CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the following aspects. Firstly, it deals with how and why language shift occurs. Next, it goes on to show the domains of language shift and the role of interlocutors in this language shift. Finally, it will discuss codeswitching, which is one of the signs of a language shift taking place and the role of the media in promoting English amongst the members of the Punjabi ethnic group.

3.1 Language Shift

There are various theories, which state that when minority communities and their respective language come into contact with a majority community, changes in the use of the ethnic language inevitably occur.

Aitchison (1991), in her findings on language shift describes this as being a really slow process. According to her, the process of language shift happens so slowly over many decades that it is quite impossible to detect its occurrence. With the first migration of the Punjabi community into Malaysia in 1940 and the necessity to adapt to the new multilingual environment, the Punjabi ethnic
minority used the language of the colonial rulers to survive in this new British colony. Hence, it is very probable that 1940's marked the beginning of the process of language shift among the Punjabi community in Malaysia.

David (1996), in her research on language shift says this process could lead to two kinds of changes. The first is a change in the linguistic form of an ethnic language. Contact situations will lead to changes in phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax of the minority language. The second change according to her findings is a gradual movement away from the habitual use of an ethnic language at certain functions and the increasing use of another, more dominating language, which in this case is English, in its place. This slow and continuous process of the dominant language replacing the subordinate language is known as a language shift.

Gal (1979) found that the villagers of Breton, speakers in France, Welsh speakers in Great Britain and Slovenian speakers in Austria had taken over 300 years for a language shift to the national language of those countries. She points out that in the urban centres of Papua New Guinea, tribal languages have been receding for several generations in favour of the English language. These language changes have been socially motivated.

How does this language shift occur? Aitchison (1991) in her theory of language shift says that a language dies not because a community has forgotten how to speak it, but because another language has gradually ousted the old one as the dominant language for political and social reasons. Aitchison(1991) points out that the young generation will be exposed from a young age to a more
fashionable and socially useful language at school. As a result, there will be a decrease in the number of people who speak the mother tongue.

According to Fasold (1984), before the Second World War, the two language groups in Oberwart were parallel rather than competing. Each language had its own kind of prestige and each group considered the other to be outsiders. More recently it has been found that the younger speakers use German and only the older ones use Hungarian. This pattern suggests that German is gaining at the expense of Hungarian as time goes on.

According to these theories, only isolated pockets of rural speakers of the ethnic language will remain. Even these isolated pockets, on coming into contact with a socially and economically more useful language, will become bilingual to survive. Fasold (1984) in his study of East Sutherland, concluded from his findings that the first generation of bilinguals are fluent in both languages of Gaelic and English. The use of the two languages within the family is strongly influenced by the age of the addressee. Fasold (1984:225) says that the grandparents would use and expect Gaelic, parents would use Gaelic with other people of their own age and the ascending generation, but use English with their children and expect it in return. For these parents, English coexists with Gaelic in the home domain. The result is that the children grow up being able to understand Gaelic but not speak it. In families such as this, Gaelic is almost sure to die out in the next generation, when the child of these passive bilinguals grow up totally monolingual in English.
Another theory regarding language shift is that if two languages take specific and complimentary functions in different settings, the result could be what is classified as “diglossia”, where for instance, the minority language is used in the home and the dominant language in the work setting. Diglossia, according to Fishman (1972), is a situation where different languages have different functions, one generally being used in the high domains of family and home, while another for intercommunity communications. Putz (1992) indicates such a situation in Namibia where Afrikaans is a lingua franca in certain areas such as farms and other local places but English is used for inter communal communication. In time, one of the languages may become so often used that it takes more and more of the communicative function of the minority language.

As a result, there is a movement away from the ethnic language to English. In some cases it may lead to the gradual death of the ethnic language. Findings by researchers such as Crystal (1995) and Rigsby (1987), show that a language dies everyday. Rigsby, in his research findings says:

“Over the last few decades there has been an accelerating loss of indigenous languages and a shift to varieties of the mainstream language, English.”

(Rigsby 1987: 359)

This study intends to show that this is the exact situation, which has occurred among the Punjabi community in Malaysia. It intends to prove that a slow language shift has occurred with the community adapting more English words into their conversations. The situation of the Punjabi community is similar
to that of the people in Eastern Sutherland. Fasold (1984) found home, work and religion as domains that favoured the use of Gaelic, whereas national secular institutions such as schools and court, public life and written uses favoured English. The interlocutor is very important in determining the chosen language. The intercommunity members are addressed in English, as are intracommunity members, if an English monolingual is considered part of the conversation. Many of the third generation Malaysian Punjabis are monolingual. According to Fasold (1984), the young generation, usually feel that it is perfectly normal to use English in both the intimate and formal domains. Hence, when a speech community chooses a new language in domains formally reserved for the mother tongue, it is a sign that a language shift is in progress.

3.2 Domains

According to Fishman (1972), a community is expected to be sensitive to the domain in which interaction takes place. Some of the major domains he mentions are the intimate domain which includes the family, home, place of worship, and the formal domain which includes the school, workplace, administration and other formal spheres. Bilinguals know from early childhood the appropriate conditions under which to speak each of their languages. They may use the mother tongue of Punjabi to converse with certain members of the family like parents, grandparents and intimate friends, and English with others with whom they have less intimacy. It is found that some communities have a rigid separation of functions of their two languages. Putz (1992), states that
English in Namibia plays an important role in the formal domain cluster, that is government, administration, education, judiciary, science and technology and the domain of the family network is considered a crucial place where the ethnic language is best maintained.

Khoo, Kreher and Wong (1993), in their research findings, state that despite the ethnic language being a literary language, a language shift to English occurs due to the discrepancy in language use. They indicate that a language shift is not a result of the ethnic language being below par, but a result of environmental circumstances as it has hardly any place in schooling and none in statecraft.

This study finds, most researchers agree that if the language policy and the mass media in a host environment do not support the use of the minority language, then its use is likely to be confined to the home, religion and community interaction. The religious domain is traditionally a stronghold for language maintenance.

However, studies have shown that this is not necessarily true. David (1996), in her research has found that for some communities, religion helps to maintain the use of their ethnic language, while for others, the role of religion in language maintenance is insignificant. The inconsistent role of religion in ethnic language maintenance may be due to the fact that for some religions, the ethnic language need not be the only language used in a religious domain. (In the Hindu religion for example, Sanskrit is the main language used rather than Punjabi).
Aitchison (1991:117) points out that in every situation "Language alters as the needs of the users alter." This is obvious in East Sutherland (Fasold 1984) where the language used in the domain of religion has recently shifted from Gaelic to English, unlike in Oberwart where Hungarian is still used in the domain of religion.

3.3 Case of a minority group

- In the case of a minority group, like the Punjabis in Malaysia, non-usage of the ethnic language is unavoidable in some formal domains like employment and education. In order to communicate with non-Punjabis, this small community has to use the majority language, which may be English or Bahasa Melayu in the formal domains. Fishman (1991) states that the ethnic language decreases with the increasing use of the dominant language of the environment.

According to Winter (1984), the pressure for language shift among cultural and linguistic minorities in Western Europe and the United States of America, similarly stems from the limited geographical range of their application. There is a necessity for the speakers to learn the majority or standard language in order to get a higher education and get ahead in society.

Therefore, ethnic language maintenance depends on whether the ethnic language is used in the domains of home, religion and intracommunity gatherings. Hence while in the formal domain cluster, there is a gradual language shift to English, the home domain is usually the last hope of language maintenance as
Roksana Abdullah (1989), found in her study of language choice among the minority Malay community in Geylang, Singapore.

### 3.4 Role of Interlocutors

In his studies, Dorain (1981) found that interlocutors play an important role in language choice or code selection. He states that older interlocutors play a very important role in the maintenance of an ethnic language. However, there is no guarantee that there would be language maintenance.

Fasold (1984) found in Eastern Sutherland that the domains of work allowed a choice of either Gaelic or English depending on the setting, interlocutors and function. The subject of speech is a major factor in determining the language selected. Gal (1984) found that there was a switch from Hungarian to German in an exchange of advice. Friendly suggestions were in Hungarian and expert counsel was in German. German in Austria and English in Malaysia are favoured by bilinguals as the proper languages of modern scientific and technological education.

According to Sridhar (1985), the ultimate test to find out if there is language maintenance is to study the extent of use of the ethnic language, in various situations, by the younger generation among themselves. A low level of use of the ethnic language among the younger educated group was found to indicate a language shift.

Fasold (1984) found that the age related patterns in East Sutherland (Scotland) are similar to the situation in Oberwart (Austria). The older speakers
in East Sutherland are most comfortable with Gaelic and the younger speakers are better in English. Clyne (1991:114), says that children act as agents of language shift whereas grandparents (especially the overseas born) are catalysts of community language use. The use of the two languages in the family domain is strongly influenced by the age of the addressee. In her study of the people of Oberwart Gal (1979), found that in recent years all young adults have begun to use German during informal exchanges with acquaintances of their own age.

It is therefore important to determine the language used by the younger members of the community in the interaction, both with their peers and with their elders to determine whether a language shift, in this case to English, has occurred.

A drop in ethnic language competence among the younger community members, according to David (1996), can cause the younger members to shift to another language in their daily interaction. If the younger members constitute a large proportion of the ethnic community, ethnic language maintenance will be adversely affected. In time, the non-ethnic language will become the norm and regular mode of communication for the majority of the community members.

Language shift is correlated to age as well as the speaker’s social environment and status. According to Gal (1979), the people of Oberwart used the choice of language as a sign of social status. She says that the young generation use language choice as a symbol of peasantness of the speaker’s social network. The ethnic language of Hungarian indicates a lower social strata compared to speakers of German who belong to a higher strata.
Similarly, among the urban residents according to Asmah Haji Omar (1993) there is a gradual language shift from the mother tongue to the English language among the young. This is because, in families belonging to the upper class of the social ladder, English is used in the house with the intention of helping children to become proficient in it at school and outside the home. She says that the English language has imposed a pressure of prestige among the people, it serves as a social identification of the individual and as a symbol of urbanisation.

How does English become so important among the younger generation of a particular society? The present young generation live in nucleated family units and have lesser contact with the older generation, compared to what they would have if they lived in extended family units. As a result, the children are not exposed to the mother tongue as much as they should be. Aitchison (1991), states that under normal circumstances, members of the younger generation will learn a language from their parents as a mother tongue but will be exposed from a young age to another more fashionable and socially useful language at school. Eventually, according to findings by Gal (1979) the young adults of the society begin to use only the language studied in school, which in the case of the Oberwart people was German.

What is the most likely thing to happen? In this situation, speakers of the old language will continue speaking it but will start borrowing from the dominant language. Gal (1979) says that each subsequent generation in Oberwart has introduced more and more German into its speech. Thus, there is codeswitching
where the old language slowly demolishes itself by bringing in more and more words from the prestige language.

3.5 Codeswitching

Valdes (1978) says that the process of codeswitching is a step in the process of language shift. He says that in essence, codeswitching involves introducing into the content of one language, stretches of speech of another language. Codeswitching is the phenomenon that reflects the change from one language or code to another in the speech of a particular speaker in a particular situation. Valdes says that, codeswitching maybe used to achieve two main objectives:

a) To fill a linguistic or conceptional gap.

b) For purposes of multicommunication

When bilingual speakers of English and Punjabi are speaking Punjabi, they may introduce a word, phrase, clause or sentence that is recognisably English in both pronunciation and form. They are then said to have codeswitched into English.

Asmah Haji Omar (1993) says that English is an epitome of fashion in the society. It is normal for people of the same vernacular to converse in English with no legitimate excuse whatsoever other than the fact that they can express themselves better in the language in which they are given their education. Codeswitching, according to David (1996), is triggered by imperfect knowledge of the ethnic language. Valdes (1978), in his study found that borrowing or codeswitching occurred when there is no exact equivalent for certain ethnic terms
in the English language. Another reason is because words in the new language are used so frequently that they become accessible to the bilingual speakers even though there might be perfectly acceptable words in the ethnic language.

Stylistic switching, according to Valdes (1978), is used as a personal rhetorical device to add colour to an utterance, to emphasize, to contrast, to underscore context or to even create a new meaning. Codeswitching is used when there is lack of knowledge of the vocabulary, for purpose of style, social reasons like topic, setting and education level of participants.

The nature and extent of use of codeswitching and the reasons for codeswitching and code mixes are varied. It could be on one hand, due to a desire to express a closer relationship, to signal group membership and shared ethnicity. Valdes (1978) gives intimacy as an additional reason when he says:

"codeswitching is known as identity markers

and are used to express solidarity and intimacy

between two speakers of the same ethnic group."

(Valdes 1978: 7)

Valdes (1978: 7) found that members of bilingual speech communities are generally quite comfortable using one language or the other in any situation. He indicates through an example of a situation in a playground where he found codeswitching taking place on the grounds among children themselves and with certain adults with whom they may have established some rapport. Much of the peer group interaction involved codeswitching regardless of the base language.
Valdes found boys playing games in English suddenly switch to Spanish for certain displays of hostility that include selected insults and threats.

Codeswitching by older members of the community maybe prompted by different factors from those prompting the code mixes and codeswitching of the younger members. The older members maybe forced to codeswitch to enable themselves to be understood by the younger generation, whose proficiency level in the ethnic language maybe limited.

Aitchison (1991), says that codeswitching, due to limited proficiency, gradually leads to extreme borrowing until the ethnic language slowly demolishes itself and destroys its own identity, by bringing in more and more forms of the prestige language, English. She goes on to say that in some circumstances the old language may disappear.

3.6 Media variance

Khubchandini (1963) found that when English is required by tertiary education, business sector and even government administration, most people choose to learn English. Subsequently, the majority of the ethnic group tends to read English newspapers, periodicals, entertainment and serious literature.

The realisation that one's mother tongue cannot be used in all types of formalised communication, government activities, travel etc often makes people indifferent to interference in it. Hence, the rate of literacy in the mother tongue drops and if the majority is illiterate in the mother tongue, there is a decline in the language competence. David (1996) points out that this inability to read and write
acts as a further catalyst to the language shift. The extent of language maintenance and shift may depend on the extent to which the skills of speaking, reading and writing are retained. For instance (David 1996:52), if the majority of the ethnic community cannot read or write in the ethnic language, this indicates a movement away from the ethnic language. A study of media variance helps to determine the extent of language maintenance or shift. Media variance is the difference in language competence among community members with respect to these language skills. A signal for potential language shift appears with deteriorating literary skills in the ethnic language between the older and younger members of the community.

Rigsby (1987) also discusses media variance as a step towards language shift. According to him, if there is no regular use of the ethnic language among the ethnic community, people lose ethnic writing skills. The young adults, teenagers and children become semi-speakers (who are able to understand the language but not able to speak, read or write the mother tongue) and there is a tendency for a language shift to English. Fasold (1984), found a similar situation in his study of the people of East Sutherland. The children and teenagers grew up able to understand Gaelic but not speak it. He says that in such families, Gaelic language is almost sure to die out when the children of these passive bilinguals grow up totally monolingual in English.