At least a hundred languages are spoken in Malaysia. While the Malays who form the majority of the population are indigenous, the non-Malays (i.e., the Chinese and the Indians) are considered immigrant communities since many of their ancestors were encouraged by the British colonial regime to move to Malaysia. Within each of the three main ethnic groups, a variety of languages and dialects are spoken. Furthermore, it is not unusual for speakers of a specific ethnic community to know and use another language better than they do their mother tongue (David 2001).

During the British colonial era, vernacular schools provided substandard education (Gaudart 1992: 73-74; Omar 1992) and was separatist, with Malay schools having 6 years of elementary education and focusing on grooming Malay women to become efficient housewives and Malay men efficient farmers and fishermen. Tamil schools had also 6 years of elementary education where Indian (mainly Tamil) students were assumed to stay on as tappers in the rubber industry, and Chinese schools followed the Chinese educational system and trained the children for business (David 2007; Abdullah Hassan 2004). The curriculum

in both the Tamil and Chinese schools was adapted from the school systems in their respective motherlands (Omar 1992). English schools, mainly initiated by missionaries, were considered elite institutions, as they were located in urban areas, and groomed individuals mainly for government and administrative purposes (Ridge 2004 408). Graduates of English schools were prepared for tertiary education in Malaya, Singapore or the United Kingdom (*ibid.*).

It is clear that linguistic and racial divisions were prevalent during the colonial era; however, geography also played a role. Malay schools, with a largely homogenous Malay student population, were mainly found in rural Malaya. Chinese medium schools were mostly located in urban centres and Tamil medium schools were essentially in rubber estates (David & Govindasamy 2003). Omar (1992) explains that as nation-building was of no great concern to the colonial administration, both Chinese and Tamil schools oriented their curriculum towards China and India respectively. English medium schools, on the other hand, were located in urban centres and were an attractive alternative to the vernacular schools. English school education was considered prestigious and elitist. Segregated schooling was therefore the norm during British rule, as schools were set up along ethnic lines and conducted in different languages (see Santhiram 1999: 35, who says ‘... the colonial power tolerated an ethnically inspired and financed vernacular education for the Chinese; and an employer-initiated Tamil vernacular primary education for the Indians’).

After independence, the choice of Malay as the national language has been successful to some extent. Most non-Malays are today fluent in Malay, as it is the language of instruction and public examinations and also the language of administration.

Even with independence and with Malay as a national language, English has always been introduced in the first year of the school system. To cater to the needs of the non-Malays, the government has permitted the existence of primary schools that use the vernacular languages of the major ethnic groups, Mandarin and Tamil, as the medium of instruction. At age 13, during the first year of their secondary school, all Malaysians are expected to converge to government schools with Malay as the national language. However, there are some 60 private secondary Chinese schools with Mandarin as the medium of instruction.

With privatisation and globalisation, English has become the language for teaching science and mathematics since 2003. This has recently faced fierce resentment by nationalists who argue that the use of English for the teaching of science and mathematics in primary schools is unfair to the large majority of rural children who are mainly Malays. In 2009, after much discussion among various vested parties, the

government decided to revert to the national language, Malay, for the teaching of these two subjects as from 2012.

However, due to the existence of different languages and the use of vernaculars in schools during the students' formative years, the reality is that actual language use among Malaysians appears to run counter to the intentions behind the language policies. Polarization among the three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indians) has become more evident particularly in schools, colleges and universities.

This volume examines what happens at the grassroots level. Policies may be imposed from above, but it is the people who have the final choice. Whilst Malay is used in public domains, the writers of this volume were keen to examine the actual choice of language used by Malaysians at the level of social interaction, especially outside the classroom. The findings of the study will provide an insight as to the possible consequences of language policy in a multilingual society such as Malaysia.

History of language policies in Malaysia

Malay or *Bahasa Melayu* (the Malay language) is the national language of Malaysia, but in order to build up a sense of national identity across all ethnic groups, the language is now referred to as Bahasa Malaysia (Gill 2004). Malaysia achieved independence from British rule in 1957; prior to independence, it had a civil service and educational institutions that used English extensively. The transition from English to Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction began in 1958, starting from the primary level. By 1983, the transition to the Malay language at the university level had been achieved (Omar 1979, cited in David & Govindasamy 2003).

The transition from one language to another was not without its problems, naturally, with accusations of linguistic chauvinism on both sides. The Third Malaysian Plan (1976-80) stated that "Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the basis for national integration" but the Plan also stated quite emphatically that "measures will be taken to ensure that English is taught as a strong second language." (Government of Malaysia 1976: 386, quoted in David 2004a). However, in a pragmatic move in 2003, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia reintroduced the English language as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics in the education system (David & Govindasmy 2005).

Case studies on language choice in Malaysia

There is a very pragmatic view in Malaysian migrant communities towards their own ethnic language, be it Tamil or a Chinese dialect. The ethnic language may be a beloved or a valued language, but it is clearly not always salient to life in Malaysia. The people in the communities studied for this book all manipulate their languages depending on the need of the moment.

Many of the chapters in this volume focus on the Indian community (who make up 7% of the total population of Malaysia). 90% of these are Tamils. The other 10% consist of Punjabis, Sindhis, Gujeratis, Bengalis, Malayalees, Telegus, etc. Among the Tamils there is a caste system, and the highest caste is the Brahmin group which speaks a variety of Tamil known as Iyer Tamil. *Lokasundari Vijaya Sankar* describes the case of the Iyer community in Malaysia and argues that even though they have shifted largely to the English language and speak Tamil functionally to retain cultural and religious lexical items, they do not feel that their ethnic identity is lost. This is because they are able to retain their identity through their dress, food, rites and rituals, and customary practices [see also David (1998) on the Sindhi community].

Being a minority community and living within a much larger ethnic majority community, it is inevitable that there will be changes in the dominant code used even in the home domain. Even the larger Tamil community has shifted to the use of a mixed code rather than one dominant heritage language [see David & Naji (2000) on the community in Kuala Lumpur]. In the second chapter, *Maya Khemlani David and Caesar Dealwis* focus on the Tamils in Kuching, Sarawak. They demonstrate that although the younger generation has not totally abandoned its ethnic language, the language of communication among Tamils belonging to the 18-29 age group is now a mixture of Tamil with other linguistic codes. They maintain, however, other ethnic identity markers (see also Naji & David 2003).

When communities are small, there is a high possibility that marriages will be exogamous. It has often been argued that exogamous marriages lead to language shift (see David & Nambiar 2002; David 2008). However, *Maya Khemlani David and Caesar Dealwis* posit that the shift is not always the result of such marriages. They illustrate the case of the only Sindhi family in Kuching that, despite marriage with a non-Sindhi, attempted to maintain the use of the heritage language. They explain that even endogamous marriages do not necessarily mean that the heritage language will be maintained.

In another study on exogamous marriages, *Francisco Dumanig and Maya Khemlani David* focus on Filipino-Malaysian communities. They found that the dominant language used by Malay-Filipino, Chinese-

Filipino and Indian-Filipino couples is English, with some switching to Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino. The couples choose English as the medium of communication at home because it is the common language that both husband and wife understand.

Another community with exogamous marriages is the Eurasian. *Stefanie Pillai and Mahmud Hasan Khan* look at the Eurasians of Portuguese descent in Malaysia. Their origins have been traced back to the 16th century when the Portuguese arrived and subsequently controlled Malacca. The Portuguese men were encouraged to marry local women and they produced a hybrid population today known as Portuguese Eurasians (O'Neill 1995, reproduced in Marbeck 1999). The writers explain that for this community, too, English has become their first language (see also David & Faridah 1999). They examine the common features of Malaysian English as a first language (MEFL) and the role of Malaysian English on identity.

As ethnicity is an important issue in Malaysia and is asked for in all government documents, *Caesar Dealwis and Maya Khemlani David* investigate the way the state determines the ethnicity of children of mixed marriages. They report that the children of Indian-Bidayuh marriages, despite having mothers who are classified as *Bumiputras*, are not able to access privileges accorded to their *bumiputra* mothers. The latter, due to their status as *bumiputras* (literally *sons of the soil*), are accorded special privileges. In their study, all the respondents described themselves as *anak Sarawak* (son of Sarawak) because both their parents were Sarawakians, yet the patriarchal regulations that forced these children to be classified under the religion of the father (Indian) denied them the *bumiputra* privileges having a Bidayuh father would offer.

That religion is a salient factor in the lives of all Malaysians is well known, but *Mohana Nambiar's* study of the Malayalee community in Malaysia brings the issue in focus. Although there is a marked decline in Malayalam proficiency and use from the older to the younger members of the community, with a corresponding increase in English and Malay proficiency, intra-community variations were obvious. The majority of the Hindus and Christian Malayalees are moving towards English, while the Muslim Malayalees are shifting to the Malay language, demonstrating that the impact of national language policy is limited.

Women are perceived as the keepers of a heritage language (see Gal 1993). The role of women in maintaining the use of the ethnic language is seen in *Dipika Mukherjee's* study of the Bengali community. She finds there is some predictability in language patterns despite the individual variance; in general, older women act as retainers and teachers of Bengali whereas the younger women are shifting to English. However, as Malaysian government policy favours positive

discrimination towards the majority community (i.e., the *bumiputra*), Mukherjee argues that the community frequently chooses to work in arenas where knowledge of English is both valued and rewarded.

Moving on to the Chinese community in Sarawak, *Su-Hie Ting's* study also demonstrates that English cuts across the public and private domains of language use, with the exception of the localised setting of the transactional domain where the colloquial Malay variety (Bahasa Pasar) prevails in intercultural communication and Mandarin in intra-ethnic communication with members of the Chinese community. In public domains, particularly religion and mass media, the inclination of the Chinese-speaking community towards English or Mandarin depends on their educational background. It appears then that for the Chinese-speaking communities in Sarawak, there is a gravitation towards English and Mandarin.

Like Mohana Nambiar's Malayalee Muslim respondents, who have switched to Malay, *Jariah Mohd. Jan's* study of the Javanese community in Kampung Jawa, Hulu Langat, points out that establishing Malayness is important for some communities that are Muslims and want to '*masuk Melayu*' (i.e., become Malays). The Javanese community is able to assimilate with the Malay community and adjust to the national language fairly easily. More specifically, members of the third generation in this community show signs of contesting identities in which their 'Malayness' takes precedence. They have therefore lost their Javanese language. Constructing a Malay identity is important to their economic survival, as such an identity allows them access to the world of Malay privileges.

The final chapter in this volume, by *Renate Kärchner-Ober, Dipika Mukherjee and Maya Khemlani David*, provides an overview of language policy in the country and its effects on the polyglot population. She suggests that a depoliticization of language issues and a more objective approach in language policy issues would lead to the desired goal of the country to make the citizens of Malaysia truly multilingual.

Impact: language policies and language use

While the Malaysian government's language policy aimed to promote unity among the various ethnic groups – particularly Malays, Chinese and Indians – by designating one national language, Bahasa Malaysia, this goal has not yet been fully achieved. At the level of the common man, the language choice or speakers' use of languages yields a different picture from that intended by top-down language policy. In the real setting of language use, it is clear that although standard Malay is used in the classroom setting, the variety that emerges for social interaction

for many of the subjects in these studies is predominantly English with some code mixing from vernacular languages.

Language policies can be used to unify various diverse ethnic groups in a country. But it must also be accepted that despite the need for languages to reflect ethnic identity and despite a national language policy that makes Malay the medium of instruction, pragmatic Malaysians have shifted to dominant English which will continue to play an important role as it is an international language of trade, diplomacy, communication and information.

Conclusion: language shift in Malaysia

The choice of a national language can create problems, for example when discrepancies between top-down policies and the actual use of languages result in a polarized society. In the case of Malaysia, the aim of achieving national unity via language policy has not succeeded at the grassroots level, as observed from the people's use of the language. Globalisation has encouraged many Malaysians to focus on the English language; indeed, the position of English as an international language has resulted in English and not Bahasa Malaysia being used as the principle language of communication, especially in the urban areas and among middle and upper class Malaysians, especially non-Malays. Code-switching has emerged as a *lingua franca* even in formal interactions, and the preference of English mixed with some words from the speakers' mother tongue has become a trend (see David et al. 2009).

The Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians, as well as other ethnic communities, choose their own friendship groups and use their preferred language to signal their membership in their respective friendship groups. In Malaysia, code-switching has become an effective linguistic option to perform many functions (see David 2006a, 2006b). For Malaysians, code-switching aids in making meaning and in getting meaning across efficiently and effectively. It has become normative to code-switch, in both formal and informal settings, in both in-group and out-group encounters, and for a whole range of reasons (see David 2000). However, dominant English is maintained. Maintaining English in their intra-group interactions – i.e., even within their own ethnic communities – indicates a shift away from their ethnic language to the dominant use of English, albeit a local variety which includes code-switches¹.

The trend towards language shift seems to be fairly clear-cut: the Muslim communities (the Javanese, the Pakistanis and the Malayalee-Muslims) are shifting to the Malay language (also see David 2003b), while all other communities, i.e., the Punjabi Sikhs (see David 2006b),

the Portuguese, the Malayalee Hindus and Christians (see Nambiar 2007), are shifting to English. It is interesting to note here that similarities in the ethnic language have less of an impact on the language the community shifts to – for example, the Pakistanis in Machang and the Punjabis in Klang valley speak a fairly similar language, yet the Pakistanis shift to Malay and the Punjabis to English. The choice of language within these communities is no doubt driven by the sociocultural and religious milieu in present-day Malaysia, especially as the notion of how much assimilation is feasible is strongly driven by religious affiliation, as in the case of the Javanese community described in this book. For the non-Muslim communities, rising ethnonationalism in Malaysia makes assimilation almost impossible, as in the case of the Indian-Bidayuh community. Nambiar's study of the Malayalee community provides clear evidence that the Hindus and Christians who form the majority of the community (90%) are shifting towards English while only the Muslims are moving towards Malay. Despite sharing a mother tongue, place of origin and setting in the host country, including its language policy, the Malayalees are not all shifting towards the same language.

Sociolinguistic studies have largely focused on network analysis (see David & Dealwis 2006; David 2005) and economic criteria (Li 2002) to forecast or comment on language change. In Malaysia, however, religious affiliation and the subsequent benefits of that affiliation, appear to be a strong determinant of the language a community is likely to shift to. This phenomenon is unique in sociolinguistic studies. Unfortunately, it also attests to a non-negotiable stratification of Malaysian society on linguistic lines, despite the strenuous efforts of the language planners of the country.

Note

- 1 See other studies on language shift: the Portuguese in Malacca (David & Faridah 1999); the Sindhis (David 2001); the Punjabis in Kuala Lumpur (David, Naji & Kaur 2003); the Malayalees (David & Nambiar 2002); the Bengalis (Mukherjee 1995).

1 The Importance of Ethnic Identity when Language Shift Occurs

A Study of the Malaysian Iyers

Lokasundari Vijaya Sankar

Introduction

The population of Malaysia is ethnically and linguistically heterogenous. It is made up of Bumiputra (65.1%) of whom the Malays are the majority, Chinese (26%), Indians (7.7%) and other ethnic groups (Table 1.1). The Malaysian Iyers are a part of the Malaysian Indian community and make up approximately 0.09% of the Indian population in Malaysia. Their mother tongue is Tamil, although they speak a variety known as Iyer Tamil (see Bright & Ramanujam 1981: 2; Karunakaran & Sivashanmugam 1981: 59; Varma 1989: 188).

Research shows that there is a significant shift to English and Malay among minority Indian communities in Malaysia from different linguistic backgrounds, such as with the Tamils (David & Naji 2000), Sindhis (David 1996), Punjabis (Kundra 2001), Bengalis (Mukherjee 2003) and Malayalees (Govindasamy & Nambiar 2003).

In a recent study conducted on the language shift and maintenance of the Malaysian Iyers (Sankar 2004), it was found that the Malaysian Iyers have moved away from the use of their mother tongue (Tamil) in the home. Social and formal domains of reading and writing have included English and Malay in their linguistic repertoire. Tamil is retained

Table 1.1 *Ethnic Composition of Malaysia*

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bumiputra	65.1%	17,104,823
Chinese	26.0%	6,051,419.4
Indians	7.7%	1,792,151.3
Others	1.2%	279,296.3
Total	100%	23,274,690

Source: Dept. of Statistics Official Website, 2000

in the religious domain for the purposes of prayer. The extensive shift away from their ethnic language is probably largely due to external pressures such as government language policies and the influence of English as the language of business. The results also showed that the Iyer identity is not completely dependent on their ethnic language, as their identity is expressed more through their cultural practices (see David 1998). This chapter describes the research conducted to try and understand the relationship between language shift and ethnic identity.

Methodology

A two-pronged emic and etic approach was used so that respondents' views could be balanced with the researcher's views. A domain-based questionnaire was administered to 291 respondents to obtain a macro picture of the community's language shift and language maintenance patterns. However, such an analysis by itself will not reveal individual language choice, nor can it provide an ethnography of communication. Therefore, the questionnaire content was complemented with micro methods that would reveal actual language maintenance and shift. Intra community conversations (of 115 respondents) were audiotaped and analysed using Hymes' Ethnography of Communication (Hymes 1977) which helped to investigate in greater detail the ethnography of speaking by investigating speaker rules of interaction and the dominant languages that were actually spoken by respondents.

Three generations of Malaysian Iyers were studied in order to gather information for this study:

1. The first generation who were born in India and came to Malaysia to find employment or a better standard of living than that available in India;
2. The second generation which consists of those born in Malaysia but whose parents (or one parent) was born in India;
3. The third generation whose parents were both born in Malaysia.

Interviews with first-generation respondents were conducted to study migration patterns to supplement available information on the early arrival and settlement of the Indian community in Malaysia. Visits were made to fifty homes to study the community's cultural practices, and these were complemented with personal observations of community interactions on 17 different occasions. Interviews were also held with leaders of the Malaysian Tamil community to supplement available documented information in order to provide current background information on the status and maintenance of Tamil in Malaysia.

Language and identity

This section presents the responses from the questionnaire regarding the respondents' ethnic identity. The object of this analysis was to find out if there was an identity crisis among the Iyers, causing or resulting from the language shift from Tamil to English and Malay. Respondents were asked if they felt that speaking the Tamil language gave them the identity of being an Iyer and what they thought was the force that identified and unified all Iyers. Answers to the question were placed into several categories, though about 5% of the respondents reported that they were unable to say what exactly gave them their identity as Iyers.

Table 1.2 Responses to 'Does speaking Tamil give you the identity of being an Iyer?'

Yes	No	No Response	Total
52 (18%)	235 (81%)	4 (1%)	291 (100%)

Only a very small percentage (18%) of the respondents reported that speaking the Tamil language gave them an ethnic identity (as Iyers): a large majority (81%) said that it did not. If language was not an integral part of identity, then what did give a person his or her identity? The questionnaire also sought answers to this question. It required the respondents to write what they felt gave them their identity as Iyers. The written answers were analysed and quantified into several categories as seen in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Factors associated with ethnic identity

Factors associated with ethnic identity	Count	Percentage
Tradition and culture (such as dress, customary practices)	101	43%
Brahmin heritage	88	37%
Religion	19	8%
Vegetarianism	9	4%
Brahmin Tamil	7	3%
Unsure	11	5%
Total	235	100%

The above table shows that tradition and culture played a very large role in ethnic identity for many respondents (43%) followed by the Brahmin heritage (37%) – i.e., being born into a Brahmin family. These were the two main factors followed by other factors such as religion, vegetarianism and language variety.

Customs and traditions

A considerable portion (43%) of the respondents who said that speaking the Tamil language did not give them their Iyer identity cited factors such as tradition and culture that gave them a special identity as Iyers. The common social and cultural practices observed by the Iyers as a community were also factors that gave them their identity.

Tradition was described in terms of cultural and religious practices that were important to the Malaysian Iyer community in terms of rites/rituals that were conducted at marriages, funerals and prayers. One respondent wrote out in Tamil three important aspects of being an Iyer – *nadai* (manner of conducting oneself), *udai* (manner of dress), *pazhakkavazhakkangal* (customs). An important part of the make-up of the Iyers was the importance placed on religion. Approximately 8% of respondents thought that being learned in the scriptures or having a greater awareness of religious practices and displaying a good understanding of religious philosophies was an important part of their religious identity. Also important to the Iyer identity was the practice of vegetarianism as reported by 4% of respondents.

The way that Iyers dressed, prayed, ate and practiced their traditions and customs gave them their identity. Tamil seemed to hold an emotional attachment for some first-generation respondents but many felt that the language was useful only as a means of communication, especially with the elders of the family or the community. As has been reported in Table 1.2, the Tamil language was viewed as a part of the tradition of being a Tamil Iyer by 18% of the respondents (though 3% of respondents felt that speaking Iyer or Brahmin Tamil was essential to an Iyer identity as opposed to 'Tamil' per se) while 81% of respondents cited other factors such as customs and traditions as essential to their identity.

In the audiotaped conversation (ATC), respondents were sometimes questioned about their identity when the researcher found an opportunity to do so (as the ATC were free flowing conversations, no forced attempt was made to interfere in the conversations unless an opportunity presented itself). Respondents who gave their views are quoted in the paragraphs below. In the excerpts reproduced, 'G' refers to generation of the respondent. So G1 is first generation while G2 is second generation.

In Tapescript 1.1, when questioned about identity, respondent 'N' below said that practicing 'the way things are in the teachings of a Brahmin way of life' would give an Iyer his or her identity. According to this respondent, following customs that were seen as inherent in Iyer tradition was an important aspect of being identified as one.

Tapescript 1.1

22 N (G1): If they marry outside the community *and don't follow our customs*, you can write them off, but not otherwise.

23 P (G1): But just because they don't know the Tamil language, you can't deny them the identity. We can't write them off.

From Tapescript 1.1 above, it is seen that endogamy was considered an important factor in retaining the Iyer identity. However, the same respondent said that one could not write off the younger generation and deny them their identity just because 'they don't know Tamil'. He felt that if they 'don't follow our customs' then you could 'write them off' as seen in the same conversation (excerpt above). If an Iyer 'practices the values that they are meant to', then the language 'should not be a barrier' to his identity (excerpt below).

Tapescript 1.2

25 P (G1): Provided you *practice your values*, but still it is an important aspect. If you are proud to call yourself a Tamil Iyer and *practice the values* you are meant to then the *language should not be a barrier* but whether they want to retain it or not is another question.

The values expressed by the respondents give credence to the view that cultural groups differ in the extent to which 'they emphasise their mother tongues as core values which act as pivots around which the social and identification system of the group is organized' (Smolicz 1992: 279). The Iyer identity appears to stem from a cultural identity rather than a language identity since 'you can be an Iyer without knowing Tamil' (Tapescript 1.1).

Brahmin heritage

The Iyers are Brahmins by caste, and this appeared to be an important part of the Malaysian Iyer identity. The caste system or the social stratification system by which Indian life is organised both socially and economically is one that is overwhelmingly important in the study of Indian society (Hypes 1936). The original philosophy underlying castes was associated with the type of work done by individuals. Today, it is purely of a hereditary nature and does not have very much to do with one's work or career (Saraswathy 1996).

The origin of the caste system goes back to the Bhagavad Gita, a Vedic scripture. It categorizes people into four stratas. *Brahmins* were those who strove for knowledge of the scriptures with faith in God and

who wished to achieve self-realisation, while *Kshatriyas* were leaders, politicians, rulers or kings. The third category, *Vaisyas*, dealt with material wealth connected with agriculture, cattle rearing and trade and were vested with the responsibility of ensuring enough food and money for the people, while the fourth category were *Sudras* or those who performed physical labour for all of the above castes.

Language was not entirely associated with ethnic identity in this study. The importance of caste identity can be seen in the formation of the Brahmana Samajam Malaysia (which is an association for Tamil Brahmins) and in the formation of a close and dense network society based on a Brahmin birthright. When conversations were being taped, attempts were always made to discuss the issue of the importance of language, especially maintenance of the mother tongue. More than a third (37%) of respondents who said that language alone did not give them their identity said that the Brahmin heritage is an important part of their identity.

The Brahmin lineage or link was described in several ways by the respondents. The most common were:

- The men should wear a '*poonal*' (the sacred thread worn as an important identifying mark of being a Brahmin).
- One should have a Brahmin '*gothram*' [the family name inherited from one of the eight original *rishis* (gurus) who started the Brahmin clans].
- The women should wear a '*madisar*' (a special manner of wearing the traditional sari among the Iyer ladies), especially for weddings and funerals.
- Prayers, customs and religious practices should be conducted in accordance with orthodox Brahmin beliefs.
- The '*avani avittam*' (the yearly custom of changing the *poonal*) should be celebrated.

ATC respondents concurred with the above findings (from the questionnaire) that class or caste in Indian terms could have a strong bearing on cultural or ethnic identity because identity was seen as one that was obtained 'at birth'. So, while Tamil was 'useful for communication with elders' it had 'limited applications at the present time' (excerpt below).

Tapescrpt 1.3

35.*R: If language is a very integral part of our culture and identity, can you then say that a Tamil Iyer who does not speak Tamil or does not speak it well, loses his identity as an Iyer?

36 K(G2): You cannot say that. But it is just that you feel that that person will be handicapped. *His identity is obtained at birth, his relationships etc. Therefore he has his identity, that is there.* But he will be handicapped for other things. Communication with elders, religious practices, etc.

40 K (G2): English I would say is useful and can be used for communication irrespective of cultural background and most available information is available in English. *Whereas Tamil is concerned with limited applications for the present time.*

*Researcher

Tapescript 1.4

9. *R: Just now you said that Tamil is a very important part of our culture. So would you say now that it is no longer possible to call your children Tamil Iyers? Because they don't really speak much Tamil?

50. Mrs.K(G1): No they are still Tamil Iyers without knowing Tamil.

*Researcher

Tapescript 1.5

52.* R: So are we talking about a *bloodline* here?

53 A(G2): Yes, of course. If he is a Tamil Brahmin, by birth, then not speaking the language does not make him a non-Iyer. We can talk to him in English to communicate.

*Researcher

According to Tapescripts 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 above, identity was established by the caste 'bloodline', by 'birth' and because 'not speaking the language does not make him a non-Iyer'. Some respondents felt that ethnic language was an important part of their identity but they also felt that the non-maintenance of the ethnic language could not deprive a person of his/her identity as an Iyer so long as he/she 'is a Tamil Brahmin by birth'. It was possible, according to some, to maintain an Iyer identity because you can be a 'Tamil Iyer without knowing Tamil'. A generational shift can be expected when Tamil is only 'useful for communication with elders' but otherwise has 'limited applications'.

Cultural identity is important to ethnic minorities, and efforts are made to retain the 'core values' that give the communities their identities (Smolicz 1992: 279). In this study too, it appears that certain values such as the traditions and customs practised by this community such as their traditional dress, the holy thread and the Brahmin heritage could give them an identity as Iyers. Many older respondents (G1 and G2) found that caste was an important factor in their identity, while younger respondents (especially G3) found that caste was a deterrent to speaking the language as the Iyer or Brahmin variety gave them away

as Brahmins, an identity that some younger respondents were not keen on maintaining.

The issue of caste affected these people (G₃) as seen in Tapescripts 1.6 and 1.7 below, but for different reasons from G₁ and G₂. While G₁ and G₂ maintained that caste gave them the Iyer identity, much more than the Tamil language, some G₃ respondents reported that the caste identity was not one that they sought out but one which they were forced to contend with especially since the Tamil variety that they spoke 'gives them away' as Brahmins. This was an identity that they 'do not like being known' for and therefore avoided speaking the only Tamil they knew, i.e., Brahmin or Iyer Tamil so that they are not recognised as Brahmins. Therefore, if friends could make out the difference in the variety of Tamil spoken by the Iyers, then they 'will stop speaking Tamil'.

Tapescript 1.6

30. D(G₃): Now, in college I speak a little. They say it sounds so funny because I speak 'correcter' Tamil than them.
31. C(G₂): Do they recognise the accent?
32. D(G₃): They don't know it's Brahmin Tamil—t – That's why I speak it.
35. *R: Do they laugh at your Brahmin Tamil?
36. D(G₃): Not ha-ha making fun. They just think it's so different and smile. My friends are nice.
37. A(G₂): It gives you away usually.
38. D(G₃): And I don't like being known a Brahmin.
- * Researcher

Tapescript 1.7

7. A(G₃): For me the whole thing is about Brahmin Tamil and non- Brahmin Tamil. Like in college now. I am starting to talk Tamil to Indians. I talk one sentence or so in Tamil. That's only because they don't know that I'm Brahmin and even if I talk they can't tell, they think it's a funny accent. *And if they did know I wouldn't talk to them in Tamil.*

G₃ respondents (Tapescript 1.8) found that the need for fitting in and getting peer approval without having the issue of caste stand in their way was an important factor for young respondents who attended college, especially since a certain solidarity was found among Indians. Younger respondents said they 'don't really care about the caste system,' and 'are not bothered by it' and 'just mix with Indians or any other race' because they did not care about caste and found the system outdated in the present context in which they lived. They did not

understand the ‘orthodox behaviour’ of the older generation who were always talking of the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of a Brahmin. When they went out with Indian friends they ‘try not to speak Tamil like an Iyer’ because their friends always ‘figure out from the way you speak that you are an Iyer’. Given the fact that third-generation Iyer were not formally educated in Tamil (in school) but probably picked up the language informally through relatives, they spoke only Iyer Tamil as opposed to standard Tamil. This conscious effort made to stop speaking the language will lead to further erosion of the language in the future.

Tapescript 1.8

2:H(G2): Not in Malaysia, not where we are now. Maybe in some villages in India or something. Yeah, *I don't see any difference between me and any other Indian.*

3 RE(G3): I don't think that I have any dislikes about being Brahmin itself. But one thing I don't like is, people – let's say the older generation – they have certain *orthodox behaviour* Like, *we are the younger generation and we don't really care about the caste system, we are not bothered about it.* We don't care whether you are Brahmin or from other castes. We just mix with any other Indians or any other races. But some of the people from the older generation – they feel that this is what you should do. For instance, marriage – why are you always getting married to a Brahmin? Then again, lets say if it's just Brahmin against Brahmin. Say this girl or this guy marries a non-Brahmin – why do they become out- castes? Why can't people accept them? There are some things that I don't like but then again you have to accept it. *Everyone around is like talking about your do's and don'ts – that's something I don't like.* You're not allowed to do what you want. So you're constantly asked, 'You're a Brahmin, you know, you should have this or that'. *At least, when I go out, I try not to speak Tamil like an Iyer. They always figure out from the way you speak that you're an Iyer.* At least you try to mingle around with them. Being an Iyer, they try to keep you away. They're really picky. Like you go for dinner and you say you're an Iyer and they're gonna say, 'Okay so we have to be extra cautious, she's vegetarian'— and stuff like that. It's a disadvantage.

Many young male respondents, as seen in Tapescript 1.9, faced problems associated with caste identity in their day-to-day lives because of the wearing of the ‘*poonal*’ – the holy thread worn by Brahmin males who had been initiated. Wearing the *poonal* is an external sign of being Brahmin, and this brought them embarrassment because friends ‘make jokes out of it’. Others might ‘look at me and say... or tend to think of me as superior’ and ‘start making fun’ even in the boys’ changing room because they don’t like it when people say ‘you’re higher, you’re lower’. It really did not matter to these respondents whether anyone was a Brahmin, other races, Hindus or whatever because ‘we’re all the same’.

Tapescript 1.9

1. *R: Do you guys wear your poonal?
2. PR(G3): No, because people see it and they *make jokes out of it* and fun of it. In the changing room they pull my underwear — things like that.
3. *R: Have you tried explaining to them the significance?
4. PR(G3): I have explained the religious reasons. But they end up joking. Then another reason is about India and its races, the history and they say Brahmins are the highest born. *So they look at me and say... tend to think of me as superior and...*
- *Researcher

However, according to some of the respondents (see Tapescript 1.10) the Iyer traditions and culture should be carried on to ‘differentiate ourselves from others’ but since Iyers were no longer involved in Brahmin vocations, they should ‘perhaps not call themselves Brahmins’. There appeared to be a need among respondents to carry on with the customs and traditions they have been practising. However, several respondents felt that caste differences should not be practised anymore since the original concept underlying the caste system (according to vocation) no longer applies in the modern context.

Tapescript 1. 10

57. *R: Yeah and only the spiritual leaders were Brahmins, but today accountants, lawyers, doctors are Brahmins. So, do you think that if Brahmins are no longer priests; do you think you are Brahmins?
58. S(G3): Yes.
- 59.R: Why?
60. S(S3): Er... because...
61. PR(G3): Through a bond. We should carry on our traditions laid out by our ancestors. Why are Chinese still Chinese? *To differentiate ourselves from others.*
62. P(G3): So we should still be Iyers. *Perhaps not call ourselves Brahmins.* We should still be Iyers as different from any other community but not necessarily higher or better than them.
- *Researcher

Table 1.2 showed that the Tamil language was not seen as the single most important factor in the Iyer identity. With this particular community of Tamils, the loss of the Tamil language does not appear to have brought about an identity crisis. This, perhaps, is one reason why there has been an extensive shift away from Tamil.

It was found that maintenance efforts among the Malaysian Tamil Iyers were not very good, though a large majority (80%) of the respondents felt that the Tamil language should be maintained. Therefore one can assume that while there appeared to be an emotional attachment to the mother tongue, it also seemed very evident that this attachment was not followed aggressively with positive maintenance efforts because their identity was perhaps not necessarily at stake. It is also possible that since the respondents had indicated that identity was not completely dependent on language, the urgency for remediation of Tamil language attrition was not felt strongly.

Apte (1972) studied the Marathi people of the Maharashtra region in India when they migrated to Tamil Nadu in South India. Although the single most important factor for a collective identity was language, he found other criteria equally influential in an extended culture contact situation. For his study he looked at two groups of Marathi people in Tamil Nadu: the Marathi Brahmins and Marathi tailors (because he identified them as a separate caste group). The Marathi Brahmins leaned towards their counterparts, the Tamil Brahmins, at the sociocultural level while the tailors emphasised their caste identity within the framework of a pan-Indian social structure and their regional affiliation to their homeland. Apte suggests that the primary parameters of identity in that situation appeared to be caste, religion and region rather than language.

In a Malaysian study of another ethnic Indian community, the Sindhis, it was found that the Malaysian Sindhi identity was based on their religion, customs and culture, kinship and social ties, and dense and multiplex networks (David 1998). In this study, too, there is evidence that language alone did not provide ethnic identity to the Malaysian Iyers. Other factors such as customs and traditions played a large role in providing identity.

Reasons for language shift

The Malaysian Iyers appear from the above discussion to have an identity that does not always depend on their language. The fact that their ethnic language of Tamil is a minority language that does not have much value outside of the home is a large factor in facilitating the language shift among this community. The reasons for language shift among the Malaysian Iyers are explored below.

The Importance of Economic Wealth and Status

The reasons for choosing languages other than Tamil can be attributed to the priorities of a migrant population. This was seen in G₁ who sought a better life in Malaysia by equipping themselves with skills related to economic survival by actively pursuing the language(s) that would enable them to obtain employment. During that time, when the British were in power, knowledge of the English language was seen as an important means to obtaining jobs. Many G₂ were also educated in English medium schools, while it is only G₃ who have attended Malay medium schools. Some of the reasons for choosing languages that have economic currency can be seen in the following examples that are taken from the ATC:

English is seen in Tapescripts 1.11 and 1.12 as the language of 'livelihood and communication' and in order to survive in the world 'we cannot separate ourselves from the world' and therefore 'have to use English'. G₁ found that the association with the British (during the colonial period in then Malaya) taught them that 'without English you can't speak or do anything'. Due to the importance of English, Iyers would 'send them (children) only to an English school' because English is 'an international language' and without English 'they cannot survive'.

Tapescript 1.11

39. N(G₁): For your own culture and identity, Tamil is important. For the language of livelihood and communication, we can't separate ourselves from the world, we have to use English.

Most G₁ understood that in order to integrate in Malaysia and find a viable career to provide the necessary comforts of a materially successful life, they have had to become proficient in English. The social network in Malaysia was structured in such a way as to privilege and reward those workers whose skills were valued in the workplace. Therefore G₁ actively encouraged their children to pursue the things in life that would provide them with material success.

Tapescript 1.12

13.*R: Or do you think that there might be some other reason? Why do you think people seem more comfortable with English in Malaysia than Tamil?

14. S(G1): Ah, this is one of the big questions when I first came here. *During the British time, without English you can't speak or do anything. Interviews will be done in English.* I have studied English really well in India but I did not speak it that well. When I got here, I attended a course to speak the language better so that I could get a job. There were special courses. I could read and write really well.

In Tapescript 1.13, the Tamil identity is seen as one that is based on emotional attachment and it is only the 'older generation like me who will need and cling to Tamil'. However, if one does not know Tamil one 'can continue with life'. The younger generation is more 'materialistic' because they want 'a good life and lots of money'. Knowing the English language 'will get them these' (Tapescript 1.14):

Tapescript 1.13

31.*R: Let us assume that the standard of Tamil is really good like in Singapore, perhaps. Do you think that you would send your children to Tamil schools if excellent schools were there from standard one till form five?

32. S(G1): This is a very good question. In my opinion I would send them only to an English school.

33. R: Why?

34. S(G1): Because it is an international language. Without the language they cannot survive. Within your home or country you can survive, but what about outside?

Tapescript 1.14

43. *R: Do you think that the younger generation are losing something out by losing Tamil?

44. K.(G1): They are losing out but they don't think so. They are more materialistic. They want a good life and lots of money and knowing English will get them these.

Many of those in G2 stated that they continued with the pursuit of English as a means of status and wealth. In the example in Tapescript 1.15, according to one G1 lady, even their grandmothers said with pride that their grandchildren spoke English like '*vellai karan*' (white men). The route to success was seen in acquiring and possessing the English language, which would then lead to a successful career. This philosophy is in opposition to the sentiments espoused about the Tamil language in Tamil Nadu, where its speakers equated their lives with their language.

Tapescript 1.15

56. D(G2): When I was young, no one insisted that I should speak only Tamil.

57. F(G1): Well even in India didn't the paatis take pride when they — **grandmothers** — said 'en peran vellaikaran mathiri pesuvan'. It was a 'my grandson white man like speaks' directed effort to become anglicized.
Translation in bold

In Tapescript 1.16, the fear of losing touch with English is seen. When the national schools in Malaysia converted the medium of instruction to Bahasa Malaysia (Malay), there were concerns over whether children would be 'left out of English'. This led to some parents deciding 'that we will speak to them only in English' because English was seen as more valuable than Tamil or even Malay (in terms of economic success). This further enhanced whatever G2 had learned from their parents about the necessity of English as a survival mechanism.

Tapescript 1.16

87. P(G2): With us, *we kind of made a decision that we will speak to them [children] more in English* because with Bahasa education — whether they will be left out of English.

88. M(G2): Left out of English?

89. P(G2): That is why we spoke in English.

90. L(G2): Because they were having Malay in schools.

91. M(G2): You thought that for survival, *English is more important than Tamil?*

92. L(G2): Yes.

93. P(G2): No doubt about it. Not only in this country but worldwide.

Tapescripts 1.17 and 1.18 show the need for some respondents to be in the 'forefront' of 'new developments and inventions' not just in Malaysia but around the world, and this overrode considerations over mother tongue maintenance so much so that children were beginning to question their parents with statements such as 'what do I get by learning this language?' Since Tamil did not have a 'commercial tag' attached to it, one G2 parent found, a little belatedly, that his children were not interested in learning Tamil.

Tapescript 1.17

1. K. (G1): If we want to prepare for the twenty- first century, the first thing is, there must be a mental shake-up. See? Because the twenty- first century is one of Information Age. As such, they should be more science-oriented and that doesn't mean they shouldn't be completely ignoring the arts. Science and Arts go hand in hand. But we should be more in the Science field so *that when more developments and new inventions take place* in Science and Technology and Computer Science and Telecommunications and all those, *our boys and girls will be ready to face such challenges and be in the forefront.*

Tapescript 1.18

74. S (G2): I feel that basically despite what I do I sometimes get accused by my own children that their English standard is low because I talk to them in Tamil at home and I'm not, as a professional, helping them to improve their English. So, in a way, after sometime... *nowadays everything has a commercial value.* So people say, if you ask them to study something, 'what do I get by doing that?' My children can talk very well, reading and writing minimal. *When I force them to go to learn or write Tamil very well, they ask me, 'What do I get if I learn this language?' So to some extent, I feel that there's not much of any commercial tag attached to the mastering or learning Tamil in this country.*

Tapescript 1.19 and 1.20 reinforce the notion that English is an international language and that 'all available information' is in English. This makes the language a particularly attractive one for those who wish not only to succeed nationally but internationally as well. The need to succeed in economic terms is the reason why one G2 respondent says 'I will not let him go to a Tamil medium school, no matter how excellent, beyond primary school'. Some G2 respondents feel that 'English education is a necessity' and that Tamil is needed 'for communicative purposes' only such as for accommodating the elders who spoke only Tamil. This is because, according to them, 'if you don't have the fluency and ability to compete, you will get nowhere' (Transcript 1.20).

Tapescript 1.19

69. *R: Suppose there were possibilities of university education in Tamil. Would you then continue his education in Tamil?

70. P(G2): Well I would have to consider the chances for his employment too. He may find it really hard to adapt in an international environment, his languages skills may be inadequate. I would have thought out about his future and based on that I would have to say no, *I will not let him go to a Tamil medium school— no matter how excellent— beyond primary school.*

Tapescript 1.20

40.K(G2): English I would say is useful and can be used for communication irrespective of cultural background and *most available information is available in English*. Whereas *Tamil is concerned with limited applications* for the present time.

52. I(G2): No, you have to see it as a whole. You can't run away from English education. *You need Tamil for communicative purposes, but English education is a necessity*. Fully Tamil medium— I don't think so.

53. K(G2): I wouldn't, because the grip on English will go. They will be handicapped at the Universities. English is the language of technology and it is moving so fast. If you don't have the fluency and the ability to compete, you will get nowhere.

What can be seen from the voices of the respondents (as seen in some of the examples above) is that English is valued as a language that will open doors for them and provide them with a successful future. A domino effect is seen with G₁ starting the trend for English, continued by G₂ and practiced by G₃. English is valued more as an international language, while Tamil is 'necessary for communication' with elders. This finding – taken together with evidence pointing to the possibility that one's identity is not based on language alone – shows that it is all too easy to give up the Tamil language in favour of the more 'glamorous' English which bestows its speakers with not only material wealth but 'high status' as well. The national language, Malay, is also useful for the purposes of education and finding jobs but it does not appear to be pursued with as much aggression as English.

For a common Malaysian Indian identity

A small proportion of respondents (5.9%) reported that the Tamil language should be maintained so that they are part of the Malaysian Indian community (of whom the Tamils form the majority). When this finding is cross-referenced with the fact that respondents reported speaking more Tamil during inter-community interaction (i.e., with Malaysian Indians who speak Tamil) than during intra-community interaction (with Iyers), it appears that there is a need among some Malaysian Iyers to establish ties with Malaysian Indians through the Tamil language, so that they belong within the larger group of Malaysian Indians.

The status of the Tamil language

The taped conversations showed a substantially higher percentage of respondents speaking English rather than Tamil. It was found that English was the more dominant language spoken among the ATC respondents (87%), who were mostly G2 or G3. Tamil was used mainly by G1. The questionnaires and conversations were analysed to try to unearth the reasons why Tamil was abandoned in favour of English, which was considered economically more viable than Tamil or the national language Malay, which was and is needed for education. Tamil was abandoned for the following reasons.

Tamil is a language of a minority group in Malaysia. As such, it is not the language of economic and social mobility. Malay is the national language of Malaysia, and English is a compulsory second language in all government schools. The English language started gaining further importance with the teaching of science and mathematics in English in 2003. Furthermore, Malaysia's education system makes it difficult for one who wishes to study Tamil also because Tamil medium education is available only at the primary level. In order to progress to the secondary level, students have to switch to the Malay and English medium. It is possible that since this community does not depend wholly on the Tamil language for its identity, they have chosen economic success and social mobility through the English and Malay languages and have neglected the Tamil language.

Some ATC respondents (see Tapescript 1.21 below) spoke about the need to choose the right school for their children so that they 'do not suffer or get left behind'.

Tapescript 1.21

57. *R: Suppose you had to choose whether to send your child to a Tamil or English school, which would you choose?

58. S(G2): An English school.

59.*R: Why?

60. V: *Because of his future. He has to come up.* Tamil school children are suffering when they get to secondary school. In the Tamil Primary schools they learn everything in Tamil, and when they get to the secondary levels where they have to learn everything in English or Malay, *they suffer and get left behind.*

61. S(G2): If they go to the Tamil school, then they are in an environment that is not so good because not too many middle class parents send their children there. *Furthermore how many Tamil Universities are there for them to attend?*

Some respondents, as exemplified in Tapescript 1.22, spoke about the limitations of Tamil as a language of education, since it ‘is concerned with limited applications for the present time’. This statement voices the belief that if one wanted to pursue education and information at a higher level, then Tamil was not the language to pursue.

Tapescript 1.22

40. K (G2): English I would say is useful and can be used for communication irrespective of cultural background, and most available information is available in English, *whereas Tamil is concerned with limited applications for the present time.*

*Researcher

In Tapescript 1.23, one G1 respondent complained about the Iyers being ‘infatuated’ with the West, while another respondent (Tapescript 1.23) complained of them having a tendency to ‘become Westernised too easily’.

Tapescript 1.23

36. *R: Eyn Brahmana mattum pesarathillai?

Why Brahmins alone do not speak?

37. T(G1): Avalukku konjam moham jaastiya irukku.

They are a little infatuated much (with the West).

Translation in bold

24. S(G1): But Tamil is still important. You can't reject a mother tongue.

Because Iyers tend to be more forward thinking, they tend to become Westernized too easily but the language will never die in Tamil Nadu, don't worry.

The above comments, though vocalised by only a few respondents, present reasons why there has been a significant shift away from the Tamil language as seen in both the questionnaire as well as the ATC respondents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the findings of the above study it appears that language alone is not an indicator of ethnic identity. Other parameters such as customs and traditions play a role in providing identity to an individual. In the case of the Malaysian Iyer community, even though they have shifted largely to the English language and speak Tamil functionally to retain cultural and religious lexical items, they do not feel that

their ethnic identity is lost. They are able to retain their identity through their dress, food, rites and rituals, and customary practices. In a discussion on ethnic identity, Fishman (1989) says that two factors potentially give identity to people other than language. One is patrimony (cultural practices) and the other is patriarchy (birthright). In the case of the Malaysian Iyers, even though they are in the process of losing their ethnic language, they are able to retain their ethnic identity through their religious and cultural practices.

2 Ethnic Identity in the Tamil Community of Kuching

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Ponmalar N Alagappan*

Background to the setting

Among the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia (the Malays, Chinese and Indians), Malaysian Indians are considered a minority. Despite being the majority minority, the Malaysian Indians have little political clout, and as a community they have increasingly little or no influence on public policy decision making (Appudurai & Dass 2008). The Indian migrants were brought into Malaya either as “labour” or “non-labour”. The “labour” migrants were mainly from South India and the “non-labour” migrants – known as the “literate” Indians (including Sikhs) – came from Ceylon, South India and North India to mainly man the administrative, technical, defense and security services (ibid.).

The spoken language of the great majority of Malaysian Indians is Tamil; this is a legacy from the earlier stages of the Indian connection with Southeast Asia, which was predominantly South Indian, and more specifically Tamil. The popular cults of Hinduism practiced in Malaysia are the same as those followed in Tamil Nadu, while social values and the role of the family follow traditional Tamil patterns (Tate 2008: 14).

The working class (“labourers”), having lived in the estate, send their children to Tamil schools for their primary education. This move was to maintain the need for the mother tongue, which gives them their identity and cultural values (Poon 2009). However, this can be problematic, as the move on to national secondary school is often an arduous experience for Tamil school students due to their lack of language proficiency in Malay and English (Appudurai & Dass 2008). All national secondary schools use Malay as primary medium and English as the second language.

In order to gain economic mileage/empowerment, the middle class (“non-labour”) Malaysian Indians have opted to send their children to Malay or English medium schools (Appudurai & Dass 2008 and Tate 2008). Their English education gave them access to, and contact with,

colonial circles which put them on a plane above the rest (Tate 2008). Those who are educated in English or Malay are unable to even recognise the Tamil alphabet, as little emphasis is given in national schools to studying the Tamil language. According to A.J. Lent (1974), the readership of Tamil newspapers among Indians has fallen because fewer Indians are going to Tamil schools or learning Tamil in national schools.

This group lacks the identity of “Indianness” due to an absence of the Tamil language in their homes, thus slowly losing the cultural values and adopting a more Western culture. This is supported by David & Naji’s study (2000), which argues that as a result of migration, the Malaysian Indians are inclined to forsake their ethnic languages either for an international language or the national language. The new languages they shift to are seen as languages that empower them. Poon (2009) explains that the Malay and English languages were seen as essential for earning a living. Such shifts also reflect the basic dichotomy within the Malaysian Indian community – the division between the English-educated middle classes and the Tamil-speaking proletariat (Tate 2008).

In this chapter we focus on the Sarawak Indian community which has a unique structure due to their separate origins and subsequent isolation from the Indians in Peninsular Malaysia. The Indian community in Sarawak has a varied composition, and divisions along racial, religious, linguistic and occupational lines exist (Komurusamy 1993). There are no statistics on the number of Tamils who first came to Sarawak in 1900, and those who returned to India before Sarawak became part of Malaysia in 1963. However, the early Tamils were generally poor and as in Peninsular Malaysia, the Tamils immigrants from India were Hindus and belonged to the lower castes (Tate 2008). Today, together with the other Indians, the community’s role and contribution to the state of Sarawak and her development far exceeds, proportionately speaking, its size within the population of Sarawak’s 2.1 million population (*Borneo Post* 14 October 2008). The Indians form the second largest immigrant community in Sarawak after the Chinese. The Tamil community in Sarawak makes up a population of 3,267 of a total Indian population of 5,210 (*Department of Statistics* 2008). They make up the largest Indian community in Sarawak, followed by the Malayalees and the Telegus.

The Tamils came in the 1900s to work either as labourers for the Public Works Department in Kuching or as tea and coffee planters for the *White Rajah* administration (1841-1946) and later for the colonial administration (1946-1963). The first Tamil settlement was located at *Gunung Serapi* (Mount Serapi) in Matang. A number of Tamils married outside their own Indian linguistic group and also contracted marriages with local people like the Dayaks, Orang Ulus and Malays. Today the Tamils can be found in various parts of Kuching city, namely Green

Road, Nanas Road, Sungai Maong, Rubber Road, Matang, Batu Kawa, Sekama, Batu Lintang, Airport Road and Mile 12 Kuching-Serian Road.

Local Tamils who have married Malays are Muslims and have identified themselves as Malays (David & Dealwis 2009b). They are referred to as Tulkans by the Hindu Tamils and are mostly involved in textile and food businesses. They stay in dominant Malay residential areas in the city of Kuching, while those who have married Dayaks have assimilated the Dayak and Indian cultural norms at home in the urban and rural areas (Dealwis & David 2008). Today, the Tamils in Kuching practice a number of different faiths including Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The majority, however, are Hindus. There are two Hindu temples in the city of Kuching and the Tamil Hindus celebrate Thaipusam and Deepavali on a big scale. The Kuching Tamils are government servants earning mostly average and below-average salaries.

Literature review and aim of the study

Studies of minority groups staying in the urban areas in Malaysia show that very often there is no extrinsic correlation between language and ethnicity. This is evident in the studies conducted by David (1998), who explains how the Sindhi language is no longer a marker of ethnic identity for the Malaysian Sindhi community. The young generations of Sindhis are no longer interested in learning their heritage language, and English has become their first language. Focusing on the Telegu community in Kuching, David and Dealwis (2006) find that the closely-knit minority Telegu community has shifted to Malay and English in the home domain. This research attempts to investigate whether language shift has occurred among the Tamils in Kuching and if so, whether there are any other markers to indicate their Tamil identity.

For Fishman (1989: 216), ethnicity is concerned with origins and cultural behaviour. Ethnicity pertains to “peopleness”, that is actions, views or attributions pertaining to and belonging to a people. A group’s actions and views are manifested through a number of symbols. These include food, clothes, religion, customs, culture and language (see also Naji & David 2003: 95).

The term ‘language shift’ was coined by Fishman (1964) to describe the lack of use of its heritage language by a specific speech community. This generally occurs due to competition from a regionally and socially more powerful or numerically stronger language. Fasold (1984: 213) states that language shift occurs when “a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one”. Sociolinguists have studied the causes of shift (noting the impact of political domination and economic change) and the course of shift (frequently via domains of use),

noting that the home and religious domains are often the last bastions for beleaguered languages (Gal 1978).

Investigation on language shift among the minority Indian communities is quite new in Malaysia. Among the earlier studies on minority groups in Peninsular Malaysia are those by Mukherjee (1995) on the Malaysian Bengali community; David (1996) on the Malaysian Sindhi community; 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, Naji and Kaur's study (2003) of the Punjabi Sikh community in Selangor; and David's investigation (2003b) of the Pakistani community in Machang, Kelantan. To date, no study has been conducted on the Tamils in Sarawak. Consequently, this study has been conceptualized to examine the ethnic identity of the Tamil Hindu community in Kuching. The aim of the study is formulated into two research questions:

1. Do the Kuching Tamils maintain the habitual use of their ethnic language?
2. If the Kuching Tamils have shifted to another language, how do they adopt other markers of Indian identity?

Methodology

The primary data for this study was taken from a 20-item questionnaire given to 350 Tamil respondents who live in the city of Kuching; this site was selected because most of the Tamils stay in the state capital of Sarawak. The data was collected over a period of six months (January to June 2009). To speed up the data collection, the researchers obtained the help of family members and Tamil friends to distribute and collect the questionnaires. Since the Tamil community in Kuching has a close and dense network, it was relatively easy to distribute the questionnaires.

The data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science version 12.0. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis which includes simple frequency distributions and percentages.

Analysis

The questionnaire elicited the following details: (a) demographic data, (b) the first and dominant language of the respondents, (c) language/s most often used in different domains and with different people, (d)

food habitually consumed, (e) festivals celebrated, (f) dress, (g) marriage preferences, and (h) social identity.

Demographic profile of the respondents

The respondents, consisting of 350 members of the Tamil community in Kuching, were randomly chosen. One hundred and fifty (42.86%) respondents were between 18-29 years of age; 128 respondents (36.57%) were in the 30-49 age group; and 72 respondents (20.57%) were above 50 years of age (see Table 2.1).

A large majority of the respondents who were above 50 years of age said that both their parents were Tamils. However in sharp contrast, only 2.9% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group, and 13.4% of the respondents between 18-29 years of age reported that one of their parents were not Tamils. 36% of the respondents had either SPM/MCE or SC qualification, followed by 26.9% who had SJC/LCE/SRP or PMR (these are abbreviations for terms which refer to government-run examinations). 17.7% of the respondents only had primary school education, 9.43% had at least a diploma, 3.43% of the respondents had at least either HSC or STPM; 3.43% did not have any formal education, 2.86% held a bachelor's degree and 0.2% had a master's degree. The majority of the respondents (98.6%) were born in Kuching, compared with 1.1% and 0.3% who were born in the other divisions of Sarawak and in Peninsular Malaysia respectively (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.1 *Profile of respondents*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18-29	150	42.86%
30-49	128	36.57%
Above 50	72	20.57%

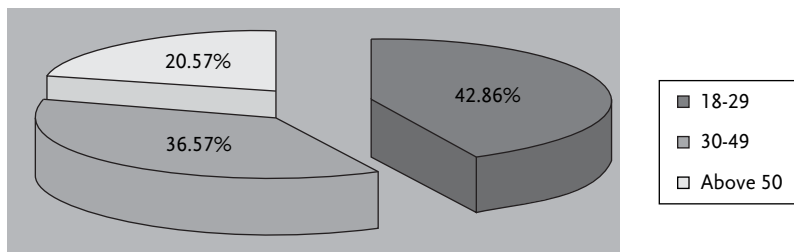


Table 2.2. *The demographic data*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Is your father Tamil?		
Yes	340	97.1%
No	10	2.9%
Is your mother Tamil?		
Yes	303	86.6%
No	47	13.4%
Academic level of education		
No formal education	12	3.43%
Primary school	62	17.7%
SJC/ LCE/PMR	94	26.9%
SC/ MCE /SPM	126	36.0%
HSC/ STPM	12	3.43%
Diploma	33	9.43%
Bachelor's degree	10	2.86%
Master's degree	1	0.2%
PhD degree	0	
Where were you born?		
Kuching	345	98.6%
Other divisions in Sarawak	4	1.1%
Peninsular Malaysia	1	0.3%

First language learned and dominant language of the respondents

A large majority, or 98.3% of the respondents, said that they first learned their heritage language (i.e., Tamil), followed by 1.14% who first learned English, 0.28% who first learned Dayak and 0.28% who first learned Malay. The dominant language used by 79.15% of the respondents was a code-mix of more Tamil and less of the other codes (Malay/English/Dayak). This was followed by 18.85% of the respondents whose dominant language was a code-mix of more English and less of other codes. 1.15% of the respondents used more Malay and less of other codes, while 0.85% of the respondents used more Dayak and less of the other codes (see Table 2.3).

Language used with parents

All the respondents above 50 years of age indicated that they used stand-alone Tamil with their parents compared with 36.7% of those between 30-49 years of age and 11.3% of those between 18-29 years of age. About 58.6% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 59.4% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they code-mixed using

Table 2.3 *First and dominant language of respondents*

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
First language learned:		
Tamil	344	98.3%
English	4	1.14%
Dayak	1	0.28%
Malay	1	0.28%
Dominant language:		
Code-mix: more Tamil, less others	277	79.15%
Code-mix more English, less others	66	18.85%
Code-mix: more Malay, less others	4	1.15%
Code-mix: more Dayak, less others	3	0.85%

more Tamil and less of other codes (English/Malay/Dayak) with their parents. This was followed by 28.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group who said that they code-mixed using more English and less of the other codes with their parents. About 0.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 2.3% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they used more Malay and less of the other codes with their parents. 1.6% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group used more Dayak and less of the other codes, and 0.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group said that they also used more Dayak and less of the other codes with their parents. However, none of the respondents above 50 years of age used more Dayak and less of the other codes with their parents. Thus, there was a major language shift from using Tamil to other codes among the youngest age group compared with the oldest age group (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 *Language used with parents*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Respondents & Percentage</i>
18-29	standalone Tamil	17 (11.3%)
	more Tamil, less others	88 (58.6%)
	more English, less others	43 (28.7%)
	more Malay, less others	1 (0.7%)
	more Dayak, less others	1 (0.7%)
30-49	standalone Tamil	47 (36.7%)
	more Tamil, less others	76 (59.4%)
	more Malay, less others	3 (2.3%)
	more Dayak, less others	2 (1.6%)
Above 50	standalone Tamil	72 (100%)

Language used with siblings

One hundred percent of the respondents who were above 50 years old used only standalone Tamil with their siblings. On the other hand, only 21.1% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group and none of the respondents in the 18-29 age group used standalone Tamil with their siblings. Instead, a large majority or 84.0% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 75.0% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they code-switched using more Tamil and less of the other codes with their siblings.

About 14% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 2.3% in the 30-49 age group also said that they used more English and less of the other codes with their siblings. This was followed by 1.6% of the respondents in the 30-49 age groups and 1.3% in the 18-29 age group who said that they used more Malay and less of the other codes with their siblings. Only 0.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group used more Dayak and less of the other codes with their siblings. It is clear that in the use of Tamil there was a marked difference between the older age groups (above 50 years old and 30-49 years old) and the younger age group (18-29 years old) (see Table 2.5).

Language used outside the home

One hundred percent of the respondents above 50 years old use standalone Tamil with their Tamil friends outside the home. However, none of the respondents in the 18-29 and 30-49 age groups said that they used standalone Tamil for in-group communication outside the home. Instead, a large majority or 84.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 60.9% in the 30-49 age group said that they used more English and less of the other codes outside the home. Only about 10% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 36.7% of the

Table 2.5 *Language used with siblings*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Respondents & Percentage</i>
18-29	more Tamil, less others	126 (84.0%)
	more English, less others	21 (14%)
	more Malay, less others	2 (1.3%)
	more Dayak, less others	1 (0.7%)
30-49	standalone Tamil	27 (21.1%)
	more Tamil, others:128	96 (75.0%)
	more English, less others	3 (2.3%)
	more Malay, less others	2 (1.6%)
Above 50	standalone Tamil	72 (100%)

Table 2.6 *Language used outside the home*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Respondents & Percentage</i>
18-29	more Tamil, less others	15 (10%)
	more English, less others	127 (84.7%)
	more Malay, less others	8 (5.3%)
30-49	more Tamil, less others	47 (36.7%)
	more English, less others	78 (60.9%)
	more Malay, less others	3 (2.4%)
Above 50	standalone Tamil	72 (100%)

respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they used more Tamil and less of the other codes outside the home. About 5.3% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group and 2.4% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they code-switched using more Malay and less of the other codes outside the home (see Table 2.6).

Language used in the Hindu temples

There are two Hindu temples in the city of Kuching, namely the Sri Maha Mariaman Temple in Ban Hock Road and the Perumal Temple in Rock Road. A large majority of the Tamils in Kuching are Hindus and ten families have converted to Christianity over the past ten years. There is a good mix of different generations that come for prayers in the Hindu temples every weekend. All the respondents for this study who were above 50 years of age said that they only used Tamil in the temple, while 11.7% of those in the 30-49 age group used only Tamil in the temple. In contrast, none of the respondents in the 18-29 age group said that they used only Tamil in the temple.

A large majority or 63.3% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they code-switched using more Tamil and less of the other codes in the temple. Only 16.7% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group said that they code-switched using more Tamil and less of the other codes and a large majority or 83.3% of the respondents in the 18-29 age group said that they code-switched using more English and less of the other codes in the temple. Only 25% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group said that they code-switched using more English and less of the other codes in the temple. There is clearly a different pattern of language used in the temple among the younger generation compared with the middle age group respondents (see Table 2.7).

In summary, while the use of Tamil both at home and outside the home rose with age, the use of English at home prevailed among the younger respondents. It is clear that there has been a language shift

Table 2.7 *Language used in the Hindu temples*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Respondents & Percentage</i>
18-29	more Tamil, less others	25 (16.7%)
	more English, less others	125 (83.3%)
30-49	standalone Tamil	15 (11.7%)
	more Tamil, less others	81 (63.3%)
	more English, less others	32 (25%)
Above 50	standalone Tamil	72 (100%)

from standalone Tamil used by the above 50 age group to a mixture of Tamil/English/Malay/Dayak used by those in the 18-29 and 30-49 age groups respectively. The younger members (18-29) of the Tamil community in Kuching preferred a code-mixed variety of Tamil, English, Malay and Dayak instead of standalone Tamil both in and outside the home.

Food habitually consumed

As in all other communities, the onslaught of globalisation has broken down the familiar barriers in Indian tastes. Most Indians in Sarawak today enjoy Chinese, Malay and Western food. It must also be pointed out that the Indians in Kuching take vegetarianism very seriously (Sebastian 2003). Vegetarian food – served on banana leaves and eaten with fingers – is the norm at traditional functions, on religious occasions and at most social gatherings.

When the respondents in this study were asked to indicate the type of food they consumed at home, about 91.6% of the respondents who were above 50 years of age said that they consumed only Indian food whereas 8.4% said that they preferred a mix (i.e., more Indian food and less of the other food (Malay, Chinese and Western)). 42.9% of the respondents in the 30-49 age group preferred more Indian food and less other food, 28.9% consumed only Indian food, 13.3% consumed more Western food and less other food, 7.8% consumed more Chinese and less other food and 7.1% consumed more Malay food and less other food.

As those in the youngest age group have been more exposed to other cultures, the Western media and interaction with other ethnic groups, it was expected that more respondents of the young age group might prefer to consume Western, Chinese and Malay food. There was a substantial difference, as only 19.3% of the youngest group said that they consumed only Indian food, 45.3% said that they consumed more Indian food and less of other food, 8.7% consumed more Chinese food, 8.0% more Malay food and less other food and 4.7% consumed more Dayak food and less other food (see Table 2.8).

Table 2.8 *Food habitually consumed*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Types of food</i>	<i>Respondents & Percentage</i>
18-29	Indian food only	29 (19.3%)
	more Indian, less others	68 (45.3%)
	more Western, less others	21 (14%)
	more Chinese, less others	13 (8.7%)
	more Malay, less others	12 (8.0%)
	more Dayak, less others	7 (4.7%)
30-49	Indian food only	37 (28.9%)
	more Indian, less others	55 (42.9)
	more Western, less others	17 (13.3%)
	more Chinese, less others	10 (7.8%)
	more Malay, less others	9 (7.1%)
Above 50	Indian food only	66 (91.6%)
	more Indian, less others	6 (8.4%)

Celebrating festivals

Tamils in Sarawak celebrate Indian festivals such as Deepavali, Thaipusam and Ponggal. The respondents were also asked to determine the importance of celebrating Indian festivals regularly. There was a general agreement between the three age groups with regard to the importance of celebrating these annual Indian festivals. However, there were also remarkable differences. Again, an overwhelming majority of the youngest age group (98.8%) attached special importance to celebrating Indian festivals while only 80.9% of the middle age group and 70.3% of the old age group felt the same way. This could probably be because the younger generation, who has shifted more to English Malay or even Dayak, felt a greater need to emphasise their cultural identity by celebrating Deepavali, Thaipusam and Ponggal (see Table 2.9).

Table 2.9 *Celebrating Indian festivals*

<i>Importance of Festivals</i>	<i>18-29 yrs</i>	<i>30-49 yrs</i>	<i>50-65yrs</i>
Extremely important	98.8%	80.9%	70.3%
Somewhat important	1.2%	19.1%	25.7%
Not important	0%	0%	4%

Marriage partners

Data was also collected concerning the marriage partner selected by the respondents. 95% of the respondents above 50 years of age are of the view that the marriage partner should be a member of the Tamil community. On the other hand, 74.8% of the respondents from the middle age group (30-49 years old) are of the view that the marriage partner should be Tamil. As for the younger age group (18-29 years old), 50.7% of them were concerned that the life partner should be Tamil. 17.5% of the younger respondents did not mind marrying non-Indians whilst only 4.6% of the 30-49 year age group and none of those above 50 years held this view. This shows that the older respondents were less tolerant of exogamous marriages. However, exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Sarawak which has 33 ethnic groups (Dealwis & David 2008). At the time this study was conducted, there were 34 families in Kuching where either one parent was a non-Indian (i.e., either Dayak or Chinese) (see Table 2.10).

Dress

With regard to wearing traditional clothes, 97.5% of the respondents above 50 years of age chose to wear their traditional clothes compared with only 2.5% who preferred modern clothes. In contrast, a large majority of the respondents between 30-49 years old chose to wear modern clothes and only 35.4% preferred traditional clothes. Most of the respondents (80.7%) in the 18-29 age group chose to wear modern clothes and only 19.3% preferred traditional clothes. Traditional clothes are generally worn by Hindu Tamils during festivals, and when they go to the temples for prayers (see Table 2.11).

Table 2.10 *Marriage partners*

<i>Marriage Partner</i>	<i>18-29 yrs old</i>	<i>30-49 yrs old</i>	<i>50-65 yrs</i>
Tamils only	50.7%	74.8%	95%
Other Indian groups	31.8%	20.6%	5%
Non Indians	17.5%	4.6%	0%

Table 2.11 *Choice of clothing*

<i>Type of clothing</i>	<i>18-29 years old</i>	<i>30-49 years old</i>	<i>50-65 years old</i>
Traditional clothes	19.3%	35.4%	97.5%
Modern clothes	80.7%	64.6%	2.5%

Social identity

This study is also concerned with the social identity of the Tamils in Kuching. Social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (Hogg & Abrams 1988). Through the process of self-categorisation or identification, an identity is formed (Stryker 1980).

All the 350 respondents from the three different age groups unanimously described themselves as Tamils first, Sarawak Indians second and Malaysian Indian third. Their self-categorisation of themselves as Tamils was because they perceived themselves as different from other Indians. Having a particular social identity meant that the Tamil respondents were socially entrenched within their own group.

Discussion

It appears that the Tamil community in Kuching is slowly accepting the fact that their ethnic language is not necessary to maintain their cultural identity. That one can still preserve one's identity is made clear through other cultural markers of identity. A similar attitude is felt by the multi-dialectal Bidayuhs in Sarawak who do not have a common Bidayuh language but share other markers of Bidayuh identity (Dealwis 2008). Although the younger generations of Tamils have not totally abandoned their ethnic language, the findings show that the use of the heritage language declines with the younger generations. The language of communication among Tamils belonging to the 18-29 age group is no longer standalone Tamil but a mixture of Tamil with other linguistic codes that are in their verbal repertoire. As with the Telegu community in Kuching, there are signs that English will eventually be more dominant than Tamil among the younger generation who are better educated and have better socioeconomic status compared with the older generation who are mostly labourers. In fact, the use of English has become common among the younger generation of Telegus and Tamils whose parents realise the economic value of the language and encourage their children to master it.

The findings of this study also show that the Malay and Dayak languages are used, particularly by families in which exogamous marriages occur. This means that the younger Tamils are multilingual, shifting from one language to another to accommodate the comfort zone of their interlocutors. The Tamil language was not taught in schools in Sarawak until 2007 when it was introduced as a third elective language in Green Road and Satria primary schools. A quick check with the school authorities reveal that the number of Tamils enrolling for the

Tamil language classes has been encouraging. This is largely due to the fact that the Tamil parents today want their children to learn how to read and write in their heritage language. There are 20 Tamil students in both schools and classes are offered three times a week after school hours. The two Peninsular Malaysian teachers trained in the Tamil language are very encouraging and ensure that the Tamil pupils do not drop out from these classes. A few Bidayuh and Malay children have also joined these classes.

Although Indian food is still favoured by all three age groups of Tamil respondents, the findings shows that the younger and middle age groups are not restricted to eating Indian food and wearing Indian clothes. The younger generation does not wear Indian clothing as often as the younger generation in Peninsular Malaysia (Naji & David 2003) because there are very few textile shops selling Indian clothing in Kuching. Furthermore, being the minority in public places, many of them want to identify with the majority who wear Western and modern clothing. Indian textiles, which are sold by individuals, are very expensive in the city of Kuching and there is no particular shop selling only Indian textiles, unlike in Kuala Lumpur. The intermarriage of Tamil men with other races, particularly Dayak women, has also resulted in their children being more flexible in their dress and food preferences. The popularity of Bollywood cinema has however caught up with the young Tamil men and women who go to Masjid India in Kuala Lumpur just to shop for trendy Bollywood fashion designs. With low airfare, which makes flying affordable even for average-income Tamils, it is quite common nowadays to spot more Tamils wearing Indian clothes during events. In fact, many urban Dayak and Malay ladies in Kuching have no reservations about wearing the salwar kameez to work.

The younger generations of Tamils tend to regard celebrating festivals such as Deepavali, Thaipusam and Ponggal as more important to signal their ethnic identity because they are less fluent in the Tamil language compared with the older family members. They also visit one another and open their homes to non-Tamils as well. Indian dishes and delicacies are served, and 'kolam' is designed by family members to indicate the important celebration.

The Tamils in Kuching are proud of their Tamil identity and also of being Sarawak Indians. With the increasing number of Tamils from Peninsular Malaysia coming to Kuching either to work or to study in Malaysia University of Sarawak (UNIMAS), the local Tamils are joining efforts with them to improve the socioeconomic status of the local Indians. They are also striving to preserve the Tamil language and other markers of Tamil identity, using the Hindu temple as a base for their activities. The more educated and traditional Tamils from Peninsular Malaysia continuously encourage the Kuching Tamils to return to their

linguistic heritage and other Tamil cultural practices. The first Indian Association – the Kuching Indian Association (where Tamils form the bulk of the membership) – that was formed in 1956 has also been playing a significant role in the moulding and evolution of Indian identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the Tamil community in Kuching is small in number, it is a community that is still conscious of its rich cultural background. Thanks to the Tamils from Peninsular Malaysia, many of the Tamils in Kuching are now appreciating their cultural heritage and are not ashamed of speaking the Tamil language in public. However, the Sarawak Tamils have formed an identity of their own that is uniquely theirs. Sarawak has become home for the Tamils born and bred in this East Malaysian state and their Tamil ethnicity is maintained not necessarily only through language but in other ways like food and celebrations which form the markers of their Tamil identity.

3 Do Exogamous Marriages Result in Language Shift?

Focus on the Sindhis of Kuching, Malaysia

Maya Khemlani David and Caesar Dealwis

Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual country with a population of 26.64 million (as of 2006) and at least a hundred languages. Of the total population of Malaysia, Bumiputras (Malays and other indigenous groups) comprise 65.1%, Chinese 26.0% and Indians 7.7% (Census Malaysia, 2002). While the Malays who form the majority of the population are indigenous, the non-Malays (i.e., the Chinese and the Indians) are considered immigrant communities since many of their ancestors were encouraged by the British colonial regime to move to Malaysia. Within each of the three main ethnic groups, a variety of languages and dialects are used. Furthermore, it is not unusual for speakers of a specific ethnic community to know and use another language better than they do their mother tongue (see David et al. 2003 on the Punjabi Sikh community). In fact, according to Omar (2003: 100), English is the first language learned by 1% of the Malaysian population.

In a country where so many languages and dialects abound, one of the issues that often arises is the choice of language not only in the public domain but also in the home domain. Should one use the national language (known over different time periods as Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Melayu), an international language (English) or one's ethnic language in the family domain – or for that matter a mixed discourse (see David et al. 2009) consisting of more than one language?

Decisions about language choice in the home are complex. Burhanuddin (2006) discusses the language choice of urban bilingual Malays in Kuala Lumpur and states that the use of the ethnic language is most dominant in conversations with grandparents, while English by itself or mixed with Malay is preferred most with siblings. Such a choice with grandparents indicates politeness and respect, she posits. The other two major ethnic groups, the Chinese and the Indians in

urban Kuala Lumpur, face similar issues of language choice depending on the circumstances.

David (1996) describes language choice and use in a minority community: the Sindhi-Hindus who number about 700 in West Malaysia. They are experiencing language shift. Language shift among minority ethnic communities in the country is not unfamiliar [see David et al. 2003 on the Punjabi Sikh community in the Klang Valley; David & Nambiar (2002) on Catholic Malayalees; David & Faridah (1999) and Ramachandran (2000) on the Portuguese community in Malacca; Mohd Yasin (1998) on the Javanese community in Sungai Lang; Ravichandran (1996) on the Chitty community in Malacca; Tan (1983) on the Peranakan Chinese in Malacca; and Teo (2003) on the Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan]. At times, women in some communities are the preservers of the ethnic language. In examining the discourse of yet another minority community – the Malaysian Bengalis – Mukherjee (2006) finds that although Bengali is the unmarked language within a group of women aged 45 and older, they switch to English when they discuss sex and related taboo topics. In describing the ways that women construct and assert female-centered identities within their community, Mukherjee states that for the older Bengali women, retention and use of the Bengali language gives them power within their community in contrast to the younger women for whom English is the language of economic power.

David (2001) also shows that within Sindhi families in Peninsular Malaya, the preferred language varies. The first generation maintains Sindhi in peer interaction, whilst the second and third generations have moved away from ethnic language use towards English with their peers. The use of English in second-generation Sindhi homes shows that English has become dominant in the home domain. This, naturally, causes their children (i.e., the third generation) to use English most of the time. In peer interaction they tend to code-switch between English and Malay, as the latter is the medium of instruction in national schools. English appears to be dominant in Malaysian Sindhi life because of the association of the language with economic and social mobility.

English has then become the first language of many small ethnic minorities, especially the urban Indians. However, the variety of English used differs depending on the setting. Pillai (2006) examines the relationship between the use of English as a first language in the family domain and the concept of identity. Data was collected through the use of interviews and audio recordings of five Malaysian families. From the grammatical structures used, Pillai infers that the type of English used in the home domain was more mesolectal in nature while in the work domain the respondents used the more acrolectal variety of

Malaysian English (ME). In informal contexts, there was a tendency to shift to the more mesolectal variety. According to Pillai, the use of ME did not seem to create an identity crisis for her respondents, as they shift between the varieties and code-switch using ethnic kinship terms in the various types of English used.

It is clear from the many studies conducted on Indian communities that due to a range of factors such as inter-ethnic marriages, education and geographical and socioeconomic mobility, many Malaysian Indians, especially of a certain socioeconomic standing, tend to use English as their first language (MEFL) or use a code-mixed variety of languages (see David et al. 2009).

This chapter attempts to address the issue of the shift of the Sindhi language among the Sindhis in Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia. Sarawak is located on the island of Borneo. The chapter first provides a brief review of the available information on the Sindhis and then seeks to investigate if a shift is occurring among the Sindhis in Kuching. The factors that are important in influencing the maintenance of or shift away from the heritage language are also considered. This study aims to consider the importance of both cultural and linguistic contact between members of the family who are both Sindhis and non-Sindhis.

Using the definitions provided by Fasold (1984), language shift occurs when a language is given up completely by a community in favour of another one. Language maintenance, on the other hand, occurs when a “community collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used” (Fasold 1984: 213). According to David (2001), among the frequently cited causes of language shift among the Indians in Malaysia are migration, exogamous marriages, school language, urbanisation and the higher prestige and economic advantage associated with the new language. In examining the reasons for language shift of two extended families of Catholic Malayalees in Malaysia, David and Nambiar (2002) found that ‘the high incidence of exogamous marriages and the many numbers relocating elsewhere...’ are the push factors for language shift (ibid: 125-34). Discussing the offspring of Indian men who have married Bidayuh women in Kuching, David and Dealwis (see chapter 6) argue they do not use their fathers’ heritage language but instead use Bidayuh, their mothers’ language. Exogamous marriages and the higher prestige associated with a language are factors that are important in determining whether a community maintains the use of its heritage language or shifts away from it. Studies conducted by local researchers in Malaysia have shown that many of the Indian migrant communities have gradually moved from their heritage language to English (see David 1996, David & Naji 2000, David & Nambiar 2002; David et al. 2003, Sankar 2004, Nambiar 2007, and David & Dealwis 2006 and 2009).

Aim

This chapter sets out to study the effect of exogamous marriages on language shift and maintenance among the Sindhis of Kuching. The Sindhis, who originally came from Sind, which is today part of Pakistan, came to Malaysia (then Malaya) to trade, generally in the textile trade. During World War II, the community made more permanent establishments in Malaya. This permanent feature was further consolidated by the partitioning of India into India and Pakistan. The Sindhi Hindus lost their homeland to Pakistan and therefore decided to remain in Malaya (and in other parts of the world where they had fled) on a long-term basis. Being Hindus, the Sindhis would have found it difficult to survive in Pakistan, which is a predominantly Muslim country (interviews with Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur). In Malaysia, over time, the children of the Sindhi community have moved on to more professional and skilled jobs.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was one of observation and oral interviews with four Sindhi men who are the offspring of the first Sindhi man who settled in Kuching. They are referred to as MG2s (second generation men) in this study. Interviews were conducted with MG2s and their spouses in Kuching. Interviews were also conducted with their children (G3s), and the language used by the grandchildren among themselves, with their parents and with their grandparents was observed.

This study traces the history of Sindhis in Kuching through interviews with MG2s. The observations and unstructured interviews which lasted almost 10 hours yielded significant data. These were conducted at home, in the *gurdwara* (Punjabi Sikh place of worship) and along India Street where one of the brothers is currently doing business with his son. Such informal conversations has enabled the researchers to seek information easily from the informants who were cooperative and open especially as one of the researchers is also a member of the Sindhi community. During the period of data collection, the Sindhi warmth and rapport was observed by the non-Sindhi researcher in their open discussion and networking with other Sindhi families. When visiting the four Sindhi homes, the different codes used by G2s with G3s and G4s and vice versa were also closely observed.

Findings

This case study focuses on the descendants of a Sindhi family that came to Kuching in the 1940s to open a textile retail business in India Street, Kuching. This is the only Sindhi family that has settled in Kuching, as most Sindhis in Malaysia opted to settle in Peninsular Malaysia due to better business opportunities there. According to Bharadwaj (1988: 149, cited in David 2001: 11), “Sindhi youth customarily travelled outside their home to seek their fortune.” About 700 Sindhis can be found in Peninsular Malaysia today and all of them came as textile merchants and other businessmen before Malaya achieved independence from the British colonial government in 1957 (David 1996). The younger generation of Sindhis was exposed to Malay and English in school. David’s research shows that the Sindhis in Peninsular Malaya have shifted to English but have maintained ethnic markers to signal identity (see David 1998 for these ethnic variables).

To understand the causes of language shift it is necessary to trace the dominant language used by the descendants of the only Sindhi family that came to Kuching in 1941. The first Sindhi textile merchant and his Sindhi wife had three children – a boy and two girls, all of whom were born in the city of Kuching. They assimilated well with the other Indian, Malay and Chinese families. When his wife died in the late 1940s, the Sindhi merchant married his Tamil housekeeper who had learned Sindhi while working for the family. The young Tamil housekeeper, who was a Hindu, adopted the cultural and religious practices of her husband and prayed with other North Indians and Punjabis in the gurdwara in Kuching. This second marriage resulted in five other children – three males and two females, all of whom are currently above 50 years of age. As the second wife had worked for the Sindhi family for some time, she knew Sindhi and this was the language used to communicate with members of the family. This was the scenario even though the second wife was not a Sindhi. When her husband passed away in the late 1960s, she rejected her Tamil relatives who were of a lower caste and instead established contacts with other Sindhis in Singapore and India largely to find suitable Sindhi marriage prospects for her children and stepchildren.

When the Sindhi father (MG1) was alive, Sindhi was the dominant code used in the home. The family stayed above their textile shop (very much like the Peninsular Sindhis), which was located in the centre of the city of Kuching. The customers then were mostly Chinese, and the owners of most of the shops along India Street were mostly Chinese although there were some Indian Muslims whose ancestors came from South India to operate spice, textile and other businesses. To facilitate communication with customers and the neighbouring shop owners, all

the members of the Sindhi family acquired a pidgin variety of the Malay language, commonly known as *Bahasa Pasar*. This variety of non-standard Malay was the lingua franca in inter-ethnic communication in the early years before Malay became the medium of instruction in 1970.

When MGI passed away in the 1960s, the home language pattern shifted because there was no longer anyone who could speak standalone Sindhi proficiently. Although the non-Sindhi wife could speak Sindhi, her vocabulary of the language was fairly limited and there were many words and expressions that she could express better in Malay. Tamil, her mother tongue, was hardly used as she rejected her Tamil identity. According to one of her sons, his mother never taught them how to speak Tamil, as she perceived it to be inferior to the Sindhi language. Instead of Tamil, she shifted to Malay for words that she could not find in Sindhi. Thus, Malay code-switches in dominant Sindhi became the home language of the family after MGI died. However, over time, due to the family business and interactions with customers in Malay, Malay became the more dominant language in the home domain.

The children from both the first and second marriages regard themselves as Sindhis and North Indians. They have had no interest in learning Tamil, which is a Dravidian language and which was never encouraged by their mother who was a Tamil herself. The stigma of being classified as South Indians who came to Sarawak as labourers did not appeal to the Tamil mother who acquired new social status in the Punjabi community (the other North Indian community in Kuching) upon her marriage to the Sindhi widower. Even in Peninsular Malaysia, the Sindhis and Punjabi Sikhs have close networks as they tend to frequent the same place of worship – the *gurdwara* (David 2001). The children of this mixed marriage sought ties with their father's relatives in India, and the non-Sindhi mother frequently took the children to visit their Sindhi relatives.

The three children from the first marriage contracted arranged marriages with Sindhis through contacts. These three children married Sindhis because their father had made such arrangements prior to his death with relatives in India, as he strongly wanted the children's Sindhi identity to be maintained. Three of the five children from the second marriage also have Sindhi spouses, through arrangements made by Sindhi relatives. However, the other two children (i.e., two brothers) married non-Sindhis, namely Chinese and Dayak. The three brothers from the second marriage remained in Kuching, and they and their families are currently the only Sindhis in Sarawak.

The children from the first marriage used Sindhi among themselves when they were young and continue to do so today. Due to sibling

rivalry over business matters, the relationship between the Sindhi siblings has been less than cordial.

The children from the second marriage cannot speak Tamil, which is their mother’s heritage language. Instead, they speak pidgin Malay and Sindhi with their mother. Besides pidgin Malay, the children from the second marriage also learned Hokkien and Mandarin due to their contact with Chinese customers. They speak Chinese with their Chinese customers and friends.

As for their Tamil mother, she stopped going to the Hindu temples and instead joined the other North Indians (i.e., the Punjabis) at the *gurdwara*. According to the respondents (MG2b, MG2c, MG2d), their non-Sindhi mother was a recognised figure in the *gurdwara* because of her generous donations to the Sikh temple building fund and charitable organisations. She also organised prayers to commemorate her husband’s death anniversaries in the *gurdwara*. The Punjabi community welcomed her and her children as Sikhs and Sindhis.

Figure 3.1 *First Marriage*

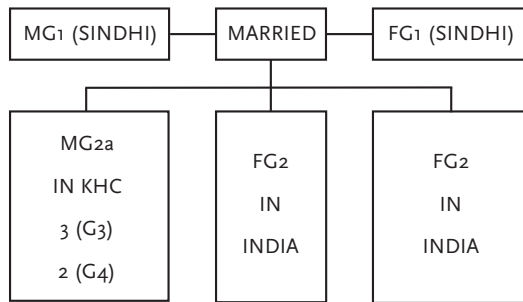
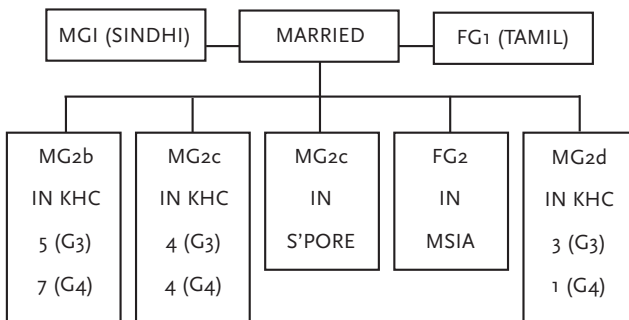


Figure 3.2 *Second Marriage*



*KCH=KUCHING

Both daughters from the second marriage also married Sindhis. Their mother, determined to retain networks with the Sindhi community, made arrangements with Sindhi matchmakers in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. She was apparently proud of her children's Sindhi identity and their organised arranged marriages with fellow Sindhis. Both daughters now live in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (where Sindhis generally use English; see David, 1996 and 2000 respectively) and identify themselves as Sindhis.

The son from the Tamil mother who married a Sindhi from Mumbai and who lives in Kuching remarked that Sindhi has again become the more dominant language in the Sindhi-English mixed discourse he uses with his wife in the home domain. He said that he has acquired a good knowledge of the Sindhi language from her. Now in his early sixties, he explained that they have three children – two of whom are also married to Sindhis, one from Spain, the other from Indonesia. However, despite marriages with fellow Sindhis, his children and grandchildren are using more English and less Sindhi at home (see Figure 1). G4 use only English with their parents and grandparents. All of them do not speak Sindhi (see Figure 2).

Discussion

All the Sindhi spouses of MG2s are proficient in English and were educated in English medium schools. The two spouses who are Sindhis speak a mixed variety of Sindhi/English with their husbands, whereas the other three who did not contract endogamous marriages use English and Malay with their husbands. However, English is the dominant home language in the Sindhi homes, with their children. It was observed that second-generation Sindhis speak English with G3s and G4s. All third-generation Sindhis said that they are not proficient in Sindhi and speak English and Malay with their parents. The six grandchildren (or G4s) who were observed used English and Malay with their parents and grandparents. Due to a change in the language policy, G3s and G4s attend Malay medium schools unlike G2s who attended English medium schools. However, one G4 attends an English medium private school in Kuching, as the grandparents are of the view that English is important. It is clear then that contracting an endogamous marriage – i.e., marrying a fellow Sindhi – does not necessarily mean that the ethnic or heritage language will be maintained. Even in the homes of MG2s who married Sindhis, Sindhi is not the dominant code.

Traditionally, it would be the mother, the homemaker, that would speak the heritage language with the children. However, in the case of

MG2c and his Sindhi wife (born in Mumbai), both appear to be equally comfortable with both English and Sindhi as observed in their discourse with the Sindhi researcher who visited them in their home in Kuching. In their research on factors that determine language choice of bilingual Welsh-English mothers, Harrison and Piete (1980) explain that children are linguistically what their mothers intend them to be. Among the factors that influenced this Sindhi mother's language choice with her children and grandchildren was the socioeconomic value of English and the chance of social interactions with non-Sindhis. In fact, marriage with a Sindhi does not necessarily mean that the ethnic language will be maintained. This is clear from Daswani and Parchani's study (1978) which shows that even Sindhis from India shifted to English and Hindi soon after the partitioning of India.

Language shift takes place when someone does not maintain his or her language and gradually their descendants adopt another language as the home code. Although the Sindhis realise that it is important to maintain their heritage language to display their Sindhi identity, they do not have close networks with other Sindhis in Kuching that could enable them to use the heritage language. In fact, there is hardly any contact even between the Sindhi brothers living in the city. Despite having Sindhi spouses who have strong roots in India, standalone Sindhi is not used with their children and grandchildren. However, MG2a and MG2c maintain some Sindhi in their mixed Sindhi/English discourse.

Sindhi does not seem salient in the lives of the younger generations of Sindhis even when the mother is a Sindhi. This clearly shows that even women who are considered maintainers of the heritage language compared with men (see Telegus in Kuching in David & Dealwis 2006) will eventually abandon their heritage language due to linguistic pressures. One of the Sindhi wives felt that she should also be conversant in Malay and English, which she needs in her daily business dealings in Kuching. In fact, she stressed many times during the interviews that the success of the family business is largely due to her good business networking with important business clients who are non-Sindhis and with whom she has to speak Malay and English. In fact, she learned Malay only after her marriage.

Like other Sindhis in Peninsular Malaysia (see David 2001: 22), this Sindhi family places a great premium on marriages within the community and such marriages are "arranged" to ensure endogamy. Since there are no other Sindhi families in Kuching, Sindhi spouses are obtained from India and elsewhere. However, as mentioned earlier, marriages with fellow Sindhis do not necessarily facilitate language maintenance as there are Sindhis even in India and other parts of the world who use English instead of Sindhi with their Sindhi spouses and children (see Daswani & Parchani 1978 on Sindhis in India; David 2000

on Sindhis in Singapore; Detaramani & Lock 2003 on Sindhis in Hong Kong; Thapan 2002 on Sindhis in Manila, Hong Kong and Jakarta). In all these countries, the Sindhis have shifted away from the Sindhi language. Consequently, contracting endogamous marriages with fellow Sindhis does not necessarily mean that the heritage language will be maintained. In fact, when the younger Sindhis from all over the world met recently in Singapore at a function for Sindhis, they were observed to be using English with each other and even with their mothers (personal observation).

According to Le Page (1985), the linguistic attributes of communities only exist in the mind of individuals, and communities live only in the way that individuals behave towards each other. This appears to be reflected in the Sindhis in Kuching who see themselves as Sindhis and are proud of their Sindhi heritage and are happy to make links with other Sindhis. Despite the decreased use of Sindhi from G2 to G3 and G4, the Sindhi family seems certain about their identity as Sindhis, as is the case with the Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur (see David 1998). Members of the family said that they could easily recognise other Sindhis by their appearance. Rapport and solidarity are quickly established with fellow Sindhis, even strangers to Kuching, and homes are opened up to them even at a first meeting.

When entertaining a Sindhi guest, the Sindhi families maintain their Sindhi identity by serving Sindhi food. In their homes, religious deities were observed and home decorations included some North Indian paintings and designs. The Sindhi wife wears Punjabi suits and saris while the men have shifted to shirts and pants but Hindu symbols like bangles on the arms of a married woman are maintained. G3s, although English speaking, still maintain Sindhi values and cultural norms. For instance, one G3 in his late twenties who was interviewed said that he would only marry a Sindhi girl selected by his mother. He believes that such a marriage will help the family maintain their Sindhi identity even though he does not speak Sindhi.

Conclusion

The shifting pattern of language use by the Sindhis in Kuching is quite similar to the Sindhis of Peninsular Malaysia (David 2001), although the latter came to Peninsular Malaysia in bigger numbers and were able to withstand early pressures because they were initially quite dependent on one another in a way that the sole Sindhi family in Kuching could not be. In Peninsular Malaysia, about 20% of the Sindhi community has contracted exogamous marriages, and this could have resulted in language shift. Unfortunately, David's 1996 study only looked at

Sindhis who had contracted endogamous marriages, and the assumption was made that those who had not married fellow Sindhis would have shifted codes.

However, exogamous marriages in themselves do not always result in shift, as noted in the history of the Sindhi family in Kuching. Other variables must be considered such as the need to be identified by a community deemed more prestigious and to move away from being identified with a community that is seen as less prestigious. This is clearly the case with the Tamil mother. In addition, pragmatic factors such as the need to do business in languages understood by their customers also caused the shift to English and Malay.

At the same time, it would be wrong to generalise that all endogamous marriages result in language maintenance of the hereditary language. Marriages contracted with fellow Sindhis who come from families where shift has already taken place does not bode well for Sindhi language maintenance.

4 Malaysian-Filipino Couples and Language Choice

Heritage Language or International Language?

Francisco Perlas Dumanig and Maya Khemlani David

Introduction

Malaysia is a multilingual and multicultural country where many people can speak two or more languages. Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the national and official language. However, English is widely spoken and used in various domains of communication by different ethnic groups. The educational system in Malaysia has considered the linguistic plurality of the people and introduced vernacular primary schools (David 2004b). At the secondary level, Bahasa Malaysia was the medium of instruction in all subjects in public or government schools until 2003, when English was introduced for the teaching of science and mathematics. With the increasing trend towards globalisation, the popularity of English has increased.

The Philippines is also a multilingual and multicultural country. Filipino is the national language, while English and Filipino are the official languages used in education, government and media. Although Filipino is widely spoken in different domains of communication, English has become a necessity for Filipinos who work overseas (Dumanig 2009). English can be considered the language for employment opportunities outside the Philippines. It is clear then that both Malaysia and the Philippines have similar linguistic scenarios, as both English and their respective national languages play an important role in everyday communication. This may have contributed to the language choice of the participants in this study.

Language choice plays a crucial role in interracial communication, specifically in mixed marriages, as both the husband and wife do not come from the same speech community. It is expected that a speaker's choice of language in an interaction can be influenced by his/her linguistic repertoire (see Holmes 2008). Moreover, language choice might be triggered by various factors such as the speaker's first language, the

community language, (Piller 2004 and Johansson 1991), age, education, role-relationships, ethnicity, (Burhanudeen 2003), the dominant language, (Piller 2004), social status, (Tan 1993), numeric factors, the economic and political position of the linguistic group, and the neutrality of the language (Degefa 2004).

Couples that are linguistically and culturally diverse may apply certain strategies when communicating. One strategy to accommodate other speakers is to modify one's speech style so as to match the speech style or norms of the other speaker in an interaction. This concept is explained by the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977) argue that CAT can be applied in interracial encounters because both interlocutors may either converge or diverge. The choice of a linguistic code may represent the speaker's attitude to a language. When a speaker approves of his/her speech partner and uses the preferred or dominant language of the speech partner, "convergence" takes place. However, when a speaker disapproves of his/her speech partner and uses another language or different speech style, "divergence" occurs.

In multi-ethnic societies, two or more languages are generally used in different domains of communication. Consequently, speakers have to make a choice of which language to use. Accommodation occurs when members of a minority group use the language of the host or dominant culture but at the same time retain their ethnic language. Assimilation, on the other hand, usually occurs when the host language is used by migrants (Giles 1979).

The concept of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) has been expanded and applied to family communication including communication between husbands and wives. Harwood, Soliz and Lin (2006) explain that there are different strategies in family communication: approximation strategies, interpretability strategies, discourse management strategies and interpersonal control. Approximation strategy is a form of accommodation to the interlocutor's productive performance that focuses on the partner's speech style. In Communication Accommodation Theory, the adjustment is done by moving towards the other speaker's speech style (convergence) or moving away from the other's speech style (divergence) (ibid: 23).

Interpretability strategies involve accommodating the partner's perceived interpretive abilities, which refer to the ability to understand (ibid: 24). This strategy is used when there is an age difference between the two speakers. For example, in interactions between a mother and a child, the mother sometimes over-accommodates by speaking like a child. This downward convergence is used so that the child can understand the mother's message.

Discourse management strategies focus on the person's conversational needs and are often discussed in terms of topic selection, face management and the like (ibid: 26). This occurs when a speaker tailors the conversation so that it fits the intellectual capability and interest of other speakers.

Interpersonal control strategies attempt to direct the course of a particular conversation or more generally a relationship by strategies such as interruption or even direct power claims (ibid: 27). This is common when two speakers have different role relationships. For example, in a student-teacher interaction, the teacher may display authority over the student through the use of language in order to assert power.

It is evident that language choice is accompanied by accommodation strategies. Speakers accommodate their speech partners in different ways and one common feature of accommodation is to code-switch from one language to the other. Code-switching has become a common feature in accommodating other speakers. Many studies prove that code-switching occurs in various domains of communication in multi-lingual Malaysia, including the home domain (see David 2001, Jawakhir 2006, Jariah Mohd. Jan 2006 and Kuang 2002). Code-switching has many functions and occurs for food items, expressions of group solidarity and rapport, teasing, distancing, expressing annoyance, and admonishing (David et al. 2009).

Objective of the study

This research examines the language choice in mixed marriages of Malaysians and Filipinos. This study examines the couples' language choice in interactions in the home domain and investigates the reasons for this choice. Specifically, this study asked the following questions:

- What is the preferred language of Malaysian-Filipino couples in interactions in the home domain?
- What are the reasons for this choice?

Methodology

This research used the qualitative approach in data gathering and analysis. More specifically, interviews and actual conversations of couples were recorded and transcribed. The participants of the study were Malaysians married to Filipinos who had lived in Malaysia for at least a year. The sample was made up of 60 participants consisting of Malay-Filipino, Chinese-Filipino and Indian-Filipino couples. All participants vary in terms of their socioeconomic status, social network, age,

ethnicity, educational attainment, languages spoken, years of stay in Malaysia and number of years of marriage. Each spouse speaks two or more languages such as the mother tongue, English, Bahasa Malaysia and other languages. Of the 30 Filipinos who participated in the study, 27 were female and three were male.

Findings

Language choice of couples: heritage or international language?

Malaysian-Filipino couples prefer English as the medium of communication at home. However, other languages are also spoken and code-switches were rampant.

Table 4.1 shows the language choice of the couples in relation to their ethnicity. The 60 participants were asked to choose one or more languages that they used in the home. They were given three options: English, first language or Bahasa Malaysia. The results show that 53 prefer English, 23 prefer their first language and 14 prefer Bahasa Malaysia. The 53 participants who prefer English consist of Malay-Filipino (40%), Chinese-Filipino (66.67%) and Indian-Filipino (70%) couples.

As for other languages used, 26.67% of Malay-Filipino couples use the first language of either the husband or wife, 33.33% use Bahasa Malaysia, and 40% use English as the medium of communication in the home domain. Among the Malaysian Chinese-Filipino couples, 33.33% use the first language of either the husband or wife, and 66.67% use English as the medium of communication in the home domain. The findings further reveal that 16.67% of Malaysian Indian-Filipino couples use the first language of either the husband or wife, 13.33% use Bahasa Malaysia and 70% use English in the home domain. Regardless of their ethnicity, therefore, Malaysians who were married to Filipinos opted to use English as the medium of communication in the home domain (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.1 *Language choice and couples' ethnicity*

<i>Couples' Ethnicity</i>	<i>First language spoken by either husband or wife</i>	<i>Bahasa Malaysia: national language spoken by either husband or wife</i>	<i>English: international language spoken by either husband or wife</i>
Malay-Filipino	8 (26.67%)	10 (33.33%)	12 (40%)
Chinese-Filipino	10 (33.33%)	0	20 (66.67%)
Indian-Filipino	5 (16.67%)	4 (13.33%)	21 (70%)
Total	23	14	53

Table 4.2 *Language choice of Malaysian-Filipino couples*

<i>Malay-Filipino couples</i>	<i>Malaysian Chinese-Filipino Couples</i>	<i>Malaysian Indian-Filipino couples</i>
* English	* English	* English
Bahasa Malaysia	Chinese (different dialects)	Bahasa Malaysia
Filipino	Bahasa Malaysia	Filipino
	Filipino	Tamil

* indicates dominant language

Although 40% of Malay-Filipino spouses prefer English in the home domain, they also use other languages. When couples communicate, they do not use one language such as English but they code-switch from English to Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino. However, English has become a dominant language in interactions. Even in the interviews conducted, the use of code-switching emerged in couples' interactions (see Extract 1).

Extract 1

"at home we mix English and Bahasa Malaysia"

"It's mixed, we speak Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese sometimes Arabic and Filipino"

"I speak Malay and English at home. If I cannot express in Malay I speak in English"

"Most of the time we mix different languages like English, Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino"

"We speak English and Bisaya at home"

From the interviews conducted, it is evident that most Malay-Filipino spouses use English and Bahasa Malaysia as their major languages at home but they often switch to other languages such as Filipino and other local languages spoken by either the husband or wife. Code-switching has become a common feature in Filipino-Malaysian couples' interactions. The use of code-switching might be required in some contexts so that the message is clearly understood. The example below of a conversation between a Malay husband and a Filipino wife illustrates this point.

Example 1

1. A: This one is nice.
2. H: No lah, the curry (...)
3. A: You want water? (...) wala na ba?(nothing?)
4. H: A little bit only (...)

5. A: Wala pa wala pa ta naka booking hon, sa hospital ba wala pa ang booking. (*no, no, we haven't booked honey, the booking is not in the hospital yet.*)
6. H: If not today tomorrow morning I will get.

The switching from English to Filipino in line 3 was initiated by the wife. It is evident that the Malay husband did not alter the language used despite the wife's continuous switching from English to Filipino. This switch by the wife may have been triggered in an attempt to compensate or soften her previous utterance, as the husband had not responded to the offer (of water) she had made.

Similarly, Malaysian Chinese-Filipino couples prefer English but code-switching into local Chinese dialects, Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino was also noted. Most of the Chinese spouses appear to have put a high premium on English but at the same time acknowledge the importance of their Chinese dialects which they use to interact with fellow Chinese. Below are the responses of the Filipino spouses when asked why they sometimes opted to use Chinese.

"I speak Chinese because my in-laws do not speak English."

"Because my mother-in-law does not speak English, so we speak in Chinese."

"We have no choice, I think for him (father-in-law) he prefers to speak Mandarin."

For the Malaysian Chinese families, both English and Chinese are given importance. Consequently, the home discourse comprises a mixed discourse of English, Chinese, Bahasa Malaysia or Filipino.

Moving on to the Indian-Filipino couples, it is clear too that a large majority of them use English often but sometimes they code-switch using Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino. The Filipino spouses also communicate with their in-laws in English. In fact, many of the Indians in this study consider English as their first language (see extract below).

"English most of the time, we simply talk in English."

"English lang, pag nag Tagalog ako I translate ko in English."
(English only, if I speak in Tagalog I translate it in English.)

"English kasi from the start English talaga ang first language namin."
(English because from the start English was really our first language.)

"English, as in pure English, we do not mix but sometimes I make some jokes in Filipino."

"English because at home that's what we speak often."

From the interviews conducted, English appears to be the dominant language used by Indians married to Filipinos. Switching from English to Bahasa Malaysia or Filipino is sometimes used, particularly if a speaker wants to crack jokes. In other words, code-switching is used to build solidarity between the speakers.

In general, the couples' choice of English in their interactions in the home domain can be seen as an accommodation strategy. The Filipino wife who speaks different languages may choose English to accommodate the Malaysian husband who does not understand Filipino. Similarly, the Malaysian husband uses English to accommodate his Filipino wife. The couples' intention to accommodate each other may have influenced their language choice.

Sometimes couples accommodate each other by switching from English to their heritage languages. For instance, a Filipino spouse speaking in her dominant English may suddenly switch to Bahasa Malaysia to accommodate her Malay spouse or to Chinese to accommodate her Chinese spouse. Because of this need to accommodate, code-switching has emerged as an important feature in interracial couples' communication.

Reasons for language choice

The findings show that interracial couples choose English, with some switching to Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Filipino, as the medium of communication in the home domain. Such use of English and code-switching in interactions occurs for several reasons. The interviews conducted with Filipino-Malaysian couples reveal a number of reasons for choosing English and for switching from English to Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Filipino.

To accommodate the spouse and other family members

Accommodation has become a common practice among Filipino-Malaysian couples in their interaction. They tend to accommodate each other by choosing a language that they both understand. The interviews show that couples choose English as the medium of communication in order to accommodate their spouses. Some spouses said:

“English is understandable to both of us.”

“English is the only language that the two of us can understand.”

“We prefer English because my husband does not speak Filipino.”

“We prefer English because it is easy to understand and my husband does not understand Filipino.”

“I prefer English because my in-laws can understand it.”

English is chosen as the medium of communication in the home domain because both husband and wife understand the language. There is less fear of being misunderstood if they use the English language. To reiterate, although English is not the first language of either spouse, it is understood by both and they do not need to learn another language to communicate.

Accommodation occurs when a spouse uses the language of his or her partner. Such accommodation is evident from comments by Filipino spouses: “*We prefer English because my husband does not speak Filipino.*” and “*We prefer English because it is easy to understand and my husband does not understand Filipino.*” Such responses show that Filipino spouses accommodated their Malaysian spouses by using English in the home domain.

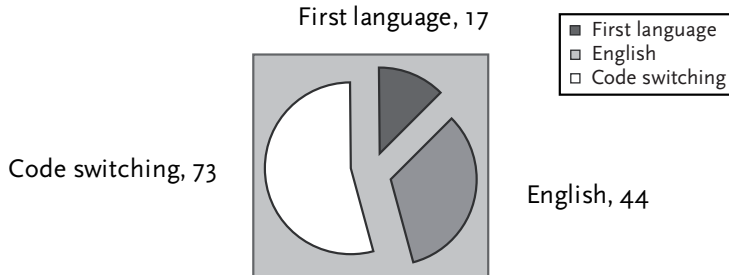
Other couples are influenced by the language spoken by their in-laws. Couples who are staying with the in-laws tend to accommodate them. One spouse said “*I prefer English because my in-laws can understand it.*” The presence of in-laws influences the language choice of the son-in-law or daughter-in-law.

To maintain language loyalty

Although English is the preferred language and dominates in interactions, speakers at times use their ethnic languages when communicating in the home domain (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 shows that 17 spouses use their first language, 44 spouses use English, 36 spouses choose to code-switch between English and

Figure 4.1 *Language choice of couples*



Bahasa Malaysia, 27 spouses prefer to code-switch between English and Filipino, and 10 spouses prefer to code-switch between English and Chinese.

In the interviews conducted, couples mentioned that aside from English they also use their first language at home. Below are some of the extracts taken from the interviews.

“I choose the Filipino language because it is my mother tongue.”

“I prefer the Tagalog because I’m a Filipino and I feel more comfortable using it.”

“We prefer Bahasa Malaysia at home.”

“I and my husband speak Malay at home.”

The interviews reveal that Filipino-Malaysian couples use other languages at home apart from English as a medium of communication. Their preference for their first language is perhaps motivated by language loyalty. Filipino spouses, for example, said: “*I choose the Filipino language because it is my mother tongue.*” and “*I prefer Tagalog because I’m a Filipino and I feel more comfortable using it.*” The Filipino language appears to be the most favoured language among Filipino spouses. This is natural given that the Filipino language serves as an identity marker.

To show emotions

Emotions may sometimes be revealed through words or actions. When emotion is expressed through words, the speaker’s choice of language displays what he or she feels. The interviews with Filipino-Malaysian couples show that Filipino spouses display their emotions – especially anger – through code choice. Some Filipino spouses said:

“If I’m mad I speak in Tagalog.”

“He will assume that if I speak in Tagalog I am already angry.”

“*Pero pagnagalit ako nagmumura ako in Filipino pero naintindihan na ng asawa ko yun* (But when I’m mad I curse in Filipino but my husband understands it.)”

“I use English to express my anger so my partner can understand.”

“We use English but if we argue to really express my feelings I use both English and Cebuano.”

The data show that some couples have different language preferences when expressing their emotions. Some prefer Tagalog to express their anger while others prefer English. In fact, in many instances a spouse

starts switching from one language to another language during an argument and this signals his or her anger. This is evident with Filipino spouses, as when they are angry they tend to switch to Filipino to express their anger (“*If I’m mad I speak in Tagalog.*” and “*He will assume that if I speak in Tagalog I am already angry.*”)

For convenience

Another reason behind the language choice of Filipino-Malaysian couples is convenience. Most multilingual speakers may choose the language they are proficient in because it would be more convenient for them to communicate in that code.

In the interviews conducted, couples said that they prefer English as their medium of communication at home for convenience.

“English is easy to communicate and easy to learn.”

“English is easy and it is tiring to learn new languages.”

“We choose English because it is the language that both of us speak.”

“We prefer English because at home that’s the language that we speak very often and my husband was educated in an English medium school.”

English is highly preferred by Filipino-Malaysian couples because it is easy to communicate in a common language that they both know. English empowers the couples to express themselves freely (“*English is easy and it is tiring to learn new languages.*”).

Learning English can be easy, as both Filipino and Malaysian spouses are exposed to the English language in school. A spouse mentioned that English was their code choice because her husband had been educated in an English medium school.

To expand the speaker’s social network

Choosing a language can help in expanding a speaker’s social network. Couples believe that their choice of a particular language as their medium of communication at home will help them to expand their network later. Couples prefer English because of its international status and use. When couples were asked their reasons for choosing English as their medium of communication at home, they said:

“We choose English because it is a universal language and there is no need for us to adjust each other.”

“English is easy to use and it is the only language that we can use to speak with some of the locals.”

“English is an international language and it is used as the language in business.”

This shows that couples choose English because of its international status. English is a language that is widely used and spoken in various parts of the world. The use of English might help the speakers elevate their status in society. The choice of English helps couples to develop their English language proficiency and eventually expand their social network locally and internationally. (*“English is easy to use and it is the only language that we can use to speak with some of the locals.”*) It can be said that a couple’s language choice is influenced by their intention to expand their social network. They choose the language not just because it is convenient for them to use but for them to interact with other people outside their homes, particularly in the community they live in.

To expose the offspring to various languages

The choice of English, Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino or Chinese was also made to expose their children to different languages. Although couples prefer English, they also use other languages like Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino and Chinese. Such a choice was made not only for their own convenience but also with the long-term interests of their children in mind. In the interviews conducted, most couples said:

“We prefer English so that our children will learn English language.”

“We choose English but we also speak other languages because we encourage our children to speak in Tagalog.”

“I want my children to be fluent in English and also be able to communicate in Bahasa because these are as far as Malaysia is concerned these are the two languages that will bring them to where they should be.”

“I’m trying to teach them (children and husband) with my mother tongue. My first language is Ilokano but I’ve never forgotten that and I’m proud of my mother tongue.”

Couples choose to use a particular language with the best interests of their children at heart. For instance, their use of English at home

Table 4.3 *Summary of Reasons for Filipino-Malaysian couples' language choice*

1.	To accommodate the spouse and other family members;
2.	To maintain language loyalty;
3.	To express emotions;
4.	For convenience;
5.	To expand the speakers' social network;
6.	To expose the offspring to various languages.

results in their children using this prestige language (“*We prefer English so that our children will learn English language.*”).

The choice is not limited to English, as couples switch from one language to another. Switching from one language to another is also motivated by their need to expose their children to other languages. Couples switch from English to Filipino for the purpose of displaying to their children the importance of learning the Filipino language. The use of the Filipino language by their parents results in children also learning Filipino. A spouse explained “*We choose English but we also speak other languages because we encourage our children to speak in Tagalog.*”

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the reasons for Filipino-Malaysian couples' language choice. In short, couples choose a language/languages for various reasons.

Code-switching: mixing the international language and heritage language

Language choice for couples in multilingual Malaysia is not limited to the use of one standalone language. Since they speak several languages, they mix two or three languages. However, in their mixed discourse, English remains dominant. English is dominant regardless of the place of residence, whether in the city centre or in villages. Even for couples that stay in rural areas like some outlying areas of Kuching, English is dominant. It must be emphasised that code-switching from the international language (English) to their heritage languages is common in spousal interactions.

Filipino spouses have taught their Malay partners to speak Filipino because such knowledge helps the non-Filipino spouses to communicate with Filipinos when they return to the Philippines to visit the extended family. Filipino films and Filipino music are also available in the home domain, and this exposes the husband and children to Filipino language and culture. The example below shows the occurrence of code-switching in a conversation between a Filipino wife and her Malay husband.

Example 2

1. A: Let's go to the hospital hon, check up *lang ba*. (*just for a check up*).
2. H: Is that Bandar Baru or Taman Putra?
3. A: *Pa scan daw ta hon?* (hon can we go for scanning?).
4. H: Can, can.
5. A: In Taman Putra *ada*. (There is in Taman Putra.)
6. H: *Wala*. (none)

Malaysian Chinese-Filipino couples also use a mixed discourse at home. Being multilingual, most of the Malaysian Chinese use local Chinese dialects. However, English is often used as the medium of communication between the couple. But when the in-laws and other Chinese relatives are around, they tend to use Chinese and the Filipino spouse is excluded from the conversation. Therefore, in order to communicate with their Chinese relatives, some Filipino spouses have learnt Chinese and so over time both Chinese and English are used in the home domain.

The Malaysian Chinese-Filipino couples explain:

"We speak three languages (laugh)... when we first married we used English after a few months like two or three months then we speak Hokkien and now because of our children we have to mix up with Hokkien and English."

"I have to mix it Bahasa, Hokkien and English so that he can understand"

"We speak English but mixed with Chinese and Filipino."

"At home we commonly speak in English and sometimes in Chinese."

"Predominantly, we speak in English with some Bahasa Malaysia but no Chinese."

Code-switching between English to other languages like Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino is also common. The occurrence of code-switching is common, as it facilitates understanding. One participant explained "*I have to mix Bahasa, Hokkien and English so that he can understand...*" Apart from English, Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia, a few Malaysian Chinese-Filipino couples also used Filipino at home. However, most of the Malaysian Chinese spouses could not speak Filipino fluently and their knowledge of the language was limited to a few words. When Malaysian Chinese spouses were asked if they wanted to learn Filipino, they said they were not interested. Two Malaysian spouses said:

“Well I would say, it’s not easy to say. I’m not interested to learn Filipino (laugh) but sometimes it just comes. It’s not easy to say, I don’t know.”

“I’m not interested to learn the language.”

Perhaps, Malaysian-Chinese spouses do not find the Filipino language useful because they are in Malaysia and the the language has limited use given that the Filipino community in Malaysia is not big. However, the Filipino spouses did express interest in teaching their heritage language to their Malaysian partners and children. They believe that if the latter can speak Filipino they could interact better with their family, relatives and friends in the Philippines.

The mix of both Filipino and Chinese in dominant English is shown in the following excerpt of a conversation between a Malaysian Chinese husband and a Filipino wife. The couple was discussing possible participants for this study.

Example 3

1. L: *Si koan hon yung* Eurasian. (The Eurasian hon).
2. F: I think, Jeffrey.
3. L: Yeah
4. F: Mixed *ma*. (“*ma*” particle)
5. L: *Filipino iyang* wife (His wife is a Filipino)
6. F: Yeah, Jo
7. L: Yeah *lah* (“*lah*” particle)
8. F: What is the title of his paper?
9. L: Interracial communication.
10. F: Oh, is it about interethnic communication?
11. L: Yeah, there you go (laugh)

On the other hand, the Indian-Filipino couples had a stronger inclination to use English than the Malay-Filipino and Chinese-Filipino couples. Indian spouses use English as their medium of communication in the home domain but at the same time use some Tamil and other Indian languages when speaking with their elders. The English language as the dominant home language for Indians appears to have been established even before marriage. As some of their Filipino partners are not as proficient in English, this has at times resulted in code-switching. The Indian spouses have even learned some words in Filipino so as to accommodate their Filipino partners.

Of the three ethnic groups, it appears that the Indians in this study have learned the Filipino language the most. As a result, a mixed code of dominant English and some Filipino has become a common feature in interactions in Indian-Filipino couples (see Example 4). Such mixing

is not only limited to English and Filipino but also includes Bahasa Malaysia since it is widely spoken in Malaysia. In fact, the switching from English to Bahasa Malaysia is more common than the switching from English to Tamil. Tamil is nominally used between the couples, as the Filipino spouses do not understand the language and find the language difficult but more importantly because the Indian spouses have already shifted to English. In the interviews, Filipinos married to Indians reported:

“English jud minsan Tamil ug Malay depende sa sitwasyun” (It’s really English sometimes Tamil and Malay it depends on the situation).

“*Hindi, pero yung husband ko nagtatagalog ng konti pero pagnag-uusap kami most of the time English*” (No but my husband speaks also a bit of Filipino but when we communicate we speak English most of the time).

Example 4

1. D: My husband also speaks Filipino.
2. J: Yeah, *kumain ka na, halika na. (Have you eaten? Come).*
3. D: You sometimes talk to me in Tagalog, *di ba?* (don’t you?)
4. J: Yeah, cause we often use it, it’s like getting married daily with the Filipino language (laugh).

Language policy versus language use

Despite the aggressive language policies to promote the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, it is evident that the language choice of Malaysian-Filipino couples is English. The status and role of Bahasa Malaysia in Malaysia does not prevent couples from choosing English as their medium of communication. Besides choosing English as the medium of communication in the home domain, other languages like Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese dialects and Filipino are also used.

This study reveals a new language variety for Malaysian-Filipino couples: code-switching. It is evident that English dominates over other languages; English has become the matrix language while Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino and Chinese are the embedded languages. The occurrence of code-switching as a new language variety for Malaysian-Filipino couples with English as the dominant language means that the mother tongue may, over time, be lost. The trend in these couples’ language choice may threaten the vitality of their heritage languages.

English is the only language where both Malays and Filipinos can converse and understand each other, and this is especially so for newly-wed couples. Filipino-Malay couples who have been married for a number of years eventually become proficient in both English and Malay. Consequently, using both languages as the medium of communication at home has become common. While the Chinese-Filipino couples tend to shift between English and Chinese, English is more dominant for the Indian-Filipino couples.

Conclusion

The dominant language used by Malay-Filipino, Chinese-Filipino and Indian-Filipino couples is English, with some switching to local languages and Filipino. The couples choose English as the medium of communication at home because it is the common language that both husband and wife understand.

Code-switching has emerged to be the normative code in the discourse of Malaysian-Filipino couples. English serves as the matrix language while Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese dialects, Tamil and the Filipino languages function as embedded languages.

In general, the choice of English (an international language) as the medium of communication in the home domain – with some switches to the heritage languages such as Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese dialects, Tamil and Filipino – can be viewed as a form of accommodation. Both Malaysian and Filipino spouses' choice of English can be seen as a strategy to accommodate each other, thus creating solidarity.

5 I am not English but my First Language is English

English as a First Language among Portuguese Eurasians in Malaysia

Stefanie Pillai and Mahmud Hasan Khan

Introduction

The origins of Eurasians of Portuguese descent (henceforth to be referred to as Portuguese Eurasians) can be traced back to the 16th century when the Portuguese arrived and subsequently controlled Malacca until 1641 when the Dutch took over (Fernandis 2000; Sta Maria 1982). During their conquest of Malacca, Portuguese men were encouraged to marry local women. The hybrid population they produced (Baxter 2005; Sta Maria 1982) became the probable ancestors of Portuguese Eurasians (Guisan 1999; O'Neill 1995 reproduced in Marbeck 1999). Along with the people of Portuguese descent, a Portuguese creole commonly known as Kristang (Baxter 2005) has survived more than 500 years. However, mixed marriages, urbanisation, education and socioeconomic and geographical mobility have resulted in a decreasing number of mother tongue speakers of Kristang among the Portuguese Eurasians (David & Faridah 1999; Sudesh 2000). In most cases, English has taken over as the home language. Baxter (2005: 18) explains that the shift to English in the mid-1800s was for utilitarian purposes: "English was a prestige language, a key to employment, Kristang was not". This sentiment is echoed by Marbeck (quoted in Yong 2004: 8):

"... we were not encouraged to speak Kristang. We were told that if you want to get on in this world you have to speak English."

Similar attitudes placing English as the most important language have also been found in David and Faridah (1999) and Sudesh (2000). Thus, it is not surprising that studies conducted of the Portuguese settlement in Malacca indicate that even in an area of high concentration of Portuguese Eurasians, where Eurasian culture thrives, Kristang is being displaced. Baxter (2005) cites Nunes' study (1996), which found that

only 56% of the 225 residents surveyed indicated Kristang as their mother tongue, with the percentage predictably decreasing with age. However, a higher percentage of respondents in David and Faridah's study (1999) cited Kristang as their mother tongue, although the different results in the two studies could be attributed to the smaller sample size in the latter (62 respondents). What is interesting is that contrary to the high percentage of respondents (73%) who said that Kristang was their mother tongue, less than half of them claimed to be fluent in Kristang as opposed to 63% of them saying that they were fluent in English (David & Faridah 1999: 473). This suggests that what people perceive as their mother tongue may not necessarily be a language in which they are fluent or one which is their dominant language, and this lack of correspondence between perceived mother tongue with fluency and dominant use needs to be taken into account in surveys of language use.

Malaysian English as a first language (MEFL)

Crystal (1997) estimates that 2% of Malaysians use English as a first language. This segment of the population is likely to include Portuguese Eurasians, children of mixed parentage and mono-ethnic families who have shifted to English (e.g. David et al. 2003; Gaudart 1995; Kow 2003; Pillai 2006). For example, in a study on undergraduate students' use of English (Pillai 2008a), 20 of the 89 Malaysian undergraduates surveyed cited English as their first language; 12 of them were Chinese and eight were Indians. All of them indicated that they *always* used English at home and all *strongly agreed* that English was their dominant language. A closer look at their language use at home revealed that all of them *always* used English with their fathers and all but one with their mothers. Yet not all of their parents had English as their L1, which indicates the probability of English taking over as the first language of these undergraduates.

However, the type of English used at home is unlikely to be homogeneous among all the L1 speakers of English in Malaysia, as there are bound to be differences due to linguistic, ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic factors. Thus, it can be expected that the variety of English being acquired will be coloured by particular features of pronunciation and vocabulary (Gaudart 1995; Tay 1993), although Gaudart (1995: 26) contends that L1 speakers of English in Malaysia "... form a speech community which transcends ethnicity". Further, it is likely that a more non-standard variety of English is used at home, although the extent of non-standardness might well depend on the socioeconomic backgrounds of the parents or caregivers. One of the reasons for the use of non-

standard English at home is that it creates a more informal and intimate speaking context expected in family discourse (Pillai 2008b). Thus, it is not surprising to find speakers who are fluent in English dropping subject and auxiliary verbs and using the tag *ah* in question forms:

D1: The cake was fif- how much? Fifty one ah? Fifty how much?
 D2: Fifty.
 (from Pillai 2008b:10)

The question may arise as to how English can possibly be considered a first language by a group of people that does not fit into the traditional sense of English native speakers – that is, white Anglo-Saxon and from a predominantly English speaking country (e.g. the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, etc). Part of the answer to this question lies in the definition of mother tongue or native language, a concept that is becoming increasingly difficult to define particularly in multi-ethnic and multilingual communities, and in migrant communities where the correspondence between ethnicity and language has become increasingly blurred. This is perhaps why many people growing up in multilingual societies find it hard to state what their mother tongue is because it may be the language of their grandparents and perhaps their parents, but not one that they themselves speak.

At a more simplistic level, we could argue that people's L1 is the main language acquired and used in childhood (see Gupta 1998), bearing in mind that in multilingual societies there are different circumstances in which children acquire a language or languages (see Pillai 2006). Gupta (1998) posits that the acquisition must take place before children start school, while Tay (1993: 88) expounds on this by defining an L1 speaker of English as "one who learns English in childhood and continues to use it as a dominant language and has reached a certain level of fluency". However, the concept of fluency is questionable given that the English acquired at home tends to be of the colloquial variety (Widdowson 1993, cited in Jenkins 2003) and thus references to fluency should be within the context of the variety being acquired rather than norm-referenced against a standard variety.

The picture becomes more complex when the language with which one grows up traditionally belongs to another ethnic group, as in the case of English. Thus, one claims English as their first language but does not claim to be English. Given that native language and self-identity are inextricably linked (see Myhill 2003), how do Malaysians such as the Portuguese Eurasians, born and bred in Malaysia, construct their self-identity with Malaysian English as their first language, a variant of English that is linguistically and culturally different from traditional

variants of English? These differences are more marked in the colloquial variety of Malaysian English but are nevertheless present even in the more acrolectal variety of Malaysian English. This often lead to a dilemma of whose English is better or more correct, as evident from studies on attitudes towards local varieties of English (e.g. Crismore et al. 1996; Soo 1990).

Bilingual and/or multilingual self

It is relevant to discuss the issues raised within the theories of bilingualism/multilingualism when studying the language use context for Malaysian Eurasians. The subjects are exposed to a dominant national language – that is, Bahasa Malaysia (BM) – and also other community specific languages, for instance, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil and Punjabi. However, in most cases, especially for the Eurasians, it is English and Bahasa Malaysia that they are mostly exposed to, hence they can simply be identified as bilinguals.

Studies in bilingualism focus mostly on the ‘grammatical competence’ of the language users, that is, ‘on the knowledge of formal rules concerning the grammar of a language’ (Cantone 2007: 4). The relevant issues in the studies of bilingualism in Grosjean’s view (cited in Blackledge & Pavlenko 2001) should include “language history”, “proficiency”, “use” and “fluency” of the bilingual self. There is still a dearth of literature in bilingualism for issues related to identity-discourse and “social network analysis” (Lanza & Svensden 2007).

Language choice in a bilingual and/or multilingual context has been studied mainly from variationist sociolinguistics and sociopsychological perspectives (Blackledge & Pavlenko 2001). Variationist sociolinguistics refers more to style and diction of the language use, while the sociopsychological approach studies ‘identity’, ‘negotiation of identity’ and ‘language contact’, among others (Blackledge & Pavlenko 2001: 244). However, both approaches, Blackledge and Pavlenko feel, fail to capture the sociohistorical process comprehensively. Hence, another model based on Bourdieu’s symbolic capital (1991) and Weedon’s “language as a site of identity” (1987) has been suggested, and this has been described as a poststructuralist model. In this model, Blackledge and Pavlenko emphasise that “language practices are bound up in relations of authority and power and larger socioeconomic and sociopolitical processes” (2001: 246). These processes link the social subjects dialectically to different forms of identification within the confines of poststructuralist theories of identity formation, and many have suggested that there is no identity but only identification (Royle 2000).

Social constructionists show how subjects are ‘produced’ and ‘organised’ as ‘different’ through a series of processes of ‘social determination’. According to the constructionist notion of identity, a ‘subject’ is ‘constructed by both discursive and social practices’ (Dunn 1998: 37). In this connection, how do the Eurasians construct themselves, which results in choosing a language of communication and moreover claiming it as their first language? Questions may also arise as to whether they construct themselves radically diversely or if there is a pattern in this discursive formation of themselves. Can we find a stable process of social determination that can be applied to all Eurasians?

Present study

Presently, there is a dearth of studies on MEFL speakers, as most of the research tends to focus on Malaysian English used as a second language. This chapter, therefore, aims to fill this research gap by conducting a preliminary investigation into Malaysian English acquired as a first language. Specifically, this study examines the common features of MEFL as used in the family domain and assesses the role of Malaysian English and the concept of identity.

According to Kanno (2003: 3), identity is ‘our sense of who we are and our relationship to the world.’ In today’s world, the way in which we perceive ourselves is often complex and multi-faceted (Warschauer 2000). Among the more salient factors contributing to a person’s perception of self-identity is language (Richard 1980; Thornborrow 2004), or in multilingual contexts, languages or varieties of the same language. In the latter, language choice may be a reflection of dual or multiple identities, where people use different languages or variants of it to weave in and out of different identities (Warschauer 2000). In relation to English, ‘even the English we speak can reflect our values and interests’ (Canagarajah 2006: 203). In the context of MEFL users, it would be interesting to examine how the use of English corresponds with the concept of identity, as English is not an ancestral language of these speakers.

Methodology

This study takes a social constructionist approach as its epistemology to explore the issue of language choice. Social constructionism is relevant in the sense that the construction of identity in this study develops in a context, with the key variable being Eurasians living in Malaysia negotiating their identity. Most of the socioeconomic variables, in the time

and space in which they construct their identity, are a priori: for instance, they are Eurasians, also known as Kristang people living in Malaysia for several centuries, where they have lived as a minority community and practiced Christianity, mainly Catholicism. Finally, the context of the nation-state in which they live, Malaysia, also worked as a contributory factor in the construction of their identity and their choice of English as their first language. These variables are identified and explored in detail in the method of this study. The sole method followed in this study is the interview. We assume that the bilingual and multi-lingual's 'semantic' and 'episodic' memory was activated when they provided information regarding the use of English as their first language.

Data-gathering process

A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data in this study. A total of 28 items were included in the interview checklist, and these were based on five areas. These included the domains of language use and the choice of language for entertainment as they watched television programmes and films. These two areas established what we identified as the practice of English as a first language.

Three other areas that established their ideological stance towards English were: embracing the identity, managing accent and rating the national language. These three items we collectively identified as their perceptions about the language. Embracing the identity was explored in questions ranging from very direct (e.g., 'what is your ethnicity' and 'will you be able to identify another Eurasian') to oblique ones ('can you state a few Eurasian expressions, if possible, in Kristang'). The second area was managing the English accent, which was explored through questions such as 'do you change your accent or your ways of speaking across social contexts', or 'how would you rate your English?'. The third area explored was attitude towards the national language (i.e., Bahasa Malaysia) and the level of English in the country.

Sampling

This study used the snowball technique of sampling. The rationale behind this was twofold. Firstly, this is an exploratory study to understand the phenomenon of English as a first language by the Eurasian community in Malaysia. Secondly, the researchers situate the study within the paradigm of qualitative study whereby the aim was to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the data. Each interview session lasted between 25 to 30 minutes.

There were nine respondents in this study, ranging in age from 39 to 68 years old. In fact, these respondents can be categorized into two groups that went through two different mediums of instruction. The first group (39-46 years old) went through a Malay medium of education at the primary and secondary school levels, while the other group (56-68 years old) had English as their medium of instruction at both levels. Seven of them are Roman Catholics, while two are Muslim converts, having married Muslims (note: Islam in Malaysia does not allow exogamous religious marriage). Four of the respondents are retired: one was a retired health inspector, another respondent served as a secondary school teacher and another worked in the palm oil industry. The fourth respondent who is retired was a journalist and PR consultant. The rest of the respondents are still either working in private organisations or are self-employed. Only one respondent is single. Among the eight other respondents, only one is married to a Eurasian while the others are married to non-Eurasians.

Recording and transcriptions

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder (Panasonic RR-US750), which was placed between the interviewers and the respondents. All the respondents consented to being interviewed. The recordings were saved as MP3 files and transcribed using Praat (Boersma 2001). This allowed multi-tiered time-aligned orthographic transcription to be done, thus making it possible to link transcription and audio data. The transcripts were also converted into text files.

Analysis of data

The interview items in this study include two content areas: practice and perception about English as a first language by the subjects. These two areas are further split into five areas: two practices and three perceptions. The construction of the contents is as follows:

The practice: the domains of language use and the choice of language for entertainment

The data show that all the respondents use English in their everyday life in most domains – at home and at the workplace; with relatives and friends; and also at shops and restaurants. For all the respondents,

English was the language they grew up with, as indicated in the following extract:

Q: And at home when you were growing up what language did you speak?

A: English I think only English.

Q: With your parents your siblings your relatives?

A: Yes yes yes.

(Respondent 4)

However, they acknowledged that if the other party involved in interaction was not able to communicate in English, the medium of communication would be Malay (BM), the underlying assumption being that all Malaysians are expected to know Bahasa Malaysia, the national language.

The language of entertainment for all the respondents is English – they watch TV programmes and films in English. Only one respondent (R4) mentioned that she would watch Malay programmes, especially soap operas. Since the respondent is a freelance copywriter often doing translation and dubbing for TV3, a national television channel in the country, she had to watch Malay language programmes to help her with her work. When she was asked if she would watch the programmes in Bahasa Malaysia for the sole purpose of entertainment, she suggested, ‘I would still watch Malay dramas but just to see what’s happening right now.’ Hence, it is quite obvious that for the Eurasians, the medium of communication in both private and public domains is predominantly English.

According to De Witt (2008), the culture practised by Malaysian Eurasians is a variation and fusion of European and Asian origins. Their medium of communication is English, although there are still some Portuguese-Eurasians who speak a pidgin Portuguese also called *Kristang*.

The claim by de Witt (2008) that the Eurasians communicate in English has been acknowledged by all the interviewees in this study. In all the private and public domains, the Eurasians in this study speak English. However, they will speak Bahasa Malaysia in a few situations when the other person involved in the act of communication is unable to do so, and they will also code-switch and accent-switch to show solidarity. Most of the respondents in this study expressed such solidarity to be a part of their identity as Malaysians. In general, the practice of code-switching, accent-switching and also language-switching is similar across all the interviews. An example from R6 is reproduced in the following extract:

Q: When you go to a shop, stall ah what language do you use?

A: It depends on the shop and the stall (pause 0.12s) if I'm going to like a *mamak* stall I'll speak in Malay (pause 0.04s) if I speak to taxi drivers it is always in Malay. If I speak to my maid it is in Malay. If I speak to like if I go down to the kampung [village] it's definitely Malay but if I go to as I said lah if I go to shop in Bangsar or something it's gonna be English.

(Respondent 6)

For R7 the use of Bahasa Malaysia is always related to establishing rapport. In his own terms:

... doing work when I had to speak Bahasa it was too academic, for some people's liking but it was the only... I wasn't very good in colloquial Bahasa, I wasn't very good in using them, it was always [to establish] rapport...

The reason why the respondents tend to be good in academic Bahasa Malaysia is that as the national language, it had to be studied as a subject at school. This is why all the respondents acknowledged that their proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia was between 2 and 3 on a scale of 5, while they rate their English as being 5 (*very good*).

As a concluding remark, although Portuguese Eurasians are supposed to speak Kristang, none of the respondents in this study do. This supports the view that language shift to English has taken place. Therefore, at the level of practice, they have established that English is their first language, or in other words, it is always their first choice as a code of communication.

The perceptions: the discursive moments of language choice

Within the sphere of perception, *embracing the identity* was the first moment of the formation of identity in relation to language choice – that is, English as their first language. There were several items within this act of embracing the identity, the questions ranging from very direct (e. g., 'what is your ethnicity' and 'will you be able to identify another Eurasian') to oblique ones ('can you state a few Eurasian expressions, if possible, in Kristang'). The first question asked was: what is your ethnicity? It is a very direct question that would have enabled them to respond with a quick answer like, *I am Eurasian*. For some respondents it was a very quick identification, but for others there were delayed responses. For instance, for R1, it was very quick:

Q: What is your ethnic background?

A: Father Portuguese, mother Portuguese (pause 0.27s) mother Singaporean father Malay-West Malaysian both Eurasians lah

Q: Both Eurasians, so you are?

A: Pure Eurasian

(Respondent 1)

Other respondents made delayed responses; they also gave further explanations almost to the extent of tautology regarding what makes them Eurasians. In their elaboration, they included how they are viewed by others as well as how they view themselves. This can be seen in the following extract taken from the interview with respondent 7:

Q: What do you consider as your ethnicity?

A: I'm Eurasian, that's what it says on my birth certificate and in my ah company registration I'm known as a Portuguese Bumiputera [Malays and indigenous people in Malaysia].

Q: So how do you classify yourself as a Eurasian I mean when you think of the word Eurasian... how do you define a Eurasian?

A: ahm where I'm concerned I think how I see it is we are a mix of European and Asian and ya... ahm and we've checked the background and seen that there has been intermarriage there's Malay there's Indians but em the bulk of it is actually Portuguese and Spanish okay because when I go to a foreign country I have no problems about blending in with foreigners and even when I speak and that's one thing I wanted to bring up was I've been asked where I got my accent from and I was like I'm speaking English British English you know I don't know that's how I classify myself.

(Respondent 7)

That she is 'a mix of European and Asian' but also 'there's Malay there's Indians but em the bulk of it is actually Portuguese and Spanish' – this is how R7 defined herself. This view does not tally with the orthodox view that Eurasians are of mainly Portuguese descent, although they are the prominent group among other Eurasians apart from Dutch and British descendents (Chan 1983 in Fernandis 2000). The major way to distinguish the Eurasians of Portuguese descent is by their use of *Kristang*. This is disappearing, however, as was strongly evident among the interviewees in this study: only one of them spoke *Kristang*, which he learned not from birth but later in life. While historians have often used *Frank*, *Mestiços* and *Black Christians* besides *Luso-Malay* to denote the integration of the Portuguese community with the Malays, the definition of Malaysian Eurasians in many scholarly journals appears as 'a reference to a mixed race of European and an

Asian' (Fernandis 2000: 262). In this case, R7 is right to define herself as a mix of European and Asian. However, the remarkable part is when she connected her being Eurasian to speaking fluent British English. This phenomenon in Lacanian terms can be identified as *misrecognition*. The subject has misrecognised herself; being Eurasian and being someone of Spanish-Portuguese descent may not correspond directly with speaking in British English. But this *misrecognition* supports Blackledge and Pavlenko's poststructuralist model (2001) of language choice as well as Royle's remark (2000) that there is no identity but only identification. In the case of this study, in relation to their choice of first language, the social subjects identified speaking English with their Spanish-Portuguese heritage. This identification can be a matter of intellectual debate, but what the respondents in this study established was that there is a certain link between them being on the periphery – a minority community – and choosing English as their first language. The social factors that caused them to choose English may not be so apparent in the conversation but it is somehow claimed by all the interviewees that English is their language.

Another marker of identity for Eurasians, only mentioned by Respondent 9, is the family name, as shown in the following extract:

Q: What would you consider as your race?

A: Eurasian.

Q: How do you classify a Eurasian?

A: *Well because of our name we are Portuguese descendents...* so ahm we are born in Malaysia... my parents and my grandparents they said you are Eurasian (*italics ours*).

(Respondent 9)

But it is just not by their names that he would have been able to identify a person as a Eurasian. He said: 'the way they speak, the flair, it tells me that this guy is a Eurasian or this girl is a Eurasian.' This identification echoes what Anderson (1991) defined as an 'imagined community' – that is, in the mind's eye, another member is imagined although they may not be known to each other, but they will be able to recognise themselves immediately if put together in a context. Similar responses were obtained from the other respondents who all indicated that they would be able to recognise another Eurasian from the way they spoke, although none could point out precisely what the identifying features were except for vague notions of differences in intonation and stress.

Another crucial point is that the majority of them do not speak Kristang, their ideal community-specific language. Eight of the interviewees acknowledged that they knew one or two words in Kristang, some of them stated they only used it when they 'curse' (R7, R3 and R9).

Most of them also stated that their proficiency in Malay was low. Hence, the language of communication for all of them was first and foremost English.

The second moment in constructing one's identity in relation to language choice was managing the English accent. This was explored through items such as 'do you change your accent or your ways of speaking across social contexts' and also 'how would you rate your English?'. This context is unlike situations at shops and restaurants where they most probably will have to change the language; this is more within the community. All the respondents speak English in their private domains, such as with family, relatives and friends, but it is often not the standard variety of English. For instance, R6 stated that:

I think the English is not pure English because it's always mixed with a bit of Malay, okay like we would never say ah it's time for dinner we say hey everybody makan [eat], okay go mandi [bathe]. So it's always mixed with Malay but I realise that ahm as I grow older maybe because I lived in US I speak less Malay than even the rest of my family. So when my mum comes and I sometimes wonder like why is she speaking Malay so much but you know it's actually how I was brought up with...

The reason why R6's conversation is often mixed with Malay is perhaps due to her husband's family being Malay. Although she speaks in English with her husband, code-switching is very natural. She has, one might say, a somewhat ambivalent relation with the language. But this is also an effect of what is known as 'social network analysis' in the literature on bilingualism (Lanza & Svensden 2007). In contrast to R6, other respondents hardly use Malay in private domains, as they have spouses who are Indians, Chinese or English. They do not use Chinese dialects or Tamil – that is, community specific language – with their spouses and children. With their spouses, children and siblings, they will only use English.

Respondents like R1 stated that his English is 'not that good', as he was a school dropout. Yet in all his private domains he uses English. He established the point that English is his first language by stating that 'we are of Portuguese descent but we don't know the language, the Kristang.' So obviously the choice was English as the acculturation process pushed him, as well as other fellow Eurasians, to choose English.

The third area explored was attitude towards the national language (i.e. Bahasa Malaysia) and the standard of English in the country. Here, the utilitarian attitude towards the language became the major reason why they chose to adopt English as their first language. In R5's view, if the country needs to adopt the technological advancement introduced

by the West and if Malaysia wants to be included in the global community, people should accept English as a means to these activities. All the interviewees felt that the standard of English in the country is 'not very good' (R6) or even 'atrocious' (R8). Interestingly enough, none of the interviewees mentioned that it is because of utilitarian reasons that they adopted English. They have included themselves within the larger imagined community that is the nation-state of Malaysia. However, in any multilingual context it is not unsurprising that a minority community might accept the language that would ensure their 'good life', bypassing the national agenda. In the case of the Eurasians, Abrams (in Fernandis 2000: 262) stated: *The uncertainty of being accepted into the mainstream of Malaysian society has been a worry for a minority without economic and political leverage, the future seemed bleak.*

Fernandis is of the opinion that 'the old question of getting equal status as an indigenous race still persists' (2000: 262). Hence, it may be for utilitarian reasons that Eurasians chose English (see Baxter 2005; Marbeck in Yong 2004).

Conclusion

Like any other identity discourse, the construction of Eurasians' identity in relation to their language choice is very complex. It is overdetermined, borrowing Althusser's terms, in a time and space that involve both utilitarian and ethnic sentiments typical of any form of identification. Whatever the specific reasons could be, it has been established unanimously that English is their first language in both private and public domains. In a multilingual country such as Malaysia, common space is often constructed by the national language. However, the language with which Eurasians interact most of the time since childhood is obviously their first language. It can also be identified as their mother tongue, as they have cut the umbilical cord with their ethnic language (i.e., Kristang) even before they knew the language.

6 Language and Identity

Children of Indian Bidayuh Mixed Marriages

Caesar Dealwis and Maya Khemlani David

Introduction

Exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Sarawak, which has 27 different ethnic groups. Sarawak has a population of 2,071,506, and the Iban forms the majority with a population of 603,735, the Chinese 537,230, the Malays, 462,270, the Bidayuh, 180,753, the Melanau, 112,984, and other indigenous groups number 117,696. Sarawak Indians belong to the minority group with a population of 3,851 people (*Department of Statistics Sarawak* 2008). The Indians in Kuching are currently second, third and fourth-generation descendants of Indian immigrants who came in the 1900s to work as labourers for the Public Works Department in Kuching, tea and coffee planters for the *White Rajah* administration (1841-1946) and later the colonial administration (1946-1963). Therefore, the early Indian settlements were located at the foot of *Gunung Serapi* (Mount Serapi) in Matang. Due to their small numbers, the early Indian groups such as the Telegus (99 people) in Kuching have married outside of their own linguistic group. However, some have also married Dayaks (David & Dealwis 2006). An interview conducted with an elderly Malayalee, Sarojini Narayanan, in June 2008 revealed that Malayalees in Kuching speak Tamil at home due to their mixed marriages with the more dominant Tamils. Some Malayalees speak Bidayuh and Malay because they have married Bidayuh women. Besides the city of Kuching, Indians are also found in the urban areas of Miri and Sibü, but the numbers are relatively smaller.

The Dayak Bidayuh are among the original inhabitants of Sarawak and have been described by foreign and local writers as '*shy and unwelcoming to strangers*' (Low, 1990; Beccari, 1982; Brooke, 1990). The early contacts with outsiders were with the warring Ibans who captured them and destroyed many of their villages (Chang, 2002). Today, the Bidayuh are basically rural people and most of them are found in the

Bidayuh Belt – a term used by Dundon (1989) to refer to Bidayuh areas such as Lundu, Serian, Bau and Padawan in the Kuching Division. According to Minos (2000), from the 1980s the Bidayuhs began coming to major towns and the city of Kuching in order to look for better jobs, higher education and a modern lifestyle.

The local Indian men marry Bidayuh women because of the small Indian population. Also, the Bidayuhs are non-Muslims and are also found in areas where the Indian men are either staying or working. Local Indian men who have married Bidayuh women either live in the city of Kuching or in their Bidayuh wife's village and assimilate with the Bidayuh culture. Some Hindus who have married Bidayuh women have even converted to Christianity. As exogamous marriages are a common phenomenon in Sarawak, both communities do not object to such unions. Thus, it is common for the local Indians or Bidayuhs to contract exogamous marriages. Since the majority of the Bidayuhs are Christians, they do not necessarily have to convert to Hinduism even when marrying Indian Hindus. Their offspring are generally well accepted by both the Indian and Bidayuh communities, as they are able to create rapport and solidarity with both communities fairly easily.

Although there are no official statistics on the number of local Indian men who have married Bidayuh women, the President of the Sarawak Indian Association, Anthony Ramanair, estimates that there are at least 25 families with Indian-Bidayuh parentage who are staying in the Kuching, Padawan, Serian, Bau and Lundu districts. This figure was confirmed by Albert George, an Indian-Bidayuh who owns an insurance agency and has a number of Indian-Bidayuh clients. A good number of Indian men from Peninsular Malaysia who came to work in Sarawak have over the years also married Bidayuh women and settled down in Kuching.

Unlike the offspring of Chinese and Kadazan parentage in Sabah who are officially recognised as Sino-Kadazan to indicate their mixed parentage, the offspring of an Indian father and a Bidayuh mother is categorized as an Indian. Ethnic identification becomes especially sensitive in a country where handouts and scholarships are awarded by the government to Bumiputras (literally 'sons of the soil'). Children of Indian and Malay parentage are classified as Muslim Bumiputras and qualify to apply for such scholarships and other benefits. All the 25 respondents in this study reported that they felt that they 'were neither here nor there'. This leads us to the issue of identity.

There is a need to clarify what we mean by the term *identity*. Identity is a term used to refer to an individual's or group's sense of who they are as defined by them and/or others (Swann et al. 2006: 140). *Acts of identity* is a term originally used by Robert Le Page and Andree Tabouret-Keller (1985) to explain an individual speaker's language use.

It suggested that speakers draw on features of a language or languages to express aspects of their identity. In the social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process is called self-categorization in social identity (Turner et al. 1987), and in identity theory this process results in identification (McCall & Simmons 1978). Through the process of self-categorization or identification, an identity is formed. Self-categorization is relevant to the formation of one's identity (Stryker 1980, Ashmore et al. 2004). The Indian Muslims in Machang, Kelantan (David 2003b) and the Indian Muslims in Kuching (David & Dealwis 2009) have adopted Malay sociocultural norms and categorized themselves as Malays in official documents. What are the acts of identity of the children of Indian-Bidayuh parents? How do they want to be identified?

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the children of Indian men married to Bidayuh women followed the Bidayuh or Indian cultural norms. There were 25 respondents involved in this study, and all of them were between 18-45 years old. Fifteen of the respondents were from the city of Kuching, while the remaining 10 were from rural areas such as Padawan (2), Bau (4) and Serian (4). All of them had completed school and were working in the government and private sectors as clerks, teachers, managers, security personnel and medical assistants.

The methodology employed in this study was observation, questionnaires and oral interviews with 25 respondents in their homes in the Kuching, Padawan, Bau and Serian districts. It was easy for one of the researchers to gain entry into these homes and obtain authentic information as an insider because he was an Indian married to a Bidayuh from Bau. Most of the respondents were either his relatives or friends, and such close networking made the respondents more open when giving their responses during the face-to-face interviews. The study, conducted over three months, began with him investigating his seven relatives and friends first. Two hours of the discourse of the respondents with the members of their respective families were also recorded to determine the dominant language used at home. Furthermore, help was enlisted from a young man of Indian-Bidayuh parentage who knew many other Indian-Bidayuh families in Kuching, Padawan, Bau and Serian. This technique of enlisting the help of a member of the group under investigation was also used by Gardner-Chloros (1991) in her study of language use in Strasbourg, and David (1996) in her study of

Sindhis in Malaysia. This strategy provided openings into many more Indian-Bidayuh homes, especially in the Padawan and Serian districts.

The research investigated the use of a number of markers of identity. These included the following:

- Language use with family members;
- Food habitually consumed at home;
- Festivals celebrated;
- Marriage preferences; and
- Social identity.

Findings

Language used at home

All the 10 rural Indian-Bidayuh learned Bidayuh as their first language. However, all 15 the Indian-Bidayuh from the city of Kuching learned English as their first language. None of the respondents learned Tamil, their father's heritage language, as their first language.

All the rural respondents also said that they used only Bidayuh with their mother but code-switched using more Bidayuh and less English and Malay with their siblings and father. The 15 urban respondents said that they spoke more English and less Bidayuh and Malay at home with their mother, father and siblings.

All the 25 respondents said that they were fluent in Bidayuh (i.e., their mother's heritage dialect), Malay and English (which they learned at school) but not Tamil (their father's heritage language). The urban respondents also said during the interviews that they could speak fluent Bidayuh because they always visited their Bidayuh relatives in the villages (see Table 6.1).

Bidayuh was the dominant language used in the home of the 10 rural Indian-Bidayuh offspring. There were two reasons to explain this. Firstly, the respondents' mothers were homemakers and used Bidayuh with the children. Secondly, the respondents were staying in Bidayuh villages.

English was the most dominant language used in the homes of the 15 urban Indian-Bidayuh offsprings. This was because both their

Table 6.1 *Language Use*

<i>Family members</i>	<i>Language use</i>
Rural respondents with:	
Mother	Only Bidayuh
Father and siblings	More Bidayuh and less Malay and English
Urban respondents with:	
Mother, father and siblings	More English, less Bidayuh and Malay

working parents were better educated and could speak English. Malay was not chosen as the dominant home language because English was regarded by the respondents as a language of prestige which had greater economic value than Malay or Bidayuh.

There is a general tendency for children to acquire the language of their mothers, and often it is the place of residence that determines which of the two groups they identify with more strongly (David 2003b: 50). Earlier studies of alliances between Thai men and Malay women in Kelantan show that the children spoke little Thai (Golomb 1978: 115) and instead used the language of their mothers, which was Malay. As for the Pakistani men and Malay women in Machang, Kelantan, the offspring of such marriages used the majority host language and the language of their mothers, which was the Kelantanese dialect of Malay (David 2003b: 51). However, the offspring of marriages between urban Kelabit men with Chinese women in Miri, Sarawak used more English at home (Martin & Yen 1992: 157). The finding of this study shows that offspring of Indian Dayak parentage staying in the rural areas are using more Bidayuh compared with those from the urban areas who use more English with family members (see Example 1).

Example 1: Language used at home

a) Only Bidayuh: Rural respondent (R5) with Bidayuh mother (M)

M: **Kulang galuak eh. Watki mu masak tih? Goik mu nak galuak eh?**

(It's lacking salt. What're you cooking? Didn't you put any salt?)

R 5: **Duoh sonuk.**

(Two spoons)

M: **Nak dom sit lagi. Itih doik sap eh. Doik nyaa la'an man eh tiak neh.**

(You've to add a bit more. This is not delicious. The others might not eat it.)

R 5: **Suba doik nyaa man eh, oku leh man sadik-sadik ku.**

(If they don't, then I'll eat it all by myself.)

b) More Bidayuh less Malay and English: Rural Respondent (R22) with Father (F)

F: **Obuo newspaper jual eh tia.**

(He sold all the newspapers.)

R22: **Daripada nyak nyikon tuui tuui, bitugung tugung nog eh bikulat.**

Doik ada faedahnya. Paguh yoh jual newspaper eh. Brisi geh topat noh tia. *(It's better from seeing it pile up until it collects fungus. There's no purpose for that. It's better to sell the newspapers. It also cleans up the place.)*

c) More Bidayuh less Malay and English: Rural Respondent (R17) with sibling (S)

R 17: **Moh blaja mu neh? Doik tuui lagi test. Sejarah neh? Oggi muu nai latihan eh neh?**

(Have you studied? The test will be soon. History isn't it? Did you do the exercises?)

S: **Moh. De sekolah birang konu koih nai** English composition.

(Already. At school we're already doing English composition.)

d) More English less Bidayuh and Malay: Urban Respondent (R12) with Mother (M)

R12: Better to do shopping at Boulevard. Parking pun senang. **Samak** drive lagi best.

*(It's better to go at Boulevard. It's also easier to get parking there. It's also best for **father** to drive.)*

M: **Muuh tih masih** no confidence in driving. Sampai bila mahu ask **samak** drive **muuh** around?

*(**You still do not have** confidence to drive. How long do you expect your father to drive you around?)*

e) More English less Bidayuh and Malay: Urban Respondent (R14) with Father (F)

R14: I think he will definitely win gold. Sudah guarantee **Ninga ajak nanti**.

*(It's already guaranteed and you **just see later**.)*

F: Buang masa. **Mit** magazine **toban katik**. Baca tih is much better than watching that.

*(Wasting time. **Take** the magazine **and bring it here**. Reading this is much better than watching that.)*

f) More English less Bidayuh and Malay: Urban Respondent (R16) with sibling (S)

R16: Dayung gila maan tubi campur dengan mee. That's really too much.

(Crazy woman eating rice mixed with noodles...)

S: What do you mean? That's creative **bakok**. **Oku** steam dua dua nya sekali. **Muuh** jealous.

*(What do you mean? That's creative **stupid**. I steam both together. **You're jealous**.)*

Key:

Malay words underlined

Bidayuh words bold

Spoken English normal text

translations italicised within brackets

From the data, it was also understood that Malay and English were often used as code-switches with dominant Bidayuh in daily communication because these languages are being taught in school and have influenced the sociolinguistic norms of the Indian-Bidayuh at home. Malay is the medium of instruction in schools and is used in formal domains whereas English is taught as a second language and is used among the educated in informal domains (McLellan 1992: 195).

Food habitually consumed at home

Respondents were asked to indicate the types of food they ate at home. Table 6.2 (below) shows that the vast majority of the respondents frequently eat more Bidayuh food and less Indian food at home.

Respondents explained that as their mothers were Bidayuh, they were more familiar with Bidayuh dishes than Indian food. Only ten percent of the respondents said that they ate more Indian food than Bidayuh food. However, the majority (ninety percent) of the respondents said that they ate more Bidayuh food than Indian food at home. Among the common Bidayuh dishes consumed at home were *midin*, *paku* (ferns), *kasam ikan*, *kasam babi* (fermented pork and fish), *pansuh* (chicken cooked in bamboo), *rebung* (bamboo shoots) and *sup tempoyak* (durian soup). Grilled fish, pork and chicken, eaten with chillies, lemongrass and soya sauce were favourite side dishes. Ulam (raw sliced papaya and raw fern) were eaten with *belacan* (shrimp) paste pounded with chillies and lemongrass. The Bidayuh dishes were mostly sweet, sour and salty, cooked with lemongrass. The only common Indian dishes were chicken, mutton and fish curries also cooked with lemongrass.

There are not many food operators selling Indian food in Kuching. It was only in the 1980s that Indian restaurants started to operate businesses in the city of Kuching. According to Mohd Shafiee, an Indian-Muslim food operator, the main reason he set up a food business was to cater to the increasing number of Peninsular Malaysian Malays and Indians who have been coming to work and study in Kuching since the 1980s. The most popular Indian food restaurant in Kuching is Bombay Masala, which has eight outlets in various parts of the city. Most of the food stalls in Kuching are operated by Chinese and are relatively cheaper than Indian food. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Indian-

Table 6.2 *Food habitually consumed at home*

<i>Type of food</i>	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>
More Indian and less Bidayuh	10%
More Bidayuh and less Indian	90%

Bidayuh respondents preferred Chinese food rather than Indian food when eating out.

- a) I'm already used to Indian curry because I studied in West Malaysia for my degree. Before going there, I seldom ate spicy food. At home, we have Indian and Bidayuh dishes. Indian food means curry. For Bidayuh food there are more varieties. R7.
- b) It's always hot and spicy and we did not eat much curries when we were small. Nowadays, it's fine for me. But I still prefer Bidayuh dishes. R9.
- c) We eat more Bidayuh food at home. My mother cooks curry with lemongrass, Bidayuh style. My Dad must have curry. So, we have curry almost everyday. R11.
- d) I like to eat meat stews. I also eat curry but less. When I eat outside, I eat Chinese food. It's cheaper. R16.
- e) I like sour and salty food and there are many Bidayuh dishes which are salty and sour. I love *kasam* (fermented food). Indian food is alright too but can't beat the *kasam*. R21.

Celebrating festivals

The participants were also asked to determine the importance of celebrating Indian and Bidayuh festivals (see Table 6.3). Since 20 of the respondents were Christians, they attached special importance to Christian celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. The remaining five respondents were Hindus and they celebrated Deepavali and Thaipusam annually.

There was a general agreement among the respondents with regard to the importance of celebrating Gawai Dayak on the 1st of June annually. All the 25 respondents said that they celebrated the Gawai Dayak festival. Gawai Dayak is a harvest festival for all the Dayak communities in Sarawak. The Indian-Bidayuh respondents joined in the celebration with other Bidayuh by having *open house* and visiting their relatives. During the interviews, all the respondents said that they served guests '*tuak*' (Bidayuh rice wine), *lemang* (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo) and *kuih jala* (fried crackers) during Gawai.

Table 6.3 Festivals celebrated by Indian-Bidayuh

Festivals	%
Gawai (25-Both Christians and Hindus)	100%
Christmas (20-Christians)	80%
Deepavali and Thaipusam (5-Hindus)	20%

Marriage partners

Table 6.4 displays data concerning the marriage partner selected by the respondents. Seventy percent of the respondents were of the view that they did not mind marrying either Bidayuh or Indians. Another thirty percent were of the view that they should marry only Bidayuhs, while none believed that they should marry only Indians.

During the interview, more specific information was obtained. Some of the comments were:

- a) I prefer to marry someone who is also mix, Bidayuh-Indian like me. We can understand each other better. We know what the sensitivities of the different culture are. R6.
- b) I'm mix, I don't mind marrying either Bidayuh or Indian. *Same lah (it's the same)*. R13.
- c) I married a Bidayuh because I'm staying with the Bidayuhs. I don't see Indians around. It's natural that I should marry someone whom I mix with. R15.
- d) Our parents are not choosy so we are not choosy too. All my brothers and sisters married Bidayuh, Iban and Chinese. I might just follow them. R22.
- e) Many people said that Indian mixed with Bidayuh children are beautiful so I think I'll choose a beautiful girl. Indian or Bidayuh as long as beautiful. Never mind the race. R24.
- f) It's easier to marry a Bidayuh and to communicate with our in-laws. I can't speak Tamil and marrying into a Tamil speaking family will cause a communication barrier. R25.

Based on observations and interviews with children of Indian-Bidayuh parentage who were of marriageable age, it is clear that it is not easy for them to find suitable Indian spouses in Sarawak. The respondents said that the chances of meeting another Indian or "mixed Indian" at their workplace in Kuching were slim.

Table 6.4 *Choice of marriage partners*

<i>Marriage partner</i>	<i>%</i>
Bidayuh only	30%
Indian only	0
No preference	70%

Social identity

This study was also concerned with the social identity of the Indian-Bidayuh. All the 25 respondents described themselves as Indian-Bidayuhs. However, they were categorized as Indians on their national identification cards. They had to juggle with these dual identities when mixing with Indians and Bidayuhs, as both recognised them as members of their respective communities.

- a) When I'm mixing with Indians, they make me feel like I'm an Indian. Sometimes they talk Tamil and they think that I can understand. The Bidayuhs make me feel that I am a Bidayuh. They always talk Bidayuh to me and I also talk Bidayuh with them because I can understand them. R16.
- b) Sometimes when I follow my mother marketing, the Indian ladies selling curry paste in the wet market always talk Tamil to me but I answer in Malay. They know my father is an Indian. They said that I should learn how to speak Tamil because I'm an Indian. When I follow my mother buying jungle produce from the Bidayuh ladies in Bau bazaar, they speak Bidayuh to me because they know my mother speaks Bidayuh well. So when I go marketing with my mother I smile at the Indian and Bidayuh ladies selling their products, in order not to be labelled as a proud Indian or a proud Bidayuh. R25.
- c) My Bidayuh friends whom I play football with in my neighbourhood make me join the Bidayuh team. They say I speak Bidayuh, my mother is a Bidayuh, so I'm Bidayuh. My Indian colleague always asks me to join him to eat Indian food for lunch. I just go along with them because I don't want to be left out. R7.
- d) I studied in SMK Lake. When I was in school my Indian classmate from Peninsular Malaysia who joined us in Form 4 was quite close to me. She was lonely and being the only Indian in the school, so I don't mind to keep her company. However, my close friends were the Bidayuhs. R9.

All the respondents, however, said they had to mark themselves as Indians when filling out official forms because the Malaysian law states that the child must be classified according to the race of the father. However, Bidayuh is their dominant home language and they socialised more with other Bidayuhs than with Indians due to the small number of Indians in Sarawak. Due to this, they consider themselves more as Bidayuh and less Indian. All the 25 respondents also said since all of them could speak Bidayuh but not Tamil, their Bidayuh heritage should be given due recognition. One respondent sums it up well:

I'm comfortable with Indians and Bidayuhs. I have more Bidayuh friends than Indian friends. Deep inside me I feel that I am more Bidayuh than Indian. R22.

Discussion

Sarawak is the largest of the 14 Malaysian states separated by the South China Sea and located on the island of Borneo. Sarawak's cultural and racial composition is more diverse than that of Peninsular Malaysia. The earliest contact of the Indians with Sarawak was in the 12th century through trade (Chang 2002), but it is the descendants of Indian immigrants that came in the 1900s who married Dayak women. Dayak refers to two native groups in Sarawak, namely the Ibans and the Bidayuhs. Dayaks are the largest group in Sarawak and before Sarawak became part of Malaysia on 16 September 1963, the Iban language was used in formal domains (Ariffin & Teoh 1992). Bidayuh was also taught in primary school in the Bidayuh villages during the colonial period (Dealwis 2008). Since Bidayuh is the dominant language in the Bidayuh villages in the Bidayuh Belt (i.e., Kuching, Padawan, Bau, Serian and Lundu), non-Bidayuhs who married Bidayuhs and stay in these villages assimilated with Bidayuh cultural norms. The introduction of the national language – Malay – in these Bidayuh village schools in 1967 was considered a 'strange subject' by many, and many did not bother to learn it (*Dayak Bidayuh National Association* 2005).

The process of unifying the nation by the Malaysian government has led to the gradual acculturation of indigenous Sarawakians towards Malay culture. This can be seen clearly today in the use of Malay as the medium of instruction in school, which has resulted in the Bidayuhs from different dialect groups using the Malay language in cross-dialect group interactions (Dealwis 2008). The Bidayuhs, who regarded the Malay language as strange forty years ago, today use it as a lingua franca in intra and interethnic communication and Malay is also used by the Indian-Bidayuhs at home.

Religion divides the Dayaks who are mostly Christians from the Dayaks who are Muslims. Islam constitutes a firm ethnic boundary between Malays and Dayaks in Sarawak. Malays in Malaysia and indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak are given *Bumiputra* status, and they enjoy various socioeconomic advantages made available by the affirmative action policy of the government to eradicate poverty under the New Economic Policy started in 1970. The *Bumiputra* and *non-Bumiputra* categorization further divides the Malays and indigenous groups from the immigrant races such as the Chinese and Indians (*Borneo Post* 20 August 2008).

To qualify for *Bumiputra* status in Sarawak, a person must be Malay or a Dayak (i.e., Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Orang Ulu). In Peninsular Malaysia, *Bumiputra* would specifically refer to the more dominant race – i.e., Malay who are also Muslims. A *non-Bumiputra* who has been brought up in a faith other than Islam must convert to Islam in order to marry a Malay. By doing so, the non-Muslim partner essentially wipes out his or her original ethnic classification and is admitted into the Malay ethnic category because of religion. The children of Indian fathers and Malay mothers are classified as Indian Muslims but the loose definition of a Malay has made them identify with the Malays for economic reasons (see David 2003b, Nambiar 2007, David & Dealwis 2009b).

In Sarawak, an application by a non-native person to be identified with the Malays and other indigenous people is clearly stated in Article 17b of the *Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak* (the official custodian of native laws, customs and traditions) and is similar to the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. It is possible for the children of non-Malay men who have married Malay women to be classified as Malays. However, it is not possible for the children of non-Dayak men who have married Dayak women to be classified as Dayaks.

The Bidayuh are *Bumiputra* and are a ‘Christian race’ (Minos 2000: 145). The children of Indian fathers and Bidayuh mothers are denied *Bumiputra status* because they have to ‘follow the race of their father’. All of the 25 Indian-Bidayuh respondents interviewed in this study resented this federal law and felt that it should not be applied to Sarawakians where Dayaks are the majority. In Peninsular Malaysia, on the strength of the fact that both parents are Muslims, the children of *bumiputra* and *non-bumiputra* marriages need not worry, at least publicly, about ethnic identity, since the issue is always resolved in favour of Malay (Boulanger 2000).

However, it would be an overgeneralisation to state that the children of Indian fathers and Bidayuh mothers wish to ‘follow their mother’ because they are motivated by economic reasons to become *Bumiputra*. The findings in this study clearly show that these children of Indian-Bidayuh parentage are more Bidayuh than Indian in their cultural and linguistic norms. Bidayuh is the most dominant language spoken at home. Gawai and Christmas are celebrated on a big scale. Bidayuh food is habitually consumed at home, much more so than Indian cuisine. Convergence to Bidayuh cultural norms occurs perhaps because the Bidayuh community is a much bigger group than the Indian community and because the influence of Bidayuh is more dominant. The generally held belief that in exogamous marriages the minority group tends to adopt the more dominant group’s culture applies to the offspring of Indian and Bidayuh parentage. In fact, the findings of this study show

that these offspring have adopted, to a large extent, the cultural norms and values of their Bidayuh mothers.

In social identity theory, a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (Hogg & Abrams 1988). All the respondents described themselves as '*anak Sarawak*' (son of Sarawak) because both their parents were Sarawakians and that was important. At the same time, their self-categorization as Indian Bidayuhs is also due to how they perceive themselves as not being fully Indian. This is largely due to the language used at home and other cultural norms that are more Bidayuh than Indian. In the final analysis, all the respondents wanted to be seen as Bumiputras and given *Bumiputra* status.

Conclusion

The prime purpose of this study was to investigate if the children of Indian fathers and Bidayuh mothers adopted the cultural norms and values of their Bidayuh mothers or Indian fathers. All the 25 respondents did not feel that it was fair to be automatically classified as Indians. Although they were officially categorized as Indians, Bidayuh language and cultural norms were transmitted to them as children by their Bidayuh mothers. This was strongly supported by the fact that the Bidayuh population is significantly larger than the Indian population. If language and cultural norms are identity markers, then it is clear from the data that such children from a mixed parentage see themselves mainly as Bidayuh rather than Indian and identify strongly with the larger Bidayuh community. As a relatively small but expanding group interacting within a multilingual, multi-ethnic and rapidly changing socio-economic environment, the Indian-Bidayuhs are experiencing a significant need for due recognition to be given to their *Bumiputra* (Bidayuh) heritage so that they too can improve their socioeconomic status just like the Malays and the other indigenous groups in Sarawak.

7 The Impact of Language Policy on Language Shifts in Minority Communities

Focus on the Malayalee Community in Malaysia

Mohana Nambiar

Introduction

Research has shown that language shift, eventually leading to language loss, is not limited to any one society; it occurs all over the world, especially in immigrant communities. For a multitude of reasons, communities, especially immigrant minorities, after a period of time, stop using their mother tongues in domains where they had previously used them in favour of other languages, usually those of the dominant communities. Studies on language shift/maintenance in multilingual and multiracial settings such as Malaysia (Nambiar 2007; Sankar 2004; Ramachandran 2000; Mohamad 1998; David 1996; and Lasimbang et al., 1992) have also indicated that minority immigrant communities are shifting away from their mother tongues. These findings are not unexpected, as Fishman (1989: 206) points out that the shift away from the mother tongue is inevitable: “What begins as the language of social and economic stability ends, within three generations or so, as the language of the crib as well...” This chapter examines the language use in the Malayalee community in Malaysia in the light of these findings.

In most studies of language shift and loss, the language policy of the land in one form or another is often mentioned as a causal factor. This chapter intends to examine to what extent language policies affect or cause language shifts by studying the role of language policy on the language shift of a minority immigrant community, the Malayalees, in multilingual, multiethnic Malaysia.

Language shift and language policy

Language shift can simply be defined as the end result of individuals, consciously or otherwise, gravitating towards a new language or one

already within their repertoire to perform the functions usually reserved for their mother tongues. According to Fasold (1984: 213), "Language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one. The members of the community, when the shift has taken place, have collectively chosen a new language where an old one used to be used." In the last half-century, there have been substantial efforts to capture the essential variables that bring about language maintenance or language shift. What has to be noted is that there is obviously no magic formula for guaranteeing language maintenance or for predicting a shift, as "different factors combine in different ways in each social context, and the results are rarely predictable" (Holmes 2001: 67). Kloss (1966) was one of the first to present a list of factors contributing towards the maintenance of a language, including ethnolinguistic enclaves, religious insulation, and the economic value and status of languages. He notes that exogamy is frequently a clear-cut factor for promoting a shift. One of the strongest determinants for language shift is economic, i.e. upward mobility (Holmes 2001; Dorian 1981; and Gal 1979). Fasold (1984: 217) gives a summary of factors that cause a shift based on many different studies: he cites among others migration, industrialization and other economic changes, the higher prestige of the language being shifted to, urbanization, and a smaller population of speakers of the language being shifted from. Janik (1996) states that language shift or maintenance is determined by a combination of factors such as cultural core values, the extent of inter-marriage, the degree of cultural similarity with the dominant group, local recognition and institutional support.

In addition to the above-mentioned causes, there is yet another important factor promoting language shift: language policy. Briefly, language policy is an outcome of language planning whereby the government makes conscious efforts to affect the structure or function of language varieties. In the case of multilingual societies, the government allocates functions to particular languages within the society (Tollefson 1991). A country's language policy is usually manifested in its choice of the national language, the official language, the media of education and so forth. One of the conditions for language shift to occur is that the spreading language must allow access to power and resources, and this is basically achieved through the educational process. Paulston (1994: 17) declares that the "major social institution which favours language shift is without doubt public schooling." School language and other government pressures are also among the factors cited by Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter (1977) and Gal (1979). Besides the educational field, the language used in other government agencies is also of importance in that institutional (governmental) support of a language can be essential in spreading or maintaining a language (Fasold 1984; Dressler

1982; Beer & Jacob 1985; Lewis 1982; Fishman 1991). As Fasold (1984: 253) rightly points out, “The language that governments use for legislative debate and the language in which laws are written and government documents are issued, are also means that can be used to promote a selected language or language variety”. Prabhakaran (1998) attributes the main causes for language shift in the Indian Andhra community in South Africa to the dominant official status of English as well as the government’s language policy. There can be no doubt that lack of government support is a significant contributory factor for language shift eventually leading to language endangerment, and that it is more marked in some societies than in others. In discussing the endangered status of the Amazigh language in Morocco, Yamina (2008) argues that government support would go a long way toward ensuring the survival of Amazigh. She states:

If Amazigh could be recognised as an official language, the state would be compelled to promote its usage and to accept it as a legitimate language for all social activities. Successful language revitalization efforts would require a change in educational policy (Yamina 2008: 179).

Closer to home, David (2008b: 82) declares that “language policy, and speakers’ attitudes regarding the pragmatic importance of learning some languages given their political and economic importance” have contributed to language shift in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. The findings of Sankar’s (2004: iii) study of the Malaysian Iyers, an immigrant minority in Malaysia, also show that language shift is largely due to “external pressures such as government language policies and the influence of English as the language of business”. Hence it appears that language policy, as manifested in the language that a government chooses for its schools and for communication with its people, is a significant contributory factor for language shift.

Yet there are dissenting voices about the impact of language policy on language shift and language endangerment. Romaine’s comments (2002:1) on endangered languages deserve closer scrutiny:

Evaluation of the potential and actual impact of language policy on endangered languages is complicated by lack of straightforward causal connections between types of policy and language maintenance and shift. Language policy is not an autonomous factor and what appears to be ostensibly the “same” policy may lead to different outcomes, depending on the situation in which it operates.

In addition, she points out that language policies may have little impact on home use, which is essential for intergenerational transmission, the foundation of language survival. However, she concedes that though language survival cannot be dependent on ‘legislation as its main support, legal provisions may allow speakers of endangered languages to claim some public space for their languages and cultures’ (Romaine

2002: 22). Fishman (1997: 194), cited in Romaine (2002: 22), is of the same opinion. He says that languages become endangered because they lack intergenerational transmission and daily use, not because they are not being taught in schools or lack official status.

In the light of these two apparently differing perspectives on the impact of language policy on language shift, the writer wishes to explore these viewpoints by scrutinizing the role of language policy in the case of the language shift in the Malayalee community within its multilingual setting. Before that, however, some background information on Malaysia, its language policy and the Malayalee community would be useful.

The Malaysian setting and language policy

Malaysia is made up of two geographical areas: West or Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. The latter consists of the two states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Malaysia is a pluralistic society whose plurality is manifested in multiple facets – racially, religiously and linguistically. The population of West Malaysia is 65.1% Malays and other indigenous groups, 26% Chinese, 7.7% Indians and 1.2% other minorities (*Census Malaysia 2000*). The Malays, who form the majority, are considered indigenous, and the non-Malays (i.e., the Chinese and Indians) are seen as immigrant communities, as the bulk of their ancestors were encouraged to migrate to the country by the British colonial regime. In terms of religious beliefs, the Malays espouse Islam, while the majority of the Chinese are Buddhist, Taoist and Christian. The Indians are mainly Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Sikh. The distribution tapestry is further accentuated by the fact that each racial/ethnic group has a variety of languages and dialects. It is believed that no fewer than 80 languages are spoken in the country (Omar 1992).

Prior to independence in 1957, education in West Malaysia consisted of four separate systems that differed from one another in terms of language medium and course content. The Malays attended Malay medium schools which were located largely in the rural areas. Tamil was the medium of the Indian schools since Tamil speakers were greater in number than any of the other Indian sub-groups, including the Malayalees. The Chinese, especially those in the rural areas, sent their children to the Chinese schools where Mandarin was the language of instruction. Then there were the English medium schools which were found mostly in urban areas. These schools were popular among the urban Chinese and Indians. Among the four systems, “the English system of education seemed to be the best system in every sense of the word”

(Omar 1982: 74). Besides receiving large subsidies from the government, the English schools had other advantages, as they groomed students for positions in the government service as well as for obtaining tertiary education in Malaysia, Singapore and abroad.

Obviously, knowledge of English was an asset under the colonial government. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the economic development of the country was in full swing,

‘... with the economic engine being driven by a small British elite and a larger group of locally recruited civil servants who were bilingual in English and their native tongue. Many of the non-Malays had by necessity to learn some Malay but it was knowledge of English that was the key to social and career advancement.’ (Ozog 1993: 64)

Besides the crucial role that English played in the education system, it also functioned as the official language of the country and the language of legislature. The language policy of the country changed after independence. In 1957, Malay became the national language as well as one of the official languages, the other being English. Ten years later it became the sole official language. Although its status as the language of government administration accorded it an exalted position (Omar 1982), it was the elevation of the Malay language as the medium of instruction, which paved the way for it to eventually replace English as the medium of instruction in all English schools and in tertiary institutions, that was the more significant step.

However, the English language was not neglected. The Education Act of 1957 also made it mandatory for English to be taught as a second language in all schools in Malaysia, thereby establishing it as the second most important language in the country, after Malay (Omar, 1982). The implications of the language policies on the communities, in particular the immigrant minorities, will be discussed following an overview of the Malayalee community and its language shift.

The Malayalee community in Malaysia

According to the Census Malaysia (2000), the Malayalees, a sub-group of Indians, number 35,244, which is 2.2% of the Indian population or less than 1% of the West Malaysian population. This small community is further fragmented by religious affiliations: 74% are Hindus, 16% Christians, 6% Muslims and 4% are classified as other. The Malayalees originate from Kerala, South India and their mother tongue is Malayalam, a Dravidian language very similar to Tamil. With the

phenomenal success of the rubber industry in the 1830s, the British had to import labour from abroad, mainly Tamils from present day Tamilnad. Soon they realised they needed supervisory staff to manage the large volume of labour. The Malayalees from Kerala were the obvious choice, as “there was already a highly evolved system of education there so that recruits to be clerks and conductors were not difficult to obtain” (*Malayalees in Malaysia*, 1990: 8). Being educated and being able to speak in English and Tamil made these early migrants an ideal bridge between the British management and the Tamil-speaking labourers. While the Malayalees who settled in the estates were mainly Hindus and Christians, the Muslims had a different migratory pattern (Arasaratnam 1979). They were part of an earlier immigrant phase to Malaysia and had already established themselves in food retailing and other small businesses by the time of the arrival of the second phase of Indian migrants – mainly Hindus and Christians. A point to be noted is that while the majority of the Hindu and Christian migrants were educated and English-speaking, the Muslims were not.

Language shift in the Malayalee community

Nambiar (2007) studied not only the existence (or otherwise) of language shift in the Malayalee community but also whether there were intra-community variations. In other words, in the event of a shift, were the sub-communities – Hindus, Christians and Muslims – moving towards the same language or different languages? Two major indices were chosen to investigate whether the community was undergoing a language shift: proficiency in Malayalam compared with other commonly used languages, and the main language used for intra-ethnic communication in five domains – family/home, friendships, religion, transactions and entertainment. The language used for inner speech was also studied. Besides religious affiliations, the other variable examined was age or generation. Data was gathered using a number of instruments: personally-administered questionnaires, interviews (both structured and semi-structured), recordings of naturally-occurring conversations, observation of language used at Malayalee social occasions and examination of community-related documents.

Two main trends were discernible in the findings. Firstly, the community was indeed shifting away from its mother tongue. There was a marked decline in Malayalam proficiency from the older to the younger members of the community, with a corresponding increase in English and Malay proficiency. In terms of language use, Malayalam was not the dominant language used for interaction with other Malayalees in any of the domains surveyed, including family, religion and inner

speech, often considered as the bastions of language maintenance. In addition, there was a well-defined decrease in the use of Malayalam from the older to the younger members, another clear indicator of a community undergoing shift. Secondly, intra-community variations were obvious – i.e., the shift was bifurcated where the replacive language was concerned. The majority of the Christians and Hindus were moving towards English while the Muslims were shifting to Malay.

Nambiar (2007) cites a number of factors that have contributed to the shift away from Malayalam, such as socioeconomic mobility, the role of parents, the lack of status for Malayalam in Malaysia and the lack of institutional support. Clearly the last two are related to the language policy practiced in Malaysia. The contributory role of these two factors to the shift in the community will be discussed in greater length before examining the extent to which Romaine's contentions (2002) are applicable.

Language policy and language shift in the Malayalee community

Given the status of the two foremost languages in the country, Malay and English, what is the status of the languages of the immigrant communities that Omar (1982) refers to as “immigrant languages”? Officially it has been claimed that while the position of the Malay language has been elevated after the nation acquired independence, it has not been at the expense of other communities' languages. Omar (1979: 40) points out that the Malaysian Constitution, while setting forth the position of Malay, also grants that “no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes) or from teaching or learning any other language”. In other words, there is no official barrier against the various communities maintaining their respective languages.

In addition to Tamil and Mandarin having official status as a medium of education, there is also provision for other languages like Malayalam to be taught in schools as Pupils' Own Language (POL). The 1961 Education Act states that instruction will be provided in a pupil's own mother tongue, provided the parents of 15 or more students request it. In practice, this has applied mainly to Mandarin and Tamil being taught as a single subject in some of the national (Malay) medium primary schools (Gaudart 1987). These POL classes have not been very popular, as they have to be conducted outside regular school hours. Furthermore, in the case of minority communities like the Malayalees, the chances of having 15 or more Malayalee students of a similar age group studying in the same school are slim.

As the Malaysian language policy only emphasises Malay and English, and to a lesser extent Tamil and Mandarin, it appears that “... no serious attempt has been made to incorporate other minority languages” (Mohamad 1998: xiii). As Lasimbang et al. (1992: 335) rightly point out, in Malaysia, “Maintenance of the mother tongue is seen as a right, but still perhaps more of a problem than a resource in a nation trying to achieve unity within the context of multilingualism”. The reality of the situation is that without official support, minority language maintenance requires great effort and commitment on the part of the different communities.

In the case of Malayalam, it has no official status in the country, and it is not the language of the government, the school, the media or the business world. Being an immigrant and a minority community, the Malayalee community has to accommodate where inter-ethnic communication is concerned. In order to interact with non-Malayalees, it has to use other languages such as English, Malay or Tamil, depending on the interlocutors and the setting. Hence the scope to use the language is basically restricted to within its own small community.

This reality is well captured in Nambiar’s study (2007). Queried about the importance of studying Malayalam in Malaysia, about one-third of the sample (107 out of 341 respondents) stated that it was not important. The main reasons provided were that the language was not useful for educational purposes or for furthering one’s career, as English was more useful. These reasons point to the community’s awareness of the lack of utilitarian value for its language. Furthermore, while more than half of the subjects felt that the main reason for the decline in the use of Malayalam was due to the Malayalees themselves not using the language, a fifth claimed it was due to lack of official support for the language, a clear reference to the government’s language policy. A number of parents claimed that once children started schooling, the language learning and language use of their children slipped beyond their control. Typical complaints heard were:

When my children were small, we used Malayalam at home. When they went to school, they started using English. We did not force them to speak in Malayalam. My children all speak Malay because in school, everything is in Malay. (Nambiar 2007: 424)

In addition to the fact that they had no opportunity to be educated in their mother tongue, there is no doubt that the prevalent medium of education paved the way or accelerated bilingualism among the younger generations of Malayalees. But bilingualism itself, while being a prerequisite for language shift, is not a cause for shift. Hence what emerges

clearly is that while the language policy did not accord the community the opportunity for a formal learning of its mother tongue or an official standing to its language, it never stopped the community from acquiring the language or passing it on to ensuing generations or using it among its own members, a point that bears out Romaine's contention (2002). The community did not take steps, either intentionally or due to a lack of awareness or due to its inability, to counter the effects of the language policy to ensure that its language was maintained.

The ambiguity of the impact of language policy on language shift among the Malayalees can also be inferred from the community's response to the change in the medium of instruction in the schools. If the medium did indeed exert a significant influence, it would be expected that once the medium of instruction changed from English to Malay, the younger Malayalees who had been taught in Malay would shift towards that language. However, Nambiar's study (2007) provides clear evidence that the Hindus and Christians who form the majority of the community (90%) are shifting towards English, while only the Muslims are moving towards Malay. This implies that there must be other factors at work besides the language policy. What is also important to note at this juncture is that this pattern of bifurcation in the language shift within a single community reflects Romaine's contention (2000:1) that 'Language policy is not an autonomous factor and what appears to be ostensibly the "same" policy may lead to different outcomes, depending on the situation in which it operates'. Despite sharing a mother tongue, place of origin and setting in the host country, including its language policy, the Malayalees are not all shifting towards the same language.

To understand the reasons for this phenomenon, one needs to examine the unique setting and the history of the community. Having had a headstart in English back in Kerala itself, the Hindus and Christians realised that knowledge of English was a tremendous asset under the British colonial regime and took great pains to ensure that their children maintained this advantage. Those in the plantations, despite the sacrifices they had to make, sent their children not to the nearest schools where the medium of education was Tamil, but to the English schools in towns far away. Greenburg (cited in Gupta & Siew 1995) notes that the single most vital factor in language maintenance is the ability and desire of parents to transmit the ancestral language to their children. Nambiar (2007: 425) cites the "parents factor" as having played a crucial role in the decline of language proficiency and use of Malayalam at the benefit of the English language. Many of the Hindu and Christian parents actively discouraged the learning and use of Malayalam because they feared that their children might not be able to handle more than one language, that they might become confused and

it was better to concentrate on one language. And in this case, the parents decided, on the grounds of economic mobility, that the one language should be English. The data from Nambiar's study (2007) are very telling. According to a second-generation Christian:

When we were young, our parents felt that speaking in Malayalam would disrupt our English. Father felt we're better off with English. We had to listen to the BBC News. Everything around us was western-centred... we had an affinity for all things English. (ibid.: 404)

Adds another respondent:

My father said not to learn or no need to learn Malayalam when I was in primary school. Just learn English and Malay. Now I can't converse with only-Malayalam speaking Malayalees. (ibid.: 404)

Many parents, even when they had an opportunity to, did not transmit their mother tongue to their children or insist that the latter use the language. In the words of a first-generation Hindu mother:

My children and I never speak in Malayalam. My husband and I did not insist that they do. As I was busy working and English was the medium of instruction, I encouraged them to use English. I truly regret it now. (ibid.: 404)

Thus, even when the medium of instruction in the national school system changed to Malay, it did not replace English for the Hindu and Christian Malayalees. As Ozog (1993) points out, the change in status of English did not automatically signal an end to English-knowing bilingualism in the country. Many English-educated parents passed on the language to their offspring. In fact, in many families from high and middle income urban homes, (and these would include many Malayalees), English is the first language or the language they are most proficient in (Gaudart 1990). The continued preference for English in the private sector, plus the emphasis on globalisation, has given the language a privileged position. Hence, to the majority of the Hindus and Christians, English was more than just another language; it was part of their social reproduction strategy (i.e., 'the strategies by which each generation endeavours to transmit to the following the advantage it holds'; Riagain 1994: 179) that had to be passed on to the subsequent generations to ensure academic, and ultimately, economic success.

In the case of the Muslim Malayalees, as mentioned earlier, the majority of the immigrants were less educated and less proficient in English than their Hindu and Christian counterparts (Al-jufri 2000: 18). This is reflected in the types of professions they took on, such as the retailing business, which required more Malay than English proficiency. Although there are many factors that have contributed to the Muslims shifting to the Malay language – including living in Malay neighbourhoods, sharing the same place of worship, and having Malay as the medium of instruction – the most significant reason for the shift to Malay is related to the question of identity of the Muslim Malayalees. A large majority wants to be assimilated into the Malay community. Technically, anyone born in the country can officially “become” Malay, since the Malaysian Constitution defines a Malay as ‘a person who habitually speaks Malay, professes the Muslim religion and conforms to Malay customs’ (Watson 1983: 139). The question then arises as to why the Muslim Malayalees would want to change their ethnicity. A very important reason is the desire to be part of the same *ummah* (Muslim community); another is the desire to acquire *bumiputra* status (accorded to indigenous people of the country such as the Malays) and the special privileges that go with it (see David 2003, who provides a similar reason for the Pakistanis in Kelantan who shifted to Malay). The Malays, being an indigenous community, are the beneficiaries of an affirmative policy, meaning they receive a variety of economic, educational and social benefits that are not accorded to the immigrant communities. Therefore, being part of the Malay community would mean more opportunities for the Muslim Malayalees to obtain economic benefits than being part of the Indian group. Hence speaking the Malay language and not Malayalam is important if one aspires to be accepted as Malay.

The Hindu, Christian and Muslim Malayalees all migrated from the same state in India, with the same mother tongue, but there were differences in their levels of education and linguistic repertoire. These in some ways influenced their livelihoods in the host country, the people they came into contact with and the languages they needed. Although they experienced the same language policy, it does not seem to have had the same effect on the three groups where language shift is concerned, one of the main reasons being that each group had its own reasons for gravitating towards a different language.

Conclusion

No single factor can account for a community shifting away from its mother tongue, as factors often feed off each other. Due to this interconnection, it is difficult to isolate the role of different factors or causes

that lead to language shift. It is particularly true in the case of language policy, as its impact takes a long time to be discerned. Despite this caveat, it is undeniable that language policy has a significant impact on the maintenance or shift of a community's language. Minority languages such as Malayalam have no public space, and this has contributed to its diminished importance in the eyes of its own community, a reason commonly cited for not knowing the language. There can be no doubt that the lack of opportunity to undergo education in one's mother tongue has led to almost no literacy skills in the language, thereby affecting the maintenance of the language.

However, it must be pointed out that while loss of proficiency in the mother tongue can lead to language shift, continued proficiency is no guarantee that the language will be maintained. A case in point is the language of the Tamil community in neighbouring Singapore. Like the Malayalees, the Tamils are a minority community. However, unlike Malayalam in Malaysia, the Tamil language has greater official recognition in Singapore. It is one of the four official languages of the multilingual country and it has legal and institutional support, as it is represented in the various institutions of the country, in most government services and in the multicultural media. More important, the government's bilingual educational policy has ensured school-based learning of the Tamil language among the younger Tamils. Yet despite the fact that more Tamil children would have acquired Tamil as a result of the implementation of the compulsory bilingual education policy, Saravanan's study (1994) shows that there was not a corresponding increase in the functional use of Tamil. In other words, though more of the younger Tamils had proficiency in Tamil, they were not using the language. Instead they use English in domains like the home because of the perceived low prestige of Tamil and the high economic value of English.

Ultimately it appears that whether a community maintains its language or shifts away from it depends on the will of that community and not on the language policy of the land. As Romaine (2002) notes, language policy has an imperceptible effect on the use of the minority language in the home or on intra-ethnic communication, domains essential for intergenerational transmission, the cornerstone of language survival.

8 My Son has to maintain his Language because that is his Culture

The Persistence and Adaptation of the Bengali Community in Malaysia

Dipika Mukherjee

Introduction

This research was conducted in the immigrant Malaysian-Bengali community in Malaysia. The language behaviour of fourteen women from this community of four hundred, over a time period of 19 months, was both observed and taped. This was the first sociolinguistic study of a migrant group in Malaysia (Mukherjee 1995; for later studies see David 1996 and David 2001). Therefore a qualitative study of the language patterns of fourteen women was conducted in great detail in order to come to a deeper understanding of the motivations behind their choice of code.

The interview questions were divided into four main sections: background information, language use, language ability and group identity. For this chapter, the results of three sections of the questionnaire (namely language use, language ability and group identity), have been tabulated in order to explore how different women in the Malaysian-Bengali community report using their languages (especially the Bengali language), and how they do so in different ways to promote a sense of community within the larger Malaysian context.

Reported language use

The questions in this section all relate to the speakers' perceptions of the languages they used inside their home as well as outside the home. Data was also elicited about the language(s) used by other family members.

In the following transcribed extracts, the capitalized sequences show stress or emphasis, spaces denote pauses and empty bracketed sequences are not clearly audible. Square brackets indicate my additions

and translations. Any names beginning with the letters “P” “S” or “T” refer to the main participants in this study, and when a name beginning with any of these three letters occurs in a conversation, it refers to the same person. P refers to a person in the Primary group (>45 age group); S to a person in the Secondary group (26-44), and T to a person in the Third group (<25 age group). Care was taken that the pseudonyms were not duplicated by the names of actual persons in the community.

Reported languages used within the family and with relatives in Malaysia (> 45 age group)

Table 8.1 describes what the women in the oldest group said about languages used at home and with their immediate relatives. The women were asked to specify which language they used the most, as well as that most frequently used by their husbands and children; they were also asked about the languages favoured by their extended family network, (that is, their in-laws, siblings, grandchildren, nephews and nieces).

Table 8.1 *Reported language use within the family (> 45 age group)*

<i>Language most spoken by</i>	<i>Protima</i>	<i>Piyali</i>	<i>Purnima</i>	<i>Priti</i>	<i>Piu</i>
Self	Bengali/ English when children can't understand	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali with parents/ English elsewhere
Husband	Bengali/ English	English/ Bengali	English	Bengali with wife, English with daughters	n/a
Children	English	n/a	English with mother	Bengali with mother, English with rest	English/ Bengali/ Hindi
Siblings	Bengali	n/a	n/a	n/a	English/ Bengali
In-laws	English	Bengali/ English	n/a	Bengali	n/a
Grand- children	English	n/a	Malay Bengali English	n/a	n/a
Nephews and Nieces	English	English	n/a	mainly Bengali	English

Table 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3 yielded data on the languages favored by the family networks of the informants. The most striking result of Table 8.1 is the evidence of women as transmitters of the Bengali language, both as mothers and grandmothers. Predictably enough, the three Indian-born women in this group, Piyali, Purnima and Priti, claim to speak very little English with anyone in their family. Piu and Protima, though they speak more English than their Indian-born peers, also actively encourage their children to speak Bengali. It is interesting to note that whenever children are involved, the husbands, in all cases, are reported to speak more English to the children.

Purnima emphatically asserts of her family: *“Cheley-meyeder shonge bangla chara kichu noi”* (*I don’t speak anything but Bengali to my children*). Interestingly enough, she tries to transmit Bengali to her grandchildren, all three of whom have non-Bengali fathers, and admits that she ends up speaking a mixture of Bengali and Malay with her grandchildren.

Piu, a Malaysian-born woman, lives alone and as such her closest family connection is with her parents. Her son lives with her divorced husband in Delhi. She claims that her parents ensured that she learned the Bengali language. Although she is the most untypical member of this group, she says she also actively encourages her son to speak Bengali:

Generally, with my parents we try to speak as much Bengali as possible, but I think, I think English comes in anyway. It’s a question of how much.

Protima’s grandchildren, although they have third-generation Malaysian-Bengali parents, do not speak Bengali fluently, as both their parents speak to each other mostly in English. So, she says, “I speak to them in Bengali so that they can pick up the language.”

The two Malaysian-born women conversed in English throughout the interview, whereas the three Indian-born women spoke only Bengali.

Reported languages used within the family and with relatives in Malaysia: 26-44 age group

Table 8.2 is a description of what the women in the 26-44 age group reported on the languages used within their family networks.

Table 8.2 corroborates Table 8.1 in depicting women as the main transmitters of Bengali to the children. In this group, only Shyama claims to speak very little Bengali, although she does agree with her mother Purnima’s assertion that Purnima tries to speak in Bengali with

Table 8.2 *Reported language use within the family (26-44 age group)*

<i>Language most spoken by:</i>	<i>Shilpi</i>	<i>Shanu</i>	<i>Shiela</i>	<i>Shyama</i>	<i>Shutapa</i>
Self	English/ Bengali with mother, grandma and some relatives	'Broken' Bengali with mother; English with siblings	English/ Bengali with mother and grandma	English	Bengali with parents; English with siblings
Husband	English	English	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mother	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Mostly Bengali with spouse; English and Bengali with children	Bengali
Father	English	English	English	Bengali with spouse; English with children	Bengali/ English with children
Siblings	English	English	English	English	English/ Malay Bengali
Grandma/ grandaunts	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali
Uncles/ Aunts	Uncles English; Aunts Bengali	Uncles English; Aunts Bengali	Uncles English; Aunts Bengali	English	Uncles English; Aunts Bengali
Cousins	English	English	English	English	English

the children. Again, the men in this table are predictably English users, especially with children. The reason why the section on grandparents includes only grandaunts and grandmothers is because there are very few surviving grandfathers left, and none of the respondents had a grandfather who was living in Malaysia.

Only Bengali is spoken in the grandparent's generation, whereas cousins tend to speak only English, and this is indicative of the generational divide in language. There is also a very clear-cut gender division; women tend to speak more Bengali, even the aunts. As Shanu says, "Even in Calcutta, my uncles speak English, aunts Bengali." The reason for this could be that the uncles would try to accommodate the visitor's (Shanu's) speech, and the aunts, perhaps only because of a lack of fluency, persist in using Bengali. However, the end result of Shanu's experience in Calcutta and in Malaysia is the same – women speak more Bengali.

Although Shanu feels that there is no stigma attached to not being able to speak fluently in Bengali, she remarks:

It becomes a barrier, especially when you, when you go for community functions and ah, a lot of ladies of the older generation, they do not speak very fluent English, and the its ah, you get around when you speak Bengali. You are able to at least ask them 'How are you' and simple things like that, you know, just to move around you know, to socialize in the community.

Even in this generation, women speak to children in Bengali. Shilpi, who speaks to her cousins in English, reported speaking to their children in Bengali.

Reported languages used within the family and with relatives in Malaysia: above 25 age group

Table 8.3 describes the responses of the women in the youngest age group with regard to the languages they use, as well as the languages used by their immediate family networks.

Findings from all the respondents in this group corroborated the main findings from the other two groups in describing women as the Bengali language bearers. Tanu points out that aunts as a rule speak Bengali, unless the aunts are non-Bengalis:

With the uncles in English, with aunts in Bengali... I guess because most of my aunts are from India and I'd rather speak to them in Bengali than English.

Because of the role of women as transmitters of the Bengali language, shortcomings in fluency in their offspring reflect badly on them:

Tripti: It is a problem... Older people will view it as oh her mother didn't do a good job, and it won't reflect on the child per se, so it won't be a problem on the child, but then like um I think you'd be much better if you could speak the language and were fluent in it.

Thus, as the mothers are expected to enforce the use of Bengali within the family, children who are not fluent speakers of Bengali can bring shame upon their mothers. Recordings made in family situations show that the daughters do speak to their mothers mostly in Bengali.

Women also emerge as the family historians. Tanu, along with others in her group, claims that her knowledge of her own family background comes from her grandmother's stories and that her grandmother would tell stories when they met every weekend. Trishna, who never knew her

Table 8.3 *Reported language use within the family (< 25 age group)*

<i>Language most spoken by:</i>	<i>Tripti</i>	<i>Tanu</i>	<i>Tapati</i>	<i>Trishna</i>
Self	Mother Bengali; Father English	Mother Bengali; Father, sister English	Mother Bengali; Father, sister English; Brother English and Malay	Mother Bengali; Father, brother English
Grandmother	n/a	n/a	Bengali	n/a
Mother	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali
Father	English	English	English	Bengali with wife; English with children
Siblings	n/a	English	English/ Malay	English
Uncles/Aunts	English	Bengali with aunts from India; otherwise English	Bengali with aunts from India; otherwise English	Bengali with some aunts; English with uncles
Cousins	English	English	English	English

grandmother since she passed away long before Trishna was born, said something very similar to Tapati:

Trishna: Old ladies, old ladies staying here start their old stories... at Pujabari... sometimes when we go visit them.

Tapati: Grandmother tells old stories... talk about a person triggers stories.

Only one person in this entire study said that she spoke in Malay, and that was Tapati, who sometimes used Malay to share secrets with her brother:

Tapati: If we have any secret talk or anything like that because the rest of the family don't really understand the Malay we speak.

Thus all three groups in this section reported women to be the Bengali language bearers, both as language users and story tellers.

Reported languages used with friends

In Table 8.4, the women responded to questions about their friends and the languages they spoke with friends. This section yielded data on the extended networks of the women and was significant in describing who the women chose to associate with beyond their extended family

Table 8.4 *Reported language use with friends by all age groups*

<i>Names</i>	<i>Race of closest friend</i>	<i>Language with closest friend</i>	<i>Race of majority of friends</i>	<i>Language with majority of friends</i>
Protima	Bengali	Bengali	Indian	English
Piyali	Singhalese	English	Bengali	Bengali
Purnima	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali	Bengali
Priti	Eurasian	English	Bengalis	Bengali
Piu	No-one specific	English	Mixed	English
Shilpi	Indian	English	Bengali	Bengali
Shanu	Chinese	English	Chinese	English
Shiela	Bengali	English/ Bengali	Indian	English
Shyama	Bengali	English/ Hindi/ English		
Bengali	Indian	English		
Shutapa	Indian	English	Indian	English
Tripti	Mixed	English	Indians	English
Tanu	Mixed	English	Chinese	English
Tapati	Malay	English	Chinese	English
Trishna	Indian	English	Mixed	English

networks. The women were asked about their closest friend and the language(s) spoken with that friend, as well as about the majority of their friends and the language(s) spoken with them.

Table 8.4 shows clearly that the oldest group has a stronger network of Bengali friends than the younger groups.

For the youngest group, participation in Bengali activities is often enforced by their parents. There are so few Bengalis in Malaysia that it is difficult for them to have their own network:

Shanu: The initial problem, being a Malaysian, when we go to school, we always get mistaken as Punjabis, meaning Bengalis. Community is so small, no one knows we exist, you see.

The women in the oldest age group also have the most resources and the time to construct their own Bengali network. Since Malaysian laws make it difficult for foreigners to obtain work permits, the Indian-born women, especially in the oldest group, found it difficult to pursue a career. Thus many of the Indian-born wives socialised within a very Bengali network simply because of their limited access to any other kind of network. These women would meet for small group luncheons, with the retired Malaysian-born women, younger Indian-born wives and the expatriate wives who did not work often joining these parties. This

group formed the core group of Bengali speakers who organised Bengali shows and operated as cultural ambassadors for the community.

It is significant that the 26-44 age group (the middle group) chooses to mix with Bengalis much more than the youngest group, and they do have a somewhat Bengali/Indian network. In contrast, not a single member of the youngest group said that she had a close Bengali friend.

Reported language used for reading and entertainment

Table 8.5 describes the language choices made by the women and their families for reading and entertainment. The informants were asked to

Table 8.5 *Reported language preferred for reading and watching movies*

<i>Names</i>	<i>Language preferred for movie</i>	<i>Language preferred by self for reading</i>	<i>Language preferred by husband for reading</i>	<i>Language preferred by parents for reading</i>	<i>Language preferred by children for reading</i>
Protima	Hindi	Bengali	English	n/a	English
Piyali	Bengali	Bengali	English	n/a	n/a
Purnima	Bengali	Bengali	English	n/a	English
Priti	Bengali	Bengali	English	n/a	English
Piu	Bengali	English	n/a	Bengali	English
Shilpi	Bengali	English	English	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Shanu	English	English	English	Mother	
Bengali	n/a				
Shiela	Bengali	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Shyama	English	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Shutapa	Bengali	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Tripti	English	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Tanu	Hindi	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Tapati	Hindi	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a
Trishna	English	English	n/a	Mother Bengali; Father English	n/a

specify whether they would prefer to watch a movie in English, Bengali, Malay or any of their other languages, if they had three hours at their disposal and videos in all languages available. They were also asked about the language they preferred to read in for pleasure, and the language preferred by their family for reading.

The most significant result of Table 8.5 is that older women are again reported to be the most stable users of the Bengali language.

Columns 3 (language preferred by self for reading) and 5 (language preferred by parents for reading) clearly demonstrate that although the younger women and other family members are reported to prefer reading in English, older Bengali women are consistently reported as preferring to read in Bengali. The above table demonstrates once again that women who are mothers are often the only members within a Bengali family to perpetuate the language. The men consistently prefer English, as do the children.

The other interesting result is in the first column. Although the older group reported a preference for Bengali entertainment, not a single member of the youngest group did so. The response of the 26-44 middle group was mixed, but they clearly favoured Bengali much more than the youngest group.

Language ability

Language ability was tested by asking the respondents to generate Bengali statements that required the use of the three levels of politeness in Bengali speech. The Bengali language has a three-tiered system for the third person pronoun where the most polite 'apni' is used with elders and respected persons, the 'tumi' form with peers and 'tui' to children and sometimes to social inferiors (Zograph 1982: 100). As Table 8.6 demonstrates, the Bengali language in Malaysia is losing the least polite form of address. Most of the women in this study used only the middle form "tumi" for everyone in the community. The numbers in the third column refer to how many of these pronoun forms were reportedly used by the respondents; however, all the women, except for Trishna, knew that there were three kinds of honorifics.

The respondents were asked to relate a story in Bengali in about six or seven lines of the last movie they had seen. This generated a great deal of hilarity, false starts and repetitions among non-fluent speakers, particularly Piu, Shyama and Trishna.

The most interesting aspect of this exercise was that non-fluent speakers were all making similar phonological errors, that is, dropping the aspirated sounds in Bengali and using the non-aspirated forms instead. The bilabial stops and velars in Bengali have both aspirated and

Table 8.6 *Language ability*

<i>Names</i>	<i>Knowledge of honorifics</i>	<i>Use of all three 2nd person pronoun forms</i>	<i>Generation of immigrant</i>	<i>Mother's country of birth</i>
Protima	Yes	Not 'tui' (2)	Second	India
Piyali	Yes	Rarely 'tui' (2)	First	India
Purnima	Yes	All (3)	First	India
Priti	Yes	All (3)	First	India
Piu	Yes	Mainly 'tumi' (1)	Second	India
Shilpi	Yes	Mainly 'tumi' (1)	Third	India
Shanu	Yes	Mainly 'tumi' (1)	Third	India
Shiela	Yes	Mainly 'tumi' (1)	Third	India
Shyama	Yes	Only 'tumi' (1)	Third	Malaysia
Shutapa	Yes	All (3)	Third	India
Tripti	Yes	Never 'tui' (2)	Second	India
Tanu	Yes	Never 'tui' (2)	Third	India
Tapati	Yes	Only 'tumi' (1)	Third	India
Trishna	No	Only 'tumi' (1)	Third	India

aspirated sounds, and as they are not allophones of the same phoneme, a pronunciation error can change the meaning. The other common element in non-fluent speakers was the inability to manipulate correctly the Bengali case system (i.e., to correctly use the morphemes, especially those attached to pronouns to indicate the subject and the object of a sentence). Trishna used the Malay “pun” to indicate possession throughout her Bengali story.

The questions in columns 4 and 5 (Table 8.6) were posed in order to investigate if there was any connection between the generation of the immigrant and language fluency, but there were no clear patterns. Of course, in the oldest group, the second-generation women were not as fluent as the Indian-Bengalis, but whether a respondent’s mother was born in India or not made no difference to the fluency of the respondent. For example, Shanu’s mother was born in India and spoke only in Bengali with her children, but Shanu’s Bengali was not the most fluent in her group.

Thus there is a great deal of interference and leveling in the Bengali spoken within this community.

Attitudes to Bengali

The responses to the questions about their attitude to Bengali was overwhelmingly positive; most women expressed pride in both their Bengali heritage as well as the Bengali language:

Piyali: *Amar shara jibon onno jaater shonge mishechi kintu amar BHISHON ekta advantage chilo jano, eta shob jagaye giyechi amake shobai janto ami kono.. .ora Indiander shomondhey comment korley shobshomoi jaanto ami alada. Actually I... sort of respect hishabey Bangalider.*

(All my life I have mixed with non-Bengali people but I had a GREAT advantage you know, everywhere I went they knew I was... if they commented on Indians they knew I was different. Actually I... received a sort of respect that they give Bengalis.)

Trishna: People always mistake me for Punjabi you know. They're saying "you're Singh-ah, you're turban," so when speak to them in that one "Oh, that's different, quite different," and they love to learn our language. They say it's nice, interesting than other languages they hear.

Some of the informants wished to improve their knowledge of Bengali, especially Shiela, who claims it is due to the influence of her Bengali boyfriend:

Shiela: *Onek kortey hobey. Oi laekha aar pora ta... na spoken ta eto bhalo na, tobey onek improve korchey.*

(I have to improve a lot. Reading and writing... no, my spoken is not so good, but it is improving.)

However, those who do not have a strong reason to improve Bengali see no reason to do so, as in the case of Shyama:

It's not so much that I don't need Bengali here. I wish that I could converse comfortably in Bengali, but since I can't I'm not going to waste my time on it because there are other things which I can achieve you see, okay.

For some, speaking Bengali is seen as important for the community, but not personally:

Tanu: I don't, I might think it's important, but I don't think so I see myself doing it because I'm so used to speaking in English. And I don't even know whether I'll get married to a Bengali so I seriously don't know. So maybe I'll be speaking in English with my husband or whoever.

However, some members of the younger generation can also read and write Bengali:

Tripti: Read in Bengali? Very badly, a little, but the thing is like I can read but when I read a book in Bengali they use a book language you see so that it's very difficult for me to pick out the words and then even when I read it's like I don't know what, I don't even know whether I am reading it correctly or not so it's like a very painful exercise so I don't enjoy it at all.

Only one respondent suggested that there might be a prestige issue in the way Bengali is viewed:

Trishna: The youths speak... they are not interested in Bengali, they feel like they're ashamed of themselves, I don't know why [laughs]. ashamed because I think... I don't know why [laughs]... Because I think they doesn't like Bengali or what, I don't know... Ashamed, in a way not really ashamed that they're Bengalis, but I think they're not interested you know, because they say, Oh my mother tongue is not important, I don't have to remember anything.

Attitudes to English

No one claimed that they did not need English at least to some degree, and the attitude towards English was a very positive one. English is a lingua franca in Malaysia, and therefore useful in many aspects of Malaysian life, both economically and socially.

The younger generation pragmatically views English as a tool for economic advancement:

Tripti: Well frankly... the thing is like, we're not *bumiputeras* [indigenous Malays] so like most probably I'll be working for the private sector and frankly in the private sector you don't need Malay. You only need Malay if you're going to work in the government sector and I doubt very much that I'll be in the civil service. I mean, since it's a requirement, it's best to have it you see, because like, sort of like, cover all the gaps, but more than that I don't think we need it... I think it gives a more polished view of you, a better image, a better perception of you as a person if you can have English and if you can converse fluently in it.

Attitudes to Malay

Malay seemed to be the least used language for these women. Most women reported that they used Malay incidentally, and not for long conversations. Malay was largely described as not necessary in their lives beyond school, and this attitude is largely fostered by the fact that the jobs that the younger women aim for require English more than Malay.

Piu: Malay, to describe something, or in teasing, joking.

Shanu: Only when required, especially when we're abroad and we want to share a secret, yeah.

Shiela: Yes basically my Malay is very colloquial. I can't, if I receive a letter in Malay, basically any official letter, and staying in Malaysia, if I intend, I should improve my Malay. At this moment the company I am working with I don't require Malay AT ALL.

Shanu: I guess uhm I guess mainly it's not our mother language you know, and it's not what we speak daily at home, you know, it is not a language that we fully understand as well as English, you know.

Tripti: [In school] Everyone spoke English. English was THE major language. Then later on we realised that okay, we have to pass Bahasa [Malay] and all that so we all like just went to tuition and all that just to pass the language but not because we felt it was so important or anything. We just need a credit to get a Grade one you know, so everyone took the trouble and that was it.

Most of the women said that the Malay language was changing too fast for them to keep up:

Shilpi: The reason that I do not use Malay often enough is that I'm not sure of the language. I'm not fluent in it you know, and there have been so many changes in Bahasa pronunciation and grammar and everything.

Malay also seemed to be associated with lower levels of education. In the two extracts below, Trishna and Tanu both explain why they don't even speak to their Malay friends in Malay:

Trishna: Because ah, they are like a bit educated types, not the lower () you know, they stay in town, the town people, so their mum also working in this big big sectors so they prefer that the children should speak in English than Malay.

Tanu: More of English. Most of my friends they are, parents are educated. I think English is ah because you see so much of TV over here, English is more fluent, you think in English somehow. I don't know why.

There also seems to be some anger at the enforcement of Malay:

Shyama: Well ah, what I can't understand is if it is a borrowed language, most of it today ah, the Malay language, is very um English. 'Produktiviti' and you call it 'Komunikasi' and the works, it's literally an English communication point of view right? BUT they still insist that you must speak in Malay, so as a result of which I think it's only fair for us to rebel. Because um, they've taken our own language, why can't they make something more convenient? No.

There also seems to be a separation of the races because of the positive governmental discrimination towards Malays (Watson 1984), which could also add to the resentment:

Tripti: You see what happens is that when we move up to Form Six, a lot of Malay girls go to MARA [a government sponsored organisation] or something. We don't really have an opportunity to mix with them. And even the LLB and CLP, these are all private courses, so like Malays don't need to do all this because they can easily go to MARA. So there aren't too many Malays in the first place for me to mix with.

Group identity issues

The informants answered questions about the languages used within their immediate family networks as well as extended friend and family networks. They also responded to questions about their attitudes to the different languages available in their networks. In Table 8.7, group identity issues are analysed, based on the participants' responses to questions posed about the frequency of travel to India, their emotional attachment to a language and whether they perceive themselves as being primarily Malaysian, Bengali or Indian.

Every woman in the Malaysian-Bengali community who is originally from India or has a mother who was born in India tries to retain close ties with India through frequent visits. This community is fairly wealthy

Table 8.7 *Group identity issues*

<i>Names</i>	<i>Travel to India</i>	<i>Love for language</i>	<i>Category for self</i>
Protima	Last visit 14 years ago	English	Malaysian
Piyali	Every year	Bengali	Bengali
Purnima	Once in 2 years	Bengali	Malaysian
Priti	Once in 2 or 3 years	Bengali	Bengali
Piu	At least once a year	English	Malaysian
Shilpi	Spent 11 years there 9 years ago	Bengali	Malaysian
Shanu	Once in 2 yrs	English	Malaysian
Shiela	Spent 11 years there 9 years ago Last visited 4 years ago	Bengali	Malaysian
Shyama	Once, in 1983	English	Malaysian
Shutapa	Every year	Bengali	Bengali
Tripti	Once in 4-5 years	English	Malaysian
Tanu	Once, then studied there for 4 years 90-93	English	Malaysian
Tapati	Every year	English	Indian
Trishna	Once at age 6	Bengali	Malaysian

and thus the cost of airfare is not a deterrent to many. Many families travel to India once every two to three years at least.

Women born in Malaysia, especially those with mothers also born in Malaysia, tend to be naturally more detached from India, especially if most of their relatives reside in Malaysia. However, there was no clear connection between the frequency of travel to India or the length of time spent in India and a Bengali identity. Shutapa and Tapati, who are sisters, travel to India every year, but whereas Shutapa identified herself as primarily Bengali, her sister Tapati felt that she was primarily Indian. Also, whereas Shutapa was the most emotionally attached to the Bengali language, Tapati said English was her favourite.

There is also no clear connection between the frequency of travel to India and fluency in Bengali. For example, Shanu travels to India every two years but uses Bengali much less and also less fluently than Tripti, who goes to India once in four to five years.

It is important to note here that most of the women in this study identified themselves as Malaysian, since they had Malaysian citizenship; these women are very proud to be citizens of a country that is so economically and financially stable. Tripti explains her choice of identity eloquently:

Tripti: Wouldn't just be Bengali. Because if I was just to categorize myself as Bengali I think like, sort of like, cut me down, narrowing my scope, whereas if I say I'm a Malaysian it would

include the fact that I'm a Malaysian-Indian and that I'm a Bengali as well.

Image of India/Bengal

Questions were posed about the emotional attachment (if any) of the Malaysian-Bengali women to India. The participants also responded to a question about what came to their mind when they thought of India and Bengal. Most of the answers by the older women were tinged with nostalgia:

Piyali: *Ekhaney je loneliness ta ami feel kori amar mone hoi okhaney ota korbo na aar ki.*

(The loneliness that I feel here, I think I wouldn't feel over there [in India]).

Purnima: *Nijer bhai bon, ma dekhbo, bhai dekhbo, relatives, hae.*

(I will see my sisters and brothers, my mother, my brother, relatives, yes).

It is interesting that Piu is the only member of this group that speaks of the economic resurgence in India. Her image of India is emotionally detached and based on economic considerations. Her image of India is not surprising, for in the Malaysian-Bengali society, she defines her worth in terms of her business acumen, not by her family as the other women in her age group tend to do. It is interesting to notice that when she does talk about Bengali traits, she mentions the stereotypical images of the Bengali as an intelligent unworldly person. However, although she takes pride in the reputation for intelligence that Bengalis have, she deplores the fact that they are not very good at business matters, a field in which she has excelled. Piu seems to want to retain certain facets of her Bengali identity, but also sees the need to shed other facets in order to define herself in a non-traditional role for this age group:

Piu: Very positive image. Especially now, over the last few years with the new foreign minister, India has opened up you know, in terms of trade and um, the foreign exchange restrictions. Even the education point of view I think the foreign exchange restrictions have been lifted... Bengal I think is a sad case. A lot of Bengalis live in past glory and talk about 'shonar bangla'. Bengalis are purported to be lazier, they are supposed to be, which I think to an extent is correct, supposed to have brains, no brawn.

Because of their affiliation by marriage or future marriage prospects to a Bengali, the 26-44 age group has a positive image of Bengal. Malaysian-Bengali women who have decided to marry outside the community have already done so by this age and have moved to the fringes, or totally outside, of this community. Thus the group that remains within the community has very ideal pictures of “home”:

Shilpi: Home. Yeah I feel very CLOSE, I don't know, something that pulls me towards Bengal you know... not, not my relatives, for the place itself, for Bengal itself, not because of my relatives or anything like that, it's just the place.

Shanu: For me, Bengal is home. I feel very much at home because I hear Bengali spoken all around me and it's, it's, it's amazing, because you are in a country whereby you have to go for a function in order to meet another Bengali, to arrange a meeting like that to meet another Bengali, But I, I really feel at home, you know.

Shiela: There's something, you know, you feel a sense of belonging there. There's a sense of belonging. Here, at times, you don't have that.

The youngest generation is concerned about the economic value of India and the living conditions there. They are more detached than the other groups, except for Tapati:

Tanu: I think... the only problem with India is population, otherwise it'd be quite great living there, especially if you have money. Because the only difference I feel there is... ah... with my education, there I would not be able to get as much income as here... that's my main problem.

Tripti: I usually think of meeting relatives... When I go to India I'm in a holiday mood you know, but I don't think I'd like to go and stay there permanently or anything like that... yeah, I do want to come back... after one month I feel like coming back.

Frequency of interactions with other Bengalis

The Malaysian-Bengali community has only about 400 members and is therefore a small and close-knit community. The members of this community interact with each other at the same gatherings; thus the frequency of community interactions for all informants of this study would be approximately the same. Of course, there is individual choice

involved in attending the community gatherings, but most Malaysian Bengalis meet at least three times a year for the major religious and cultural festivals.

Table 8.8 describes the frequency of interactions with other Bengalis as reported by the informants. They were asked to state how often they met Bengali relatives and close Bengali friends, and how often they hosted Bengali gatherings in their home. They were also asked to comment on whether they thought their family had maintained the Bengali culture and religion more than other Malaysian-Bengali families. Finally, they commented on whether they thought the Bengali community was likely to survive for another generation.

Table 8.8 *Interactions with the community*

<i>Names</i>	<i>Maintained culture and religion</i>	<i>Meet Bengali relatives</i>	<i>Meet Bengali close friends</i>	<i>Bengali dinner/ lunch at home</i>	<i>Will the community survive?</i>
Protima	Average	Once or twice a month	3-4 times a year	Once a year	Yes
Piyali	Above average	Every week	Once in two months	Twice a year	Yes
Purnima	Average	Once in two months	Once a month	Once in six months	Unsure, wish it would
Priti	Above average	2-3 times a week	Once or twice a month	3-4 times a year	Yes
Piu	Above average	Almost daily	Once a month	Never	No
Shilpi	Above average	Weekly	Weekly	1-2 times in two months	No
Shanu	Average	Twice a week	Yearly, at functions	Once in six months	Yes
Shiela	Above average	Weekly	Twice or thrice a week	5-6 times a year	Yes
Shyama	Above average	Weekly	Twice a month	Once a month	No
Shutapa	Above average	Weekly	Once a month	4-5 times a year	Perhaps
Tripti	Average	Once a month	Once in three months	Rarely	Yes
Tanu	Average	Once a month	Once or twice a month	2-3 times a year	No
Tapati	Average	Weekly	Once a month	3-4 times a year	No
Trishna	Average	Once a month	Once a month	Twice a year	Yes

Maintaining the Bengali culture and religion was obviously important to this community, for not a single person claimed that their family had maintained the Bengali culture and religion any less than the others. Since the three choices available as answers to this question were 1) below average, 2) average, and 3) above average, it is interesting that all the members of the above 25 age group replied “average”. This group was the most detached and neutral on this issue; some members of the other two groups went to lengths to elaborate why their family was “above average” in maintaining the Bengali culture and religion.

This table is perhaps the most difficult to decipher, as the term ‘relatives’ meant different things to different people. Piu, for instance, does not live with her parents but visits them almost daily; thus, her parents were ‘relatives’ but no one else considered parents as relatives. Also, in such a small community, ties with those that are not kin can become as strong as blood ties, for many of the older generation grew up in someone else’s home in order to attend school, or during the World Wars. Thus columns 3 and 4 are difficult to interpret correctly. Column 5 is inconclusive, although most informants expressed the wish that the Bengali community would last.

Table 8.8 shows that the interactions of the informants in this community with other Bengalis are at fairly similar rates of frequency, when columns 3, 4 and 5 are all taken into consideration. This was borne out by personal observation.

Changing times

Table 8.9 records the comments of the participants about the longevity of the Bengali language within the community. It is interesting to note that not a single member of the community thought that the Bengali language was unimportant for the community. This strong assertion of language loyalty was unanimous:

However, the Malaysian-Bengali community was also facing a dilemma between bringing in the new while not throwing out the old ways altogether: a struggle of traditions as opposed to modernity. Piu talked about the frustrations:

Piu: When people leave their mother country and come to a foreign country, ah, they tend to stick to what they know, uhm, from back home, what they are used to in their villages or wherever they come from and they don’t want to change. Probably in India would have changed and become more whatever, broad-minded, but the Bengalis here sometimes are so insular, living

Table 8. 9 *Bengali and the community*

<i>> 45 age group</i> Protima	<i>Does the Bengali community need to keep on speaking Bengali in Malaysia?</i> Actually not very important, but to know it is an asset also, it's your own language... If they can learn, they should learn. Take the same interest to learn Malay or Chinese-ah?
Piyali	[translation.] I feel that one should learn Bengali for this reason that no matter how small the community if you can speak the language at least, speak it and understand it, then your, you will enjoy what comes with the language. When you hear a song in your own language, or if the atmosphere is there in your house you will be conscious of your heritage and your own culture will be automatically maintained, without trying.
Purnima	[translation.] Of course... Bengalis should indisputably know Bengali. To keep up traditions, for the family, for culture. Take my family for instance: I have a son, he will have children, so my son has to maintain his language because that is his culture.
Priti	[translation.] I think they should speak Bengali... even in Malaysia. Then our culture will remain alive otherwise everything will die.
Piu	I think it's good to speak the language if possible, you know, yes, why not... it's your mother tongue, you know. And I think if children are taught at an early age, why limit yourself to one language when you can speak other languages, why not?
<i>26-44 group</i> Shilpi	<i>Does the Bengali community need to keep on speaking Bengali in Malaysia?</i> I think the Bengali language is very important because it's good to know your mother tongue... that's your mother tongue, it's an identity, don't you think?
Shanu	I think it is important. I think as, being a close community, I mean a very small community, we should try and retain our culture, our language, and it should be widely spoken, among our children, our elders.
Shiela	Yes, it is very necessary. It's my mother tongue and it's very disgraceful if you don't know how to speak your own mother tongue, I think so.
Shyama	Yes, I think to preserve our culture and to preserve, well to preserve this thing about language itself right, I think it's necessary to speak in Bengali.
Shutapa	It is... it should, because I guess because if people from outside, or let's say if we have visitors from say India, and if we're going to portray () your own culture we should be able to tell them yes, we can also speak Bengali, even by being overseas.
<i>< 25 age group</i> Tripti	<i>Does the Bengali community need to keep on speaking Bengali in Malaysia?</i> I think at home they should um learn Bengali, keep up learning it... well, I mean they're Bengali and the language is part of that identity.
Tanu	I would rather them speaking Bengali, elderly ones yah... because I think it's important in certain ways.
Tapati	YES... like ah, I don't know, you never know when it's needed especially when you talk to your elders, not your relatives, and all that. I don't think they'd really like you speaking in English or Malay. They prefer you to converse in ah Bengali.
Trishna	Like, we all, like the Bengalis, we keep up our tradition we won't lose our identity.

in their own little world, you know, so, it's very frustrating, you're hitting your head against the wall.

Piu is not the only Bengali woman who feels that the Bengali community in Malaysia is caught in a time warp. For Piyali, the solution to this anachronistic community is the infusion of new blood; and she feels that Indians are particularly effective in bringing the community up to date:

Piyali: *Tarpor ami ekhon chesta kori.keu eley-telei ami taader dekhi je ki ki... amar nijer thekey money hoi je maney jaara naki already ekhaney born aar jara born hoyechey tara thik addition to Bengali culture to ora thik bhabey ditey... maaney, not that they don't want to give, but oder pokkhe dewa to shombhob noi, sheijonne ekhon bhabo tumi eshecho ekta desh thekhe, ba ekta keu elo expatriate, hotey parey ba notun biye korey keu elo, ora jodi... taholey amader culture ba .karon sincerely era to chai... ora kintu chai eta bachiye raakhtey, ekhon hoi ki, jodi addition na hoi, ba ekta notun gondho na ana jai, na dewa jai, taar pholey hobey ki oi ektu ponchas bocchor to picchiye thaakbo amra.*

(Now I try... if anyone new comes I try to find out if they... I feel that whoever, I mean, those who are born here and have been born here they cannot quite add to the Bengali culture... I mean, not that they don't want to give, but it is not possible for them, that is why, if for instance you've come from India, or an expatriate comes, or a new bride comes, if they... then our culture or... because they [local-born] sincerely want this... they want this to remain alive, but what happens is that if there is no addition, or a new wave is not brought in, if it can't be done, then we we will have to remain behind by about fifty years.)

Conclusions

Caught between a nostalgia for the past that cannot be recaptured and a present that is a mixture of many separate identities, the individual members of the Malaysian-Bengali community are trying to cope the best that they can. Bengali mothers are arranging Bengali marriages for their sons to ensure that Bengali families continue in Malaysia for another generation. The cultural ambassadors are trying to keep the Bengali culture alive in Malaysia by scouting for new talent. Grandmothers are telling stories and speaking in Bengali even to non-Bengali grandchildren.

Thus although there is some predictability in language patterns, there is also a great deal of individual variance, depending on where a woman was born, whom she marries and what her future plans are. In general, older women act as retainers and teachers of Bengali; this was consistently reported in Tables 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and 8.5. The 26-44 age group, once they get married and have children, seem to become more and more like the older group, as the survival of the language and the community become important issues for the sake of their children. The only time that a normative Bengali shifts to English is during discussions of sex and taboo topics (Mukherjee 2006).

The youngest group is the most uncertain about the future, and therefore the most ambivalent about their Bengali identities. They are also the group that is the most conscious of the economic possibilities in Malaysia, as they have not settled into steady careers yet. Uppermost in their minds at this point in their lives is their own future economic success, and as jobs have absolutely nothing to do with their Bengali identity it is not surprising that their sense of Bengaliness is not as fully developed as among the women in the older group.

However, there are women in the youngest group, especially Tripti and Tapati, who at times expressed quite a strong Bengali identity. None of the women in this group have any animosity towards Indian-Bengali wives, as all the women want the Bengali language to continue and bringing Bengali wives seems to be the only solution (see, however, David and Dealwis's chapter in this volume on Sindhi wives from India).

Since the community is so small, the social network is fairly similar for everyone in the Malaysian-Bengali community. There are three main religious/cultural events every year and everyone in the community is invited to the other community events like weddings. Individuals choose to participate in community events, but sometimes parents force their children into Bengali activities when they are young. Unless the child develops an interest in the Bengali culture, this forced participation stops at adulthood.

This similarity in the nature and frequency of Bengali interactions brings up questions about the efficacy of networks controlling the language of groups as in Milroy's model (1987). Table 8.8 described the informants' frequency of interaction with the Bengali community, but the network obviously has not affected each participant in exactly the same way. The difference in the sense of identity despite similar networks is especially glaring in the case of sisters: Shiela in her earlier tape-recordings displayed a much weaker sense of Bengaliness, especially compared with her sister Shilpi. However, by the end of the study, she was answering the questions of the interview in Bengali. Tapati and Shutapa are also very different; Shutapa has a strong sense of Bengali identity

whereas her sister Tapati chooses to speak Malay and sees herself as Indian, rather than Bengali (also see Mukherjee 2003; David & Dealwis 2007). Thus although the network is important, it does not control the language of the Malaysian-Bengali group in Malaysia. The individual linguistic choices made by the women at every point in their lives can, and often do, override the group norm, as in the case of Piu.

There are also interesting theoretical issues raised by studies such as this (Oonk 2007): is there *one* Indian diaspora, and if so, what is the nature of this? For women in the Malaysian-Bengali community, the move to retain Bengali and adopt English in the home is partially a reaction to the growing ethno-nationalism in Malaysia; their Bengali network becomes salient in keeping external forces at bay. On the other hand, the women in the Surinamese-Hindustani community in the Netherlands have a problem dealing with the internal conflicts arising from community norms and family expectations that contradict the liberal Dutch lifestyle; this leads to a problem of high suicide rates in this community (Mukherjee 2010). Speakers often resist national and community forces that attempt to proscribe language and behaviour, and the refusal of the Malaysian-Bengali women to make the national language a home language could be seen as just another example of covert subversion of the dominant language (Gal 1993).

9 Intercultural Communication in Sarawak

Language Use of the Chinese-Speaking Communities

Su-Hie Ting

Sociocultural background of Sarawak

Sarawak is a Malaysian state located on the island of Borneo, flanked by Malaysian Sabah in the northeast and Indonesian Kalimantan in the south. Sarawak has a population of 2.07 million (*Department of Statistics Malaysia* 2009). The largest ethnic group in Sarawak is the Iban, which makes up 29.1% of the Sarawak population, followed by the Chinese (25.9%) and the Malays (22.3%). After these major ethnic groups, the second largest indigenous group after the Iban is the Bidayuh (8.1%), residing mainly in the Kuching and Kota Samarahan areas. The Melanau, Bisaya, Betawan, Kayan, Kedayan, Kelabit, Kenyah, Lahanan, Lun Bawang, Penan, Sekapan, Kejaman, Baketan, Ukit, Sihan, Tagal, Tabun, Saban, Lisum and Longkiput are much smaller groups (*Sarawak Government* 2009).

Some of the ethnic groups are found in larger numbers in certain localities in Sarawak. For example, the Iban traditional settlements are located in the river valleys of Batang Ai, the Skrang River, Saribas and the Rejang River whereas the Bidayuh are found mostly in Kuching and its hinterland. In contrast, the Sarawak Malays are spread throughout the state although they “traditionally lived along the coasts, where they were fishermen, and the majority of Malays in Sarawak still live along the coast – mostly around Kuching and Limbang, near Brunei” (*Sarawak Government* 2009). The Chinese also live in all parts of Sarawak but the sub-groups tend towards certain geographical regions due to early immigration patterns. “Chinese migration into Sarawak began under the British rule, when James Brooke, the British Resident of the time, brought in labourers from China to work in mines here. Over the years, the Chinese moved on, venturing into trade and industry, with their natural skills for business” (*Sarawak Government* 2009). According to Chew (1990), who wrote about the Sarawak pioneers from 1841 to

1941, the Foochows are concentrated in the Rejang River basin flanked by the towns of Sibü, Sarikei and Bintangor, whereas the Hakka mostly live in the rural parts of Kuching. Chew also described the Hokkien and Teochew as occupying the urban areas of Kuching. The smaller Chinese sub-groups such as the Liu-Chiu and Cantonese are found in smaller pockets. Even today, the Sarawak population statistics confirm the association of ethnic groups with geographical locality, except that many have moved into urban centres in search of better educational and job opportunities.

The rural-urban migration and mobility of the people has led to ethnic diversity in cosmopolitan centres in Sarawak. The ethnic composition in government departments and major corporations reflects the ethnic diversity in the state, although more ethnically-based companies show a predominance of a particular ethnic group. For example, some family-owned timber-based businesses such as Rimbunan Hijau and KTS employ mostly Foochow Chinese. People from different ethnic backgrounds interact on a daily basis in public domains such as the transaction, education and employment domains. The next part of this chapter describes the language use of the Chinese-speaking communities in Sarawak in several public domains encompassing the transaction and employment domains, starting from their language use at home base.

Chinese families' language use in the family domain

This section provides a description of the language(s) used for family communication in three larger Chinese speech communities, namely the Foochow, Hakka and Hokkien, based on empirical studies. The family communication is largely intra-ethnic in the sense that it is within the Chinese speech community, but the dynamics of language choice in families with parents from different Chinese sub-groups (dialects) provide fertile ground for the study of how these oral Chinese languages compete with one another as well as with standardised languages such as Mandarin and English. The description of language use in the family domain begins with the Foochow group and moves on to the Hakka and Hokkien groups.

In Foochow families, one would expect the Foochow language to be used with parents and siblings as well as with the extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, since the family domain is usually considered the bastion of ethnic language use. However, Ting and Hung (2008) found that even in the Foochow-dominant Sibü town, there is a shift towards speaking Mandarin with children in Foochow families where both parents were Foochow and used Foochow for social

and work interactions. This study was conducted on fourteen Foochow mothers in an extended family spanning four generations: five from the third generation, seven from the fourth generation and two from the fifth generation. Only two of the participants had a Cantonese father but it was as if they had a Foochow father because he spoke Foochow with his family members. The other twelve mothers were of Foochow-Foochow parentage. Data were collected by means of interviews and observations. The results show that for the second-generation Foochow mothers who were in their sixties and seventies, Foochow was the main language used at home. The next generation of Foochow mothers in their thirties and forties began to incorporate the use of Mandarin, although Foochow was still the main language used at home. However, when it came to the younger generation of Foochow mothers in their twenties, two out of the seven mothers opted to speak only Mandarin to help their children who were enrolled in Chinese medium schools. A growing shift away from Foochow towards Mandarin is evident in this group of Foochow families living in a Foochow-dominant town.

Given this pattern, it is not surprising to find Foochow losing its stronghold in Foochow families living in Kuching. A case study by Ting (2006) on five Foochow families that migrated from Sibü to Kuching at various points in time revealed that parents made a deliberate attempt to speak Mandarin and English with their children, except for the family that moved to Kuching when the youngest of their children was in her early twenties. In two of these families, the older children were able to speak Foochow but not the younger children. In one of the families, both parents now in their late fifties were Foochow. The Foochow mother explained that it was imperative for her to speak Mandarin with her younger daughters when they were toddlers to ensure that they would not be left out socially in kindergarten. In the other family involving a Foochow father and a Hakka mother, the switch away from Foochow was initiated by the second daughter in the family. She wanted to use the same language as her Hokkien neighbours. Assimilation into the social circle of the children seemed to be a strong motivation for dropping Foochow, as the Kuching urban area is dominated by the Hokkien group.

Besides social integration, the children's educational advancement was another reason given for choosing Mandarin over Foochow for family communication in Foochow families. Parents from another two families in Ting's study (2006) spoke English with their children at first and gradually changed to Mandarin. Both cases, incidentally, involved marriages between Foochow men and wives from other Chinese sub-groups: Heng Hua and Teochew. However, the mother not being a Foochow was not a factor for the shift, as the same phenomenon was happening in families where both parents were Foochow, and in a town

where many Chinese were Foochow and where other Chinese sub-groups could speak Foochow.

A similar pattern in shift in language allegiance away from the ethnic language to Mandarin was evident in Hakka families in Kuching. A study involving a large close-knit extended Hakka family was conducted by Ting and Chang (2008). The study involved 32 out of 64 members from seven nuclear families who had once lived under the same roof as the patriarch of the family, aged 82, who migrated from China. The interviews and observations showed that the parents in their thirties and forties, whether married to Hakka or other Chinese sub-groups, were choosing Mandarin over Hakka for their children's educational advantage. The closeness of the family relationship and the frequent family gatherings of about once per month did not provide a strong enough stabilising force for Hakka to retain its role as the language for family communication. The study found a decrease in the usage of Hakka with the younger generation. The 82-year old patriarch could not speak Mandarin but the younger family members in their teens were under no strong compulsion to communicate in Hakka with their great grandfather. Besides, having elderly monolingual grandparents is slowly becoming a thing of the past, as many of the older generation are educated and are not confined to speaking the ethnic language.

Research on younger members of the Hokkien speech community in their mid-twenties also showed a shift towards Mandarin. Nelson (2009) surveyed the language use of 184 Hokkien undergraduates at a Malaysian tertiary institution located in Kuching. The Hokkien participants were of either full or part-Hokkien parentage. The questionnaire results showed that Hokkien was also losing its grip in the family domain, and the contending languages were Mandarin and English. Nelson also found that the Hokkien undergraduates were integratively oriented towards Hokkien and Mandarin but instrumentally oriented towards English. Thus, despite Hokkien being traditionally the main Chinese group in Kuching, the same phenomenon of language shift evident in Foochow and Hakka families was also taking place in the Hokkien speech community.

Transactional domain

Platt and Weber (1980) divided the transactional domain in Malaysia into three sub-domains, namely market, shop and the fashionable type of shops. In this section, the current linguistic scenario of the transactional domain in the Sarawak setting is described based on studies conducted by my research group in a fruit stall, a photo shop, a computer shop, supermarkets and a hotel.

The most localised setting of the transactional domain is the hawker stall where products sold ranged from knick-knacks to food and drinks. The hawker stalls may be housed in weekend and night markets as well as food courts. Hawker stalls and shops are frequented by people from all walks of life. Thus the clientele is from diverse ethnic and language backgrounds, giving rise to the question of which is the most appropriate language to use.

Ting and Chong's study (2008) in a weekend fruit stall revealed that communicative efficiency was the essence of the language choice decisions confronting the vendors of the stall. Observations over a period of three months at a weekend fruit stall operated by a Hakka Chinese couple revealed that the fruit sellers made their language choice decisions based on the appearance of their customers, basically whether they were Chinese or non-Chinese. With Chinese customers, they spoke Mandarin unless they were familiar with the customers and chose between Hakka (their ethnic language) and Hokkien which was the Chinese language widely spoken in Kuching. With non-Chinese customers, they spoke Pasar Malay, the colloquial variety of Malay that is often used in the marketplace. Pasar Malay has Hokkien words and pronunciation incorporated in the language. For example, "lihat lulok" literally translated as "see first" would be verbalised as "lihat dulu" in Bahasa Melayu. Chinese and even Malay speakers not accustomed to Pasar Malay do not necessarily know how to speak it although they may understand the meaning from contextual cues. The fruit sellers in this study sized up the ethnicity of their customers using appearance cues such as skin colour (fair = Chinese), eye shape (slanty = Chinese) and the wearing of the headscarf (Muslim Malay). They also listened to the languages used by customers among themselves and sought to use the same language. Incidents of inappropriate language choices with customers indicated that in the case of non-Chinese customers who were spoken to in Chinese languages, the outcome was incomprehension but in the case of Chinese customers spoken to in Malay, the problem was not incomprehensibility but social inappropriateness. Three decades ago, Platt and Weber (1980) had noted that the Chinese did not wish to speak to each other in Malay although they could both understand and speak it. While national language planning has ensured that the Chinese are proficient in Malay and can use it for intercultural communication, they have not embraced it as a language for intra-ethnic communication within the Chinese community.

In the sub-transactional domain of shops, my co-researchers and I covered a photograph developing shop, a computer shop and supermarkets. Lau's study (2009) was at a photograph-developing shop located in the heart of the business districts in Sibü. The photo shop was owned by a Foochow couple and operated by two other Foochow shop

assistants. Out of the 150 transactions observed and video-taped over a period of three weeks, 99 were with non-Chinese customers and 51 were with Chinese customers. Because of the greater proportion of inter-ethnic communication, it is not surprising that the frequency of transactions conducted in Bahasa Melayu (41%) and Pasar Malay (24%) exceeded that in Chinese languages (Foochow, 21%; Mandarin, 9%; Hokkien, 1%). The remaining 4% took place in other languages and even non-verbally; in fact, one transaction took place with no verbal exchange as the situation of a customer holding a handy drive was understood to be a request for digital photographs to be developed. Similarly, customers holding a pick-up slip meant that they were there to pick up photographs that had been developed. There were only two interactions with inappropriate language choices, and both were due to a wrong judgement of the customer's ethnicity. The female Iban customers thought to be Chinese responded in Pasar Malay, and the shop attendants quickly switched to Pasar Malay. This study showed that for transactions with non-Chinese customers, Bahasa Melayu and Pasar Malay was the preferred choice whereas with Chinese customers, Foochow was the most frequently used Chinese language.

A similar study (Phe 2009) conducted in a computer shop located in a shopping complex in an older part of Kuching city revealed that visual cues were also used to decide on appropriate languages to use with customers. In this computer shop, there were eleven sales persons involved in entertaining customers' queries about computers and accessories and handling customers' requests for computer repair. Seven were Chinese, two Bidayuh, one Iban and one of Chinese-Bidayuh parentage. Out of 114 transactions observed and audio-recorded, 37% were conducted in Sarawak Malay, 24% in Mandarin and 17% in Bahasa Melayu while the others (22%) were in a mixture of languages. Similar to Lau (2009) and Ting and Chong (2008), Phe's study showed that Malay (whether Sarawak Malay, standard Malay or Pasar Malay) was the most common language for transactions across ethnic boundaries. Of the Chinese languages used with Chinese customers, Mandarin was found to stand out. Mandarin is a convenient choice because most Chinese in Sarawak can be assumed to understand Mandarin.

A similar tendency to use Malay for inter-ethnic communication was found in Ong's study (2008) on the structure of service encounters involving car dealers and supermarket product promoters. In this study, Ong and his friends in their mid-twenties made up the team of Chinese participants playing the role of interested customers on different occasions. The product promoters targeted were those selling shampoo, skin care and nutritious food and drinks. Ong found that the non-Chinese promoters spoke Bahasa Melayu with a sprinkling of English words used for describing the features of the products. The Chinese

promoters, on the other hand, tried to incorporate Mandarin into the conversation conducted largely in English but when Ong stated that he could not understand, she stopped using Mandarin but went on to use some Hokkien in her sales talk. These few incidents showed that even in transactional encounters with customers whom they were not familiar with, the Chinese promoters found a need to emphasise the shared Chinese identity through their language choice but the inter-ethnic communication was characterised by the use of Bahasa Melayu.

At the upper end of the transactional domain are interactions in businesses that have international linkages, for example, fast food outlets, airline companies and hotels. For eating places, my co-researchers and I surveyed the language used during the ordering of food and drinks in fast-food outlets such as KFC, McDonalds and Pizza Hut as well as Western-style restaurants in Kuching [see also David's study (1999) of fast-food outlets in Kuala Lumpur]. In Jong (2004), it was reported that English was used for all the ten interactions studied. The cashiers and waiters/waitresses were trained to use English in a set pattern for taking orders regardless of the ethnicity of their customers. Admittedly in some outlets in rural locations, I noticed orders being taken in Malay. For example, "Makan sini?" (Eating here?) was used to enquire whether the customers were eating there or taking away.

Besides Western style fast-food outlets and restaurants, we also covered hotels, as the hospitality industry has an international edge to it. Ting (2008) carried out a case study in a locally-owned hotel located in Sibul over a period of two months. A total of 60 telephone calls attended to by the Foochow Chinese receptionist were audio-recorded with the permission of the hotel management. From Ting's study (2008), it was found that 35 service encounters were conducted in English, 16 in Bahasa Melayu, 9 in Mandarin but none in Foochow. The receptionist usually began the service encounter in English but switched to Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin towards the end, following either the customer's preference or verbal cues of the customer's ethnicity. Even though other languages were used for these service encounters, there was a sprinkling of English words for referring to the type of room and facilities available at the hotel. For the Sarawak transactional setting, intercultural communication in the upper end of the domain showed the influence of the international linkage in the use of the global language, English, but this was mediated by the local sociocultural setting evident in the switch to other languages during the service encounter.

From research carried out in various contexts of the transactional domain in the two main cities of Sarawak, Kuching and Sibul, it can be concluded that the intercultural communication between customers and Chinese vendors and service-providers are characterised by the use of Bahasa Pasar and Bahasa Melayu for intercultural communication

and Mandarin for communication within the Chinese-speaking community. The tendency for the ethnicity of the customers to be taken into account in language choices prevailed in hawker stalls and shops more so than in businesses with an international flavour.

Language use in the multi-ethnic workplace

Language use in the workplace can be for formal and informal purposes of communication. For formal communication such as meetings, written notices and letters, the official language of the organisation is used with clients, and this is usually English or Bahasa Melayu. In informal interactions with colleagues and long-standing clients, there may be a deviation away from the official language towards other languages. In many respects, the languages used with colleagues resemble that used with friends from other ethnic backgrounds. This chapter presents the outcome of research on language use in two organisations – one a Malay-dominant organisation and another that was ethnically diverse.

Ting (2002) reported the language use in a Malay workplace in Kuching based on non-participant observations carried out for a month. The youth organisation comprised 18 staff members, 15 of whom were Malays. The study found that although Sarawak Malay dominated the office communication, the staff sometimes had to use English at times to respond to queries from the public on the activities organised for the young people. As only three of the staff were fluent in English, the other staff members often passed the call to them to handle. One of them had to code-switch to get the message, and these situations often arose in calls made by non-Malays. Thus despite Bahasa Melayu being the official language of this organisation and Sarawak Malay being the main language for informal communication, English was still at times needed for intercultural communication because of the lack of proficiency in Malay languages among portions of the Chinese-speaking community.

In another organisation with a diverse ethnic composition, the language choice was found to be governed by two main factors: ethnicity and hierarchical status (Ting 2007). In the survey of 141 staff members (64.8% of total staff), 76 were Malay, 43 were indigenous and 22 were Chinese. The study revealed that English was preferred to Bahasa Melayu for inter-ethnic communication and for upward communication. Ting explained that:

English is also the dominant language for intra-ethnic communication when there are dialectal and regional variations in the language, particularly in the case of Indigenous and Chinese groups

because these conveniently used broad categories comprise sub-groups which often have mutually unintelligible languages. The only ethnic language that played a role in interethnic communication was Sarawak Malay, and there is a dichotomy in the language choice patterns for this language with the Malay and Indigenous groups falling into one category, and the Chinese into another. (ibid.: 244)

English is the language for bridging ethnic and hierarchical boundaries in the ethnically diverse workplace because many with higher hierarchical status in the organisation were English-educated. The patterns of language choice for intercultural communication in the employment domain may change in time when the middle and upper management levels are occupied by those who are educated in Bahasa Melayu.

Overview of language used in legal, mass media and religious domains

To complete the description of the language used by the Chinese-speaking communities in Sarawak, this chapter concludes with an overview of language used in the legal, mass media and religious domains based on general observations, as sociolinguistic research in these domains in Sarawak is lacking.

Exceptions were made for the use of Bahasa Melayu as the official language in the legal domain in Sarawak, despite the constitutional acceptance of the national language as the official language of Sarawak in 1985. Legal transactions, whether court proceedings or legal documents, are still in English. In court proceedings where the defendant cannot speak English, translators are available to provide the translation. Lawyers from Chinese-speaking backgrounds often find themselves translating not only the legal jargon into daily language but also into languages familiar to their clients.

In the mass media domain, Sarawak has several Chinese daily newspapers in circulation. The Sarawak-based newspapers include *Sin Chew Jit Poh* with a daily circulation of 360,000 (*RH Group* 2009), see *Hua Daily News*, *United Daily* and *International Times*. There is a large variety of Chinese magazines produced in Malaysia, Taiwan and China available in bookshops and newstands. Besides accessing news in printed form, the Chinese-speaking community in Sarawak has access to radio and television news broadcasts in Mandarin. In fact, the Sarawak radio stations also broadcast news in Chinese dialects such as Foochow and Cantonese, particularly in the evening slots. Mass media materials in Chinese are popular with the Chinese-educated as well as

with Chinese who have attended primary school with Mandarin as the medium of education before continuing with secondary school education in the national language, Bahasa Melayu. The smaller proportion of Chinese who cannot speak or read Mandarin opt for English dailies. The Sarawak-based English newspapers are The Borneo Post with a daily circulation of 86,000 (*Bernama* 2009) and Eastern Times with a daily circulation of 20,000 (*Eastern Times* 2009). The national English newspapers include the New Straits Time, The Star and The Edge. Few choose the Malay dailies such as Utusan Sarawak or Utusan Malaysia if they have other options because of their proficiency in the language and their preferences.

Finally in the religious domain, we see the prominence of the Chinese language, English and Mandarin as the language used for preaching of sermons and reading of religious texts. The main religions that the Chinese community of Sarawak embraces are Christianity and Buddhism (which includes Chinese Taoist beliefs). In the Christian context, Foochow was, and still is, used in some rural churches, and is the main language for sermons and reading of the Bible. The early roots of Christianity among the Foochows began with the groups of Christians brought by Wong Nai Siong from China to Sibü (see Chew 1990). Nowadays it is more common to find Mandarin being used for the conduct of the church service, as there are only seven Methodist churches with English services out of the 124 under the care of the Sarawak Christian Association of Churches. There are also 45 Methodist Iban churches with a predominantly indigenous congregation where Bahasa Melayu or Iban is used for the conduct of the church service. Besides the Methodist denomination, the Chinese Christians in Sarawak also belong to *Sidang Injil Borneo* (SIB) and the Roman Catholic church. The SIB consists of 219 churches in Sarawak with a membership of 59,674 (*Sidang Injil Borneo* 2009), but the congregation is largely indigenous. In Sarawak, there are 48 churches under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (*Herald* 2009). For the 16 churches in the Kuching archdiocesan where information on the language of the weekday, Saturday sunset and Sunday masses is available, 27 use English, 11 Mandarin, five Bidayuh/Iban and five Bahasa Melayu for these services. The Chinese Catholics usually attend services conducted in English. In contrast, the language for the practice of Buddhism is usually Mandarin because of the almost exclusive absence of non-Chinese. Religious texts and ceremonies are conducted in Mandarin but informal interactions may be in the Chinese dialects. For the Chinese-language speaking communities in Sarawak, the main languages used in the religious domain are English and Mandarin.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the language use of the Chinese-speaking communities in Sarawak in six domains: family, employment, transaction, law, religion and the mass media. English cuts across the public and private domains of language use, with the exception of the localised setting of the transactional domain, where the colloquial Malay variety (Bahasa Pasar) prevails in intercultural communication and Mandarin in intra-ethnic communication with members of the Chinese community. In public domains, particularly religion and mass media, the inclination of the Chinese-speaking community to use English or Mandarin depends on their educational background but English is undoubtedly the legal language. In the home and work settings, the existing research on the language use of the Chinese-speaking communities in Sarawak has revealed a gravitation towards a pattern of language use similar to public domains, in that English and Mandarin are preferred to ethnic languages. The shift away from ethnic languages, particularly in the family domain, may eventually lead to reduced linguistic diversity within the Chinese community, bringing about a supra-Chinese ethnic identity with blurred dialectal distinctiveness.

10 Malay Javanese Migrants in Malaysia

Contesting or Creating Identity?

Jariah Mohd Jan

Introduction

Modernisation and globalisation has led to immigration and at times integration with the host society. In Asia, millions of migrants from less developed countries have left their home countries in search of better job opportunities and an improved lifestyle in foreign lands. A huge number of migrant workers, mainly from Indonesia, contribute extensively to the cultural diversity in Malaysia.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, with three major ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese and Indians. Besides these three major races, there are also other ethnic groups and other indigenous people. The Javanese migrants from Indonesia constitute a large number in Malaysia and they are now fully assimilated into the society (Sekimoto 1988).

Multiculturalism in Malaysia was established as early as the 15th century ever since Parameswara, a Prince from Palembang, came to Melaka. The term *multiculturalism* is debatable and has been both championed and maligned. What was once an expression that was supposed to show how progressive, integrated and cosmopolitan a country was – where people from all cultures live side by side without anyone taking notice of what culture the other is from – is now seen to highlight differences between people instead of celebrating the experience that everyone brings to a society. Optimists agree that *multiculturalism* embraces every human being and is the best way of building a successful community, where there is mutual respect for people of all cultures. Others argue that it draws up divides, as people will automatically be broken up into smaller communities, preventing social cohesion and impeding integration.

Identities – create, construct and contest

Ethnic identities provide social relations across boundaries that can bond countries both economically and politically, as history has proven that one country's diaspora is another country's diversity. The study of identity offers a picture about an individual and his/her community to shed light on the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which identity is formed (Gilroy 2000). Globalising markets and media, the flow of people, ideas and values, ethnic revival and the redrawing of political frontiers – these all contribute to identity questions at all levels of sociopolitical integration and differentiation (Driesden & Otto 2002). Today, identity formation is rather fluid, as “untying (dis-embedding, disencumbering) of tied (embedded, situated) is all too easy” (Bauman 1996). For the sake of survival, it is vital to create identities or construct identities or contest identities – whether this is done knowingly or unknowingly.

The social recognition of difference confers some similarity in life-chances and fates on those who share an identity and demonstrates separateness from those who do not share similar identities. Identities are socially negotiated in interaction, albeit in a specific context, and so they are displayed for public consumption to warrant its accountability (Berger 1963). Identities are constructed not only according to the current context but also with both past experiences and future orientations taken into consideration. Therefore, according to Castells (1997) and Shotter (1993), identity is a long process and is always in the making based on fluctuating circumstances, strategies and interactions, as it is something that we ‘do’ rather than something that we ‘are’.

In essence, if the original racial and ethnic identities persist, a national identity cannot emerge which may result in new sub-national and supra-national identities emerging. When the original identities of migrants dissolve, pride in and identification with the host or current nation will flourish. What is the situation of identity of the Javanese migrants in Malaysia?

Purpose of study

In 2008, there were over two million migrant workers in Malaysia, and this accounted for around 25% of the labour force in the country (*Department of Statistics Malaysia* 2009). Around 85% of them are from Indonesia and are generally found in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. This study examines how the Javanese immigrants in Malaysia contest, create or construct their identity in terms of their migration.

Methodology

The methodology is primarily qualitative, and fieldwork in the geographical areas where migrants from Java typically settle (in and around Kuala Lumpur) was conducted. The location selected was Kampung Jawa in Hulu Langat (Batu 18), Selangor, a Kuala Lumpur suburb. The village was founded in 1912. Most villagers are descendents of Javanese migrants from the area of *Kebumen* and *Banyumas* in central Java who entered Malaysia about one hundred years ago.

The Javanese community in Hulu Langat

Historically, the Javanese migrated from Indonesia to Malaysia between 1880 to 1930 in order to seek a better life and to escape from the Dutch colonists who then dominated Indonesia. The Javanese migrants have been known to be hard-working, enterprising and patient. While initially they were farmers, construction workers and timber workers, they now occupy better working positions and the number of Javanese working as skilled workers has increased dramatically. The second and third generations have become white-collar workers and are bankers, pilots, engineers, academicians, accountants and politicians. Although they have become Malaysian citizens, they still see themselves as both Javanese and Malays. Thus, this study raises the question of self-identity. Do they describe themselves as Javanese, Malays or Malay Javanese?

For the purpose of data collection, a total of eight interviewees were selected based on *convenient sampling*. Potential respondents were 40 years old and above, as the younger generation might not have been exposed to the migration process.

Instrument

As interviews were the primary data-gathering instrument, a semi-structured interview was used and questions were carefully designed to provide adequate coverage for the purpose of the research. In addition to the prepared set of questions, which were not necessarily asked in a set order, the interviewers had the liberty to increase, adapt and change the questions when necessary.

Data analysis and findings

The primary data obtained from the interviews were analysed on levels of integration based on the sense of Malaysian identity, combinations of marriages, attachment to the language of origin, maintenance of culture of origin and participation in Malaysian society.

Sense of identity: truly Malaysian

The 'Javanese Malays' refer to Malaysians that have the legal status of Malaysian Malays but who have retained a strong consciousness of their Javanese origin. They have become Malaysian Malays and integrate well with the Malays but still maintain their identity as Javanese (see Excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1

Q: Do you consider yourself a Malaysian or Indonesian or both? Will you go back to your roots in future?

1. HL1: My grandparents were from Indonesia, came here during the Japanese era. My parents were also born here. I was born and grew up in this village... *so of course I am a Malaysian*. My wife's parents are from Indonesia, came to settle down in Malaysia long time ago, and she was born in Negeri Sembilan. My children are all born here... *we are all Malaysians*.
2. HL2: The village was founded by the Jawa community in 1912. Kg Jawa stretches from Pekan Batu 18 to 19. The people here consist of the Chinese who own the shops in the town area and the Indonesians who are now Malaysians. And our Indonesian ancestors are mainly from Jawa, Palembang and Kerinci. *I am a Malaysian*. Even if I were to go to Indonesia, it will be just for a holiday. I do not know who my relatives are.
3. HL3: *I am Malaysian*. I don't go back to Indonesia. I may have some relatives there but I don't know who and exactly where they are...

In Excerpt 1, respondents in Hulu Langat interviewed were born in Malaysia and have been living in Kampung Jawa their entire lives. As such, they feel very much a part of Malaysian society. They state that they are Malaysians. Even though HL1 (line 1) recalls the identity of his grandparents, he still maintains that his parents were born in Malaysia and like him (*of course I am a Malaysian*), they are Malaysians (*we are all Malaysians*). Similar statements are made by HL2 and HL3 in lines 2 and 3, as the respondents claim that they are Malaysians (*I am Malaysian*).

Obviously, time plays a major role in creating a sense of having a Malaysian identity. The Indonesians in Hulu Langat have a strong sense of Malaysian identity due to the fact that their ancestors migrated to Malaysia a long time ago.

Mixed marriages

Marriage is a way of integrating with the larger host society. In this study, 'intra-bicultural' refers to marriage between Indonesians (e.g. when someone from Java marries someone from Madura), 'bicultural' or 'mixed marriage' refers to marriage between two different cultures (e.g. when an Indonesian marries a Malaysian), and 'mono-culture' refers to marriage between the same ethnic group (e.g. a Malaysian marrying another Malaysian). The Indonesians in Hulu Langat tend to marry the local Malays, as shown in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2

Q: Can you tell us about the residential population distribution in Kampung Jawa? Are there bicultural and mono-cultural marriages among your community?

1. HL3: The village was founded by the Jawa community in 1912. Kg Jawa stretches from Pekan Batu 18 to 19. The people here consists of the Chinese who own the shops in the town area and the Indonesians who are now Malaysians. And our Indonesian ancestors are mainly from Jawa, Palembang and Kerinci. *Marriages are mostly mixed.* I had challenges with my mother-in-law as she insisted that her daughter (now my wife) married a pure Javanese. Most people living here in this village were born here. Their ancestors from Indonesia came here a very long time ago. *But many families are mixed.* Some Malaysians are married to our village people and stayed on.
2. HL2: Most people living here in this village were born here. Their ancestors from Indonesia came here a very long time ago. There are about 15 pure Malaysian families that live among us in this village. *They do inter-marry.*

Excerpt 2 illustrates that Indonesian communities in Hulu Langat are in mixed marriages without any ethnic discrimination (see responses highlighted by HL3, line 1 and HL2, line 2). Over the years, many Malays have married Javanese and live peacefully in Hulu Langat.

Retaining the language of origin

Javanese is a language spoken by some 70 million speakers living in the eastern two-thirds of the island of Java and most of the northern coast of Java except Jakarta (Errington 1988). Apparently, because the vast area of Indonesia and Malaysia is fragmented into hundreds of geographical, cultural and linguistics units, there was a need to have a single common language that could be understood by the natives of the archipelago (Mohamad Subakir 1998: 18). The Malay language took on this role due to its long use as a mother tongue by people on both the Sumatran and Malaysian side of the Straits of Malacca. The Malays spread the language to traders, migrants and religious missionaries who frequented the Straits and learned Malay in order to use the language in their inter-ethnic contacts with one another (*ibid.*).

In the early days, it appears that the ability to speak languages other than Javanese was highly dependent on job experiences. For instance, if a job required knowledge of more than just Javanese or Malay, then the motivation to learn and use that language was high. Otherwise, Javanese was the only language used in daily communications between family members while Malay was used in intra-community interactions. Another reason for the sole usage of Javanese for communication was because the then newly arrived migrants did not know Malay. Consequently, the early migrants had a strong attachment to their heritage language. Over time, the younger members of the community have shifted to Malay (see Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

Q: How about the language used for communication? How about Indonesian language? Can you speak Java language? How about you and your family?

1. HL1: I speak Malay and so does my family. *I don't speak Jawa*. No [shakes head].
2. HL2: Yes *I can speak some Indonesian language*. Our communication usually involves a mixture of Indonesian language and Malay... My children... they speak Malay as well at home... Although most of the time we are used to speaking Malay, sometimes some Indonesian words might slip our tongues. But usually when we speak with an elder person, *our tone of voice and words usage is more 'gentle' as a sign of respect*.
3. HL5: *I don't speak Jawa*. Don't understand it at all but *my mother knows Jawa but she can't speak it*. My grandmother speaks Jawa only to my mother and the elders. It sounds foreign to me [smiles].
4. HL7: We *speak Malay* at home... the food that we eat are just like the normal Malay food...

Due to their high integration into Malay society, the Malay language is often used for communication in Hulu Langat especially among the younger members of the community. However, as HL1 (Excerpt 3) states, even though the Malay language is more widely used, there are still traces of the Indonesian language used occasionally, and HL2 explains that they still try to keep the Javanese language alive. This is especially so in the case of the older community members. This indicates that the attachment to an ethnic language or cultural background depends on the length of time lived in Malaysia (see also David 1996).

Preservation of cultural heritage and traditions

The first generation of the community in Hulu Langat still retains their cultural heritage and tradition strongly. There are traces of Indonesian influence in their food, and their music is also retained despite the fact that they have integrated into the Malay community and culture (see Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

Q: Can you tell us something about the Indonesian culture, music or food? Is it still preserved in this community? How about you and your family? Do you uphold your culture, train/encourage your children to keep your tradition?

1. HL2: We still have our *traditional music*... the *kompang* and everything... usually for special functions like weddings... I can *play the kompang* as well... and also *silat* (self-defense), I teach my children... and they are quite talented in these... the food that we eat are just like the normal Malay food.
2. HL5: *Our traditional music Jidor* is usually played for celebrations... welcoming guests, weddings and newborn. We speak Malay at home... the food that we eat are just like the *normal Malay food*, but the special ones would be *Nasi Ambang* where we all eat together in a huge tray-plate, *sambal goreng* (fried chilli paste), *pecal* (tomato and chilli and tamarind paste) *empe* (fermented soya), *ikan bakar* (grilled fish) and we have a Javanese stall.
3. HL7: We have *our famous wayang kulit* and *our traditional music*... usually for special functions... as for *food*, like what we served you today; those are our specialties... and also mutton satay.
4. HL8: Yes, definitely. Young people must always be *reminded of the traditions*.

Excerpt 4 shows that the Indonesian culture is still alive in Hulu Langat. Traditional Javanese music such as the *Jidor* and *kompang* (HL5,

HL2), and popular traditional activities such as *wayang kulit* and the *silat* (HL7, HL2) play an important role on significant occasions. The younger members of the community are exposed to these cultural aspects, which are continually kept alive. There is evidence in the data that indicates that the Malay Javanese in Hulu Langat still hold on to their traditional norms and culture. Aside from consuming the normal Malay food, they also prepare special Javanese food such as suggested by HL5. Thus, despite the decline in the use of their language of origin, it appears that the Malay Javanese still attempt to preserve their heritage, especially the music, dances, ceremonies, food and traditions.

Integration into Malaysian society

The Kampung Jawa Indonesian community in Hulu Langat is seen to be quite actively participating in Malaysian society. Such active participation denotes their effort to integrate and adapt to the lifestyle and culture of Malays. Further evidence of integration can be seen in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

Q: Do you always get involved in tourism activities? Home stays or visits from students...?

What other activities are you involved in?

1. HL2: Yes. I am always involved with the *Kelab Rekreasi Pencinta Alam*. I bring students for jungle tracking and also many other activities like *rubber tapping, mountain climbing and plantation activities*. Many people who love outdoor activities and if they need a tour guide, they will come to us and we will bring them around for these activities. I also experience the *Program Anak Angkat* (foster family programmes), having students as our 'family' for about 4 days or so.
2. HL3: Yes, but there are no home stays, people just visit us.
3. HL5: I vote during elections. I participate in the political campaigns. This is good for this *Kampung*.

It is found that community members belonging to the first and second generation work as tour guides. HL2 (line 1) and HL3 (line 2) state that they are active members of a recreation club (*Kelab Rekreasi Pencinta Alam*) that organises outdoor activities such as *rubber tapping, mountain climbing and plantation activities*. In line 3, HL5 relates that like other Malaysians he also *votes and participates in political campaigns*, which he feels is *good* for his village (*Kampung*). It is clear that regardless of age and generation, there is a high level of participation in the larger host community.

Conclusion

Members of the Javanese community in Kampung Jawa, Hulu Langat, have created a new identity for themselves so as to assimilate with the local Malays. At the same time, they have retained some aspects of their Javanese culture. Being migrants in Malaysia who have adjusted to the Malay community and culture, they have succeeded in creating a new identity that allows them to maintain their Javanese culture on the one hand and accommodate the larger host culture on the other. Whilst the majority of the first and some of the second-generation Javanese constructed identities that were and are dependent for their economic survival, the younger members of the community shows signs of contesting identities in which their 'Malayness' is more evident and they have lost their heritage language.

Moving forward, Malaysia should take advantage of the inherent ethnic and religious differences in their people and turn them into a source of strength. It does not matter where the ethnic groups come from as long as they are able to integrate into society. The nation should celebrate cultural diversity, as diversity is essential to the development of a strong, progressive and united nation (see Raja Nazrin 2008).

11 Conclusions

Multilinguality in the Malaysian Context of Nation-Building and Globalisation

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Introduction

The Southeast Asian region has been multilingual for many centuries, and consequently, plurilingualism and multilingualism has been the norm for Southeast Asians for centuries. More recently, Tickoo (2006: 168) has described language educational matters within the South Asian region as “shortsighted”, as they show “disregard for the sociocultural contexts of the languages in use and also for the forces that contributed to language maintenance and shift”. At the same time, the presence of English and its varieties and functions in Southeast Asia has become a widely researched topic of scholars (Kachru & Nelson 2006).

In present-day Malaysia, linguistic diversity can be described as a “5-C-situation”: *contact, competition, cooperation, conflict* and *coexistence* between languages. In fact, Bateson (1972) describes Malaysia’s sociolinguistic situation as schismogenic, as the relationship between languages is perceived to be more competing than complementing. Bahasa Malaysia has been designated a unifying language for Malaysians, who in essence comprise heterogeneous ethnic and religious groups. English was displaced in governmental and educational domains after Malaysia gained independence in 1957. Hence, today a dramatic decline in the standard of English can be observed. Apart from English, which is deemed the second most important language, other languages such as French, Arabic and German have been introduced in educational settings. The languages of the other communities – e.g. Mandarin and Tamil – have also been given emphasis in Malaysia (David 2003 and 2008b). However, as David states, “the emphasis on Malay, the National language, and also English as an international language, are seen as more important than time spent on learning the mother tongue [...]” (David 2008b: 79). The complexity of this ethno-linguistic vitality and sociocultural heterogeneity raises a number of questions with

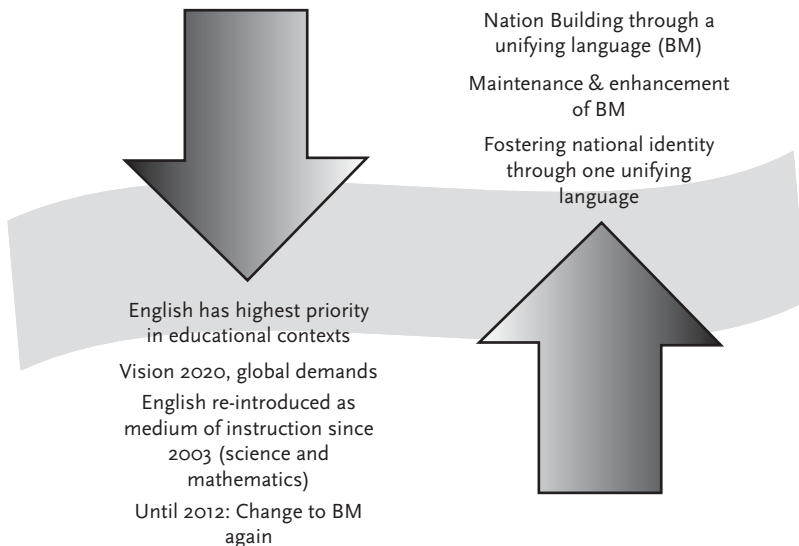
respect to language policy and language planning and have created paradoxical situations in educational scenes.

Background

The position of English, Bahasa Malaysia, indigenous languages and foreign languages is situated in a dichotomous sociopolitical situation, as Malaysia aims to prepare its citizens to be competitive for the global market and advocates in parallel the importance of nation-building. The complex relationships of personal, cultural and social identity, the demands of the society, political twists and turns, and the role and status of diverse languages have caused ambivalent attitudes towards language learning and language use among the diverse Malaysian ethnic groups. The ever-changing dynamic linguistic scenario creates a linguistic dilemma, although the government has attempted and keeps on attempting to find solutions that best suit the country's needs and goals. The ever-changing dynamics is represented in Figure 11.1 below. The wave symbolizes the fluidity, use, shift and/or maintenance of other languages.

Malaysia's sociopolitical profile is marked by its multilingual richness as well as its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. The creation of the nation in 1957 caused asymmetries with regard to inter-ethnic relations, especially in view of language policies, language planning and language

Figure 11.1 *The dynamics of English and Bahasa Malaysia*



education. Fettes (2003: 37) describes such a situation: “the field of language policy and planning has been dominated by what I call the politicostrategies of languages.” Being a product of British colonialisation (see Hirschman 1986; Gaudart 1992; Harper 1999 for a review on history, language education and colonial policy in Malaya/Malaysia), Malaysia faces challenges like any other post-colonial multilingual country with regard to sociopolitical developments, and a plethora of questions have been raised regarding the role and status of the colonial language and indigenous languages. To engineer national unity, Malaysia decided to embrace Bahasa Malaysia as the unifying language, and the former colonial language, English, “... became the first second language” (Salleh 2006). The decision to make Bahasa Malaysia the national language of independent Malaysia was based on several considerations. Neither Mandarin nor Tamil, the languages of the migrant communities, have ever been seriously considered as potential national languages. The English language, which was dominant in governmental and educational domains, was ruled out, as it symbolised “the exact opposite of self-government and freedom from colonial rule” (Wong 1973: 117). Language issues have remained problematic and erupted again when the former prime minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, emphasised the importance of being highly proficient in English in order to achieve the nation’s goal of becoming a fully developed country in 2020.

Political and linguistic issues are tied together like Siamese twins. David and Govindasamy (2003: 215) explain that “a discussion of language education-related issues in Malaysia may turn out to be reductionist in nature if historical roots and the political set-up of this multi-racial nation are not foregrounded.” In fact, Hirschman (1986: 331) argues that:

[a]lmost every writer who addresses the ‘race problem’ or the ‘plural society’ of Peninsular Malaysia suggests that roots of contemporary ethnic divisions and antagonisms were formed during the colonial era.

To make matters more complicated, the role of minority languages (the languages of the Chinese and Indians) and foreign languages add problems to the situation of contemporary Malaysia’s linguistic scenario. In many studies related to language issues, it is often felt that it is necessary to emphasise that using English will not threaten Bahasa Malaysia. Even well-known educationists like Gill (2005: 33), when discussing language policy, have to explain:

I write this paper with an awareness of the need for sensitivity and neutrality required in examining language policy in the

challenging context of the interplay between nationalism, modernization and internationalization. Even today language issues remain *sensitive issues* (see Omar 1993) and issues regarding English cannot be discussed without assuring the nationalists that the status of Bahasa Malaysia is and will not be threatened.

Sociolinguistic scenario

Haugen (1972) proposed the term ‘language ecology’ to describe how diverse languages interact in multilingual societies. Looking at the complexity of Malaysia’s ethno-linguistic scenery, we may better understand how language diversity is embedded in a whole system of relationships and interactions by language users. From this perspective, Malaysia presents a rich linguistic ecology that is more than the mere sum of its parts (see also Wijayanto, 2005, whose study deals with multilingual Indonesia). Languages and society are interrelated (Romaine 2000), and a “specific arrangement [of language patterns] is achieved through political processes relating to education and language use” (Aronin 2005: 9).

About 100 languages are spoken in Malaysia (Gordon 2005). The major language communities comprise Bahasa Malaysia (plus dialects), Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, etc.), and Indian (Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi, etc.), as well as Iban, Semai and many other indigenous languages. Thus, the sociolinguistic landscape of Malaysia is characterised by its widespread linguistic mosaic. The role and status of the major languages and their linkages to politico-economic forces challenge paradigms of current language policies and language education issues. After independence in 1957, efforts were undertaken to raise the formal standard and development of Bahasa Malaysia in order to unify the ethnically and linguistically diverse society through one single language as a tool for nation-building (David & Govindasamy 2003: 216). Since 1967, Bahasa Malaysia has become the “national and sole official language” (Omar 1987: 21), while English was given the status of “the second most important language” (Omar 1993: 46). Malaysia’s language policy is determined by two major concerns: first, a move towards nation-building (*Bangsa Malaysia*, i.e. ‘*Malaysian Race*’), and second, a move towards Vision 2020 and now the 1Malaysia concept. Politicians constantly affirm and confirm that the use of English will not threaten Bahasa Malaysia, the language of the majority Malay population, (see also Ridge 2004) whilst Malaysian researchers such as Omar (1993: 47) state categorically that “the different roles assigned to these two languages should not be subject to any more controversies”. However, following the media and referring to a myriad of personal

conversations, language issues remain highly sensitive and critical, and language choices as illustrated by David (2007) are a reality in present Malaysia. Urban Malaysian Chinese with different Chinese dialects and Indians with different Indian languages communicate in English rather than Bahasa Malaysia. Language is, after all, a marker of identity and “establishes social relations” (Spolsky 2001: 57). In effect, as Pillai (2006) explains, sociocultural parameters and concepts of identity determine choice of language and use to a great extent.

According to Abdullah and Talif (2002: 216), linguistic matters are a persistent potential for language conflicts, as they “generally incorporate symbolic struggles over religious, ethnic, cultural, or national identity”. Promoting linguistic *duality* (Bahasa Malaysia-English) in Malaysia is often treated as linguistic *duel*. The government has consistently supported the Malays in all domains of education, including language policies, repeating as if it were a mantra the importance of mastering English well. Yet, in contrast to other ethnic groups, “Malays seem to be reluctant learners of the English language” (Mostafa 2004: 17). Furthermore, the decision not to teach English resulted in Malays being left behind in global developments, while the Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia, who continued to learn English, were better prepared to work in the Southeast Asian region and multinational firms (see David & Govindasamy 2005).

To overcome this problem, ad hoc solutions such as reintroducing English as a medium of instruction for mathematics and science in order to raise the standard of English were implemented in 2003. This led to a myriad of problems due to what Eggington (2002: 414) describes as “ideologically driven unplanned language planning”.

At the same time, although debates on the role and status of English and Bahasa Malaysia dominate the linguistic scenery, we ought not to forget the attempts to revitalize indigenous languages (David 2008b). Minorities are often forced to assimilate into the dominant culture, and many minority languages are marginalized in educational settings.

One flag, one anthem, one nation, one language?

By and large, language planning has been the result of politics during the past decades, and the current situation could be described as “artificial language conflict” (Nelde 2002: 333), which means that a “conflict arises out of the situation of compromise in which one or more language communities is disfavoured.” We may agree that an equal multilingualism is illusory; however, multilingual countries have to deal with linguistic diversity. In terms of the latter, Malaysia does not differ much from other ex-colonial countries. However, in terms of special

rights for one ethnic group, Malaysia does differ, as positive discrimination of the Malays is enshrined in the Constitution. The Federal Constitution guarantees the right to learn other languages apart from Bahasa Malaysia without restrictions “as long as the use of these languages does not hinder the development and use of the national language” (Mostafa 2004: 13). *De jure*, no limitations with regard to language use exist (*Federal Constitution* 1982: 137-138), yet *de facto*, the situation is somewhat blurry. Azman and Razak (2007: 52) state that “the crucial issue that now arises is the challenge to maintain the balance between the role and status of Bahasa Malaysia for the nation and that of the pragmatic role of English” (see also Martin 2005: 75). Global aspirations together with the nation-building process provoke linguistic battles on many fronts.

Gaudart (1992) argues that true multilingual education has not been taken into account in the discussion on language education. The clear focus on Malaysian identity has placed other languages at the periphery. Yet Baharuddin (2005: 3) remarks that Malaysia is a “State in stable tension or in the state of stable tension”.

Changing roles in language education

Since 1957, national education acts and language education reforms have been changing; education has been regarded as a medium both to correct economic imbalances and to achieve national unity. However, as Singh and Mukherjee (1990) state, there is some disappointment, as promises have not been kept and disparity between the ethnic groups has not been eliminated. Efforts have been undertaken to raise the literacy rate and to guarantee a formal education of at least nine years. In 1971, a common system was proposed and a common curriculum developed.

A milestone in language policy was reached when the change in the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia was completed in 1983. Then, in January 2003, English as a medium of instruction for mathematics and science was implemented (Pillay & Thomas 2004). However, by July 2009, it was announced that English would be dropped and Bahasa Malaysia will be the operating language of instruction for these subjects from 2012.

A thorough look at the literature and headlines of newspapers reveals how contradictory and disunified, if not outright hostile and always highly emotional, language issues have been when discussed and analysed. As Schiffman (1996) points out:

Language policy in Malaysia is a topic that cannot be openly discussed without fear of being charged under the Sedition Act of 1948. The policy, as stated in the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1971, is that the status of Malay as official and other languages as tolerated “may no longer be questioned, it being considered that such a sensitive issue should forever be removed from the arena of public discussion.” (Suffian bin Hashim 1976: 324).

It is only one of many taboo issues – which includes the place of Islam and the special status of Malays – that may not be discussed in Malaysia.

Questions of language education are directly or indirectly influenced by sociopolitical considerations. Although we can attribute a certain degree of success to Malaysia’s language education, as all students are proficient in the national language to the extent that they can participate in all domains of life, there are still shortcomings with regard to the teaching and learning of other languages. The picture for private boarding schools or private universities is somewhat different, as courses in the former and degree programmes in the latter are run in English. This situation creates another inequality, as graduates from private universities outperform their counterparts from public universities and have a broader choice of job opportunities. Salleh (2006: 6) comments:

Universities have been accused of failing to produce graduates competent both in Malay and English. [...] Corrective measures must be carried out in schools, and obviously not in universities.

There is also the problem of racial segregation in schools and universities, as the strong value systems that link languages to culture and religion in Malaysia can lead to linguistic chauvinism. According to Brendan Pereira (quoted in Tan 2005: 58-59), 95% of Chinese students attend Chinese-language schools, 700,000 Malay students are in religious schools and 90% of Indians are in Tamil schools. Despite attempts by the government to introduce nation-building measures such as the National Service and Vision Schools, there is some spillover political and interracial tension which affects the language choices of the different migrant communities in different ways.

English as the world’s *lingua franca* and *lingua mundana* plays a major role in any language planning context in today’s world. Although the rigorous promotion of Bahasa Malaysia has created a modern generation of Malaysians who are able to function in that common language, the side effect of a decline in English proficiency has been unavoidable. Thus, language use has become a major issue in the process of unifying the multi-racial and linguistic heterogeneous population, and this is

strictly linked to its sociocultural and sociopolitical agenda. As Ridge (2004: 407) states:

Linked to all these pathways along the track to Malaysian nationhood is the issue of language policy (with a special focus on the status of the national language vis-à-vis English) and access to educational opportunities [...] particularly in the era of Vision 2020.

In short, language can and has become “a surrogate for other factors underlying the language conflict” (Wiley 2002: 105; Kremnitz 1994; Nelde 2002).

From multilingualism to monolingualism – or bilingualism?

In this section, the role and status of English and its “off-again, on-again affair” (Ridge 2004: 409) will be examined. When we talk about English, we also talk about Bahasa Malaysia. With the arrival of the British in the 18th century, the English language was added to the plurilingual mosaic of languages in Peninsula Malaya. Since then, the strong influence of the English language in almost all domains of the Malaysian way of life has been extraordinary. Reviewing the literature with regard to Malaysia’s language planning policy, a contradictory picture arises. The most important goal of any plurilingual post-colonial state is to forge unity and to form an own identity. The role and status of the country’s vernacular languages have also to be defined, as does the role of the ex-colonial language, and all this inevitably leads to conflicts. As Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 31) point out:

The former colonial language, spoken by an elite and probably providing access to the larger modern world, may not be a good choice if an objective of the choice is to facilitate national unity, since the colonial language may be regarded as a symbol of oppression. [...] If not a foreign language, then which of the indigenous languages? [...] It is, however, relatively rare, in genuinely polyglot communities, that any single language is in fact spoken by a clear numerical majority.

The multiple changes in language policy were rather dominated by an “either-or” policy than by balanced considerations or by attempts to seek a healthy compromise. For the sake of national unity, the common denominator, Bahasa Malaysia, brought together Malaysians of all races. English has been seen more as a competitor than as a companion.

Twenty years ago, Ozog (1990) argued that the dichotomous status could only be eradicated when Bahasa Malaysia achieved the same level of prestige as English. Yet in 2009 the controversy that raged regarding the continued use of English for the teaching of maths and science demonstrated that this state of affairs had not yet been achieved.

Multilingualism is the dominant linguistic state for most people and is not, as Aronin and Singleton (2008) state, “a purely linguistic phenomenon” but rather “of universal and often critical relevance to people’s needs, concerns and interests in our present world at many different levels.” Though a distinction between individual and societal multilingualism is usually drawn (Romaine 2000: 33), we cannot maintain this idea in many cases. Omar (1993: 103) argues:

Malaysia is indeed a multilingual country in the sense that it has a number of speech communities. This does not mean that the Malaysians are all multilingual.

Mesthrie et al. (2008: 35) suggest that “it is now time to recognise that if languages are all linguistically equal they are not socio-linguistically equal”. To a certain extent, Malaysia implicitly promotes monolingualism; in this quote by Omar (1979: 55) the dangers of a bilingual education are expressed:

The domination by the more prestigious language in the school curriculum is a sure path to pushing the other language into a more restricted area of the curriculum [...]. The egalitarian language policy inevitably crumbles in the face of its own implementation.

Bilingual education in Malaysia is an exercise in social policy, as Edwards (1985) says. To achieve national unity, bilingualism models (*full bilateral bilingualism*) were initially proposed by several advisory committees (Gaudart 1992). This idea was rejected after Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. “The question of bilingual education, transition or maintenance, has never really even been asked,” explains Gaudart (1992: 222). Debates on languages issues were less based on linguistic factors but were more affected by sociopolitical concerns.

Despite the fact that language planning has been an ongoing issue since independence and despite political statements to ensure that English proficiency should be maintained, as yet essential steps to create a truly bi-/multilingual education have not been undertaken.

Using the policy of a somewhat forced assimilation through abandoning the mother tongue of a majority of Malaysia’s population has been criticised. Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir has conceded:

The idea before was that people should become 100 per cent Malay in order to be Malaysian. We now accept that this is a multi-racial country. We should build bridges instead of trying to remove completely the barriers separating us. We do not intend to convert all the Chinese to Islam, and we tell our people, the Muslims, not to try to force people to convert (*Time Magazine* December 1996).

Mother tongue education for non-Malays takes place in primary schools, and in secondary schools (national schools) the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia. Other languages are taught “if requested by the parents of at least 15 children in the school” (David & Govindasamy 2003:217). Abdullah and Talif (2006: 167) note that:

This inclusion of English can be considered as an official recognition of the kind of bilingualism that uses Bahasa Malaysia as primary language and English as a second language, also known as BM-English-knowing bilingualism. This situation reflects a state of co-existence of two languages and must be regarded an asset rather than a liability. Yet it is clear that non-native speakers of Bahasa Malaysia are learning English against the background of two languages as compared to their Malay counterparts.

The need to focus on Malay as a unifying language and on English as a global English has had some repercussions. Due to the drastic decline of English proficiency over almost four decades, students can hardly cope with English reference material at the university level. “Despite more than ten years of exposure to English, university students lack the linguistic competence to facilitate the reading of English referenced texts” (Shah 2002: 116). At the same time, there is still a lack of academic books in Bahasa Malaysia; from 1956-1995, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka “had only translated and published 374 books, while public universities had published 168 books within the same period” (Ridge 2004: 417).

Fragile language issues

Language learning and language use, as well as multilingual education, are strongly affected by sociological and socioeconomic factors when none of the relevant ethnic groups advocates a straightforward, egalitarian multilingual language policy. Despite apparent attempts and profound changes in language policies and language education,

controversies and problems with regard to language policy and language education still exist in Malaysia.

In spite of attempts by language policymakers to promote multilingualism, the implementation has been marred by political issues. In addition, language shift is increasingly taking place, and language maintenance is not always a desirable goal of minorities, as "... the young ones, have shifted away from using and appreciation of their respective mother tongues" (David 2008b: 84). Factors contributing to fragile language issues are "values given to the language" (ibid.: 85), economic reasons and identification factors. Language is considered a part of human rights, as Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) emphasises, and is as important as other rights.

Concluding remarks

Although the chapters in this book all closely examine the diversity of the culture and languages in many of the migrant communities of Malaysia, no single book can possibly capture all of the country's immense linguistic diversity and rich mosaic. As this book set out to describe migrant communities, the majority of the Malaysian people, the Malays, are not represented in this volume except in reference to the adaptive practices of the Javanese Malay migrants. Sociolinguistic investigation into Malaysian-Chinese families is also relatively scarce, although studies on the loss of the Foochow dialect in the northern state of Kedah (Kuang 2002) and the effect of the mother's choice on language shift in Malaysian-Chinese families (Cheng 2003) have been extremely interesting. Although language teaching in schools is a controversial political issue for all ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Malaysian-Chinese Schools, backed by the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (better known as Dong Jiao Zong), is very powerful and have clashed with the Malay ruling elite over the language issue in the past (*International Herald Tribune* 7 June 2005). Also, according to Tan (2005), 7,000 Chinese Malaysians chose to attend English medium schools in Singapore.

Currently, Malaysia is trying hard to maintain a unified nation through a national language despite the primacy of the English language in a globalising world. Recent political developments may create new power relationships that may affect language policy issues as well. It is hoped that debates concerning languages may become less emotional and asymmetries in language education less prevalent. As a multilingual country, Malaysia possesses linguistic preconditions and could make optimal use of its polyglottal riches. A de-politicization of language issues and a more objective approach in language policy issues

would lead to the desired goal of the country, to make Malaysians truly multilinguals. As Gaudart (1992: 222) remarks: “Perhaps it is time to start asking what is best for the child.”

Socioeconomic considerations, nation-building, modernization, globalisation, linguistic aspects and human rights are central parameters for language planning goals. In a multilingual world, the concept of linguistic pluralism (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 402) should be taken into account. The functions of languages and their roles in different domains (Cooper 1989) need to be re-assessed in Malaysia and could be a starting point for overcoming disparities between the ethnic groups in the country. Differences should not be seen as a threat to one’s own identity but as an asset to develop linguistic skills and to foster a deeper cultural understanding, a necessity in our globalising world.

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