

## **CHAPTER 9:**

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS**

This thesis attempts to answer the hypothetical questions posed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. One of the main aims of the study is to ascertain existence of a trend towards major languages, and the implication of the trend, posing the question: Does the pattern of language preferences of the educated Bidayuh indicate a possibility of an on-going language shift among members within this social category? If they are shifting, the study examines its sources and motivations. It was also hypothesised that variations in language choice patterns of members within this social category would reflect differences in attitudes towards the transformation that the Bidayuh community has undergone since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when school was first introduced to this community.

The language choice patterns of the Bidayuh graduates have indicated the existence of a trend towards the use of English in this community. The “superiority” of the English language perceived as a language crucial for social mobility and economic advancement has motivated educated members of this community to inculcate the use of English at home. This view has its roots in the changing mindset of members of the community. Bidayuh community leaders view advancement in education as fundamental to further socio-economic progress of the community. The view is promoted through various community activities anchored to two main organisations, Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) and Bidayuh Graduate Association (BGA). However, the trend has proven to be detrimental to the continuous survival of the community language in families of educated Bidayuh. It deprives Bidayuh children

in these families of the natural environment (i.e. the home) to acquire the Bidayuh language.

The home setting is crucial for transmission of community language for minority groups in urban centres. It can act as a bulwark against outside influences. In relation to the Bidayuh, the encroachment of Malay and English in the domain traditionally reserved for the use of the community language seems inevitable because of widespread occurrences of inter-ethnic and inter-dialectal marriages. A common language is needed not only between couples and their children within the core family, but also in communication among extended family members. These circumstances do not support retention of the mother tongue.

Minority communities in urban setting, as is the case with the educated Bidayuh, would assume urban norms after a prolonged stay in cities. Assimilation and social acceptance by the larger community is the aim that members of minority communities would want to achieve to adapt to the new situation. Hitherto, adaptation would require speakers to assume urban norms in social behaviour including language behaviour. As a consequence, community members may come to view loosely the link between community language and one's ethnicity particularly if they are less attached to the community. The social norm whereby the community language is spoken to express solidarity with group members is changing for urban Bidayuh. This norm is only adhered to when they visit Bidayuh villages. Above all, this study points to the ambivalent attitude of the Bidayuh speakers towards the Bidayuh language to symbolise ethnic identity as a major factor leading to the occurrence of language shift in Bidayuh families in urban centres.

The methodology employed in this study has offered an alternative framework for studying *LSLM* in complex multilingual communities where speakers may employ several languages at their disposal in a given situation, and choice at the micro-level is largely dictated by the types of interlocutors.

This study has also benefited from the existence of extensive literature in two inter-related fields: (i) the study of language choice, and the study of social variation in language and linguistic change. Basically, the literature has touched on two main perspectives to the study of language choice – (i) the macro-sociological construct – the work of Fishman (1971) and Ferguson (1972), which aims ultimately to arrive at the social structure governing language choice patterns in this community and (ii) the interactional construct to language choice such as the work of John, J. Gumperz which views language choice as a form of communicative activity, and the speaker as the locus of investigation. Each of these constructs has its own contribution to this study, and the approaches are seen as complementing each other rather than the latter counteracting the former.

From the study of social variation in language, this study applies the notion of “speaker variation in language choice” and the “implicational scaling” technique (c.f. Gal, 1979; Li Wei, 1994) in its framework of analysis. By means of such construct, it was possible to describe the *process* of language shift, and to show it is “speaker variables” rather than “social variables” (e.g. age, gender) as major variables in description of the process of language shift. Language shift is a gradual process, and it should be clear to the researcher before embarking on *LSLM* study. By employing the speaker variation framework, this study has identified the social profiles of speakers

that are initiating changes in language choice patterns in this community and the motivations leading to shift.

The study has also examined the nature of societal and individual bilingualism in the community. The choice of language speaker makes in interaction is also dictated by the practice of societal bilingualism. Individual bilingual practice to a large extent is dictated by community norms. Community norms may be maintained through institutional norm enforcement agencies e.g. workplace, school, media etc. So, the use of language specific to a domain is a form of norm-enforcement. Given that, societal bilingualism is a major influence on bilingual practice at the micro-level.

In this study, in more formalised settings, such as the workplace and the church, the norm of language use specific to a particular domain is shown to exert a greater influence on language choice. Whereas in the informal domains such as the social domain, language choice is not domain-specific; speaker's social circle is a major factor for variations in patterns of language choice. It is suggested that social circle is a form of non-institutional norm enforcement agency that has accounted for the dominant use of the Sarawak Malay dialect among younger Bidayuh speakers in this study. Likewise, in the home domain, language choice is dictated by the norm of language use in intra-community interaction. Social norm that places the community language as an expression of cultural and ethnic identity is valued; and this is translated into language behaviour. Nevertheless, the norm of language use in this domain is changing, and is threatening inter-generational continuity of the Bidayuh language.

At the micro-level, language choice is primarily dictated by the immediate context of the situation. At this level of interaction in this community, choice is

determined by the interlocutor type on the basis of ethnicity and level of education. Knowledge of the social background of the interlocutor basically indicates common language between participants in interaction in this multi-ethnic setting. Social parameters determining choice differs by type of interactions, intra- or inter-ethnic interactions.

The degree of individual bilingualism varies between speakers which is how languages are put to use by the speakers. The various forms of bilingual practice among individual speakers in communities reflect the attitudes and perceptions speakers have towards languages, which are also influenced by societal form of bilingualism. This study has also shown that the “recessive” form of bilingual practice is an added factor threatening the survival of the mother tongue in this community.

Although this study has not attempted specifically to make predictions as to whether the Bidayuh language will survive in this community, the findings of the study have given greater insights into the Bidayuh language situation. Whether the Bidayuh language is retained or otherwise as main language in daily interaction of its community members depends on the following speaker variables: mixed parentage, mixed marriages, language orientation at home, school influence, language experience in formative years, degree of attachment to community life in Bidayuh villages, and language attitudes. In relation to the survival of the mother tongue in the near future, the factors of attitudes towards own language and demography will determine the direction of shift.

Perhaps, it is not too hasty to speculate that the language will not survive in families of educated Bidayuh in many years to come unless drastic steps are taken to

reverse the shift. The creation of job opportunities in Bidayuh areas, and increased accessibility has motivated many Bidayuh to settle in Bidayuh areas. This will provide natural environment conducive for the acquisition of the community language by Bidayuh children. However, there is also the possibility of greater threats of encroachment of Malay and English within the Bidayuh Belt. Urban Bidayuh children may influence the patterns of choice of Bidayuh children in villages.

In this community, the ambivalent attitude of its members towards the community language as a ticket to group membership is a major factor motivating the shift. For the shift to be reversed, greater awareness of the family domain as crucial for inter-generational transmission of the community language should be propagated. Fishman (1991) has suggested that further shift in minority communities can be prevented with identification of variables that will work towards language maintenance. In view of that, greater attachment to community life will increase ethnic pride and change the speakers' attitudes towards the community language.

Contrary to the view expressed by many Bidayuh in this study, it is argued that the acquisition of the community language by Bidayuh children at an early age is a crucial factor determining its survival in the community. Being able to speak the community language enables Bidayuh children to participate fully in community life and creates bond with members of the community. More critical is the view that Bidayuh children should perceive the community language as the norm in intra-community interaction. This factor provides an instrumental motivation for learning and knowing the language. Given that, opportunities to acquire and learn the language should be provided for Bidayuh children to ensure successful inter-generational transmission of the community language in succeeding generations. This can be

achieved through various formal and informal means such as through the use of this language as a medium of instruction in pre-schools, employing Bidayuh caretakers etc.

The Bidayuh should also promote greater use of the language within the community. This concerns the creation of special functions of the community language. A potential domain where the use of Bidayuh could be enhanced is the domain of religion. Perhaps, this can be attempted by increasing religious materials written in Bidayuh, and providing church services in the Bidayuh language in urban centres.

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, the Bidayuh predicament is a consequence of language contact i.e. greater assimilation with other ethnic groups in urban centres. At this point, the shift is seemingly inevitable among educated Bidayuh. In view of the various constraints in the use of the community language, it is proposed that perhaps the idea of having a single dialect for intra-ethnic interaction could be worked on. This move may reduce the community's dependency on Malay and English in inter-dialectal communication although linguistic diversity of the Bidayuh speech system can be adversely affected.