

**LANGUAGE SHIFT IN A MAJORITY ETHNOLINGUISTIC SPEECH GROUP:
A CASE STUDY OF KADAZANDUSUN FAMILIES IN SABAH.**

by

**ESTHER JAWING
(8161)**

**Bachelor of Science with Honours (TESL)
Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak**

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A project entitled **Language shift in a majority ethnolinguistic speech group: A case study of Kadazandusun families in Sabah** was written by Esther Jawing and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language)

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

(Signature of Supervisor)

Dr. Ting Su Hie

(Name of Supervisor)

Date: _____

With a special dedication to my late brother

Gerald Jawing (26th May 1982 - 20th March 2006)

Who was called to his eternal rest

“Avasi daa doiho, Avanus asanang, Poimpasi tomoimo, Idoos do kinoingan”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Tbn D/TD = Tambunan Dusun

PK = Penampang Kadazan

Tpld D = Tamparuli Dusun

SML = Sabah Local Malay

E = English

Hkn = Hokkien

Md = Mandarin

BR = Bahasa Rojak

BM = Bahasa Malaysia

ML = Malay Language

GF = Generation Female

GM = Generation Male

GF1 = Generation Female 1

GM1 = Generation Male 1

GF2 = Generation Female 2

GM2 = Generation Male 2

GF3 = Generation Female 3

GM3 = Generation Male 3

GF4 = Generation Female 4

GM4 = Generation Male 4

ABSTRACT

Language shift in a majority ethnolinguistic speech group: A case study of Kadazandusun families in Sabah

Esther Jawing

Language shift for multiethnic speech communities may result in the mother tongue being no longer spoken within the community itself. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of intergenerational shift in language use within the Kadazandusun families. The aims of this study are to find out the language(s) used by different generations of speakers and for what purpose(s) the language(s) is/are used, the factors that motivate certain language choice that leads to language shift and finally, to examine the use of Kadazandusun language in relation to the value of ethnic identity. This study is a case study of five Kadazandusun families where general observation has shown the rapid use of another language in family domain. The methodology employed is one of interview and participant observation to study the social phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. The results show that only the first and second generations speak Kadazandusun as their mother tongue whereas almost all of the third and fourth generations speak Sabah Local Malay and/or English as their mother tongue. Sabah Local Malay and/or English have taken over some of the communicative functions of Kadazandusun in the family domain. Secondly, the extent to which individuals in the speech community have changed their habitual language use varies considerably according to a range of factors such as education, intermarriage, prestige, relocation and language contact. These factors accelerate the shift from the use of Kadazandusun language to other languages. Finally, a majority of the younger respondents (Generation 2 and 3) under study value the importance of Kadazandusun language as the marker of their ethnic identity. The findings are applicable to the context of this case and other contexts that are similar to the setting of the study.

ABSTRAK

Language shift in a majority ethnolinguistic speech group: A case study of Kadazandusun families in Sabah

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Peralihan bahasa (Language Shift) di kalangan masyarakat majmuk daripada berbilang etnik merujuk kepada bahasa ibunda yang tidak lagi diguna pakai di kelompok masyarakat itu sendiri. Kajian ini mengkaji fenomena pertukaran bahasa antara generasi dalam keluarga masyarakat Kadazandusun. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti penggunaan bahasa dalam setiap generasi yang berbeza dan tujuan bahasa tersebut digunakan, mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mendorong kepada proses peralihan bahasa dan mengkaji perkaitan di antara penggunaan bahasa Kadazandusun dengan nilai identiti etnik. Kajian ini adalah merupakan kajian kes yang diadaptasi berdasarkan pemerhatian umum di mana penggunaan bahasa dalam domain keluarga telah mengalami perubahan yang ketara. Kaedah yang digunakan adalah temubual dan pemerhatian untuk mengkaji fenomena sosial yang menitikberatkan perspektif responden. Penemuan kajian mendapati bahasa Kadazandusun hanya digunakan di kalangan Generasi 1 dan 2 manakala generasi muda (Generasi 3 dan 4) cenderung ke arah penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia (dialek Sabah) dan Bahasa Inggeris yang diadaptasi sebagai bahasa ibunda. Penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia (dialek Sabah) dan / atau Bahasa Inggeris telah mengambil alih fungsi komunikasi yang dahulunya didominasi oleh Bahasa Kadazandusun dalam domain famili. Beberapa faktor yang telah dikenalpasti sebagai punca kepada peralihan bahasa ialah pendidikan, perkahwinan campur, prestij, perubahan persekitaran dan masalah dalam kepelbagaian bahasa yang digunakan dalam perhubungan. Faktor-faktor tersebut mempercepatkan lagi proses peralihan bahasa. Akhir sekali, majoriti daripada generasi muda menghargai kepentingan Bahasa Kadazandusun sebagai penentu identiti mereka yang datang dari rumpun bangsa Kadazandusun. Penemuan kajian ini boleh diaplikasikan dalam konteks kajian ini dan juga dalam konteks berbeza yang mempunyai 'setting' yang sama dengan kajian ini.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, significance of the study and definitions of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

In multiethnic society, many languages exist because people speak one or more languages with different levels of proficiency in communication between people of different language background. When people from different ethnicity share more than one language, the question of the appropriate choice of language arises because different speech communities have a range of linguistic variation. Linguistic variation in different speech communities could influence the members of each community to select the appropriate code for any particular interaction according to the context in which they are communicating. In these cases, a speaker must choose which set of variants to use within a single language in any given situation. Therefore, when we consider within language variation to be a kind of language-

choice problem, then language choice is possibly for monolingual speakers as well as bilinguals (Romaine, 1994, p. 181). Certain social factors such as the participants, domains, the function and topic of the interaction, social distance, the status relationship between people, features of the setting and the dimension of formality turn out to be important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech communities (Holmes, 1992).

Typically, multiethnic speech communities tend to assign different language to different contexts and situations. Fasold (1984) indicated that “[o]ne language, for example, might normally be used as the home language and with close friends, whereas another is used for doing business with government agencies” (p. 8). According to Holmes (1992), “[p]eople may select a particular variety of code because it makes it easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless of where they are speaking” (p. 29). Therefore, the members of the multiethnic speech communities have to decide on what language to use when they are in different domains. At home, people often discuss work or school, for instance, using the language associated with those domains, rather than the language of the family domain (Holmes, 1992, p. 29).

Bilingual and multilingual speech communities usually decide on the appropriate use of code within a particular domain owing to their linguistic repertoires, especially when they come into contact with people from different language background. However, what real choice is there for those who speak minority languages in a community where the people in power use world languages such as English? How do the economic and political factors influence language choice? Consequently, the various constraints on language choice faced by the multiethnic speech communities will lead to the potential longer term effect of these choices that is language shift. Overtime, language death on some minority languages.

Language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely and move from the use of one language to another, either by an individual or a group (Fasold, 1984). Language shift for the multiethnic speech communities may result in the mother tongue being no longer spoken within the society itself. When language shift occurs within the community, it is almost always shifts towards the language of the dominant powerful group as “a dominant group has no incentive to adopt the language of a minority since it is associated with status, prestige and social success” (Holmes, 1992, p. 61). Some of the indigenous populations eventually become nationalized to the larger group and become linguistically and culturally assimilated to one degree or another (Fasold, 1984, p. 9). As a result, the community of the minority language will gradually shifts from using their mother tongue to each other most of the time to using the dominant language in the society for their

communicative needs. Language shift in this study refers to the mother tongue of an indigenous community being replaced by another language, which gradually used by the younger generations as their 'mother-tongue'.

The shift in the community may take three to four generations but sometimes language shift can be completed in just two generations (Holmes, 1992, p. 56). Fasold (1984) indicated that "the earliest sign of language shift is movement of one language into domains that used to be reserved by another, and that language shift is usually intergenerational" (p. 240). Migrants families, for instance, who live in a predominantly monolingual countries like England, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America almost always shift towards the language of the dominant powerful group due to the fact that they are not living in their own country and seldom have the opportunity to use their mother tongue, except in the family domain. This situation can be the catalyst to endanger the future prospects of the migrant's mother tongue. However, what about the multiethnic speech communities who live in their own country and happen to suffer from the same phenomenon, which is the shift from their mother tongue to a more dominant language in the society?

According to Brenzinger (1992), “[i]n larger groups, language may be of secondary importance for self-identification; with groups speaking minority languages, however, language is always an eminent component, since minority languages are doomed to vanish...” (p. 4). Legere (1992), on the other hand, stated that “languages play an important role in any attempt to identify ethnicity” (as cited in Brenzinger, 1992, p. 145). However, the shift in the use of ethnic language might take place in both of the majority and minority groups if they disregard the importance of their ethnic language for self-identification and speak a language that is used for a wider communication in the community where they live in.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Malaysia is well known for its diversity in races, religions, customs and, mainly, languages since the multiethnic speech communities speak different languages such as Malay, Chinese, Tamil and other indigenous languages in Sabah, Sarawak and Pahang. Hence, every speech community in the multiethnic society relies on communication with each other to safeguard their existence in the place where they live in. Every ethnic group has their own ethnic language. Generally, their ethnic language is acknowledged as their mother tongue, which is usually not taught formally in school.

Mother tongue is our own language that is acquired and used since we were small. According to Romaine (1994), “mother tongue was taken to be the language spoken at home from earliest childhood” (p. 37). Likewise, mother tongue is the language which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his or her natural instrument of thought and communication (UNESCO, 1953 as cited in Lasimbang, 1997). Basically, mother tongue is the most important emblem for indigenous communities because it is seen as an identity for certain community. However, does every member in multiethnic speech communities really preserve their ethnic language as their renowned distinctiveness? Does the use of mother tongue really epitomize one’s ethnic identity? Does every member in all generations utilize their ethnic language as their mother tongue?

The use of mother tongue among the multiethnic speech communities has decreased because of intergenerational differences in their ethnic language proficiency (Rouchy, 1992; as cited in Terborg & Ryan, 2002). Research to date has shown that language shift has always occurred among the younger interlocutors. This situation is experienced by the Kadazandusun in Sabah, especially among the younger generation. They are more likely to adopt other languages in daily communication such as the Malay and English language despite having the largest population in comparison to other ethnic groups. As such, it is surprising to notice their strange language behaviour as they can actually stick to the use of their mother tongue because they are the majority speech group.

The language situation among the Kadazandusun is seen as a worrying practice as the “Kadazandusun mother tongue is a valuable aspect that the Kadazandusun community regards as a major indicator for the identity of a Kadazandusun” (Stephen, 2001, p. 14). Stephen noted that:

[t]he language situation in Sabah, especially among the Kadazandusuns is worrying as the “conversation with the elderly Kadazandusuns 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. (2001, p. 15)

This situation has a significant impact on the shift from using their mother tongue to a most frequent language used within the community where they live in. Thus, it is vital to carry out a study that can examine the pattern of shift across generations in Kadazandusun families as they are the majority ethnolinguistic speech group in Sabah. Hence, the interest of this study is to investigate the nature of ongoing shift in language use across generations within the Kadazandusun families in Sabah. The aim here is to find out the language situation in Kadazandusun families as well as to examine whether the use of another language moves away the use of Kadazandusun language within Kadazandusun families.

1.3 Research Objectives

The aims of this study is to find out

- 1) the language(s) used by different generations of speakers and for what purpose(s) the language(s) is/are used.
- 2) the factors that motivate certain language choice that leads to language shift, which can be the catalyst that lead to language shift processes.
- 3) the use of Kadazandusun language in relation to the value of ethnic identity.

1.4 Setting of the study

1.4.1 Sabah: A Brief Introduction



Figure 1. The map of Sabah

Sabah is one of the 13 states that make up Malaysia is traditionally known as *The Land below the Wind*. It is recognized as one last tropical rainforest of the world. Sabah sits on the northern tip of the Borneo Island and covering an area of 73,600 square kilometres (Figure 1). It is surrounded by the South China Sea on the West, the Sulu Sea in the north and the Celebes Sea in the east. The most prominent and well known landmark of Sabah is none other than the majestic Mount Kinabalu. Sabah is known as *The Land below the Wind* since it is, geographically, situated at the south of the Philippines and Sabah is just outside the typhoon belt which blights the Philippines (Wong, 2000).

1.4.2 Background of the Community: The *Kadazandusuns* in Sabah

The geographical context for this study is the Malaysia state of Sabah, which has a population of 2.47 million and the Sabah population attributed only 10 percent of the total national population (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2004). The population in Sabah is as diversified with at least 40 ethnic groups speaking over 50 languages and 90 dialects.

The *Kadazandusun* (a political term encompassing both the Kadazan and Dusun) is the largest ethnic group in Sabah. The rest includes *Bajau*, *Murut* and the largest non-indigenous *Chinese* population. The *Kadazandusuns*, the speech community focussed on in this study, comprises 19.4 % of the total population of Sabah (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2004).

Grimes (1996) pointed out that there are 138 languages in Malaysia, of which 54 are indigenous to Sabah. Thirteen of these indigenous languages are classified under the Dusunic language family (as cited in Lasimbang, 2000, p. 415). According to Lasimbang (2000), “[t]here are no current data for language from the recent national census, but according to the 1999 Sabah census projection, speakers of Kadazan/Dusun ethnicity should be numbered 750,000 by 2000, making Kadazan and Dusun the majority ethnolinguistic speech groups in Sabah” (Sabah Department of Statistics, 2000).

1.4.3 The term “*Kadazandusun*”

LeBar (1972) indicated that the name *Dusun* literally means *orchard* and is said to give the connotation of *rural* (as cited in Banker & Banker, 1984). Appell and Harrison (1968) stated “the name is said to be an exonym, which was applied to the local people of Sabah by Malay and English voyagers” (p. 297). Meanwhile, the term *Kadazan* appears to have originally referred only to the people of Penampang and Papar (Banker & Banker, 1984). However, according to LeBar and Whelan (1970), “the name is gaining popularity, thus, many in other areas are using it as a general autonym” (as cited in Banker & Banker, 1984, p. 297).

The term *Kadazandusun* was conscientiously debated and unanimously passed at the 5th KCA Delegates Conference on November the 4th and 5th in 1989. In Article (6) (1) of the KadazanDusun Cultural Association (KDCA) Constitution & Rules, the definition of Kadazandusun refers to:

the generic and overall ethnic label to encompass and cover the following dialectical and tribal groups ... (followed by 40 tribal group names) ... and of a person whose mother tongue is any of the above dialect and who habitually practices and expresses the traditions, customs and other cultural manifestations of the same. (KDCA Constitution and Rules, 1995; as cited in Stephen, 2001, p. 7)

The Kadazan and Dusun in this study are terms that various groups of people who speak varieties of the Kadazandusun language have come to call themselves. Lasimbang (2000) indicated that the term *Kadazandusun* is the conjoined term decided on as the official name of the shared language (the standard language of