ABSTRACT

This is a study of the role and status of the English language among the minority ethnic group of Punjabis, with special reference to the urban Punjabis in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to show how and why English has become so important among this minority group. The Punjabis in Malaysia speak a language, which is a mixture of Punjabi and Hindi or as Khubchandini (1963) points out 'Kari Boli'. According to Khubchandini, the reason this happens is because the spoken versions of Hindi and Punjabi are quite similar and as such, they are mutually intelligible to speakers of either language. The major difference is the accent and some lexical items.

The study attempts to investigate the effects of the "English takeover" or "the language shift" among this ethnic group and the growing importance of English in various domains.

In most Punjabi families, there has been a noticeable tendency for a language shift to English. English has become the first language and the Punjabi language has moved to the position of a second language for the first generation of Malaysian Punjabis, and a foreign language for the second generation.

This study, in its first chapter, familiarises the reader with the group of people under study, that is the Punjabis in Malaysia, by looking at their historical background. This is followed by a review of literature concerning the effects of adapting the dominant language, which in this case is English. It discusses how a

language shift occurs among such a minority group. Next the study looks at the methodology used for collecting the relevant data, stating the types of method chosen and the reasons for choosing them. The next chapter analyses the findings of the data collected. Finally, the concluding chapter explains how English began to play a major role in the lives of the Punjabis and why it has grown to be so important. It outlines the role and status of English as the first language, in the intimate and formal domains of this minority group of people in a dominantly foreign environment.