

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Overview

The objectives of this study are twofold; first, to find out if there has been a language shift and if so, proceed to investigate the domains which have experienced this language shift from Punjabi to English. And second, to examine the role and status of English among the urban Hindu and Sikh Punjabi ethnic group.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In urban areas, when two Punjabis meet they will greet each other with “Namestay” or “Satsriakal” (Hello). The next words will be “How are you?” Apart from the initial greeting in the mother tongue, the rest of their conversation tends to be in the English language. English dominates the social domain of the majority of the urban Punjabis. Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language of the country, takes the position of a second language while the mother tongue has moved down the hierarchy to the position of a third language.

1.4 Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to create awareness, among the younger generation of Malaysian Punjabis, about the increasing role played by English in various domains of their life and the decreasing role played by their mother tongue. It is hoped that this study will lead them to embark on a course of action that will help the Punjabis adjust to the importance of English in their lives.

1.5 Limitations of Study

The study concentrated only in selected urban areas because of the following reasons:

1. The Punjabi families are scattered in small numbers in all the states of Malaysia. Therefore, the constraints of cost and time limit the scope of study.
2. The concentration of the Punjabi population is mainly in the urban areas, such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Malacca and they have a greater exposure to the English language than rural areas, through television, movies and contact with foreign businesses and tourists.
3. Furthermore, according to Fishman (1964), the best place to study a language shift is an urban area. He says that the urban dwellers are more inclined to experience a language shift than the rural dwellers that tend to be more conservative and more isolated. There is limited scope of study in language shift in rural areas and small towns.