CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

When we think of Malaysia as a multiracial country, more often than not, we think of the three major ethnic groups of the Malays, Chinese and Indians living together in the country. However, apart from them, there are other minority groups that make up Malaysia’s population. One such group is the Portuguese Eurasians (Chan, 1969).

The Portuguese Eurasians living in Malaysia (and Singapore) today represent a unique ethnic minority group whose ethnic ties can be traced back to the Portuguese conquistadors of the sixteenth century. Three and a half decades after the fall of Malacca to the Dutch, this group of people stand as living proof of the Portuguese legacy. Their culture and language among other things have enabled them to be distinguished from the other ethnic groups of Malaysia.

It would, however, be incorrect to assume that all Portuguese Eurasians are descendants from only the Portuguese colonial masters of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese Eurasians today, can actually trace back their lineage to the inter-marriages of the past European
administrators of Malacca (the Portuguese, Dutch and British) with the locals (Asians). Refer to section 1.4.4 for a further discussion on the evolution of the Portuguese Eurasian community.

This study defines Portuguese Eurasians to include all Eurasians because the majority of this ethnic group are Roman Catholics, which according to Chan (1983:267) is “an important identifying cultural trait of the Portuguese Eurasian community” and whose ethnic language is generally referred to as “Papia Kristang” or “Christian speech” (Knowlton, 1964:212).

This study is concerned with the status of the Kristang\(^1\) language, a Portuguese Creole whose survival now depends on a small community, an estimate of thirteen thousand speakers spread throughout the country (New Strait Times, 28 December 1998:5). For a further description of Portuguese Creole, see section 1.5. For the purpose of this study, only the Portuguese Eurasians in the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca, who represent the largest number of Portuguese Eurasians living together in a close-knit community, shall be studied to ascertain the status i.e. the language maintenance and/or shift of Kristang.

\(^1\) Eventhough this word has been spelt Cristao (Sta Maria, 1982) and Christao (Pintado, 1974), the spelling, Kristang is adopted in this study.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to determine:

a) the patterns of language use among the Portuguese Eurasian sample population

b) whether variables such as age, gender, and socio-economic status contribute to these patterns of language use (language maintenance and/or shift) and how these factors influence the choice of language used by the sample population

c) the attitude of the sample population towards Kristang and also towards the other languages in Malaysia

1.2 Significance of the Study

The Kristang language through its evolutionary process represents one part of the cultural heritage of the Portuguese Eurasians in Malaysia. Though it had never been taught in school nor enjoyed any exposure in the mass media, this social language still exists today, especially among the Portuguese community members in the Portuguese Settlement. However, it is not certain what the future holds in the event that the Portuguese
Settlement in Malacca ceases to exist, a fate that has befallen the Eurasians in “Kampung Serani”, Pulau Tikus in March, 1992 due to development (New Straits Times, 28 December 1998:5).

Among other things, it is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a better understanding about the status of Kristang among the Portuguese settlers in the settlement. These may enable or assist the community leaders of the Portuguese Settlement to come up with strategies to revive, preserve and promote its greater use in the community through its proposed Cultural Heritage Preservation Programme. Consequently, it is hoped that this effort will create an awareness among members of the younger generation to hold on to their heritage, culture and identity.

Equally important, it is hoped that this study can serve as a stimulus or basis for future research on the maintenance and shift of the Kristang language among Portuguese Eurasians throughout the country. Apart from that, it is also hoped this study will contribute and build resources on ethnicity studies of principles of language maintenance and shift among the other ethnic minority groups residing in Malaysia.
1.3 **Scope of the Study**

Even though there are other Portuguese Eurasians in Malacca and in other states throughout Peninsular Malaysia, this study will only focus on the Portuguese Eurasians in the Portuguese Settlement. As here lies the greatest concentration of Portuguese Eurasians, their unique situation may allow them to exhibit distinct characteristics that may be absent elsewhere as far as the Kristang language is concerned. This study will further limit its description and analysis of the patterns of language use to those manifested or decided by the respondents in the various domains chosen (see Chapter 3, section 3.1 for more details on selection of domains).

Due to time and cost constraints, the number of respondents for this study is limited to sixty-four individuals and only variables such as age, gender, education level and socio-economic status are taken into account. The issue of exogamous marriages is not looked into. Since the methodology entails using questionnaires as the main source of data collection, the weaknesses of self reported data cannot be avoided.
1.4 Historical Review of the Portuguese in Malaysia

This part of the chapter shall outline the history of the Portuguese in Malacca before their invasion, their occupation, and their post colonial struggles in which they evolved into the Portuguese community of Malacca. Finally, a brief account on the sociolinguistic situation on the background of the study, the Portuguese Settlement, (encompassing their social structure and their language) shall be given.

1.4.1 Malacca and the Portuguese Invasion

Malacca was founded by the Palembang born prince, Parameswara in the early 15th century and by the end of that century it had established itself as one of the busiest ports in the world. Its strategic location at a narrow point in the Straits of Malacca enabled it to be used as a natural rendezvous for traders from both the east and west to trade their precious commodities. By the early 16th century Malacca was said to have a cosmopolitan population of 100,000 with a total of 84 languages spoken in the city (Sta Maria, 1982 : 27) with traders coming from as far as Alexandria beyond the Red Sea, across the Persian Gulf to China and
Japan, Africa, Ceylon, south of Sumatra, Java and the fabulous Spice Islands (Pintado, 1990).

Realising her importance as a trading centre, the King of Portugal, D. Manuel gave instructions to his agents to proceed to Malacca with the task of obtaining a treaty to establish a trading post (Thomaz, 1991 : 22). After the failure of the first mission in 1506, a second mission led by Diego Lopes de Sequeira arrived in Malacca in 1509 and successfully signed a treaty of peace and trade between the Malacca sultanate and the Portuguese government (Thomaz, 1991 : 23).

However, the short-lived treaty failed “owing to the intrigues of other foreign traders, notably the Gujaratis, who were very close to the Sultan” (Pintado, 1990 : 16) and twenty Portuguese were left behind. Diego Lopes left Malacca warning the locals that he would return later to save the prisoners left behind if peace and friendship were not restored. On the 2nd of May 1511, Alfonso D’Albuquerque left Calcutta, India with 18 ships and 700 Portuguese men (Sta Maria, 1982 : 28) to establish a new peace and trade treaty and save the Portuguese captives. When diplomacy failed, D’Albuquerque declared war and attacked Malacca on July, 1511 capturing the town three weeks later (Thomaz, 1991 : 26).
1.4.2 The Portuguese Occupation (1511 - 1641)

Malacca’s capture opened a new chapter spanning one hundred and thirty years of Portuguese rule. D’Albuquerque set out to establish a permanent presence in Malacca by expanding her trade and spreading Christianity.

This new development managed to put Lisbon ahead of Venice as “the greatest trading centre in Europe for the eastern trade” fulfilling Tome Pires’ opinion that “whoever holds Malacca has his hands on the throat of Venice” (Pintado, 1990 : 16). D’Albuquerque was eventually responsible for the building of a walled city protected by a huge fortress called ‘A Famosa’ (The Famous), hospitals and religious houses such as churches, convents, chapels and monasteries (Augustin, 1981 : 5).

As the Portuguese did not come to the East only to trade, their passionate zeal to spread their religion established Malacca as an European Christian town responsible for the spreading of Christianity to Siam, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and the Indonesian Islands. However, the Portuguese lost control of Malacca to the Dutch due to certain developments in Europe that started as early as 1580. The Dutch having lost their access to the Spanish and Portuguese ports focused their
attention on the east to obtain their spices and other goods. Their systematic attempts to weaken the Portuguese that started in 1606 proved successful with the capture of Malacca 35 years later on the 14th of January, 1641 (Pintado, 1990: 18-22).

1.4.3 Post Colonial Struggle

On 16 January, 1641, two days after the capture of Malacca, there were three thousand surviving victims of the Portuguese - Dutch war from a population of twenty thousand (Teixeira, 1987: 295) and out of this, one thousand six hundred were of Portuguese stock. As part of the surrender agreement, a privileged few were given free passage to Batavia (Jakarta) and also the prominent and wealthy Portuguese officers were allowed to sail on Dutch ships to Goa (Teixeira, 1987: 303).

The majority who were left behind or chose to stay behind for various reasons, fled into the rural hinterlands and townships for fear of Dutch oppression (Sta Maria, 1982: 63). Determined to eradicate the Catholic religion, the Dutch forbade public worships and banished the catholic priests. Despite these and other efforts taken to suppress the
Roman Catholic faith, the Portuguese held on to their religion (Sta Maria, 1982 : 64).

Since they were persecuted because of their religious beliefs (Sunday Star, 26 July, 1998 : 4), the forced alienation from mainstream society during the Dutch rule meant the loss of the entrepreneurial spirit of their ancestors which reduced them to an impoverished people. Their low level economic activity continued even after Malacca was taken over by the British when the Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed in 1824. Neglected by the British, they were reduced to a Portuguese community consisting of poor fishermen "living in slum conditions in what is now Bandar Hilir" (Sunday Star, 26 July, 1998 : 4).

Turnbull, quoted by Sta Maria (1982), wrote about the British Settlements between the years 1826 - 1867 and had this to say about the community:

The Eurasian community, the descendants of the Portuguese who had ruled Malacca for more than a century, were a depressed class nearly all of them poor fishermen ... (Sta Maria, 1982 : 95)

As Malacca slowly began to lose her status to Singapore, Penang and Batavia (Jakarta) as the premier trading centre in the Far East during the Dutch rule and the British’s failure in rejuvenating her economic activity,
the declining economy of the state was an important factor for the migration of the Eurasian community. Dickinson in Sta Maria, (1982) wrote,

'It is obvious that large sections of the Malacca Portuguese had migrated from Malacca during the Dutch domination of the state. From the total of almost five thousand Malacca Portuguese in 1695, there remained in Malacca by 1827, an estimate of 2,289 Malacca Portuguese with a few Dutch mix-marriages'.
(Sta Maria, 1982 : 99)

Chan (1983 : 269) noted that throughout the British period and later on (based on census collected between 1871-1970), the Malacca Portuguese community never exceeded a total population of 2,440 (1970) owing to their continuous emigration from Malacca.

1.4.4 The Evolution of the Portuguese Eurasian Community in Malacca

Sta Maria (1982 : 23) referred to the Portuguese Eurasians as 'Malacca Portuguese' due to the absence of an acceptable terminology for the descendants of the Portuguese in Malacca, unlike, for example, the Portuguese descendants who in Goa are called 'Goanese'. In his opinion,
this did not constitute an identity crisis on the part of the Portuguese descendants of Malacca but rather is attributed to their various stages of evolution.

This evolution can be traced back to the sixteenth century when in his quest to expand the Portuguese empire and to propagate Christianity, the King of Portugal encouraged inter-marriages between the Portuguese men and local women (Augustin, 1981: 3). Similarly, young Portuguese women known as ‘Orphans of the Queen’ were sent to Malacca to be married to the local young men (Sta Maria, 1982: 34). These efforts were taken as a means to create a resident community loyal to Portugal.

According to Teixeira (1987: 279) it also created a generation called ‘Mesticos’, a term referring to all Portuguese half-breeds. In Malacca specifically, they were called ‘Topazese’, a term synonymous with the yellowish brown colour of the Topaz stone akin to the skin colour of the ‘mesticos’ (Sta Maria, 1982: 24). Another term, ‘Luzo-Malay’ was also used by Pintado (Sta Maria, 1982: 26) to refer to descendants of inter-marriages of the Portuguese with the Malays and Indonesians at that time.

The Portuguese community of Malacca today can trace its roots not only to this policy of inter-marriage but also through a different
lineage of conversions of Malays and Javanese into Christianity that happened during the Portuguese occupation for reasons of trade, social position and office as it enabled them to "ingratiate with their white masters" (Sta Maria, 1982: 36).

Consequently, the evolution continued with further inter-marriages of Portuguese descendants between the Dutch and British during their respective years of rule in Malacca. However, as far as the state is concerned, the Portuguese Eurasians make up the most important Eurasian sub-group in terms of number and cultural influence compared to those of Dutch or Anglo-Saxon descent. This could be due to the larger dispersal of the later two sub-groups away from Malacca to places like Singapore and Selangor in order to be with Eurasians of their own kind and also for economic reasons (Chan, 1983: 267).

1.4.5 The Portuguese Settlement

The emigration of Eurasians from Malacca for economic reasons and the prospect of losing their heritage in addition to the declining economic levels of the Portuguese Eurasian Community residing in Malacca, impelled a few community leaders to seek for the establishment
of a settlement ‘to house poor Eurasians’ (Chan, 1983 : 275) and to ‘preserve their identity’ (Pintado, 1974 : 37).

This settlement later came to be known as the Portuguese Settlement or ‘Padre Sa Chao’ (The Priest’s Land) due to the efforts of a French missionary, Father Pierre Francois and Father Martin Alvaro Coroado that started in 1926 (Pintado, 1974 : 37). Their constant appeals to the British government finally prompted the British Resident at that time, Mr Reginald Crichton, to remark, “no doubt this community is going downhill, something must be done to help them and put them in a place where they can be saved guarded for future generations” (Sta Maria, 1982 : 130).

The government acquired 28 acres of land with Dutch Title deeds at Ujong Pasir for $30,000 and combined them into one lot known as lot 248 (Sta Maria, 1982 : 128). Therefore, in 1933 the Portuguese Settlement was established with an initial number of ten (10) settlers. The number of houses later increased to 85 in 1967 (Chan, 1983 : 273) and 107 in 1979 (Banerji, 1979 : 25). Today the settlement has an estimate of 120 houses with a ‘1,000-strong community’ (The Star, 22 July, 1998).
1.4.5.1 Management of the Portuguese Settlement

In order to better manage the establishment of the settlement and due to the failure to form a Portuguese Settlement Association, the Portuguese Settlement Committee agreed that a ‘regedor’ (headman) should be elected by the people to assist the committee with Mr Felix Danker being the first (Sta Maria, 1982 : 132). However, since the 1990s the Malacca state government took over the task of appointing the ‘regedor’ (headman). (The Star, 27 June, 1998 : 15). Today, Mr Peter Gomes is the sixth ‘regedor’ having taken over from his predecessor, Mr Michael Young on the 29th of June 1998 (The Sun, 20 July, 1998). As with all the previous ‘regedors’, Mr Gomes will hold the position until the age of sixty when he reaches the mandatory age for retirement.

1.4.5.2 The Portuguese Eurasian Community

According to Mr Michael Banerji, the vice-president of the ‘Regedor’ Panel and President of the Malacca Portuguese Eurasian Association (MPEA), the total number of the Portuguese Eurasians living in the Portuguese Settlement and the surrounding areas just outside of its
boundary may number up to 1,200 people (personal communication with Mr Banerji). This is just a small increase from the total number of 1,013 Banerji recorded in a survey about 20 years ago (1979:25). However, it should be noted that due to the limited physical boundary of the settlement, space constraint is one significant factor for not allowing more people to live there. Banerji’s survey recorded a total number of 455 people above the age of 21 with 558 youths below 21 years of age. Based on the researcher’s conversation with Mr Gomes, today, the majority of the Portuguese Settlement community comprise members of the older generation (above 45 years of age) and the young (mainly school going children). Though there are young working adults living in the settlement, emigration from the settlement is more common among this group.

The economic activity among the Portuguese Eurasians is varied. There are doctors, pilots, ship captains, teachers, restaurant owners, stall owners/hawkers, government servants, clerks, businessmen, skilled labourers and also fishermen (the majority of whom are above 45 years of age). The womenfolk, on the other hand, are mainly homemakers though there are some who have their own food stalls and others involved in
small cottage industries making pineapple tarts, dried salted fish, pickle, and ‘belacan’ (traditional shrimp paste).

The socio-economic status of the community in the settlement can be generally described as ‘average’ or middle class. There is also a small portion of upper middle class families with ‘one or two’ poor families though not considered living in poverty (personal communication with Mr Gomes).

In 1979, there was a total of 285 school going children and one university undergraduate. The majority (208) of the student population was between the ages of 9 and 15 (Banerji, 1979 : 26).

The community also comprise members from other ethnic groups such as the Indians and Chinese who are assimilated in the settlement by marriage. This phenomenon of mixed marriages is still practised till today (New Straits Times, 6 September 1998 : 15).

1.4.5.3 Traditional Customs and Religious Practices

The 130 year rule and the resultant assimilation of the Portuguese with the local people brought about the development of the local Portuguese culture in Malacca. This culture evolved by the blending of
the artistic culture of the local people with the exotic culture of Portugal (Sta Maria, 1982: 197).

Some of the traditional customs among the Malacca Portuguese Eurasians today live on because of their love for dancing and singing. The 'Branyo', a flirtatious social dance, is one such example. Similar in style to the Malay 'Joget Ronggeng', it is danced to popular tunes like the 'Jinkli Nona' (Singhalese Girl) and 'Bong Bong Fila' (Be Cautious Young Girl) but is better appreciated if supported by the lyrics of the 'mata cantiga', which literally means 'to kill the song' (Sta Maria, 1982: 201). It is the singing of verses by a duo, a man and a woman, to be composed on the spot with the objective of killing the opponent's verse. The 'Branyo' and 'mata cantiga' are popular at weddings and festive occasions though the latter is slowly experiencing a wane as it becomes harder to find participants.

Several religious festivals still celebrated today for centuries are namely, 'Introdu' (meaning coming before), 'Festa de San Juang' (Feast of St. John the Baptist), 'Festa de San Pedro' (Feast of St. Peter) and 'Natal' (Christmas). 'Introdu' is celebrated on the last Sunday before Lent, the Christian fasting period. This is the last day for merry making and fun before the solemn month of Lent.
On the 23rd of June every year, the Feast of St. John the Baptist is celebrated. On this day, all the houses of the Portuguese Eurasians in the settlement are lit with candles in the evening to signify St. John's preaching about the light of the world - Jesus Christ, and children wear green clothes “as a symbol of innocence” (Sunday Star, 26 July 1998: 4).

The Feast of St. Peter, celebrated every 29th of June honours Saint Peter, the patron saint of the fishermen. Ever since 1967, 'Festa de San Pedro' took on a new dimension as visitors became interested in the decorated boats competition and attractive prizes to be won (Sunday Star, 26 July 1998: 5). It is considered the grandest festival (Sunday Star, 18 January 1998: 13) generating a carnival like atmosphere lasting for three days with the potential of attracting as many as 30,000 visitors (conversation with Mr Banerji).

‘Natal’ (Christmas) is another famous religious festival celebrated in the Portuguese Settlement on the 25th of December to signify the birth of Jesus Christ. The celebrations in the settlement last right up to the greeting of the new year. The community clean and decorate their houses with decorations and light the Christmas trees in and outside of their houses. They have ‘open houses’ for the public (to come and visit them)
and share in the abundance of typical Portuguese cuisine and merry making.

1.5 Kristang (Malacca Creole Portuguese)

The Kristang language owes its genesis to the Portuguese conquest of Malacca. Malacca, which developed a multi-ethnic character due to her role as an international port (Baxter, 1984 : 14) had a settled community who comprised Malays, Gujaratis, Parsis, Bengalis, Arabs, Javanese and Tamils (Sandhu & Wheatly, 1983, II : 542). In the early sixteenth century, the ‘lingua franca’ or contact language being used for trade was Malay, specifically, Bazaar Malay. It was probably the language used by the pre-existing slave population in Malacca (Baxter, 1984 : 15).

The intermarriages of the ‘newcomers’ (who spoke Portuguese) with the locals (who spoke Bazaar Malay) was an important factor for the creation of a pidgin language (Pidgin Portuguese). A pidgin language is a language created for "practical and immediate purposes of communication" among people who otherwise would not have a common language (Hudson, 1980 : 61). Bickerton (1981 : 18) notes that it would
have been variable in structure as it was used by speakers with a variety of linguistic backgrounds. It later developed into a creole (Kristang) when it acquired native speakers (offspring of the unions between the Portuguese and locals).

It is ironic, however, that the survival and development of the Portuguese creole, Kristang would have been stillborn if Malacca was not captured by the Dutch and later by the English. As was the case with Macao and Goa which remained Portuguese possessions, it would have been decreolized, in other words, "reabsorbed into the mainstream of the Portuguese language" (New Sunday Times, 6 September 1998:15).

With the Portuguese departure, effectively removing itself as the model, it is not surprising that the increased influence of Bazaar Malay led to the formation of Kristang. According to Baxter (1995 : 49), who has researched the language and compiled the grammar of Kristang, "the Malay element is strongest in the grammar of this language, whereas Portuguese has prevailed in the vocabulary" (95 percent of Kristang words are Portuguese derived). However, the contact between both the languages has also benefited the Malay language as according to de Silva (1979 : 11) "more than 400 words have helped to enrich Bahasa Malaysia". The Kristang language too, has been enriched by borrowings
from Malay, Hokkien, Dutch, English and other languages brought by the intrepid Portuguese explorers who came to this part of the world (New Sunday Times, 6 September, 1998: 15).

Still, it is said that Kristang essentially has retained its archaic features of the sixteenth century Portuguese language (New Sunday Times, 6 September, 1998). This can be attested to by Hashim (1977), in his interview with the late Fr. Pintado, who said that "the older country side folks of Portugal do speak such a language to a certain extent".

According to Baxter (1984: 28-29), the establishment of the Portuguese Settlement created a "cultural homeland" and a better opportunity for the maintenance of the Kristang language through the close contact of its members, "a large portion of which" were "relatively poor". In 1967, Chan (1969: 263) in his study on the social geography of the Malacca Portuguese Eurasians, discovered that the Portuguese Settlement had a 56 percent Kristang speaking population. Baxter, however, in his 1984 study of the Kristang grammar, estimated a 60 percent Kristang speaking population in the settlement.

Both researchers attributed this level of maintenance mainly due to the nature of the close-knit community, their relatively poor status and low educational attainment. These three connecting factors had somehow
maintained the use of the language in the community. However, with more exposure to development, the increasing importance placed on the English language and Bahasa Malaysia, in addition to the possible improving economic situation of the community members, it would be interesting to see whether the desire to preserve one's language will outweigh the practical needs of the community - mastering the aforesaid languages to gain social and economic improvement.