

## Abstract

### The Vitality of the Language and Culture of the Tibiya People of Sarawak

Florence G. Kayad  
Centre for Language Studies, UNIMAS  
[kflorence@cls.unimas.my](mailto:kflorence@cls.unimas.my)

Norazuna Norahim  
Centre for Language Studies, UNIMAS  
[nazuna@cls.unimas.my](mailto:nazuna@cls.unimas.my)

The disappearance of language normally follows from the disappearance of culture, and vice versa. Both are critical elements of group identity and the survival of a language is dependent on their continuous vitality. This paper presents preliminary findings of an exploratory study on a group of the Bidayuh people in Sarawak who are facing imminent resettlement due to development in the form of a dam. The Tibiya (also known as Biya) people who originally belong in the Upper Padawan area will be resettled in the Penrissen area. This could have an adverse effect on the linguistic and cultural heritage of the group. The current estimated population of the group is 2000 comprising 12 small villages of which 4 are affected by the dam. They will be uprooted from their original speech community and separated from the rest of the group into a linguistically new environment. The Tibiya group identifies themselves with the Biatah dialect while the dialect of the community around the resettlement area is Penrissen (Emperoh). With reference to the Tibiya situation, this paper discusses the intricacy of the relationship between language and culture, and demonstrates how it may play a major role in determining the survival of the Tibiya dialect in the near future. This paper also considers other demographical factors that could change the language choice patterns of its community members.

Key words: language and culture; resettlement; group identity; language survival and vitality

---

#### Biodata

Florence G. Kayad is a lecturer in English at the Centre for Language Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). She holds a Master in Applied Linguistics and has taught TESL and English courses at the university for more than ten years. She is a Bidayuh from Padawan/Penrissen area and has been involved in several research activities on the Bidayuh language.

Norazuna Norahim is a senior lecturer attached University Malaysia Sarawak. Her research interest includes threatened and endangered languages of Sarawak. Her previous research projects were on the Bidayuh community in Kuching-Samarahan Division, and sociolinguistic consequences of Iban-Malay contact in Sebuyau, Sarawak, and Language contact and Endangerment scenarios in selected indigenous communities in Sarawak.