

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DAYAK BIDAYUHS

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides background information about the Dayak Bidayuh community in Sarawak. From literature search and personal communication with Dayak Bidayuhs of various backgrounds and generations, this chapter reports information which is useful in understanding the Bidayuh people and various aspects of their lives. The various sections in this chapter also provide the basis to explain later some of the reasons for language choice among the Dayak Bidayuhs undergraduates.

Information on the rural-urban migration, their socio-economic status and cultural aspects is necessary to understand the background of the present day Bidayuhs. It is also important to know the efforts to promote the use of the heritage dialects. Other aspects which can determine the use of Bidayuh is the amount of Bidayuh literature that exists, Bidayuh education that has been provided and the role of the mass media. It is useful to know the codes which have become 'comfortable' (Asmah cited in David, 2001: 153) among the educated Bidayuhs in the Bidayuh forums such as Dayak Bidayuh National Organisation (henceforth DBNA), *Ja Ata Britong*, Bidayuh Graduates Association as well as the codes used by the Bidayuhs in social interactions.

## **2.2 Rural-urban migration**

The Bidayuhs are basically a rural people but from the early 1980s they began migrating to the urban areas looking for better jobs, higher education and modern lifestyle. Some ended working in the public service while others in the private sector. Just as they were getting better pay and stable jobs, new housing areas were developed in Kuching, namely Batu Kawa, Desa Wira, BDC and Tabuan Jaya. Thus, it is only logical that when these areas were opened up, the Dayaks including the Bidayuhs started to move in (Minos, 2000: 154). In fact, rural-urban migration is a serious problem in Sarawak and among the Bidayuhs in general:

‘It’s not easy for the Government to solve this growing problem of rural-urban migration and its resultant effects. Since the 1980’s, the Bidayuh school leavers have moved to the urban areas in search for jobs and a better life for their families. The Bidayuhs are not fussy about jobs and they take on any jobs that give them incomes. However, a good number of Bidayuhs working in towns receive very low incomes and eventually become town squatters.’

*(Minos, 2000:155)*

## **2.3 Socio-economic status of the Bidayuhs**

Traditionally, the Bidayuhs were paddy farmers and the majority of them who are still in the rural areas are still farming on their ancestral lands. From the 1960s they started planting cash crops such as rubber, pepper and cocoa and showed less concern for paddy. This is because the cash crops provide them with more cash which they need for their daily expenses. By the early 1970s, as more and more Bidayuhs were educated and as more of them were exposed to

urbanisation, their preference had also shifted to securing stable jobs in both the government and private sectors. Unlike in the past, today Bidayuhs can afford to drive expensive cars and live in comfortable concrete houses in the urban areas (Personal communication with Henry Anak Jimok on 22nd June 2006).

Nevertheless, according to Minos (2000):

‘The community is still economically backward compared to the major races in Malaysia. Only about 10 percent (167,756) of the Bidayuhs who have the education and expertise are working as civil servants in the various Government ministries, departments, statutory bodies and other agencies and in the private sector companies and enterprises throughout the country, mainly Sarawak. Only a handful of them are professional doing their own practices as doctors, lawyer and accountants in the urban areas.’

(*Minos, 2000: 44*)

## **2.4 Adat Oma**

*Adat Oma* is the ancient religion of the Bidayuhs which focused on nature. Before the advent of Christianity in 1880s considered as a modern religion, the Bidayuhs who were hill paddy planters offered prayers, rituals and offerings to the supernatural. They paid a lot of homage and tribute to nature including the hills and mountains where they planted paddy and gathered food, the woods and forests which provided them with fire and materials for their homes and streams and rivers which gave them water. Their special reverence was also given to land and paddy which was the direct source of their livelihood, sustenance and life (Minos, 2000:117).

The common fear in the olden days was the *penyamun*-the fear of headhunters. Periodically, it swept over the whole Bidayuh population in the Kuching and Samarahan Divisions causing alarm not only among the Bidayuh community but also among some Chinese and Malay in the nearby areas as well. The common means of protection was through the belief of *Tampa Raiuyuh* and the ancient spirit or *adapt*.

The Bidayuhs observed very closely the superstitious beliefs and omen. They believed in dreams and in witchcraft connected with sickness. To the pagan Bidayuh sickness was caused by the evil spirits and they tried by all means to please the evil spirits so that they would not harm them. Both Chang (2002.: 226) and Minos (2000:118) estimated that there are about 10% of the Bidayuhs in the Bidayuh Belt who are pagans and still practicing the *Adat Oma*. The prayers are conducted in Bidayuh. However, the number of the atheist population is decreasing because the old atheists have passed away and the young atheists have embraced Christianity and Islam.

## **2.5 Christianity among the Bidayuhs**

Minos describes the Bidayuhs as ‘a Christian race’ and he foresees that ‘as the Bidayuhs get more educated and as the non-Christians meet and socialise with the Christians in the villages or towns, almost 100 percent will be Christians by the year 2020’ (Minos, 2000:119).

Christianity was brought to the Bidayuh villagers from the era of James Brooke in 1841 by missionaries of the Roman Catholic and Anglican denomination. By the late 1890s the Roman Catholic had established a mission at Singghai when the first priest Father Felix Westerwoudt was sent there in 1867 (Westerwoudt, 2002:24). The Anglicans established St James Mission in Quop in Kuching District.

By the late 1960s Christianity was well accepted by the Bidayuhs. To become Christian meant modernity and modernisation and a close association to education and betterment. At present the Bidayuhs in the rural or in urban areas, educated or otherwise perceive Christianity as a modern and progressive religion and see it as part of their culture. There are also some Bidayuhs belonging to other Christian churches such as Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Borneo Evangelical Group (SIB) but the numbers are not as big as the Bidayuh Roman Catholics who numbered 135,000 (unofficial statistics provided by Father Simon Poh in charge of Kuching Catholic Archdiocese Archive, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007). The prayer services in the village chapels and churches as stated on the church notice boards are conducted in both Bidayuh and Bahasa Melayu on Sundays. In the urban churches and cathedrals the church notice boards stated daily and Sunday masses are conducted in English and Bahasa Melayu daily.

## 2.6 Bidayuh festivals

In the olden days, the Bidayuhs celebrated *Gawai Mukah* or the Dried Skull festival. However today, only Opar village in Bau District still observes this practice and it is celebrated once every four years.

Today, all Dayaks (including Ibans and Orang Ulus) officially celebrate *Gawai Dayak* on 1<sup>st</sup> June every year, to commemorate the end of the paddy harvesting season. Some villages celebrate the Gawai earlier than others and one village in each district each year is the main host for the celebration. During this festive season, Bidayuhs from the urban areas and those working in other areas will return to their respective villages to celebrate with family members and relatives. Since Bidayuhs are also Christians, they also celebrate Christmas on a grand scale in their respective villages.

*Bung Bratak* is celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May on Mount Bratak every year to commemorate the first settlement of the Bau-Jagoi Bidayuhs in Sarawak. On that day, Bau-Jagoi Bidayuhs from all walks of life gather on the mountain top to celebrate according to Bau-Jagoi traditional customs and practices.

## 2.7 Bidayuh headhouse

The Bidayuh Head-house is known as '*baruh*' in Bau District, '*pangah*' in Padawan District or '*baluh*' in Serian District. *Baruh/Pangah/Baluh* has

traditionally and historically constituted a major symbol embodying the Bidayuh ideology, its colourful world and unique culture. It plays a pivotal role in the daily life of the Bidayuh villages. The existence of *baruh/pangah/baluh* is recognized as an integral part or element of Bidayuh identity. Very often it is a notable building in the village, a source of pride in achievement and ownership to the Bidayuh community who built it together in their respective villages. Macdonald (1956, cited in Chang, 2002), described the head house as such:

‘a small round house stands in each community—a sacred place especially constructed to lodge heads taken in the battle. Unlike the other pagan tribes of Borneo, Land Dayak (Bidayuhs) may not keep these honourable trophies in their houses. In the centre of every village is the circular building raised on piles, with a steep, cone-shaped grass roof crowned by a carved finial. It looks like a fancy hayrick propped on stilts.’

(Chang, 2002: 251)

The other uses of the Headhouse besides keeping heads are also to provide residential needs of the unmarried men and accommodation for travellers to the villages. During the Gawai, it serves as a venue for the religious and traditional ceremonies. Besides the traditional functions of the past that have been carried on to this day, the Head house also serves as centre for practicing *Adat Oma* by the Bidayuh pagans, a centre for performing their traditional dances and a place for meetings conducted in Bidayuh.

## 2.8 Efforts to develop a common Bidayuh language

The Bidayuh language Development Project (BLDP) was formed in 2001 to preserve and promote the Bidayuh language in the home, in schools and among Bidayuh communities so that the language and culture will continue to be used and practised and passed from one generation to the next. The project goals are to:

- ❖ Revitalise the language, i.e., forgotten and neglected terms will be recovered.
- ❖ Develop a unified orthography for all dialects of Bidayuh
- ❖ Expand the body of literature in Bidayuh
- ❖ Facilitate having Bidayuh taught in schools.

*(The BLDP: A Status Report, 2003)*

A unified orthography system was achieved after a series of workshops from March 2002 to August 2003 as shown in Table 2.1 below.

*Table 2.1  
Current and unified symbolization for Bidayuh words*

Pronunciation	CURRENT SPELLING			UNIFIED SPELLING	
	Bau	Kuching	Serian	Proposed	Decided
( $\alpha$ )	A	A	a	A	A
( $\text{ə}$ ) / ( $\text{ə}^\text{h}$ )	---	A	a	E	E
( $\text{iə}$ ) / ( $\text{ɛ}$ )	Ie	E	e	É	É
(i)	I	I	i	I	I
( $\text{uə}$ ) / ( $\text{ɔ}$ )	Uo	O	o	O	O
. ( $\text{ɔ}$ ) / ( $\text{w}$ )	O	Ũ	u( $\text{ũ}$ / $\text{û}$ )	Ø or $\text{ũ}$ / $\text{û}$	Ũ
(u)	U	U	u	u	U

*(Adapted from Rensch, et al., 2006:25)*



## **2.9 Bidayuh education**

Bidayuh has never been made or used as a medium of instruction or as a third language to be taught in the Bidayuh Belt in the State of Sarawak since Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963. The major reason could be because there is no common Bidayuh language. Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution of 1957 gives provision for the mother tongue of the numerous other languages. It states that the pupil's own mother-tongue (POL) can be taught in the schools if the parents so desired and if there are at least 15 students to make up a class. Personal communication with Endawi Egup Anak Mayeg, a 62 year old Bau-Singgai grandfather, revealed that many Bidayuhs prefer their children to master English and Bahasa Melayu so that they could compete with the other races when looking for jobs. They feel that Bidayuh could be taught at home by the grandparents.

After Sarawak joined Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1963, the local languages such as Iban and Bidayuh have been marginalised by the wide usage of Bahasa Melayu which is the official language in the new nation (Arrifin and Teoh, 1992: 117). Today, there are 140 primary schools and 67 pre-schools in the Bidayuh Belt where over 80 percent of the teachers are Bidayuhs (Sarawak Education Department, 2006). However, no formal attempt has ever been made by the Malaysian Education Ministry to introduce any of the Bidayuh dialects in these schools to the Bidayuh pupils.

According to an online article published by DBNA (2005), the Bidayuh dialects were used in schools before Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963. One of the strategies used to Christianise the pagan Bidayuh by the Catholic Mill Hill missionaries was to set up basic educational facilities in Bidayuh villages. During this period, missionaries started a number of primary schools in Bidayuh villages where the local dialects, notably Biatah in the Kuching-Padawan region and Bukar-Sadong in Serian district, were used as the medium of instruction. In Bau District in particular the Jagoi and Singgai areas, schools and Catholic missions were built for the ‘primitive and dirty looking natives’ (Westerwoudt, 2002: 24).

These schools later became known as St John in Singgai, St Leo in *Kampong Serasot* (Serasot village) and St Mark in *Kampong Staas* (Staas village). The unnamed author of the DBNA on-line article also stated that:

‘These schools were only a few of the numerous schools set up by the Mission. The medium of instruction was supposed to be English but for the first three years Bidayuh language was used as a transition medium. Most of the teachers at the early stages were missionaries or volunteers. For the foreign missionaries and teachers of different races, teaching in these pioneer schools was also a place where they learn the local language. Catechism books and church hymns were the first written media available in the Bau-Jagoi dialect.’

(DBNA, 2005:2)

Sarawak joined Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1963 and under the various Malaysian educational policies, government schools were built throughout the State including the Bidayuh Belt and with it came Malay as a medium of instruction which was not easy for the Bidayuh.

‘The introduction of Bahasa Malaysia (or merely known as “Malay Language” then) in Bau in 1967 was not any easy. To most Bidayuh communities, the Malay language was as strange as the English language. Again the use of Bidayuh, albeit informal and normally not encouraged by school authorities, was used as a ‘bridging’ medium during the children’s first few years of schooling. Thus, we can see that the Bidayuh dialect or language was widely used in the past not only as a spoken but written form as a medium of instruction.’

*(DBNA, 2005:3)*

The Borneo Post (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2006: 14) reported the latest development to introduce Bidayuh in schools under a project called Multilingual Education, by United Nations’ Education, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Personal communication with Jim Smith, a representative from UNESCO’s Multilingual Education, in Kuching on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2006, indicated that both UNESCO and DBNA were looking at the possibility of introducing Bidayuh as a medium of instruction in play schools in the Bidayuh Belt. There have been no standard curriculum guidelines for these play schools. The project aims to teach Bidayuh children five years and below to communicate correctly using the dialect of their mother tongue. UNESCO and DBNA have also planned to design a structured course to be implemented in the first year of pre-school where the pupils would be taught in the Bidayuh dialect.

Phase One comprises two objectives: first to have a playschool in each major Bidayuh village conducted 100 percent in the local dialect; second to produce materials that could be used in the teaching programme.

‘UNESCO realizes that by promoting Bidayuh as a subject may encourage its development, but this can also handicap students’ ability to learn other subjects taught in Bahasa Malaysia. As such, a broader policy is needed to make ethnic minority languages the language of instruction in rural schools.’  
(*Borneo Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> August: 14 2006)

The project which started in January 2006 now has five playschools set up in various districts, catering to the various Bidayuh dialects—one each in Serian, Bau, Padawan and two in Lundu (*Borneo Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007: 13).

The Sarawak Cabinet Minister of Environment Health and Public Health, Datuk Michael Manyin in his speech on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006 (*Borneo Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007: 13.), assured the Bidayuh community that written suggestions for introducing the Bidayuh language as *Bahasa Ethnik* (Ethnic Language) into the national education has been submitted to the Ministry of Education and Sarawak State Education Department in early 2006. He also warned the Bidayuh community not to miss the chance to preserve the language through books and research, or else it would face extinction.

While DBNA President, Ik Pahon Joyik called for greater unity among the Bidayuhs to really make the project a success (*Borneo Post*, 1<sup>st</sup> April , 2007: 13), Minos states that it is the dream of every Bidayuh to see that the dialects can also be their symbol of unity and be taught in schools to their younger generation.

‘It is the Bidayuhs’ desire to keep alive, enrich and perpetuate their respective dialects. If one day they should have one common language, I believe the Bidayuhs too want the language to last forever.’

(*Minos, 2000:126*)

## **2.10 Bidayuh Literature**

The Dayak Bidayuh early literature was Christian materials compiled by missionaries. The Christian missionaries not only compiled wordlists of the various Bidayuh dialects but also wrote prayer books, hymnals and Bible stories which they used when preaching Christianity to the Bidayuhs. Among the materials produced by these missionaries were the translations of the New Testament Bible by an Anglican missionary Rev. Fr. Peter H.H. Howes into the Biatah dialect called *Kitab Payu Bauh*. In Bau District, the missionaries spread the Roman Catholic faith to the Bidayuhs and also developed Christian materials using the Bau dialects. Fr. Luis Schwabl from the Roman Catholic Church not only spread Christianity, and trained local catechists but also religiously wrote Christian materials for the pagan Bidayuhs. If not for the Christian missions, the Bidayuh dialects would have declined in use more rapidly (Rensch, et al., and 2006:10).

In fact, these materials are still used today with more materials being added. In village churches in the Bidayuh Belt the prayers are still conducted in the Bidayuh dialects although the hymns may also be in English and Malay. One

such church is St Mary's Church in Kampong Bogag in Bau District where the mass is conducted in Bau-Jagoi dialect.

The Borneo Literature Bureau established in 1959 during the colonial period was responsible for publishing Bidayuh literature before it ceased operations in 1977. It published a couple of Bidayuh phrase books. It also organised writing competitions and published winning short stories. It translated works in English such as 'The Story of Daniel' into Bidayuh (Rensch, et al., 2006:16).

However, until today there are not many books written in the Bidayuh dialects. Furthermore, with no education in the Bidayuh language it is difficult to expect materials to be produced by the younger generation. However, secondary schools such as SMK Lake, SMK Bau, SMK Serian and SMK Padawan have published in their annual school magazines short stories written by Bidayuh students using the various Bidayuh dialects.

The major contribution to Bidayuh literature since 1977 is the *Bidayuh-English Dictionary* compiled by Datuk William Nais in 1988. It is a substantial work and is used by the Biatah dialect speakers as well as other Bidayuhs when doing research (Rensch, et al., 2006:17).

The Council of Customs or Majlis Adat Istiadat established in 1974 can be said to be the main body which produces materials in Bidayuh dialects. It was formed not only as a centre for the collection, codification, interpretation and

dissemination of the Dayak adat laws (customary laws) but also as a centre for the collection, transcription and translation of the various oral traditions which include, among other things, legends, folklore, myths, history, chants, traditional songs, traditional music and games. In short, its mission is to preserve and nurture the customs and traditions of the Dayaks of Sarawak so as to maintain order and development of the community (Laws of Sarawak 1977). The Council published one volume of Bidayuh folktales in Singgai, Biatah and Bukar dialects in 2001 followed by another five titles of a similar genre in 2004 written by Robert Jonas Ridu in the Bukar-Sadong dialect (Rensch, et al., 2006:18).

The Sarawak Museum Journal which started in 1911 occasionally publishes Bidayuh short stories, written in both English and the Bidayuh dialects. The earliest Bidayuh short story entitled *Sirtuh Kumang Ruwai*, written by Nyandoh was published in 1956.

### **2.11 Bidayuh in the mass media**

Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) Sarawak Bidayuh service broadcasts news items in the Biatah, Bau-Jagoi and Bukar-Sadong dialects. Today, the Bidayuh service of RTM broadcasts for nine hours a day. It features not only news but also songs, stories and discussion forums in the various Bidayuh dialects. A number of Bidayuh singers, who write and sing their songs in Bidayuh, have them broadcast through the RTM Bidayuh service. The Bidayuh singers play a

very important role in promoting and preserving the Bidayuh language. Rensch, et al., (2006:18) stated that the Bidayuh lyrics in songs are influential in teaching reading and spelling in Bidayuh, as well as transmits Bidayuh words to the younger generation.

Today, Bidayuh bands playing music with English lyrics are also popular among the younger generation of all races. Among the popular Bidayuh bands are *Candy*, *Nice Stupid Playground*, *Indie's Wild Child* and *Vormit*. The younger generation of Bidayuhs enjoy English and Malay music and movies since there is little of such entertainment in Bidayuh. To date there has been no movie made in Bidayuh.

There is no Bidayuh used in any of the local newspapers, *Borneo Post* and *Utusan Borneo*. However, the *Catholic News*, the monthly Catholic Church Bulletin printed by the Archdiocese of Kuching has 10% of news reports written in Bidayuh Bau-Jagoi, Biatah and Bukar-Sadong dialects.

## **2.12 Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA)**

The first Bidayuh forum was the Dayak Bidayuh National Organisation or DBNA. The main motive of DBNA which was established on 22nd September 1955 was 'to unite the Bidayuh people who were then separated by dialects , distance and religions' to quote the words of the First DBNA President Ah Guan Guga (cited in Chang, 2002 :265). Today there are 16 DBNA branches



throughout the State, including the Women's branch. According to Minos (2000):

'Because of DBNA, the Bidayuhs in the four Districts of Lundu, Bau, Kuching and Serian have known, met and got acquainted with each other through the numerous DBNA functions and activities held over the years. When the Bidayuhs meet in the DBNA, they forget that they are of the Salako-Larra, or Bau-Jagoi or Biatah or Bukar-Sadong dialectal groups. In DBNA, all are simply Bidayuhs.'

(*Minos, 2000:168*)

This was supported by Chang (2002):

'The Dayak Bidayuh National Organisation has made the Bidayuh community conscious of their origin, of their identity, of their historical and cultural roots, of their common problems and difficulties and of their future and destiny.'

(*Chang, 2002:272*)

### **2.13 *Ja Ata Britong***

*Ja Ata Britong* is a popular modern day Bidayuh forum which uses modern technology to discuss various topics on the old ways of the Bidayuh community. It reflects a new dimension undertaken by the increasing number of educated Bidayuhs. This discussion is done through the website:

<http://www.bidayuh.com/britong>

To give a new lease of life to 'britong', *Ja Ata Britong* (literally means 'Let us discuss') was created in 1997 and since then the art of 'britong' (discussion) has never been the same again as various codes are used. Below is an example where no Bidayuh word is used but only English and Bahasa Melayu are used.

'I heard on the term **pelabelan** being used on the TV news this evening in the context of food production from our own local agro raw material. I suspect the **istilah** is yet another **pinjaman** from the English root word "label" so as to make **pelabelan** a Bahasa Melayu equivalent for "labeling" in English.'

*(Ja Ata Britong, 13/4/2007 cited in McLellan's Working paper, UNIMAS, July 2007)*

## **2.14 Educational attainment**

The younger generation of Bidayuh is highly educated with many of them having university and professional qualifications. There is a Sarawak Bidayuh Graduates Association (SBGA) which organises activities for members as a way of getting the educated Bidayuh together. English and Bahasa Melayu are used during SBGA meetings. In the urban areas, Bidayuh parents are keen to enroll children in missionary schools, perhaps because they are Christians themselves. Nevertheless, there are many Bidayuh students who study in government schools as well. The common codes used during social interaction in schools are Sarawak Malay, Bahasa Melayu and English. Personal communication with a Bidayuh senior school teacher Nyibos Anak Neggog, (June, 2006) revealed that in schools, Bidayuh is never used among the urban Bidayuh students during social interactions and is not encouraged by the Bidayuh teachers in rural schools either. According to Minos (2000:116), by the Year 2020, with a better attitude towards education, at least two percent of the younger generation of Bidayuh will be university graduates and professionals.

## 2.15 Conclusion

A Dayak Bidayuh lecturer at University Technology MARA in Samarahan best summarises Bidayuh identity and unity:

“The Bidayuh unity does not come about with the dialect he or she speaks. In fact, solidarity is achieved when a Bidayuh knows that the other person is also a Bidayuh. There is already a natural ethnic bond which exists because they know being Bidayuhs, although they do not speak the same language yet, they have almost the same history, culture, customs, beliefs and practices. These give them a Bidayuh identity.”

*(John Francis Anak Noyan cited in Dealwis, 2007:247)*

The background of the Bidayuhs shows that they have been much oppressed throughout history and this has made them submissive people. Such an attitude can be seen among the younger generation of Bidayuhs who often succumb to the linguistic pressures in the environment by speaking more non-Bidayuh codes during language contact (Minos, 2000). They are mild people who are concerned with creating closer rapport and solidarity. For them, this can come about not necessarily by using Bidayuh. The fact that less Bidayuh is used in the mass media, literature, education also makes the younger generation of Bidayuh more prone towards using the more dominant languages such as English, Bahasa Melayu and Sarawak Malay.

Chapter Three will provide the theoretical constructs and related literature review use in this study of language choice among the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah undergraduates who represent the younger generation of educated Dayak Bidayuhs today.