

# The Language Ecology of the Kedayan in Sarawak: A Quantitative Survey on Language Sustainability

Dilah Tuah<sup>1</sup>, Chong Shin<sup>2</sup>, Remmy Gedat<sup>1</sup> and Muhammad Jazlan Ahmad Khiri<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.*

<sup>2</sup> *Institute of the Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

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## ABSTRACT

The Kedayan is one of the ethnic minorities settled in Bekenu, Limbang and Lawas in the state of Sarawak (Malaysia). As an ethnic minority as well as reside in a multilingual environment, the Kedayan language encountered a language contact with other more dominant languages such as Malay, English, local Malay dialect and Iban language. This research is a language ecology study that investigated the interaction of the Kedayan community in contact with the languages that exists in their environment and this is an attempt to describe the social and psychological situation of a language. Based on previous researches, there were no significant studies on the language choice of the ethnic Kedayans in Sarawak. The domain analysis approach proposed by Fishman (1972) was adapted in this study, i.e. the domains of family, friendship, religion, education and employment. A total of 118 respondents (59 youths and 59 elders) were randomly selected in this study. This study revealed that the Kedayan are loyal to their own mother language in the family domain. Outside the circumstance of family domain, the Sarawak Malay dialect is used broadly in interethnic and intraethnic interactions. This finding has found that the Kedayan language is well maintained presently. The sustainability of this language is closely related to the positive attitude of the Kedayan speakers towards their mother tongue and it is used broadly in interlocutions, particularly in family domain.

*Key word : Language ecology, Kedayan, Language choice, Domains analysis*

## Introduction

The terms “language ecology” was first introduced in Einar Haugen’s (1971/72) work. He defined this term as “...the study of interactions between any given language and its environment...The ecology of a language is partly psychological, partly sociological, and is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit it to others”. In other words, this approach is closely related to the scope of language use in society. According to Creese and Martin (2003) as cited in Blackedge, 2008, “An ecological approach to language in society requires investigation of the relationship of languages to each other, to the speakers of those lan-

guages, and to the social structures in the society in which the languages are spoken”. The notion of language ecology includes the following: (i) language evolution as the study and description of multilingual interaction, (ii) language environment as the inter relationships between the speakers, interlocutors and other factors in the environment, and (iii) counteracting language endangerment or language maintenance as the ultimate goal of discovering language choice and language policy (Christoffersen, 2013).

Indeed, Hornberger’s framework has contributed a clear guideline and broaden the scope for the studies of language ecology in contemporary times. For the case of Kedayans in Sarawak (Malaysia), like