CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.0 Overview

This chapter concludes the study made on the role and status of the English language.

6.1 Language Shift

Analysis of the data collected representing the ethnic Punjabi people shows that there has been a definite language shift to the English language. According to Aitchison (1991), a person’s speech can gradually alter over the years in the direction of those around. This study firstly looks to see if there has been a language shift. It traces the early history of the migrants to find out what could have happened to the Punjabi individual in his language learning process to result in a shift away from the mother tongue to the English language. This study finds, through the three generations studied, that the Punjabis found their mother tongue alter to the English language as their needs altered. They adapted and assimilated to survive in the multilingualist environment found in Malaysia.

The process of language shift began, according to our analysis, gradually from the time of the arrival of the migrants, continued through generation A, generation B and finally has resulted in the youngest generation experiencing a major language shift to English. The background of the urban people with very
little exposure to Punjabi but maximum exposure to English in a multiracial society stimulated the learning and use of the English language. 96% of generation A had an education in the English medium. This generation formed the roots of generation B and the third generation of schoolchildren. According to Harjinder (1997) the new generation, which in the case of this study consists of the third generation, has grown up in a socio-linguistic background which is actually an "English-Punjabi" environment, where the parents and relatives tend to converse among themselves in English. Accordingly, this study finds that the child's exposure to English is far more than to Punjabi. Findings in this study show that 84% of generation A, 80% of generation B indicate English as the main language spoken and it results in 100% of the third generation being able to speak English. Comparatively 16% of generation A and nil of generation B indicate Punjabi as their main language. The findings show that there has been a language shift and this is due to minimal exposure to the Punjabi language and an increase in exposure to English via television, movies and socialising with friends of other races.

6.2 Areas of Language Shift.

According to Valdes (1978), a typical immigrant community undergoes four stages of changes through the various generations. He outlines the stages with the initial stage being when the immigrants learn English through their mother tongue and use it only in the domains of work. This study found that a similar situation had occurred among the urban Punjabis. The study looks at the
history of the Punjabis from the time when the migrants first came to Malaysia during the British rule. It finds that the use of the English language was mostly in the work domain to enable the Punjabi individual to survive in a multiracial society as well as be able to communicate in the language of the rulers.

The second stage according to Valdes (1978) begins when the individual learns more English and carries out intracommunity communication in English. Similarly, this study found that 50% of generation A, 61% of generation B use English and 43% of the third generation use English as the main language in the social domain both at intercommunity and intracommunity levels. English is the main language used when the members of the Punjabi ethnic group are attending a party or are having a social function or are having a conversation with their peers at intracommunity or intercommunity level.

Valdes (1978) says that in the third stage the individual becomes bilingual and domains overlap. Morrow (1987) points out that at this stage English loanwords find their way into practically every domain and become so entrenched in their usage, as they did in Japan, that speakers would be hard pressed to carry out a conversation without them. This study found a similar situation among the Punjabi ethnic group. Generation A members who had had an English education or grew up in an English speaking environment had become bilingual with 20% speaking English and 16% Punjabi. Similarly 80% of generation B use English while 20% use Malay. Even the third generation has been found to be bilingual with 100% being able to use English while 70% boys and 75% of the girls perceive to be able to speak Punjabi at the same time. The
study finds that 100% of generation A and 92% of generation B codeswitched with English in the home and social domains for various reasons. Various communicative strategies are used in intragroup communication to relay messages clearly and enable complete understanding among members who have varying language proficiency.

English gradually became the predominant language even in the formal domain where 84% of the adults are able to read and write in the English language compared to 16% able to read and write Hindi and 18% able to read and write in Punjabi. 36% of the schoolchildren are literate in the ethnic language compared to 100% being literate in the English language.

The fourth stage, according to Valdes (1979) is when English displaces the mother tongue except for the most intimate and private domains. Observations in this study show that English has taken over the various domains but in the religious domain the role of English is minimal. This is evident among members of generation A with only 28% using English when they pray. However, English plays a larger role among members of generation B with 76% saying prayers in English. The third generation has to be encouraged to participate in the religious domain though a language, which is comprehensible to them, that is English.

Finally according to Valdes(1978) there comes a stage where the ethnic group will not have the language resources in the mother tongue for easy expression. This is reflected in findings of this study, which indicate several children’s preference to answer in English, when spoken to in Punjabi, by the grandparents in the family domain.
6.3 Status of English

According to Asmah Haji Omar (1993), English is spoken in almost every aspect of Malaysian life, particularly in urban areas, although the variety that is used is mostly Malaysian variety of English. Interaction among the educated Malaysians, especially those, who have had their education via the English medium, may take place in English regardless of whether the participants involved are of the same or different ethnic groups.

Asmah Haji Omar (1993) says that the non-Malays place great importance on the study of English while disregarding the vernacular. According to her findings, this is because all of them believe that English is the language of international business. The training of majority of professions is in the medium of English and all professional literature is in English. Furthermore, English is the primary mode of communication. Kachru (1986) supports this belief of English being of major importance, when he says that English is considered a symbol of modernisation, a key to expanded functional roles and an extra arm for success and nobility in a pluralistic society.

Corresponding with the above, this study finds that English enjoys a high status among the Punjabis as well. 40% of generation A, 72% of generation B and 100% of the third generation support English education. All three generations stress on the importance of the English language, as it is an international language opening doors to higher education, good jobs, higher social status and technical knowledge. 100% of the adult generation indicate that English has become the first language of the Punjabi ethnic group.
Gradually, the use of the Punjabi language decreases with minimal need for it in the process of daily communication with siblings, friends and other members of the multilingual society. In many cases, the study finds that the Malaysian urban Punjabis use English for communicating with Punjabi native speakers as well. The native speakers who are probably new immigrants are compelled to use English to fit in with the community. Correspondence with other Punjabis is also done in English. The use of English is a prestige symbol. Literate adults use English for formal intracommunity communication. The growing status of the English language in the lives of the urban Punjabi means a diminishing status of the mother tongue.

The death or almost death of the Punjabi language among the Punjabis in Malaysia is a result of the social needs in a multilingual environment. The mother tongue is being used decreasingly, according to Kachru (1983), because it does not fulfill the social needs of the community that speaks it, whereas English does. According to Kachru and Marckwardt (1983), functions and roles played by English in the home, government, in religion, education, business and industry but most importantly in the domains of home and friendship has lead to English becoming deeply rooted. The study finds this to be evident among the Punjabis in Malaysia.

The study can therefore conclude that the English language plays an important role among the Punjabis in the urban areas and it has taken the status of the first language among the youth and children.
6.4 **Recommendations for the Future**

The study indicates that the Punjabi community does realise that in order to survive and prosper in a multilingual society the Punjabis have to adapt, assimilate and improvise. Although they accept the fact that the English language plays an important role in their life, they wish to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity through language maintenance.

Despite their different geographical locations and different levels of language fluency, the Punjabis realise that their mother tongue is slowly but surely dying out especially in the urban areas. The study finds that the parents, from generation B, who themselves can hardly read, write or some even speak their mother tongue are now stressing that their children (the third generation of Malaysian Punjabis) should learn to speak, read and write the Punjabi language. Their desire is to ensure some language maintenance.

In addition to the desires of parents, the study finds that the secondary school respondents are very interested in learning the mother tongue for various social reasons. Through the data collected the study finds that the third generation places great importance on the learning of English but at the same time they feel a desire to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity.

Ethnolinguistic minorities, like the Punjabis have undergone the process of language shift due to insufficient boundary maintenance of the intra and inter communal kinds. Realisation of the rising status of English in the lives of the young has made the Punjabi ethnic community take steps to prevent the death of their mother tongue. In Malaysia, it is felt that the language shift towards English
has resulted in a large number of Punjabis not being able to speak the mother
language so something more has to be done to language teaching in order to
maintain the mother tongue.

The place for the learning of the mother tongue is restricted to religious
places or temples, such as, The Laksmi Narayan Mandir and the Titiwangsa
Gurduwara. Regular classes are held every week for groups of varying ages. To
increase the desire to learn, the temples can inculcate activities, which attract
children to this domain. The existing incentives such as competitions, dramas,
youth gatherings called ‘Samelans’, bajan classes (hymns), tabla (Indian drums)
playing classes and many others could be made more interesting to draw in the
young.

Table 32 shows the places where some of the mother tongue classes are
held and the number of children enrolled. However, it is not an effort to reverse
language shift because the Punjabis know that English is very important to enable
them to survive and be on par with others in the multilingual environment in
Malaysia. The Punjabi language has to live in the shadow of larger languages like
English and Bahasa Malaysia in Malaysia. A minority speaks Punjabi, so taking
into account the number of speakers of each language it is truly at the bottom of
the hierarchy of languages spoken in Malaysia. According to Asmah Haji Omar
(1998), in such a situation the child’s first language, which operates at the bottom
of the educational ladder, is viewed as a mere stage on the way to gaining the
mastery of the larger languages which are known to serve more important goals.
The aim of these classes, which are held in religious places, is to prepare children to perform well in ethnic festivals and family occasions throughout the calendar cycle.

Table 32. Punjabi classes and their enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place in Urban areas.</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laksmi Narayan Mandir/Temple</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>120 (8 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guruduwara saab Petaling Jaya</td>
<td>Thrice a week</td>
<td>70-80 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tat Khalsa Chow Kit</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>100 (8 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentul Guruduwara</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>15-16 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak School</td>
<td>Weekdays</td>
<td>40-50 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titiwangsa Guruduwara</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>40-50 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabha House Bangsar</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>60 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selayang Baru Guruduwara</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>70 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.5 Conclusion

The Punjabis find that from the period of migration to the present there has been a language shift from Punjabi, their mother tongue, to English. Analysis of the data collected on the subjects under study shows that there has been a definite language shift to English in all domains of life with the minimal being in the home and religious domains. It also finds that the status of the English language has risen as a result of minimal use of the mother tongue with each new generation. With increasing use of the English language in almost all domains the respondents under study claim English to have gained the status of first language among the Punjabi people.

Despite the language shift to English, the Malaysian Punjabis form part of an international community with a common socio-cultural identity. It is a close-knit community, which is proud of its identity and should try its best in Malaysia to maintain this identity.