

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The study of language comprises of many different fields of investigation. Some branches focus on the internal structure of a particular language, such as morphology or syntax, whereas others attempt a broader placement of language use in contexts, such as sociolinguistics, focusing on the relations between language and society, or psycholinguistics, which investigates the ties between language and the human brain. Each of these different approaches pursues the study of language in its own way. This study on language choice among the Ceylonese community will be based on the sociolinguistic approach.

This chapter firstly, describes briefly speech repertoires in a multilingual setting. Next, it will touch on the domains of language use. Then, studies pertaining to the process of language shift will be discussed. Other related studies will also be discussed and presented.

2.1 Speech Repertoires in Multilingual Settings

In a multilingual speech community like Malaysia, a whole range of languages or repertoire is available to speakers, who have a choice to use some of them in their linguistic interaction to perform particular social roles. Probably the following example would be appropriate to illustrate this statement. A Malaysian Ceylonese teacher in her thirties uses the national language, Malay, to teach her students at her work place. She uses English when speaking to her English speaking colleagues, goes to the night market and uses bazaar Malay with a Chinese trader there and has conversations with her parents in Ceylonese Tamil over the phone. The following day, when her part time

maid comes to work, she gives all the instructions in Tamil. We can conclude that these different languages and varieties enable her to perform different roles in the community.

2.2 Domains of Language Use

The idea of the domain was first used by Schmidt Rohr (cited in Fishman, 1966:428) and was popularised by Fishman. Joshua Fishman has introduced domain analysis which describes the use of languages in various institutional contexts in a multilingual society. Fishman suggests that one language is more likely to be appropriate in some specific contexts than others.

The five domains for language use originally derived by Fishman, Cooper and Ma (Romaine, 1995:30) were family, friendship, religion, employment and education. Other researchers have subsequently added to this original list. For example, Anju Saghal in her study on language use in India, described the language use in three domains of family, friendship and institution (Saghal, 1991:299).

Domains are important to the study of language choice since communities are expected to be sensitive to the domains in which interactions take place. The three important components that are necessary to determine language use in a domain are the participants or interlocutors and their role relationships, the topic under discussion and the setting (Rubino and Bettoni, 1991:312). As far as the participants are concerned, factors such as age, gender, social status, socio-economic background and their role relationship (close or otherwise) may influence the choice of language used.

The type and number of domains to be studied for a particular community depends largely on the nature of the group and their contact with society at large (David, 2001:40). Different researchers have used different number of domains to study

different communities. However, regardless of the number of domains in a study, the family domain is always consistently included (David, 2001:40).

For the purpose of this research, the four domains that will be investigated are family, friendship, entertainment and religion with family being the most important domain.

Next, we will look at the definition of language shift and some relevant studies.

2.3 Language Shift

Language shift is known as a movement away from the ethnic language. Fishman (1968:424) refers to this movement as a demonstrable change in the habitual use of a language. Pandharipande (1992:253) states that, “language shift is a process by which a language A is replaced (partially or completely) by language B to the extent that the former becomes dysfunctional in one or more domains of its use”.

This preference of using another language may well lead to the “gradual disappearance of the first language” (Shameem, 1994:404). The term language shift can refer to different stages in the reduced use of a language; that is from the reduced use of a language in one or more domains of language use to its complete use in all domains.

According to Holmes (2001), when language shift occurs, it almost always shifts towards the language of the dominant powerful group. A dominant group has no incentive to adopt the language of a minority. The dominant language is associated with status, prestige and social success. It is used in the “glamour” contexts in the wider society, for formal speeches and ceremonies, by newsreaders and radio, and by those whom young people admire such as pop stars, fashion models and disc jockeys. It is scarcely surprising that many young minority group speakers should see its advantages and abandon their own language (Holmes, 2001). This study will attempt to investigate if there has been a language shift from the Ceylonese Tamil language, from its traditional domains such as family, friendship, entertainment and religion by

the Ceylonese community in Klang. We will proceed on the first discussion on language shift.

Schiffman (1996) focuses on the language shift and maintenance that is taking place simultaneously within the Tamil speaking community in Malaysia . He has divided the Tamil speaking community into two social economic classes. The opinion of the writer is that the language maintenance is relatively secure in the poverty stricken and labor class estate workers. According to him, these Tamil speaking people are cocooned in an environment where the language can be maintained and preserved. On the other hand, the urbanized educated Tamilian is susceptible to a new language choice and it is primarily a language shift towards English.

However, in this study another two main issues are investigated. The first and primary issue is the language choice of the Ceylonese community in a specific location called Klang. This study will focus on the educated Tamils who comprise of the Ceylonese community which is different from the Tamil speaking community which Schiffman (1996:7) concentrated on in his study. This Ceylonese community came to Malaya not as a labor centric resource but more for the purpose of administration contingent for the British (Schiffman, 1996:8). They were mainly made up of the more educated class of people. As a community too, they have always focused on education in uplifting their lot. Education is an integral part of the family structure and the community as a whole (Schiffman, 1996:10). Being more educated this community has also tended to become professionals and urbanized in their geographical locations in Malaysia which include the location of this study the town of Klang. The study focuses on this area to ascertain its role in language choice within the community.

Maintenance of language or loss is the result of decisions and behavior of the members of the community themselves (Fishman, 1991). This is captured clearly by Fishman's

term intergenerational transfer. Basically the term means, if each generation passes on the language to the proceeding generation, then the language lives, if not it dies. It is about the language parents use when speaking to their children. Fishman quotes, “Vernaculars are acquired in infancy, in the family, which means intimacy. They are handed on that way, in intimacy and in infancy” (Fishman, 1991:47). In this study, one aspect that will be closely examined is at the language choices of the Ceylonese community in Klang. This is very clearly connected to the concept of intergenerational transfer.

2.31 Other Studies of Language Shift – Sindhi

Language shift is most definitely taking place within the Ceylonese Community across generations. David, 1996 in a study of the Sindhis of Malaysia stated. In fact, through her questionnaire findings, recordings and observations she summarized that in another 20 to 30 years, the Sindhi language as the language for communication will cease to exist within the community because the oldest generation would have passed on and there will be no agent to reinforce the use of the language. This will be second issue investigated here, to look into the difference in language choice across the various generations of Ceylonese Tamils in Klang. Therefore, in the scope of this research the respondents chosen are across different generations to gauge the language choice evenly and without bias. Each generation has its own contributing factors to language choice and looking into a diverse respondent group will aid this research in achieving a more objective result. This paper will focus on the impact of language choice across generations. It will focus on generations that first came to Malaysia as immigrants and also proceeding generation’s right up to today’s Ceylonese youth. The study will be able to give an accurate diagnosis for the longevity of the Tamil language among the Ceylonese community in Klang and if there is a possibility of language shift to occur.

2.32 Other Studies of Language Shift - Malayalee

Discussing the Malayalee community, Nambiar in her Ph.D thesis on language shift in the Malaysian Malayalee community (2007) concluded that there is indeed an inter-generational loss in Malayalam proficiency among the respondents. As more of the older generation as compared to the younger members claim to be proficient in their mother tongue, it is a general indicator that the language ability of the community is on a decline since the language is not being passed on to the next generation. The use of the language with the older members is frequent but the younger generation's use of the language is irregular. (Nambiar, 2007:460). From the data collected from her questionnaires, clearly more respondents claim to be more proficient in English and Malay (to a lesser extent) compared to Malayalam. It is obvious then that the loss in Malayalam proficiency is a clear indicator that the community is making a language choice that shifts away from use of its ethnic language. This study will also take a closer look at the level of language choice in the Ceylonese community in Malaysia by using the questionnaire method of data collection. The questionnaire will look into into various factors that might contribute to language choice such as age, generation gap, education level, language proficiency and language use.

The questionnaire method was also used by David and Sankar and by most researchers investigating this issue.

2.33 Other Studies of Language Shift - Iyer

In yet another study on the Iyer community in Malaysia, Sankar, Vijaya (2004) found that the Iyer community is going through an extreme change of the Tamil language especially in the family domain (2004:23). However, she concluded that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Tamil language is still being maintained at least in the religious domain because the community places great importance on religious

affairs. The Malaysian Iyers religious culture is a big factor in sustaining the mother tongue of the people. Her findings were largely collected from tape scripts and questionnaires. This study will also investigate the extent of language choice across the various domains such as religion, entertainment, friendship and family domains. Religion is a very important facet in an individual's life and the Ceylonese Tamil language is an important part of religious activities within the community. It will probe to what extent each domain is contributing to language of choice. Questions that will help indicate language choice will be asked in each domain. This research investigates if indeed the Ceylonese Tamil community is making language choices which are moving away from the ethnic language. Respondents will be asked on their proficiency in various languages including their ethnic language to measure the language choice and see if there is a shift occurring from one language to another.

2.4 Other Local research studies

The status of Kristang, a creole used among the Portugese Eurasians which have received much interest, are among the studies conducted locally (David and Faridah,1999). This study is based on the Portugese community who reside in the Portugese settlement in Malacca. The questionnaire method was used in this study to gather information on whether the creole was being maintained across generations within the community. David and Faridah compared language choice and use between the older and younger community members to ascertain the future of Kristang. They studied the domains of home and outside the home, that is with other community members. In their findings, it was discovered that over 70% of the respondents considered Kristang as their mother tongue, though the younger generation had a more diverse range of languages that they considered as their mother tongue. The use of Kristang is dominant among the older members and English among the younger

members. It was concluded that the Portugese community is heading towards language shift. (David and Faridah, 1999: 475). It must be noted that the Portugese are a minority, immigrant community like the Ceylonese community in Malaysia.

Using all the material reviewed and knowledge gained from the extensive literature review, the best possible methodology to study the subject matter will be formulated and used. This will be explained further in the next chapter.