

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a brief account of the background characteristics of the sample group. This is followed by a summary of the findings of Kristang language use in the seven domains studied as well as the attitude of the respondents towards Kristang and the dominant languages in Malaysia, English and Malay. Wherever applicable, the findings of this study are compared to other studies conducted on language maintenance and shift. The final section of this chapter provides the conclusion of the study along with suggestions on how language shift may be prevented within the community.

#### **7.1 Background Characteristics of Respondents**

This section provides a summary on the pertinent facts that may affect language maintenance and / or shift within the sample group. The findings on the verbal repertoire of the total sample reveal that more and more of the younger respondents cite English as their first spoken language. This finding corresponds to Nunes' 1996 study on the same

group where he finds a decreasing number of Kristang mother tongue speakers.

Furthermore, in the current study, the researcher discovered a larger number of respondents who consider themselves currently most proficient in English as compared to any other language. This was also determined by David and Faridah in their research on the same group only a few years ago (1999 : 474). The impact of education may also play a significant role on the decreasing use of Kristang within the group.

Therefore, after examining the background characteristics of the total sample, it appears that if the current situation is allowed to persist, it may be only a matter of time before Kristang loses its status as the main language of any Portuguese Eurasian within the community.

## **7.2 Summary of Findings and Connections to Other Studies**

From the data collected and presented in the three previous chapters, the summary of the findings provide mainly a bleak future for the Kristang language.

In the work domain, the influence of the English language seems to have overshadowed the role of Kristang among the majority of the respondents who work outside the settlement. Their dominant use of the English language among Eurasian and non Eurasian co-workers does not bode well for the maintenance of the language.

However, Kristang is used largely by the respondents who eke out a living within the Settlement, the majority of whom are the women folk and respondents from the low SES group. Similarly, the majority of the respondents who are in the food business claim that Kristang is the dominant language they use with their Eurasian customers. Possibly, with the maintenance of such a working environment, the survival and continued use of the language may be preserved within this domain.

Among the school going respondents, there is a clear distinction in the patterns of Kristang language use between the boys and the girls. While, the majority of the girls may favour English as their tool of communication among their Eurasian schoolmates, the majority of the boys prefer using Kristang with their counterparts. If according to Sridhar (1987), the litmus test of language maintenance is the extent of use of the ethnic language among the younger generation members themselves, this development may surely provide some promise for the maintenance of the language among these young male respondents.

Overall, in the transaction domain, the English language is the main language used among the total sample regardless of age, gender or socio-economic status. However, the results also showed that Kristang is still popularly used by the older age group subjects (G3 and G4) when transacting with their fellow Eurasians and that quite a number of the sample claim to use Kristang with a certain non Eurasian shopkeeper.

Unless, this situation can further enhance or promote the increased use of Kristang within the community, there is little indication that English will soon be displaced as the controlling language.

From the data gathered in the family / kin domain, it is very apparent what role the presence of the older generation members can play towards the maintenance of an ethnic language. As discovered by a few researchers such as Janik (1996) and Martin (1991), this study found that the majority of the oldest age group respondents (G4) have managed to maintain a high level of the ethnic language use among their family members.

Furthermore, unlike other studies such as David's (1996) study of the Sindhi community, this study discovered that speech accommodation is happening on the part of the grandchildren as a notable number of G1 respondents affirm that Kristang is the main language they use with their grandparents. Under such circumstances, the maintenance of Kristang can be promoted within the community.

However, the popularity of the English language is still evident among the younger age groups. Among G1, G2 and G3 respondents, the majority of them prefer using English to converse with each other. Furthermore, even with G3 respondents, the English language is the choice language for interaction with their children and grandchildren.



The influence this may have on their offspring will almost certainly contribute towards language shift as they emphasise the importance of the dominant language, English. This conclusion is shared by Dorian (1981) and Putz (1991) who point out that such a trend may inevitably serve to promote language shift away from the ethnic language. Another sign that the English language is fast becoming the commanding language in the home is that with the younger age groups (G2 and G1), the statistics show that English is widely used.

In the neighbourhood domain, the use and subsequent preservation of Kristang may slowly diminish once the older members of the community are no longer alive. The fact that the settlement consists of around 120 Portuguese Eurasians households might not be enough to stop the growing influence of the English language on the community, especially so among the younger generations (G1 and G2).

In short, as long as the older generation community members are around, the large amount of the younger respondents will continue to use Kristang with them in their daily interaction. However, as can be seen from the data gathered, English is the favoured language for mingling with their younger neighbours. With such a scenario, it seems that the younger community members are slowly moving away from Kristang in this domain and language shift seems inevitable.

Between the male and female respondents, the data shows that the men are more inclined to use Kristang as compared to the women to speak to their neighbours. This study also discovers that Kristang language use is most dominant among the low SES respondents for their neighbourly interaction.

The choice of language use differ between the different age groups when communicating with friends. While the majority of G3 and G4 respondents prefer speaking Kristang with their Eurasian friends, English is the primary language for the two younger groups (G1 and G2).

However, with the youngest age group, G1, the use of Kristang is quite notable as almost half the respondents claim to use Kristang for this communicative purpose. As the majority of them come from the low SES group, their language use may correspond to what Chan (1969) discovered in his study of the same group more than thirty years ago. The use of Kristang is most common among the poorer community members.

Equally important, this finding along with what was discovered among the G1 male respondents in the school domain, shows that a consistent pattern of Kristang language use by this age group can be observed in their contact with acquaintances of the same ethnic background. Therefore, taking into account David's (1996) contention about the importance of studying peer interaction among the younger generation community members in language maintenance and shift studies, this study observes that the ethnic language, Kristang is quite popular

among the male respondents from G1 and may have some bearing on the maintenance of the language.

Through the creation of Kristang songs and their recording into cassettes, a new avenue for the promotion of the language has been created. Furthermore, as discovered in this study, the majority of the respondents do listen to Kristang songs even though a slightly lesser number actually possess their own cassettes.

Their active involvement in producing their own songs may have an indirect effect on the promotion of the language within the community. If such efforts can be continued and interest is evoked within the community, this may be one area for the language to continue living.

The English language appears to predominate over the prayer domain, especially among the younger age groups (G1 and G2). In fact, except for a certain percentage from the oldest age group (G4), English is already the main language used by most of the respondents from G1, G2 and G3 respectively.

In the area of personal prayer, the influence of English is even more notable as more than ninety percent of the total sample profess to using the language for this devotional activity. It can therefore be determined that there is clear language shift away from Kristang in the prayer domain.

Finally, this section examines the attitude of the respondents towards Kristang , English and Malay. From the feedback given by the respondents, this study detects a very strong sentiment professed by the general sample towards Kristang. Their positive attitude towards the use and promotion of the language among the community is largely supported by one main reason: that Kristang is the language of their descendants and part of their identity.

However, similar to the discovery made by David (1998) in her study of the Sindhi minority group, the positive sentiments the Portuguese Eurasians in this study have for their ethnic language is not manifested in their language use. Instead, when queried about their most comfortable language, the majority of all respondents except from the oldest age group (G4) identified English as their chosen language.

The results from the final question in the questionnaire also point to the fact that English is considered the most important language as discovered by David and Faridah (1999) in their earlier study. Apart from English, the majority of the youngest age group (G1) rated the Malay language as being more important than Kristang. These respondents' self-rated perception on the importance of these two languages over Kristang further underlines their growing understanding that these languages are vital for their economic advancement and social mobility.

This study also discovered that generally, the male respondents have stronger sentiments towards Kristang but it is the female subjects who are more comfortable with the language. Across the variable of socio-economic status, this study uncovered a consistently higher preference for the Kristang language among the average SES group as compared to the other two SES groups.

### 7.3 Conclusion and Suggestions

The data collected on the language use of the respondents in the seven domains indicate that language shift is happening within the community. In almost all of the domains, the main language used by the younger age group respondents, especially G2 shows that English is fast becoming the dominant language. In a few areas such as in the school and friendship domain, there appears to a notable level of Kristang language use among the male respondents in the youngest age group (G1).

Though, most of the respondents from the oldest age group (G4) display a high level of Kristang language use, this pattern does not seem to be followed by the younger age groups. It would therefore appear that with the demise of these older community members, the rate at which Kristang is losing its grip on the community will certainly hasten and the possibility of language shift is only a matter of time.

English and Kristang

Between the male and female respondents, their general patterns of language use reveal that Kristang language use is dominant among the women even though the men profess to have stronger sentiments towards the language.

Among the three different socio-economic status groups, the group that has the strongest affinity towards Kristang is the average SES group. Therefore, from the discovery of the patterns of language use among this group, Kristang has featured quite significantly as compared to the other two groups.

Having mentioned all the above findings, the researcher feels that certain factors that may have been present ever since the setting up of the settlement may still contribute towards language maintenance, for example, the spatial concentration of the community (Chan, 1969) and the close and dense networks as attested by and Milroy (1987) that is present in a close-knit living minority community. Other factors that may contribute towards the maintenance of Kristang among the community is the low level of educational attainment among the school going children and low socio-economic status.

Still, there are other factors that may play an important role towards the status of the language within the society. If the younger generation community members feel that in order to attain a better life, they will be required to be more fluent in the dominant languages such as English and Malay, then the status of the Kristang may be seriously

threatened. Then, there is also the possibility that in the awareness of the importance of the language and its bearing on their identity, the community may make a conscious effort to ensure the language is passed down to their descendants. Whatever decisions they decide to take, the researcher feels that the Cultural Heritage Preservation Programme initiated by the 'regedor' and his panel members may point in the right direction to ensure that this language which has so far survived more that three and a half decades will not only be preserved but prosper and grow as a dynamic language and not a dying one.