

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The Malaysian definition for the term 'Dayak' is provided by *Article 161 A* of the Malaysian Constitution whereby 'Dayak' refers specifically to two native groups in Sarawak, namely the Ibans or Sea Dayaks and the Bidayuhs or Land Dayaks. According to Dundon (1989:407) the term 'Sea Dayak' was first coined by James Brooke, the first White Rajah of Sarawak referring to the seafaring and wandering Ibans. Rajah James Brooke described the Bidayuhs as 'Land Dayaks' as they were more settled and passive or 'the Dayak of the hill country' (Chang, 2002: 18).

However, following the passing of the Interpretation (Amendment) Bill 2002 at the State Legislative Assembly in Kuching, Sarawak on 6 May, 2002, the Bidayuh communities were no longer to be referred to as 'Land Dayak'-the terminology given by the Brooke and Colonial administrations in the olden days. Today the Land Dayaks prefer to be known as Bidayuh. In their dialect, '*Bi*' means 'people' and '*Dayuh*' means 'Land'.

1.2 Origins

According to early Western writers, the Dayak Bidayuh are believed to be among the earliest inhabitants of Borneo (see Low, [1848], 1990:275; Shelford, [1916], 1985:305; Staal, 1940:55; Mac Donald, 1956:50). Keppel in ([1846], 1991:102) expressed the opinion that the earliest Bidayuh, like the other Dayak groups in Borneo, could have come from the mid Pacific islands of Polynesia, 'if the Dayaks of Borneo and the Arafuras of Celebes and New Guinea speak a dialect of Polynesian, it will go far to prove an original people as well as an original language'. Nevertheless until today no study has been done to prove the origins of the Bidayuh people before arriving in Borneo. Their place of origin before they came to Borneo is lost in the mists of prehistory (Noeb, 1992).

In Borneo, their original home is believed to be around the lower basin of Kepuas River, upstream Sanggau River and Sekayam River in Western Kalimantan (see Lee, 1970; Grijpstra 1976; Brooke, [1866], 1990; Minos, 2000). They began moving to Sarawak for various reasons such as to avoid being taken as slaves, preyed upon by pirates, harassed by lackeys of the Sultan of Brunei who ruled Sarawak then, hunted by headhunters and cheated through the unfair trading system of forced trade.

1.3 The Bidayuh Belt

Sarawak is the largest of the fourteen states in Malaysia and is located on the island of Borneo (*see Map 1 in Appendix A*). There are eleven administrative divisions in Sarawak with Kuching as the First Division followed by Sri Aman, Sibul, Miri, Limbang, Sarikei, Kapit, Samarahan, Bintulu, Mukah and Betong. The Bidayuhs who came to Sarawak from West Kalimantan built their villages in the districts of Kuching and Samarahan Divisions. The homeland of the Bidayuh in Sarawak is termed *Bidayuh Belt* by Dundon (1989:407) and the Belt spans across the districts of Kuching Division (covering Lundu, Bau, and Kuching) and the Serian District in the Samarahan Division, in the western end of Sarawak (*See Map 2 in Appendix B*). Ninety percent of the Bidayuhs are still staying in the Bidayuh Belt in the rural areas (Minos, 2000: 4).

The Dayak Bidayuhs form the fourth largest group in Sarawak after the Ibans, Malays and Chinese. The latest official figures provided by the Statistics Department of Sarawak (May, 2007) states that there are 167,756 Dayak Bidayuhs in Sarawak, the majority of whom are found in the First Division which is also the ancestral home of the Dayak Bidayuhs. They are considered *Bumiputeras* (sons of soil) by the Malaysian government which signifies that they are entitled to specific privileges.

1.4 Descriptions of Bidayuhs by foreign and local researchers

Most of the descriptions given by the European writers in the 19th century and local writers about the Bidayuhs are useful when understanding why they are mild people and can easily be influenced by others. This could also explain why they have never been bold enough to strive for better recognition for their language thus far, even though they are staying in the outskirts of the city of Kuching.

Low ([1848], 1990) for instance gave some interesting opinions of the attitude and characteristics of the Bidayuhs. He said that the Bidayuhs had a:

‘...grave and quiet expression of countenance, which gives to their features a melancholy and thoughtful air. It is very probable that their many miseries may have much increased this appearance. Their countenance is an index to the character of their mind, for they are of peculiarly quiet and mild dispositions, not easily aroused to anger, or the exhibition of any other passion or emotion, and rarely excited to noisy mirth, unless during their periodical festivals.’

(Low, 1990: 240)

Beccari ([1904], 1986) complimented the Bidayuhs by stating that ‘the honesty of the Land Dayaks is remarkable, and they are at the same time noted for their simplicity’ (p.60). He added that the Bidayuhs were a ‘very superstitious people and that they fancy seeing spirits everywhere, floating in the air, and wandering in the forest or on the summits of the mountains’ (p.61).

Brooke ([1866], 1990) did not think very much or very highly of the Bidayuhs and described them as having customs and appearance which ‘do not encourage

so great an interest in a traveller's breast as the Sea Dayak (Ibans)' (p.48). His words implied that the Bidayuhs lacked self-confidence.

Spenser St John ([1882], 1986) apparently spent quite a lot of time in travelling to Bidayuh areas. Like other 19th century Europeans, he too saw the singular mildness and quietness in the Bidayuh character. He said that 'the expression of all classes and of both sexes of these people is that of subdued melancholy' (p: 150). Spenser St John attributed this to their past horrible experience of oppression and suppression during the Brunei Sultanate.

More recent researchers have also made interesting comments on the Bidayuh character and attitudes. Lee (1970), for instance said that the Bidayuhs had a 'conservative nature', that they were a 'timid and retiring people, suspicious of change and progress' and that they 'seem less progressive than other Dayak groups' (p.92). The reason for this according to Lee was that the Bidayuhs had been separately exploited and victimised by others for a very long time.

Like the others, Grijpstra (1976) also was of the view that the Bidayuhs were a rather conservative and less energetic people but felt that there were modern day reasons why the Bidayuh behaved as they did. He explains:

'Land Dayaks did not get much attention and encouragement from the Administration (Government) for many years. This neglect was mainly due to competition by other, more numerous and sometimes more troublesome ethnic groups. The Land Dayaks, used to being treated badly by outsiders, tacitly accepted this inferior position, which in turn contributed to the still popular idea that they are a conservative and less energetic people.'

(Grijpstra, 1976:53)

Minos (2000: 8) stated that the Bidayuhs regard talking too loudly in public, airing one's views too openly, pushing oneself and trying to order others around as marks of rudeness and arrogance. To be regarded or said or even perceived to be rude and arrogant in the Bidayuh community is undesirable and demeaning. To the Bidayuhs, a good and respected person is one who talks the least, who does not push himself or herself around and who does not annoy or disturb anyone. Being natural adherents of extreme personal freedom and independence, the Bidayuhs tend to avoid those who order them around or who control too much of their lives or who tell them what to do or what not to do.

To summarise, the picture that emerged of the community is that the Bidayuhs are a very self-conscious group of people. They live in a close-knit and dense community, especially in the Bidayuh Belt, where they still depend on one another a great deal and the opinion of others about them is taken quite seriously. In fact, they are always careful with their words when talking to outsiders so as not to be regarded as being impolite.

1.5 The Bidayuh dialects

The major linguistic problem facing the Bidayuh people is that there is no common Bidayuh language which can unite all the Bidayuh communities. Compared to any other ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Bidayuh group is a very diverse community because of the existence of the various dialects spoken.

According to (Asmah, 1987; Nais, 1989; Dundon, 1989) there are four major Bidayuh dialects. They are Bukar-Sadong for the Bidayuhs residing in Serian District; Biatah for the Bidayuhs residing in the Padawan District; Bau-Jagoi for the Bidayuhs residing in Bau District; and Salako-Larra for the minority among the Bidayuhs who reside in the outskirts of the Lundu District in the western part of Sarawak.

However, Asmah (1987: 148) discovered that there are also sub-dialects spoken. Among the Biatah sub-dialects are Penyua, Binah, Bipuruh, Tebia and Bebengo. Common Bau-Jagoi sub-dialects are Bisingshai, Biroh, Krokong and the Bijagoi. Sub-groups are also found among the Serian Bukar-Sadong Bidayuhs. The Bidayuhs residing in the upper tributaries of the Sadong River speak a slightly different dialect from those residing in the lower reaches of the River and those Bidayuhs residing closer to the Sarawak/Kalimantan border too speak different dialects than those living along the Kuching/Serian Road.

Later, the 29 Bidayuh sub-dialects were classified into four main dialects by Nais (1989) and Dundon (1989) according to the districts in the Bidayuh Belt (see in Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: The four main Bidayuh dialects according to districts

District	Main dialect
Bau	Bau-Jagoi
Serian	Bukar-Sadong
Padawan	Biatah
Lundu	Salako-Larra

There are variations within each of the 29 dialects. The sub-dialects in each district have phonological and style differences. For example, a Bau Singghai is able to understand a Bau Krokong easily. However, Dundon (1989: 410) describes how some words in one dialect means different things in other dialects. For example ‘bisaki’ in Biatah means ‘how’ and in Bukar-Sadong it means ‘making love’. Another example taken from Dundon (1989:411) is

I want to eat rice:

- ❖ Aku an man tubi (Biatah)
- ❖ Oku raan man tubi (Bau-Jagoi)
- ❖ Aku era maan sungkoi (Bukar-Sadong)

The variations in the four main dialects often make the Bidayuhs turn to other codes across dialect group interactions, as stated by Dundon:

‘... with each dialectal group having many variations and different talking styles, sound and pronunciation, it looks very confusing even to Bidayuh themselves. In such a situation they would begin to speak in Malay or sometimes in English.’

(Dundon, 1989: 412)

1.6 Multilingualism among the Bidayuhs

McLellan (1992: 199), states that the sociolinguistic norms of Bidayuhs in Sarawak are influenced by:

- i. Standard Malay** (Bahasa Melayu), the national language in the more formal domains such as education and the mass media.
- ii. Sarawak Malay** (The lingua franca of interethnic communication in Sarawak, as distinct from the mother-tongue of the Malay peoples of Sarawak) in the more informal domains such as everyday conversation.
- iii. English** especially among the increasing number of educated Bidayuh speakers (who have received any post secondary level education) in both formal and informal domains.

In Malaysia the official language is Bahasa Melayu with English as a strong second language especially in the urban areas (Gill, 2002). A similar situation exists in Sarawak which joined Malaysia on 16th September 1963 after over 100 years (1839-1946) of being governed by three English autocrats, the Rajah Brookes and 21 years (1942-1963) of British Colonial Administration.

Besides being taught as an ESL in schools, beginning from the year 2003 the teaching of Science and Mathematics is now in English because of the need for all Malaysians to compete in the global market. After 30 years of switching the medium of instruction to Bahasa Melayu, Bidayuhs of the younger generation

have become proficient in the national language and use it in all official domains to reflect linguistic unity and Malaysian identity.

While English and Bahasa Melayu are taught in schools, Sarawak Malay is learnt by the Bidayuhs through contact with local Sarawak Malays in unofficial domains. According to Madzhi Johari (1988: 1), Sarawak Malay has the most number of speakers compared to any other dialects or languages in Sarawak and is spoken widely without feelings of embarrassment in unofficial domains. It is the lingua franca in interethnic communication among the *Bumiputeras* (sons of soil) and some Chinese and Indians when speaking with the *Bumiputeras*. Asmah (1987: 58), said that ‘Malay has always been the lingua franca in intergroup communication in Malaysia since the colonial days’. The Bidayuhs who migrated and settled down in the city of Kuching beginning the 1980’s eventually learnt Sarawak Malay and used it daily (Minos, 2000: 127).

1.7 Present day younger generation of Dayak Bidayuhs

The younger generation of Bidayuhs today socialise with different races, something which their parents did not do (Minos, 2000: 194). They are no longer ‘shy or unwelcoming to strangers’ as described some early writers (Hugh Low, [1848], 1990; Beccari, [1904], 1986; Spencer St John, [1882], 1986; Lee, 1970). Instead the Bidayuh youths today are not only better educated but also friendly and open minded. Many of them grow up with

modern ideas, striving for academic and job excellence (Minos, 2000: 188; 2007: 62).

The younger generation (those below twenty five years old) of Bidayuh has become sophisticated, but somewhat losing some of the qualities identified with their Bidayuh ancestors. It is also common to see them carrying hand phones and going to cybercafés. They enjoy chit-chatting, sending e-mails and messages on the handphones in other languages besides Bidayuh.

The younger generation of Dayak Bidayuh's *linguistic repertoire* (Fishman, 1972a) is influenced by the larger linguistic environment, whether it is in the rural or urban areas and also the Malaysian national language policy. The rural Bidayuh are less fluent in Sarawak Malay and English but are proficient in Bahasa Melayu as it is the medium of instruction in school. The urban Bidayuh often use Sarawak Malay, English, Bidayuh and Bahasa Melayu in a number of domains. Many of them are less proficient in Bidayuh compared to Bidayuh from the rural areas (Dealwis and David, 2007:63).

The researcher is familiar with the Bidayuh community as he is married to a Bau-Jagoi Bidayuh and has lived among the urban Bidayuh throughout his life. The researcher observed that the younger generation of urban Bidayuh is proficient in Sarawak Malay and often use it at home and with Bidayuh peers. This is also reported by Samuel Aubrey in the now banned local daily *Sarawak Tribune*:

... 'In the urban areas, even though the Dayak youths belong to the same ethnic groups, the hereditary language is not always used. Just like any other Dayaks living in the city of Kuching, the urban Bidayuh youths in Batu Kawa, BDC (Borneo Development Corporation) and Tabuan areas speak Sarawak Malay.'

(Sarawak Tribune, 23rd February, 2005: 14)

1.8 Research Problem

The Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates of MARA University of Technology, Samarahan who come from the rural and urban areas represent the younger generation of educated Bidayuhs. They inhabit a complex, polyglossic linguistic environment and interact using a variety of codes on a daily basis at home and in the university. The Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates are focused on in this study because they are multilinguals who have at least four codes in their repertoire namely Bidayuh, English, Bahasa Melayu and Sarawak Malay.

According to Sekaran (2000:67), a research problem is 'any situation where a gap exists in literature'. The actual state is that the Bidayuh undergraduates are not only using less Bidayuh but are also using other codes at home and in intra and across dialect group interactions in the university. The gap which exists is the lack of information as to what extent Bidayuh, Sarawak Malay, English and Bahasa Melayu are being used by the Dayak Bidayuhs undergraduates at home and in the university. Understanding the reasons for the language choice of the Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates with family members at home and with peers in intra and across dialect group discourse in the university can surely contribute towards a better understanding of the extent of the different codes used.

1.9 Aims of the study and research questions

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the present language choice patterns of the Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates with family members at home and with other Bidayuh undergraduates in intra and across dialect groups in the university. The Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates in this study belong to three main dialect groups namely Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah. There was no Salako-Larra Bidayuh undergraduate studying at UiTM Samarahan at the time this study was conducted. Asmah (1992: 77) has been of the opinion that Salako-Larra should be considered separate from the Bidayuh group because of the many variations in the Salako dialect compared to the other three main dialect groups. Therefore, the aims of this study are:

1. To investigate the code/s selected by the Bidayuh undergraduates belonging to Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah dialect groups when interacting with their different generation of family members at home.
2. To investigate the language choice patterns of the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah Bidayuh undergraduates in intra and across dialect groups in the university.
3. To determine the reasons for language choice in 1 and 2 above.

The aims of the study can be formulated into 6 research questions as shown below:

- 1a. At home, what are the language choice of the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah undergraduates when interacting with family members?
- 1b. What are there differences in the language choice patterns used by the rural and urban Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates?
- 2a. In the university, what are the language choice of the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah undergraduates in intra and across dialect groups?
- 2b. What are there differences in the language choice patterns used by the rural and urban Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates?
- 3a. What are the reasons for the language choice of the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah undergraduates with family members at home?

- 3b. What are the reasons for the language choice of the Bidayuh undergraduates in intra and across dialect group interactions in the university?

1.10 Scope of the study

This sociolinguistic study focuses on the language choices of the rural and urban Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates belonging to the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah dialect groups. Urban Bidayuh undergraduates refer to those staying in the city of Kuching, while rural Bidayuh undergraduates refer to those staying in Bidayuh villages located in Bau, Serian and Kuching Rural district (sub –districts of Padawan and Siburan).

The researcher has limited the study to two domains only namely home and university because the Bidayuh undergraduates in this study are staying in UiTM and their contact with outsiders in the public domain is quite limited. The home and university domains are chosen also because it is the aim of this study to investigate the language choices of the Bidayuh undergraduates with family members at home and with Bidayuh peers in the university. The language choices of the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah undergraduates in the home and university domains are investigated both qualitatively and quantitatively.

1.11 Research site

There are two settings in this study. Firstly, the Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates' homes in the urban areas of Kuching and in Bau, Serian and Kuching Rural districts. Secondly, in University Technology MARA (UiTM) Samarahan , with an enrollment of about 4,620 full time (80% residential) and 800 part time students. Malays are the majority or 75% of the student population in UiTM Samarahan. Sabah and Sarawak local indigenous or *pribumis* are the minority or 25% of the student population. There are 213 Bidayuh undergraduates studying various courses at UiTM Samarahan (data provided by UiTM Samarahan Students Record). All the 213 Bidayuh undergraduates are selected for this study. UiTM Samarahan is specifically chosen because the university has the most number of Bidayuh undergraduates compared to other institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

1.12 Significance of the study

So far there has been no study on language choice among the educated younger generation of Bidayuh in both intra and across dialect group interactions and doing such a study would add to the limited literature available. There has only been only one doctoral thesis of an ethnolinguistic study among the Betong Ibans by Noriah Mohamad (1991) focusing on language choice. Given the complexity and fragility of the linguistic ecology (cf. Muhlhausler, 1998) of Sarawak, it is surprising as Martin (1992) notes in relation to Borneo in general

that so few indepth studies have been carried out to investigate the language usage patterns of the multilingual people. Asmah (1992: 77) said that research in language choice is also important, especially at the present time when the linguistic communities of Sarawak are undergoing changes in their use of language arising from the Malaysian language policy.

Both Fishman (1964) and Fasold (1984) have called for more research in this field in the developing regions of the world in order that comparisons and generalisations can be made. In fact, in Sarawak very few studies on language patterns have been reported in literature. This is in spite of the fact that the social and historical conditions of Sarawak make the communities therein ideal subjects for in-depth study. Sutlive (1991: 138) and Winzeler (1990) have pointed out that surprisingly little research work has been done in the field of Bidayuh studies as a whole. Studies related to the Bidayuh people are mostly related to history, customs, practices, anthropology and economic development.

The present study is an ideal opportunity to look at the patterns of language used by the Bidayuh undergraduates before a common Bidayuh language is created by the on-going Bidayuh Language Development Project (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6). It also provides data for future comparative studies on language choice of other undergraduates belonging to other multidialectal ethnic groups in Malaysia

1.13 Conclusion

The foregrounding has been necessary in order to understand the sociolinguistic terrain which the present study was conducted. It was incumbent to portray the relevant background information of the Bidayuhs in order to be able to view in proper perspective the sociolinguistic context which influences the language choice patterns of the Bidayuhs undergraduates.

This chapter has also made clear the research aims and the problem under investigation. Chapter Two will inform the readers more about the Bidayuh people, so that the reasons for the language choice of the Bidayuh undergraduates from the three dialect groups of Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah can be better explained later.