

BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF IBAN AND MALAY MULTIWORD EXPRESSION: AN INSIGHT INTO L1 AND L2 ACQUISITION AND COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines usage and use of multiword expressions (MWE) among Iban youths in Sarawak. The questionnaire data were from 80 Iban youths who had to identify 15 MWE (similar, nearly similar and different) in Malay and Iban, and use them at the word, phrase and sentence levels. The findings revealed that close to 67% of the respondents could not recognise or use expressions in Iban, suggesting some loss of productive knowledge and language empowerment. However, respondents with recent schooling experience were able to use the expressions in Malay and reproduce them in written forms. Formal instruction and the written language have helped to extend local knowledge and use of MWE expressions for Iban youths. The study suggests that documentation, preservation and maintenance efforts stand to benefit when there is greater sharing and consciousness raising of common features between and among languages in the region.

Keywords: oral tradition, multiword expressions, Iban, Malay, written expressions

Introduction

As the functions of World Englishes and national languages expand, the domain of use of regional languages and languages of wider communication shrink (Kachru & Smith, 2009). Set against the backdrop of rapid loss of linguistic diversity, the languages of Sarawak in Borneo (e.g., Kelabit, Kayan, Kenyah, Melanau, Bidayuh) are

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