



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**LANGUAGE CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF KADAZANDUSUN  
TEENAGERS IN KOTA BELUD, SABAH**

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**LANGUAGE CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF KADAZANDUSUN  
TEENAGERS IN KOTA BELUD, SABAH**

by

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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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The project entitled **Language Choice Considerations of Kadazandusun Teenagers in Kota Belud, Sabah** was prepared by Tham Fung Ling@Sharen and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Education with Honours (English as a Second Language).

It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all necessary amendments of the project for acceptance

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **LANGUAGE CHOICE CONSIDERATIONS OF KADAZANDUSUN TEENAGERS IN KOTA BELUD, SABAH**

Tham Fung Ling@Sharen

This study is undertaken to investigate the language choice considerations among the Kadazandusun teenagers in Kota Belud, Sabah. Specifically, it aims to identify the teenagers' proficiency level in their ethnic language as well as their language choice patterns in daily life communication across the domains of family, education, friendship and religion. In addition, the teenagers' attitudes towards their ethnic language are also investigated in shedding light on possible factors that lead to their language choice considerations. To address these objectives, a survey research design utilising questionnaires was employed, covering a total number of 205 Kadazandusun teenagers who were selected from eight secondary schools in Kota Belud. The findings from the study revealed that the Kadazandusun proficiency level among the respondents in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is restricted to performing daily life interactions such as chatting with their siblings and using common expressions in greetings or salutations, in which 40% of the respondents rated their proficiency level as average and another 37% rated themselves at the beginner level. In terms of language choice across domains, the findings showed that Kadazandusun is widely used only in the family domain especially when the respondents are communicating with their grandparents (83.4%) and parents (60.5%). In other domains (friendship, education and religion), the Sabah Malay dialect is the preferred choice as opposed to other language or language variety. In the education and religion domains, the Sabah Malay dialect is chosen mainly due to formality and age difference between respondents and their interlocutors. As for language attitudes, the findings from this study showed that the respondents have very positive attitudes towards Kadazandusun and a majority of the respondents (96.6%) agreed to the importance of preserving the language. This study noted that though the respondents have positive attitudes towards their ethnic language, their use of Kadazandusun in daily life is somewhat limited, which suggest the need for further research to look into this situation.

## **ABSTRAK**

### **PEMILIHAN BAHASA DALAM KALANGAN REMAJA-REMAJA KADAZANDUSUN DI KOTA BELUD, SABAH**

*Tham Fung Ling@Sharen*

*Kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemilihan bahasa dalam kalangan remaja-remaja Kadazandusun di Kota Belud, Sabah. Secara khususnya, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti tahap kemahiran para remaja Kadazandusun terhadap bahasa etnik mereka iaitu Kadazandusun dan juga corak bahasa yang dipilih dalam komunikasi harian merentasi domain keluarga, pelajaran, persahabatan dan agama. Selain itu, kajian ini turut mengenal pasti pandangan para remaja terhadap bahasa etnik mereka bagi meneliti faktor-faktor yang berkemungkinan mempengaruhi pertimbangan mereka dalam memilih sesuatu bahasa. Bagi mencapai objektif-objektif kajian tersebut, suatu kajian tinjauan dengan menggunakan soal selidik telah dijalankan ke atas 205 remaja Kadazandusun yang dipilih daripada lapan buah sekolah menengah yang terdapat di daerah kota Belud. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa tahap kemahiran Kadazandusun yang merangkumi kemahiran mendengar, bertutur, membaca dan menulis dalam kalangan responden adalah terhad dalam interaksi harian mereka. Sebagai contoh, apabila para responden berinteraksi dengan adik-beradik, penggunaan bahasa Kadazandusun adalah terhad kepada sapaan, salutation dan topik-topik yang umum sahaja. Kajian menunjukkan 40% daripada responden memperakui kemahiran Kadazandusun mereka adalah pada tahap sederhana dan 37% lagi memperakui kemahiran mereka pada tahap baru mula belajar. Dari segi pemilihan bahasa dalam kehidupan harian merentasi domain keluarga, pelajaran, persahabatan dan agama, kajian ini menunjukkan bahasa Kadazandusun digunakan dengan meluasnya di dalam domain keluarga terutamanya apabila responden berkomunikasi dengan datuk dan nenek (83.4%) dan ibu bapa mereka (60.5%). Di dalam domain persahabatan, pelajaran dan agama pula, Dialek Melayu Sabah menjadi pilihan utama para responden, ini disebabkan status formal dan perbezaan umur di antara responden dan interlocutor. Dari segi pandangan responden terhadap bahasa etnik pula, kajian ini menunjukkan para responden mempunyai pandangan yang sangat positif terhadap bahasa Kadazandusun, sebahagian besar daripada responden (96.6%) bersetuju bahawa adalah penting untuk mengekalkan bahasa Kadazandusun. Hasil daripada penelitian pengkaji, didapati bahawa sebilangan besar daripada responden mempunyai pandangan yang positif terhadap bahasa etnik mereka walau pun mereka kurang mahir dan terhad untuk menggunakan bahasa tersebut dalam kehidupan harian. Kajian ini justeru mencadangkan agar kajian lanjut ke atas situasi ini dapat dijalankan pada masa akan datang.*

*With a special dedication to my late father*

**Tham En Siong (26<sup>th</sup> Dec 1926 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Apr 1989)**

*who was called to his eternal rest.*

*“God has put eternity in their hearts. He has made everything beautiful in its time..”*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

L2	=	Second Language
ESL	=	English as a Second Language
KD	=	Kadazandusun
KLF	=	Kadazandusun Language Foundation
KDCA	=	Kadazandusun Cultural Association
USDA	=	United Dusun Sabah Association
TV	=	Television
SMK	=	Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Sociolinguists have long been fascinated by the phenomenon of multilingualism and the complex language switching patterns that often accompany it. Speakers in a multilingual society who have more than one language in their repertoire tend to use different languages in their conversational interactions (Holmes, 1994). According to Holmes, examining the way people use language in different social contexts provides a wealth of information about the way language works, as well as about the social relationships in a community. The choice of language reflects factors such as the relationship between the people in the particular situation, and how the speaker feels about the person addressed. The reasons for the choice of one language rather than another involve some of these social considerations: the participants, the social setting, and the topic or purpose of the interaction.

In relation to that, Buda (2006) mentioned that whenever speakers of two or more languages come together, a decision has to be made about which of these languages is

to be used. Buda further explained that the speakers are able to switch from language to language with ease, sometimes in mid-sentence. Research reports on the subject are filled with such terms as 'domain', 'code-switching' and 'ethnolinguistic vitality', but often reduced to the level of a layman's understanding (Buda, 2006). The common conclusion would seem to be that choice of language is dictated primarily by the situation in which the speaker finds himself.

Nonetheless, though bilinguals or multilinguals have more than one complete language system intact and can use any of them with equal fluency, there may be factors predetermined in the speakers' life that sway them to use one language more than the other or master one better than another (Pavlenko, 2004). The extent of use of a language, time of acquisition, and socioeconomic factors may contribute to mastery and thus selection of a language.

### **1.1.1 Domains of Language Use**

Conversational interactions have been identified as relevant in describing patterns of language choice in speech community. Fishman (1965), describes five domains which can be identified in many speech communities, they are the friendship, education, family, religion and employment domains. A domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings. For instance, the interactions within an education domain would involve teacher and student (participant), solving a chemistry problem (topic) in the classroom (the setting). This particular domain would require a particular language choice that would differ from the

choices made in other domains. Similarly, Holmes (1994) argued that certain social factors such as who you are talking to, the social context of the talk, the function and topic of the discussion turn out to be important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech community and that it has proved very useful, particularly when describing code choice in large speech communities, to look at typical interactions which involve these factors. For instance, a typical family interaction would be located in the setting of the home, the typical participants would be family members and typical topics would be family activities. The interactions between multilingual speakers in many speech communities would allow researchers to identify the patterns of the language choice in different domains.

Fishman's (1992) domain theory further argued that bilingual performance needs to be evaluated from a sociolinguistic perspective as a reflection of the macro-social influences of situation prescribing the language choice. The theory reinforces earlier prospects summarised by Weinreich (1953):

...the ideal multilingual switches from one language to the other according to [reflecting] appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topics, etc.) but not in an unchanged speech situation, and certainly not within a single sentence. (p. 73)

This domain theory thus explains that speakers who interact within a particular domain are influenced by the situations in which they are engaged in.

### **1.1.2 Context of Situations**

Apart from the wider scope of language use in specific domains, bilingual or multilingual speakers also tend to choose one language from the other based on contexts of situations. This would mean that, within a domain itself, a speaker may select a language according to the different social contexts that exist in the domain. This, according to Holmes (1994), is an outcome of various social factors such as who they are talking to, in what kind of setting, and for what purposes. She stated that, in any community the distinguishable varieties which are available for use in different social contexts form a kind of repertoire of available options. The selection of appropriate variety from this wide linguistic repertoire depends on the aforementioned social factors. This is supported by Ferguson and Gumperz (1960) who recognized that different social aspects become salient in different speech situations and thus affect the choice of language used.

As further elaborated by Holmes (1994), when both participants share more than one variety, various factors may contribute to the appropriate choice. For instance, the social distance dimension (how well do the participants know each other), would influence their choice of language in interaction. Besides, social role may also be important and is often a factor contributing to status differences between people. Typical role relationships are teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, soldier-civilian, priest-parishioner, and official-citizen. The same person may be spoken to in a different language depending on whether they are acting as a teacher, as a father or as a customer in the market place. Furthermore, features of the setting and the dimension of formality

(Ferguson & Gumperz, 1960; Holmes, 1994) are also important in selecting an appropriate variety or language. In church, for example, a formal ceremony requires appropriate language which will be different from the language used afterwards in the church porch. Another relevant factor is the function or goal of the interaction. It is the purpose of which the language is being used, whether it is used to give order or to ask a favour. The descriptions of these social factors represent the “language patterns of the community” (p. 11) accurately (Holmes, 1994).

Nonetheless, Holmes (1994) also argued that people may select a particular variety or language because it makes it easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless of social roles or where they are speaking. For instance, at home, people often discuss work or school, using the language associated with those domains, rather than the language of the family domain. In other words, particular topics may regularly be discussed in one language rather than another, regardless of the setting or addressee.

In the immediate context of a conversation, Auer (1984, as cited in Yu, 2005) asserted that whatever language a participant chooses for the organization of his/her turn, the choice exerts an influence on the subsequent language choices by the same or other speaker. This influence is realized through contextualization cues, which may take various linguistic forms, sending out messages in respect of the relationship between the participants and their attitudes towards each other (Schegloff, 1987; Lanza, 2001). As these cues are provided and interpreted in the process of interaction by the speakers involved, they should be examined in the context in which they occur in order to bring about their situated meaning (Auer, 1995; Li, 1998). This sometimes causes a

switch to other languages used in an interaction, which is commonly known as code switching.

### **1.1.3 Code-switching**

When the speakers of a multilingual society are conducting a conversation, they tend to switch to another language that is available to them based on a number of reasons such as the language used by the interlocutors and the purpose of that conversation. Some studies have been directed towards the social functions of code switching, and bilinguals or multilinguals have been found to use different languages for different activities or topics (Ferguson & Gumperz, 1960).

Holmes (1994) explained that people sometimes switch code within a domain or social situation. When there is some obvious change in the situation, such as the arrival of a new person, the participants tend to switch to another language. This switch may be related to a particular addressee or as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity with an addressee. The “switches” are often short and they are made primarily for social reasons, either to signal the speaker’s ethnic identity or solidarity with the addressee. Holmes also argued that the switch could simply be an interjection, a tag or sentence filler in the other language which serves as an ethnic identity marker. According to her, switches motivated by the identity and relationship between participants often express a move along the solidarity or social distance dimension. Besides, people tend to switch from their roles of a personal interaction to a more formal transaction. This kind of role switch is commonly associated with a code-switch in multilingual communities. In addition, people may also switch code within a speech

event to discuss a particular topic. Bilinguals or multilinguals often find it easier to discuss particular topics in one code rather than another. Certain kinds of referential content are more appropriately or more easily expressed in one language than other. The technical topics are firmly associated with a particular code and the topic itself can trigger a switch to the appropriate code. Many bilinguals and multilinguals are adept at exploiting the rhetorical possibilities of their linguistics repertoires. The ability in language repertoires could also be used for affective purposes in any social interaction. In other words, a person may switch language because he or she wants to express feelings.

The points as mentioned above where the speakers' ethnic identity and solidarity with the addressee, their roles of interaction as well as the topic are factors influencing code-switching in a speech community. Sociolinguists argue that the points at which people switch codes are likely to vary according to many different factors such as which codes are involved, the functions of the particular switch, and the level of proficiency in each code of the people switching, and the code-switching could take the form of a whole segment, an interjected short segment, a tag or a sentence filler.

According to Holmes (1994), people are often unaware of the fact that they code-switch. When their attention is draw to this behaviour, however, most tend to apologise for it, condemn it and generally indicate disapproval of mixing languages. Reactions to code-switching styles are negative in many communities, despite the fact that proficiency in intra-sentential code-switching requires good control of both codes. It seems possible that an increase in ethnic self-consciousness and confidence may alter

attitudes among minority group members in other communities over time as attitudes to a minority language are very important in determining not only its use in a code-switching style, but also its very chances of survival.

#### **1.1.4 Language Maintenance and Language Shift**

As multilingual speakers tend to choose different languages in their daily communication, a long term effect of their choices may lead to language maintenance or language shift. According to Wijayanto (2007), language shift or language maintenance is the result of long-term language choice. It is a sign of the beginning process of abandoning a language, if an individual or a society begins to choose language other than their previous language (or mother tongue) (Fasold, 1994, p. 213).

Sociolinguists argued that there are several factors that may lead to language shift. Fasold (1994) stated that factors contributing to language shift are migration, industrialization, obligation to use a certain language at schools and the language policy of a government. Similarly, Holmes (1992) also stated that there are some influencing factors language shift such as immigration, politics, and social changes. According to Holmes, these social factors would lead a community to shift from using one language for most purposes to using a different language, or from using two distinct languages in different domains, to using different varieties of just one language for their communicative needs. The order of domains in which language shift occurs may differ for different individuals and different groups, but gradually over time, the language of the wider society displaces the minority language mother tongue. For instance,

immigrants are often regarded as threatening by majority group members that lead them to shift to the dominant language of the society. Holmes added that 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 on ceremonial occasions, by news readers on television and radio, and by those whom young people admire such as pop stars, fashion models and disc jockeys. According to Holmes, this shift may take three or four generations, but sometimes it may be completed in just two generations. Typically, migrants are virtually monolingual in their mother tongue, their children are bilingual, and their grandchildren are often monolingual in the dominant language of the host country. The shift could be observed by noting the change in people's patterns of language use in different domains over time (Holmes, 1992, p.65).

Furthermore, Fasold (1994) stated that language shift is not influenced by age groups, though language shift itself can influence next generation of a certain language speakers. However, a common factor that leads to language shift is the language attitude of those language speakers. When the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer. According to Fasold, positive attitudes support efforts to use the minority language in a variety of domains, and this helps people resist the pressure from the majority group to switch to their language. The younger generations of an ethnic group may or may not inherit the ethnic language from the older generations, thus it is important to examine their language use or choice in their daily communication in order to see whether or not their ethnic language is still being used and maintained in the society.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Research to date has repeatedly found that young adults belonging to a particular ethnic group are ashamed of speaking their ethnic language (Karahana, 2007). This phenomenon is observed to be experienced by the young generations specifically the teenagers of Kadazandusun in Kota Belud, Sabah. These teenagers are generally proficient in several languages, this is, either they inherited the languages from their parents or they learnt it in school. The inclusion of the ethnic language, Kadazandusun, in some primary schools and recently in some secondary schools at Form One level aims to help the younger generation to maintain the use of their ethnic language in daily life. However, through my observation, some Kadazandusun teenagers prefer Malay and English to Kadazandusun in their daily communication.

In relation to the aspect of their language choice and language attitudes towards the ethnic language, an earlier study of Kadazandusun situations in Sabah, Stephen (2001) noted that:

the language situations in Sabah especially the Kadazandusun in worrying as the conversation with the elderly Kadazandusun consists of the elderly speaking in Kadazandusun and the younger generation answering in Malay... it is surprising to notice a group of Kadazandusun do not grow up having the Kadazandusun language as their mother tongue. (p.15)

It is predicted that their choices of language and attitudes towards the use of the ethnic language may be influenced by several social factors, such as the participants whom they are speaking to, the setting of the interaction where they are speaking, the