

CHAPTER 6
THE SURVEY
LANGUAGE CHOICE PATTERNS AT THE WORKPLACE

6.1 Introduction

This chapter and the succeeding one describe the language choice patterns of the educated Bidayuh with interlocutors in three settings: (1) Workplace (2) Places of recreation and community activities, and (3) Places of worship. It is assumed that interactions in these settings would be influenced by the contexts of the social situation – where, with whom and why (Fishman, 1965/2000). “Where” refers to the immediate avenue where an interaction takes place; “with whom” refers to the interlocutor(s) i.e. who the speaker is addressing, his social background; and the “why” requires the researcher to investigate the nature of the interaction (e.g. social chats or work related; in-group or out-group situation).

The investigation of language behaviour of the educated Bidayuh goes further into the social relationships between participants and the social roles they may assume in interaction (Bloom & Gumperz, 1972) which is also observed to have a profound influence on language choice decisions of speakers at the micro-level. The “interlocutor” factor which has been much deliberated in many qualitative studies on language choice (e.g. Chong Shin, 2005) to have significant influence on choice at a micro-level is dealt with in greater depth throughout this chapter. Presumably, choice would also be dictated by the degree of formality and informality of the social situation and other social dimensions between participants in interaction - e.g. the notion of social distance between speakers (Holmes, 1992).

The language choice patterns described are taken from the survey conducted on the respondents which basically asked the types of interlocutors they interacted regularly with in each setting, and the choice of language with these interlocutors. In addition to the survey questionnaire, participant observation of language behaviour of these speakers in actual interaction was conducted to support the results of the survey (Also refer to section 7.1 in the following chapter on how “participant observation” was conducted)

6.2 The influence of setting on language choice patterns at the workplace

This sub-section shows how “setting” can influence the language choice patterns of multilingual Bidayuh at the workplace. It will be shown in particular language choice can also vary within a setting. As highlighted by Bloom and Gumperz (1972), “setting represents the initial stage in speaker’s processing of contextual information”; therefore, it is a crucial component of the “social context” in interaction.

6.2.1 Working environment in organisations and language choice patterns

“Setting” in this context encompasses the overall working environment and language practices in organisations. The general atmosphere in an organisation can be more formal than others dependent on the type of organisation. Accordingly, language choice is also dictated by this factor. For example, the Sarawak State Planning Unit (SPU) executes government policies, and deals with planning and implementation of government projects. Considering this factor, the working atmosphere in this organisation can be categorised as “formal”. But, as one enters semi-government

organisations such as Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Agency (SALCRA), Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC), International Tropical Timber Organisation, Sarawak Forestry Department, the atmosphere is “less formal”. This has to do with the core business of these organisations which involve giving assistance to estate workers, and consequently greater interactions with people in the lower social category. Dealing with people in the lower rank necessitates the use of languages which are comprehensible to these individuals. In this type of working environment, speakers are given more latitude and less constraint in the choice of language. Hitherto, native languages, e.g. Iban and the Sarawak Malay dialect (SM), are also spoken widely in these organisations. In organisation where the ethnic composition consists largely of Malays, the Malay language is predominantly spoken in interaction. Chinese and other natives in this environment succumb to the language of the majority. This pattern is typical of smaller government-managed agencies such as Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) and Yayasan Sarawak. The working environment varies within a single organisation, between departments. The following examples illustrate this point.

Speaker No.33 works as a Plantation Executive. She describes her patterns of language choice at the workplace as “a mixture of Iban, Malay and English”. She speaks the Iban language and English with Iban superiors (i.e. General Manager, Head of the Department, Production Controller); and additionally Malay with peers. In encounters with dialect group members, the Bidayuh language is spoken, with occasionally switching to Malay and English. Whenever there is dialect difference with Bidayuh interlocutors, she resorts to the use of Malay and English. Clients are largely Malays and Chinese, and she speaks Malay and English with them. Overall, the working environment in the department where she works is quite informal. It is an Iban

dominated office and employees are quite informal with each other. This has accounted for the regular use of Iban and Sarawak Malay in this environment. In this setting, English is not the norm in interaction; the use of English is only required in written documents and reports.

On the other hand, the language choice pattern of a Bidayuh executive in the same organisation (Speaker No.42) varies from her colleague described in the preceding paragraph. The executive works as a Project Officer in the Planning Section in this organisation. The working atmosphere can be described as formal. Her immediate office mates are English-speaking, and the office culture favours the use of English. Despite being an Iban dominated department (staff constitutes 70% Iban), English is the norm in this environment. Hence, for this speaker, English is predominantly spoken with an occasional switch to Iban, Malay and Bidayuh. English is spoken most of the time with superiors from her department i.e. the General Manager (an Iban), Head of Unit (a Chinese) and Plantation Manager (Bidayuh) irrespective of the ethnic group the interlocutor belongs to. With a Malay manager however, bilingual Malay-English pattern is employed. The speaker who is also competent in several Bidayuh dialects converses in a Bidayuh dialect with fellow Bidayuh colleagues from the Bukar-Sadong and Jagoi dialect groups, but will occasionally switches to English when she needs to deliberate on work related matters.

6.2.2 Language practices in different types of organisations

Generally, the language practices in organisations can be distinguished in terms of the type of organisation – i.e. government-run or private-managed agency. To some extent, the language practice in government agencies in Sarawak is dictated by the

national language policy that promotes the use of Malay in governmental transactions. Malay is to be used as an official language in administration. Despite that, the use of English prevails. In fact, English is more predominantly utilised in government transactions than Standard Malay (also see Asmah Hj. Omar, 1992). Meetings at managerial level in government-run agencies are normally conducted in English and Malay. But, Standard Malay has to appear in minutes of meetings. Very often, reports involving planning and implementation of government projects are prepared in English in particular documents that make references to the sciences. On the whole, English, together with Malay are the main languages utilised in the day to day running of government agencies. Nonetheless, observation of language behaviour of the respondents at the workplace shows that the Malay language predominates in informal situations and in inter-group interaction involving interlocutors from various social backgrounds.

Government-linked companies such as Sarawak Information Systems (SIS) and private firms are examples of private-managed agencies. There are also agencies such as Angkatan Zaman Mansang (AZAM), an NGO and Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC), a research institute, which are set up for specific purposes by the local government. These agencies need not adhere to the national language policy in management of the agencies. The use of English is more prevalent in private agencies and government-linked companies. There is practically no obligation on the part of company employees to use Malay in business transactions, aside from matters dealing with government policies involving the general public. Private agencies endorse the use of English for business transactions and this culture is cultivated among employees. For the most part, communication between company employees is in English. Occasionally, languages of other ethnic groups are spoken to accommodate clients who are not English-speaking

individuals. Standard Malay is only used in written documents (e.g. reports meant for public inspection) and inter-departmental transactions involving the federal government.

6.3 Summary of patterns of choice of the respondents at the workplace

On the whole, interactions at the workplace involve two main languages i.e. English and Malay as these languages are most commonly understood by various ethnic groups in this multilingual community. Table 6.1 below summarises the patterns of language choice of the respondents at the workplace. The three major “patterns of choice” employed are: dominant English pattern (41%); Bilingual Malay-English (23%) and dominant Malay (21%).

Table 6.1: Summary of overall patterns of language choice of the respondents at the workplace

Patterns of language choice		Younger speakers (Under 39)	Older speakers (39 & above)	Total
Monolingual Pattern	Malay	9	4	13 (21.3%)
	English	10	15	25 (41%)
Bilingual Pattern	Malay-Bidayuh (MB)	-	1	1 (1.6%)
	Malay-English (ME)	11	3	14 (23%)
	Dominant Malay with English (M*E)	-	1	1 (1.6%)
	Dominant English with Malay (E*M)	1	3	4 (6.6%)
	Malay-English-Iban (MEI)	1	-	1 (1.6%)
	Malay-English-Iban- Bidayuh (MEIB)	-	1	1 (1.6%)
	Iban-Malay (IM)	1	-	1 (1.6%)
	Total no. of respondents	33	28	61 (100%)

To some extent, the language choice patterns of the Bidayuh executives in this setting are dictated by the language culture of organisations they are attached to, and the general working environments in these organisations. Nevertheless, inter-speaker

variations at individual and group levels suggest that patterns of choice relate closely to the type of social circles speakers interact regularly with at the workplace. This situation depends on the position held by the Bidayuh executive in the hierarchical structure of an organisation, and the nature of work they are assigned with. The type of social circles i.e. whether regular interactions are limited to a group of professionals or otherwise has dictated patterns of choice of the respondents in this domain. In addition, job specification requires the use of particular language(s) in this setting.

Table 6.2 gives a description of speaker's social profile that characterised each pattern of choice as given.

Table 6.2: Summary of patterns of choice at the workplace and speaker profiles

Pattern of choice	Speaker Profile
English predominates (E)	Typically, this pattern is employed by older speakers who hold position as senior managers in government sectors. Their social interaction at the workplace constitutes largely executives of the same managerial level or higher. Their job specifications require English. The pattern is also employed by younger speakers in Chinese populated private-managed agencies whose nature of work relates to the technical fields.
Malay predominates (M)	This pattern is employed typically by speakers whose social circles at the workplace constitute largely Malays and/or natives from lower rank e.g. research officers whose work involve largely research assistants and support staff. The teachers with this pattern use Malay with both types of interlocutors i.e. students and teachers at the workplace. Individuals with this pattern may be less competent speakers of English; thus, socialise in Malay at the workplace.
Dominant English with substantial use of Malay (E*M)	The speakers utilise English most of the time for work-purpose, but they also have frequent interaction with colleagues in the lower rank or use Malay for social interaction at the workplace e.g. Bidayuh who are English teachers, Bidayuh executives who are attached to research agencies or Bidayuh researchers in academic institutions.
Dominant Malay with substantial use of English (M*E)	This pattern describes speakers who utilise Malay most of the time for work purpose and informal interaction at the workplace but with substantial use of English e.g. Bidayuh who teach the Malay language in schools and institution
Bilingual Malay-English (ME)	The speakers with this pattern utilise Malay and English in a "diglossia-like" pattern at the workplace - English for work-purpose (e.g. teaching) whilst preferring Malay in informal interactions with colleagues. This pattern also describes individuals who interact regularly with colleagues from the lower rank and at the managerial level.
Bilingual Malay-Bidayuh (MB)	The speakers with this pattern use Malay for work-purpose but Bidayuh is preferred in social interactions at the workplace, e.g. Bidayuh teachers in Bidayuh populated schools

Bilingual Iban-Malay (IM)	The speaker with this pattern use Malay for work-purpose but Iban is preferred in social interactions at the workplace, e.g. Bidayuh teachers in Iban- populated schools
Malay-English-Iban (MEI)	The speaker with this pattern has several languages at his disposal, which he utilises at the workplace. The speaker works as a research officer and work task requires her to use native languages at the workplace.
Malay-Bidayuh-English-Iban (MEIB)	The speaker with this pattern has several languages at his disposal which he utilises at the workplace. The speaker has a larger social circle. His tasks require the speaker to monitor government project which bring him into regular contacts with interlocutors from various social backgrounds.

6.3.1. Patterns of choice respondents from Chief Minister’s Department

In comparison to other organisations mentioned in this study, the organisational structure of SPU is relatively quite complex. There are various departments responsible for each task, and each department is sub-divided into units and sections. The hierarchical structure normally demands certain norms of language use be observed between superiors and his subordinates. The workforce is predominantly native. Among other things, the core business of the establishment involves planning and managing resources, and overseeing government projects. On the whole, the setting is rather formal. The patterns of language choice of the respondents in this organisation is summarised in the following table:

Table 6.3: Patterns of choice of respondents from the Chief Minister’s departments

Speaker No.	Age	Department	Pattern of choice
8	36	State Planning Unit (SPU)	ME
9	39	State Planning Unit (SPU)	M
2	44	Human Resource Development (HRD)	E*M
5	51	State Planning Unit (SPU)	E
10	51	Human Resource Development (HRD)	E
12	52	State Implementation and Monitoring Unit (SIMU)	E
17	50	Information and communication Technology (ICT)	E

Note: E*M = dominant English with substantial use of Malay

The patterns of choice of respondents in this organisation can be associated with the type of interlocutors encountered at the workplace. This also relates to the position of the respondents within the structure of the organisation. As an example, an individual who holds the position as Principal Assistant Director heading one of the sections under the Chief Minister's Department handles planning and implementation of government projects. The scope of his work brings him into frequent contact with high-ranking officers and managers in other organisations. This individual normally socialises with peers of the same managerial level, and English is normally preferred for interaction within the social group. This pattern of choice is typical of older respondents in this organisation. On the other hand, junior executives in this organisation display a predominantly Malay (M) or Malay-English (ME) pattern of language choice in interaction. Individuals at this level in the hierarchical structure of an organisation interact with immediate colleagues from the same or lower category. It is a common sight in this setting whereby junior officers converse in English with bosses, but prefer the Sarawak Malay dialect (SM) or the bilingual *ME* pattern with peers and subordinates.

In this organisation, respondents with *E* pattern (dominant English) and *E*M* (dominant English with substantial use of Malay) are senior managers in their late 40's and in their 50's. Most of the time, interaction at the workplace involves high level personnel. In addition, job specification requires these individuals to write reports, presentations and email correspondences in English particularly when dealing with state agencies. English is preferred because it is the language that is most convenient and applicable, as tasks assigned are related to government policies and matters in the technical fields (e.g. ICT, corporate finance, HRD). For this category of speakers, Malay would be spoken on two occasions – normally if interlocutors constitute a mixed

group in terms of level and ethnicity, and when interacting with support staff. In meetings involving officers and support staff from various ethnic groups, Malay would be the safest choice as it is the language comprehensible to all participants in interaction. Deliberation and instruction to support staff is also done in Malay. Occasionally, Bidayuh is also spoken when the need arises – usually in encounters with interlocutors from the same dialect group.

A single respondent with *ME* pattern use English when dealing with work-related matters whilst preferring Malay in interaction with support staff and in informal interaction - e.g. socialising with friends and colleagues at the workplace. In informal interaction with natives as such, native languages may become the matrix language, with English phrases and sentences incorporated during conversation from time to time. This respondent works as an Assistant Secretary in the Corporate Affairs Division. Her regular contacts constitute executives and managers within and outside the organisation inclusive of foreign visitors.

The respondent with *M* pattern (a junior officer, aged 39, female) conveyed that her daily interlocutors at the workplace consist largely of Malay colleagues from her immediate office.

6.3.2 Patterns of choice of respondents from the Department of Agriculture

This setting is an example of a government-run organisation described in the preceding subsection. The Agriculture Department of Sarawak has a similar structural organisation as SPU mentioned above, but the working environment in this

establishment is less formal. The core business of the department is to monitor agricultural projects and conduct researches.

Table 6.4 below summarises the patterns of language choice of respondents from the Department of Agriculture, Kuching. The four respondents who are attached to this department are older speakers, age ranging from 47-53. Two respondents with *E* pattern, one with *M* pattern, and another converses in several languages – Malay, English, Iban and Bidayuh (MEIB) at the workplace.

Table 6.4: Patterns of language choice of respondents from the Department of Agriculture

Speaker No.	Age	Department	Pattern of choice
40	49	Dept of Agriculture	E
55	53	Dept of Agriculture	E
59	48	Dept of Agriculture	M
41	47	Dept of Agriculture	MEIB

Akin to the pattern of language choice of senior executives in government agencies described earlier, Speaker No. 40 and 55 from this organisation who have similar speaker profile also communicate in English most of the time with interlocutors at the workplace. Job specification requires them to interact mostly with peers, and being a research organisation, English is used extensively in reports and daily correspondences at the workplace. Respondent with *M* pattern (Speaker No. 59) works as an assistant agriculture officer. His work entails contact mostly with research assistants and support staff. He reiterates that Malay has become a “handy tool” for communication in this multilingual setting. Speaker No.41, who is conversant in several languages, prefers to accommodate to the native’s tongues of various ethnic groups for ease of communication at the workplace. At the office, he employs *ME* pattern whilst

the local Malay dialect, Bidayuh and Iban are preferred in encounters with natives when overseeing projects in villages.

6.3.3 Patterns of choice of respondents from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Sixteen respondents from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) were involved in this study. In an academic institution, the organisational structure is relatively simpler than in government-managed organisations described earlier. Each faculty is managed by the Dean and his deputies who are directly accountable to the Vice-Chancellor. Staff includes academic and non-academic personnel. Teaching and conducting research is the core business of each faculty.

In this institution, generally English is utilised as a medium of instruction and communication in faculties, even more so in the science-based faculties. These faculties also recruit a large number of foreign lecturers. In these faculties, in particular the medical faculty where foreign lecturers constitute about 40% of the population, written documents and meetings would have to be in English. Social interaction occurs mostly in this language. This being the case, lecturers attached to these faculties would use English most of time at the workplace (i.e. Speaker No.14, 15 and 16). On the other hand, aside from *TESL*, in the classroom, English is used together with Malay as medium of instruction and communication in faculties which are not science-based. The patterns of choice of the respondents in this organisation are summarised below:

Table 6.5: Patterns of language choice of respondents from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Speaker No.	Age	Department	Pattern of choice
46	38	Language Studies	E
13	48	Social sciences	E
15	49	Medicines & Health Sciences	E
16	49	Medicines & Health Sciences	E
19	50	Library	E
14	50	Medicines & Health Sciences	E
44	50	Applied Learning & Multimedia	E
3	53	Biodiversity & Environment Conversation	M*E
47	54	Applied Learning & Multimedia	ME
6	29	Resource Sciences & Technology	ME
20	29	Language Studies	ME
49	40	Finance	ME
45	31	Language Studies	M
54	27	Resource Sciences & Technology	M
11	36	Engineering	M
18	34	Social Sciences	M

Note: M*E = dominant Malay with substantial use of English

There are seven speakers with the *E* pattern, four speakers with *ME* and four speakers with *M* and 1 speaker with *M*E* (dominant Malay with substantial use of English). Inter-speaker variations in patterns of language choice appear to correlate most with the type of social circles speakers interact regularly with at the workplace. For example, despite being competent in English, two speakers (No. 11 and 18) indicate a dominant *M* pattern at the workplace. Speaker No.18 informs the reason is that his immediate office consists of predominantly native workforce from the lower rank. Likewise, Speaker No. 11 states that her regular contacts include largely Malay colleagues and students. The Malay language is utilised for teaching and other administrative tasks.

The respondents from the science-based faculties demonstrate greater use of English for work purpose and for social interaction at the workplace. They employ the dominant *E* pattern. However, Bidayuh academics that interact regularly with colleagues from the lower category as well as those in the managerial level have the *ME*

pattern of choice. Individuals who use English for work-related task but maintain Malay for social interaction at the workplace also use the same pattern of choice. The respondents with the *M* patterns of choice typically utilise Malay for work purpose and for informal interactions with their regular circles of friends. They are also less competent speakers of English; they indicate an “average” competency (Scale 3) in the language.

6.3.4 Patterns of choice of respondents in school setting

Eleven Bidayuh teachers from various schools were interviewed. Apart from the teaching of English, Mathematics and Science, all other subjects are taught in Malay in these schools. Social interaction in the school largely involves fellow teachers and students. Bidayuh teachers use Malay or English most of the time in various social situations. In a predominantly Bidayuh environment, nevertheless the Bidayuh language plays a major role as the main language of communication in the school. Bidayuh teachers located in a predominantly Bidayuh area (e.g. SMK Tun Abdul Razak) found the Bidayuh language indispensable for daily interaction at the workplace. This is the case for the respondent with *MB* pattern. Table 6.6 below summarises the patterns of language choice of the respondents in these schools.

Table 6.6: Patterns of language choice of respondents in school setting

Speaker No.	Age	School	Pattern of Choice
26	50	SMK Pending	E
39	55	SMK DPHA	E
56	50	SMK St Joseph	E*M
25	42	SMK Pending	E*M
61	32	SMK Bako	IM
24	36	SMK Pending	M
60	37	SMK TAR	M
38	48	SMK Agama	M
21	44	SMK Pending	ME
32	32	SMK Pending	ME
59	35	SMK TAR	MB

Note: E*M = dominant English with substantial use of Malay

Bidayuh teachers with the dominant *E* or dominant *M* pattern correspondingly employ one of these languages in both social situations i.e. interaction with students and with colleagues at the workplace. The respondents with *E* or *E*M* are also English teachers; naturally English has become dominant at the workplace. The Malay language is spoken in encounters with non-English speaking Malay teachers and support staff.

The respondents with the dominant *M* pattern (Speaker No. 24, 38 and 60) also prefer Malay with students and teachers. Speaker No. 24, a history teacher, teaches in Malay and prefers the local Malay dialect and the Iban language for social interaction at the workplace. She only speaks English when the need arises, normally in encounters with Chinese teachers. Speaker No.38 is an English teacher located in a “predominantly Malay” school. English is only utilised during English lessons and in encounters with a handful of Chinese teachers in the school. Speaker No. 60 teaches in a Bidayuh dominated school, but doesn’t speak much Bidayuh because of the lack of competency in the Biatah dialect. He uses a variety of Standard Malay in most social situations at the workplace and for teaching.

The Bidayuh teachers who indicate that they use Malay and English most of time (*ME*) at the workplace have different functions for each language. The Bidayuh respondent with the *ME* pattern (Speaker No.21), an English teacher, informs that she prefers Malay for social interactions, whereas English is solely utilised for teaching and other work-related matters. This pattern occurs in reverse with Speaker No. 32 (history teacher) who prefers English for interactions with peers but uses Malay with students.

Speaker No.61 describes her pattern of choice at the workplace as bilingual Iban-Malay (IM). She uses Standard Malay in the classroom. The local Malay dialect and Iban are preferred when the social situation is less formal (e.g. outside teaching periods/hours).

6.3.5 Patterns of choice of respondents from Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC)

This is a local research institution set up by the state government. The core business of the organisation is to conduct research in the field of Biodiversity and assists in the rehabilitation and preservation of natural resources of Sarawak. The overall working environment is relatively less formal. Because of the predominantly native environment, social interaction in this organisation is largely in local languages particularly Iban and SM. The use of English is confined to written document and in encounters with non-Malay speaking individuals.

The patterns of language choice of the respondents in this organisation are summarised below.

Table 6.7: Patterns of language choice of respondents from Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC)

Speaker No.	Age	Department	Pattern of choice
36	24	SBC	M
28	27	SBC	ME
31	35	SBC	E*M

Note: E*M = dominant English with substantial use of Malay

The Bidayuh respondents in this organisation interact largely with research assistants and research officers. The younger speakers (No.36 and No.28) indicate that they use *M* or *ME* patterns most of the time at the workplace, whilst another senior colleague (Speaker No.31) describes her overall pattern of choice as a ratio of “70% in

English and 30% in Malay” (E*M). This respondent prefers English with executives and Malay with support staff. As she also knows Chinese, this language is sometimes spoken in encounters with Chinese executives.

The younger speakers usually speak English with senior officers; SM with research assistants and peers from various ethnic groups including Bidayuh interlocutors. It is also observed that these speakers speak SM with general ease; SM has become “a natural way of communicating with friends” as reiterated by the respondents.

6.3.6 Patterns of choice of respondents in private organisations

The patterns of language choice of respondents from various private organisations are summarised below.

Table 6.8: Patterns of language choice of respondents in private agencies

Speaker No.	Age	Department	Pattern of choice
1	29	SIS	E
4	33	SIS	E
22	33	SIS	ME
37	31	Law firm	E
52	30	IT company	E

The respondents in private agencies are younger Bidayuh speakers, age ranging between 25-33 years old, and are attached to Sarawak Information Systems (SIS), a law firm and an IT company. The respondents work in the technical fields and the sciences. The agencies they are attached to are Chinese-populated organisations. As indicated earlier, there is no obligation on the part of private organisations to adhere to the

national language policy, unlike government agencies. Hence, English has become the main language utilised by these speakers at the workplace.

English is used to accomplish administrative tasks as well as on interaction with colleagues and friends at the workplace. Presentations, working papers, and written documents are in English. Discussions and meetings are conducted in English. The Bidayuh executives in these organisations also have frequent contacts with international clients. Native languages are spoken occasionally in informal social situations (e.g. interacting with colleagues over breakfast discussing a local topic) or in interaction with non-English speaking clients and staff in the lower rank (e.g. technicians and support staffs). The respondents indicate that they also deal with clients from the local government and private agencies. They speak English with these clients as interactions mainly involve work-related matters. Occasionally, the Sarawak Malay dialect is spoken with regular clients.

Speaker No.22 is the only respondent who has indicated a bilingual *ME* pattern in this organisation. He deals with a network of interlocutors consisting of a more diverse group i.e. executives and site employees. Here, Malay is spoken regularly in addition to English at the workplace. This suggests that speaker's social circles may dictate patterns of language choice at the workplace.

6.4 Language choice patterns of the respondents with various types of interlocutors at the workplace

The data on language choice patterns described in this sub-section is collected through observation and interview conducted on Bidayuh executives from the Chief

Minister's Department, Kuching. The results provide further insights into the intricacy of social dimensions affecting language choice in this multilingual setting.

Interlocutors at the workplace can be categorised into three types. Generally, respondents have encounters with: (a) superiors - e.g. top level executives, section or department heads (b) peers - colleagues of same level in the hierarchical structure of the organisation, and (c) colleagues in the lower level of the organisation - e.g. technician, clerks, and drivers. The respondents' regular contacts also include clients and customers from various social backgrounds. The patterns of language choice observed are as follows.

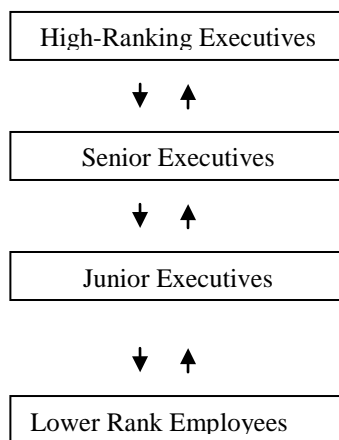


Fig. 6.1: Types of interactions observed at the workplace

In this study, the older respondents hold positions as senior executives, and the younger respondents as junior executives. The observation was conducted among senior and junior executives with various types of the interlocutors (superiors, peers and subordinates). The arrows indicate a two-way interaction. The choice of language(s) observed is as follows: (a) between senior executives with high-ranking executives, junior executives and employees in the lower rank, (b) between junior executives with high-ranking and senior executives, and employees in the lower rank.

6.4.1 Language choice patterns of older respondents with various types of interlocutors

Generally, the older Bidayuh executives prefer English with superiors and peers (i.e. senior executives and high-ranking officers) irrespective of the ethnic groups the interlocutors belong to. These interlocutors are also within the same age-group and they are English-educated. Occasionally, Malay, Bidayuh or Iban phrases are incorporated during conversation depending on language repertoire at speakers' disposal. A slight difference in pattern of choice is displayed with Malay senior executives and high-ranking officers. English is the matrix language spoken with occasional switchings to the Malay language when the interlocutor is a local Malay. The Standard Malay variety is the matrix language with occasional switchings to English in encounters with Malay executives from West Malaysia. Apparently, in general, West Malaysian Malays prefer the Malay language in social interaction. With Chinese executives, the choice is "most of the time English, with some Malay".

In contrast, the older respondents display different patterns of choice with younger executives and colleagues in the lower rank. With junior executives, *M*E* or *E*M* patterns are employed depending on the interlocutor's competency in languages. *M*E* describes the pattern of choice whereby respondents indicate they speak roughly 70% Malay most of the time, but with substantial use of English. Whereas *E*M* denotes English most of the time (70%), while switching to Malay occasionally (30%). At times, these older speakers may also switch to Bidayuh when conversing with junior Bidayuh officers who are less competent speakers of English.

6.4.2 Language choice of younger respondents with various types of interlocutors

The language choice patterns of younger Bidayuh respondents in this study vary from the older speakers to some extent. Younger Bidayuh executives, whether they work in private or government sectors also prefer English with superiors because it is the norm in superior-subordinate relationship at the workplace. Speaking in English is perceived positively by bosses. Less competent speakers, nonetheless resort to a bilingual pattern whereby Malay and English are switched interchangeably during conversation.

In contrast, with peers and subordinates, the younger executives are less constrained in the choice of language. The patterns chosen depend on competency and comfortability in speaking languages. A bilingual pattern is preferred with other junior executives. As deliberated by the respondents, switching between languages is habitual between peers. When interacting with non-Bidayuh executives the *ME* pattern is generally employed. Between Bidayuh executives, the *BE* or *MB* pattern characterises conversations.

Personnel in the category of “support staff” include personal assistants, secretaries, technicians, drivers, tea-ladies and cleaners. On the whole, the choice of language of the older and younger Bidayuh executives in this study with members in this category is predominantly Malay partly because the majority of them do not have a sufficient level of competency in English (with the exception of older employees who are English-educated). The languages of other ethnic groups may also be spoken with subordinates who have these languages at their disposal.

6.5 Conclusion

Language choice patterns at the workplace show the apparent dominance of English. Despite Malay being the official language to be utilised in government transaction, English predominates among the Bidayuh professionals in this study. It is the language preferred in interaction between managers irrespective of the type of organisation. On the whole, the “patterns of language choice” at the individual and group levels correlate most with the types of social circles at the workplace. Nonetheless, the norms of language use in various organisations are also shown to have dictated patterns of choice.