



**Faculty of Language and Communication Studies**

**Social Network, Language Use and Language Ability among the  
Kejaman Community, Malaysia**

**Amee Joan**

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Social Network, Language Use and Language Ability among the Kejaman  
Community, Malaysia

Amee Joan

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

.....

Signature

Name: Amee Joan

Matric No.: 13010090

Faculty of Language and Communication Studies

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

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## ABSTRACT

The Kejaman community is a small indigenous group living in the interior of Belaga, along the Balui River, in the Kapit Division of Sarawak, Malaysia. This study investigated the social network, language use and language ability among the Kejaman Community in Malaysia. The specific objectives of the study were to (1) compare the use of Kejaman to Malay, English, Chinese, Iban, Kayan, and Mixed Language by the three generations of Kejaman speakers; (2) determine the language ability of the three generations of Kejaman speakers to speak Kejaman, Malay, English, Iban, Kayan, and Mixed Language, and (3) compare the generational differences in the social network patterns of the Kejaman community. This study involved three generations of Kejaman speakers from two longhouses (Rumah Kejaman Neh Long Litten and Rumah Kejaman Ba Segaham) in Belaga. Data were collected from 123 participants through a questionnaire survey. The study employed Milroy's (1987) framework for social network analysis. In terms of language use, the study found that Mixed Language had the highest percentage of users, followed by the Kejaman language and the Iban language. Languages with the lowest percentage of users were Malay, English, Kayan and Chinese. The results of the study indicate that the older generation of the Kejaman community still speaks their native language, while the younger generation is switching to other languages. Additionally, findings from this study found there was a shift from monolingualism to multilingualism across three generations in the Kejaman community. Language ability varied significantly between the older and younger generations. The first and second generation had higher abilities in using their native language than Malay, English, Iban, Kayan, and Mixed Language. As for the third generation, their ability to speak their native language has significantly declined. Based on the analysis of the social networks for the Kejaman community, the participants had more

exchange networks than interactive networks. The exchange networks played a significant role in matters concerning families, money, properties, financial matters, as well as matters related to their cultural traditions and customs, such as funerals, deaths, and taboos. Interactive networks dominated matters related to health, grocery shopping, ICT, and work. In terms of density and multiplexity, results showed there were only slight differences between the three generations. All three generations had low density scores, indicating that they had few social networks. Results from multiplexity analysis showed that the majority of participants had uniplex social networks. Based on a four-matrix quadrant chart, the Kejaman community involved in this study falls into two quadrants; Quadrant 3 (Low density, Uniplex) and Quadrant 4 (High density, Uniplex).

**Keywords:** Language shift and maintenance, domains of language use, social network patterns, density, Kejaman community

***Hubungan Lingkungan Sosial, Penggunaan Bahasa dan Kemahiran Bahasa dalam  
Kalangan Komuniti Kejaman di Malaysia***

***ABSTRAK***

*Komuniti Kejaman adalah kumpulan minoriti yang tinggal di pedalaman Belaga, di sepanjang Sungai Balui, di Bahagian Kapit Sarawak, Malaysia. Kajian ini mengkaji peranan hubungan lingkungan sosial terhadap penggunaan bahasa dan kemahiran bahasa komuniti Kejaman. Objektif khusus kajian ini adalah untuk (1) membandingkan penggunaan bahasa Kejaman dengan bahasa lain antara tiga generasi komuniti Kejaman; (2) menentukan kemampuan berbahasa antara tiga generasi komuniti Kejaman bertutur dalam bahasa Kejaman, Melayu, Inggeris, Iban, Kayan, dan bahasa campuran serta (3) membandingkan pola hubungan lingkungan sosial antara tiga generasi komuniti Kejaman. Soal selidik telah dijalankan terhadap 123 orang responden daripada tiga generasi penutur Kejaman dari dua buah rumah panjang (Rumah Kejaman Neh Long Litten dan Rumah Kejaman Ba Segaham). Kajian ini telah menggunakan kerangka kerja Milroy (1987) untuk menganalisis hubungan lingkungan sosial. Dari segi penggunaan bahasa, kajian ini mendapati bahasa campuran mempunyai peratusan pengguna tertinggi, diikuti oleh bahasa Kejaman dan bahasa Iban. Peratusan terendah pengguna ialah bahasa Melayu, bahasa Inggeris, bahasa Kayan dan bahasa Cina. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa generasi tua masyarakat Kejaman masih aktif bertutur dalam bahasa ibunda mereka, manakala generasi muda beralih kepada bahasa lain. Hasil daripada kajian ini juga mendapati terdapatnya peralihan daripada monolingualisme kepada multilingualisme yang berlaku dalam kalangan tiga generasi komuniti Kejaman. Bagi kebolehan berbahasa pula, terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara generasi tua dan generasi muda. Hasil kajian menunjukkan*

*bahawa generasi pertama dan kedua mempunyai keupayaan yang lebih tinggi dalam penggunaan bahasa Kejaman. Generasi pertama masih aktif menggunakan bahasa ibunda, justeru itu, merekalah yang paling fasih menggunakan bahasa Kejaman. Generasi kedua juga masih mahir bertutur dalam bahasa ibunda mereka kerana mereka masih berkomunikasi dengan ahli keluarga dan saudara mara dalam bahasa tersebut. Bagi generasi ketiga, kebolehan berbahasa dalam bahasa ibunda mereka menurun dengan ketara. Analisis rangkaian sosial mendapati bahawa peserta kajian mempunyai lebih banyak rangkaian pertukaran berbanding rangkaian interaktif. Rangkaian pertukaran memainkan peranan penting dalam hal berkaitan keluarga, harta benda, kewangan, dan tradisi serta budaya. Rangkaian interaktif mendominasi perkara yang berkaitan dengan kesihatan, membeli-belah, ICT dan pekerjaan. Dapatan kajian ini juga menunjukkan perbezaan kecil antara tiga generasi dari segi skor densiti dan skor multipleksiti. Ketiga-tiga generasi mempunyai skor densiti yang rendah sekaligus menunjukkan bahawa mereka mempunyai jumlah rangkaian sosial yang amat sedikit. Berdasarkan skor multipleksiti, kebanyakan peserta mempunyai rangkaian sosial unipleks kerana rangkaian mereka tidak mengenali satu sama lain dalam lebih daripada satu konteks atau situasi. Divisualkan menggunakan carta sukuan empat-matriks, komuniti Kejaman yang terlibat dalam kajian ini tergolong dalam dua sukuan utama; Kuadran 3 (Densiti rendah, Unipleks) dan Kuadran 4 (Densiti tinggi, Unipleks).*

**Kata kunci:** *Pemertahanan dan peralihan bahasa, domain penggunaan bahasa, pola hubungan lingkungan sosial, densiti, komuniti Kejaman*



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EN	Exchange Network
G1	Generation 1
G2	Generation 2
G3	Generation 3
H	High-status language
IN	Interactive Network
L	Low-status language
ML	Mixed Language
N	Total number of possible links
Na	Actual number of links
NSS	Network Strength Scale
SN	Social Networks
SNA	Social Network Approach

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research problem, the aim and objectives of the study, the sociolinguistic background of the Kejaman, the operational definitions for the terms used in the study and the significance of the study. This chapter ends with the scope of the study.

### 1.1 Research Problem

Research on various speech communities revealed that many communities all around the world are shifting from their ethnic language to a more dominant language (Trevilla, 2009). Language maintenance and shift describes a person's or a group's habitual language practices. Clyne (2003, p. 20) explains that a "language shift" can encompass a wide range of changes such as the main language used, the dominant language of an individual or group, the language used within a specified domain, and the ability of people to read, write, speak, or understand the heritage language at the individual or group level. In language maintenance and shift research, the aim has been to understand what makes some individuals or groups of people much more successful in transmitting and using a heritage language than others. In most 20th century research about language maintenance and shift, speakers were assumed to have one heritage language and had moved once or twice during their lives to a location where one or two dominant languages are widely spoken (Clyne, 2003; Li, 1994). Language shift in modern societies can be viewed as a three-generation process. The older generation prefers to speak their heritage language, their children are bilingual in the heritage language and the dominant language in the society, and their grandchildren know little to nothing of the heritage language but are conversant in the dominant language (Clyne 2003; Li, 1994; Platt & Weber, 1980). Language shift is reflected in the shrinking domains of ethnic

language use (Fishman, 1991). Speakers only use their ethnic language with their own speech communities, mostly in the family domain. In Malaysia, the ethnic language fulfils the L (low) functions while the dominant language in the society fulfils the H (high) functions in domains of employment, education and law (Platt & Weber, 1980). Evidence from various studies also suggest that speech communities who live in rural areas and are from lower socio-economic groups maintain their ethnic language better than those residing in the urban areas (Gal, 1979; Lippi-Green, 1989).

Decline in the use of heritage languages among speakers can be attributed to several factors. Since language maintenance and shift are phenomena that occur in language-contact situations all around the world, the factors that facilitate them are also presumed to be universal. In western countries, language shift is occurring among migrant communities (Abdizadeh, 2020; Gal, 1979; Garcia, 2007; Grosjean, 1982; Lanza & Svendsen, 2007; Li, 1994; Lippi-Green, 1989; Matsumoto, 2010; Milardo, 1988; Milroy, 1987; Sarhimaa, 2009; Stoessel, 2002; Svendsen, 2001; Veettil et al., 2021; Velazquez, 2013; Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021; Yamasaki, 2020). Most commonly cited reasons include migration, either by small groups migrating to an area where their language no longer serves them or by large groups flooding the local population with a new dialect (Dorian 1980; Gal 1979). Besides migration, language attitude is another factor contributing to language shift. Baker (1988) asserts that attitudes are learned, not inherited. Attitudes play an important role in the social behaviour of an individual since it identifies and encourages certain behaviours. Language shift can result from speakers' negative attitudes towards their own language. In addition to language attitude, several studies conducted in the west have shown that speakers opt to use a particular language because of their ability to use the language (Li, 1994; Platt & Weber, 1980). For example, in Li's (1994) study of the Chinese community in Britain

found that the youngest generation (grandchildren) were shifting to English because of their inability to use their mother tongue.

In Malaysia, studies focusing on language maintenance and shift found that a variety of factors contributed to language shift. According to David et al. (2003), in multilingual societies like Malaysia, the language choice is influenced by both macro and micro variables. The macro variables represent macro pressures on language choice patterns among the ethnic minorities which include factors like migration and economic change, urbanisation and improved transportation and communication, school language and government policies, small population size and the existence of many dialects within each ethnic community (David et al., 2003). At the micro level the factors influencing language choice are exogamous marriages, speakers' attitude towards their languages and religious conversion (David et al., 2003). Similar to studies conducted in western countries, language ability also emerged as an important factor influencing language shift. For example, David and Noor's (1999) study of the Portuguese community in Malacca revealed that the younger generation of the minority community was not able to speak their ancestral dialect, Kristang. As a result, they spoke English mixed with Kristang when speaking to adults.

In Sarawak, studies conducted on the minority ethnic groups have reported language shift among the Bidayuh (Dealwis, 2008; Norahim, 2010; Ting & Campbell, 2007), Kayan (Wan et al., 2015), Iban (Coluzzi, 2010), Kejaman (Joan, 2013; Joan & Ting, 2016; Joan & Ting, 2017; Strickland, 1995), Miriek (Ghani & Ridzuan, 1992), Remun (Cullip, 2000) and also the Kelabit from Bario (Martin & Yen, 1992). In general, language shift in Sarawak is strongly influenced by education (Coluzzi, 2010; Dealwis, 2008; Norahim, 2010; Ting & Campbell, 2007), intermarriage (Coluzzi, 2010; Dealwis, 2008; Norahim, 2010; Ting &

Campbell, 2007), urbanisation (Alagappar et al., 2018; Martin & Yen, 1992), the small population size of speakers (Mohamad, 1991; Mohamad & Hashim, 1992) and the existence of many dialects within each ethnic community (Alagappar et al., 2018; Martin & Yen, 1992). In ethnic minority groups, specifically, major factors influencing language change are urbanisation, employment, friendships, and intermarriage. These four factors are more prevalent than others because ethnic minority groups in Sarawak are very likely to experience these factors. Many of them move to the city to work, meet new people through employment and friendships, and establish new relationships. As a result of these new associations or relationships, eventually they marry people from other races, different cultures, and different religions. For example, Martin and Yen (1992) in their study found that, in urban areas, the intermarriage rate among the Kelabit in Sarawak is high. According to Clyne (2003), intermarriage decreases the rate of language maintenance in subsequent generations.

Researchers have used different methods to examine the phenomenon of language maintenance and shift in a community. The earliest assessment tool was by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977), which identified the importance of transmission of heritage language in the home. Some of the most influential has been Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS, updated by Simons and Lewis (2006) as EGIDS), and the Language Vitality and Endangerment Measure Guidelines established by UNESCO in 2003. In previous studies of language maintenance and shift, most of them have primarily focused on assessing language vitality and how languages are used in different domains. Some researchers (Gal, 1979; Li, 1994; Mayer, 1961; Milardo, 1988; Milroy, 1987), however, have gone beyond describing patterns of language use. These researchers employed an approach

that examined the identities of the people with whom they regularly interacted, as well as the speaker's own identity. This approach is known as the Social Network Approach.

Social Network Approach has offered researchers not only a methodological instrument for measuring the structure of communities through social networks, but also new insights into how social differences (i.e., the relationships between individuals and how they adopt or reject a group identity) influence linguistic differences. Social Network Approach is underpinned by the assumption that speakers' language use is influenced and shaped by the types of social contact they have (Li, 1994; Milroy, 1982). This approach examines how individual speakers emerge socially as the result of interactions between them. Various studies were conducted in the west and locally in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s using the network approach to explain patterns of language shift and maintenance. Earlier studies in western countries and locally have provided differing views with regard to whether close and dense networks aided language maintenance or not. For example, Gal (1979) used the concept of social network to describe language choice and language shift in a bilingual Hungarian-German community in Oberwart, Austria. Gal (1979) examined the identities of the speakers' network ties along a peasant to urban continuum. Hungarian and German represent opposing values of rural and urban life, so if any Hungarian is used, it would be among those who identify with the traditional way of life and German by those who distance themselves from it. According to Gals' (1979) analysis, there is a positive correlation between peasant ties and Hungarian contacts, and between German and urban contacts. Gal (1979) suggests that the close-knit social network structure helps maintain language in that they permit members of the group to form a stronger unified group capable of withstanding linguistic and social pressure. On the other hand, loose-knit social network structures would facilitate language shift (Gal, 1979).