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A Study On The Frequency Of Dusun Language Use Among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Languages have been classified as the heart of a society as it can reflect the uniqueness, culture and identity of that specific community. As one would have it, having the younger generations to take on and learning their respective native languages is absolutely vital to ensure the continuity of that language in the years to come. Alas, when there are less people speaking this language, it can become endangered and will eventually cease to exist, and hence it will be an extinct language. Hence, this study will be focusing on the frequency of Dusun language usage among secondary school students in Sabah. Through identifying the rate of frequency of the Dusun language use among these young students, it can greatly help in pinpointing the level of fluency and the frequency of usage for the native language of the Dusun community in Sabah. Each of the participating respondents for this study received a total of 20 questions that have been divided into two sections, both section is a scale-based questions utilizing the five-point Likert scale and consisting of 10 questions, and in the first section will be used to determine the frequency of the respondents in integrating Dusun language into their daily conversation, while the second section is aiming to discern some of the factors that may be influencing the respondents in using Dusun language. It was foundthere is an alarming trend in the younger generation as to why they prefer other more commercial language instead of their own native mother tongue.

Keywords: language, native language, mother tongue, endangered, young generation.

Kajian mengenai Kekerapan Penggunaan Bahasa Dusun Antara Pelajar Sekolah Menengah

Abstrak

Bahasa dikelaskan sebagai kunci sesuatu masyarakat disebabkan ia dapat mencerminkan keunikan, budaya dan identity masyarakat tersebut. Kebiasaannya, adanya generasi muda untuk mewarisi dan mempelajari bahasa ibunda masing-masing adalah sangat penting untuk memastikan kesinambungan bahasa tersebut pada masa yang akan datang. Sebaliknya, apabila sesuatu masyarakat kurang menggunakan bahasa tersebut, maka ia boleh menjadi terancam dan seterusnya makin ditinggalkan dan bahasa tersebut akhirnya akan menjadi pupus. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini berhasrat mengkaji kekerapan penggunaan bahasa Dusun dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah di Sabah. Dengan mengenal pasti tahap kekerapan ini penggunaan bahasa Dusun dalam kalangan

generasi muda ini dapat menentukan tahap literasi dan kekerapan penggunaan bahasa ibunda dalam kalangan penutur asli iaitu masyarakat Dusun di Sabah. Responden akan diberikan 20 soalan yang dibahagikan kepada dua bahagian, dan kedua-dua bahagian menggunakan Skala Likert lima mata. Di bahagian pertama adalah untuk menentukan kekerapan responden menginterasikan bahasa Dusun dalam perbualan harian, manakala bahagian kedua pula meninjau faktor-faktor yang mungkin mempengaruhi penggunaan bahasa Dusun oleh responden. Daripada kajian ini, didapati terdapat trend yang membimbangkan dalam kalangan generasi muda di mana mereka lebih gemar menggunakan bahasa yang mempunyai nilai komersial daripada bahasa ibunda mereka sendiri.

Kata kunci: bahasa, bahasa ibunda, keterancaman, generasi muda

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1. Introduction

Language has and will be the most prominent method in human communication all around the world. Each part of the world has a unique language that is native to that continent or even more specific, a community that is residing in that part of the world. The state of Sabah in Malaysia is no exception to this, as there have been approximately 42 different ethnic groups currently residing in this state alone.in recent years, several efforts have been made to preserve and cultivate the usage of native languages in the nation through the production of dictionaries, classes that are being conducted in native languages and also through the publication of books in these native languages (New Straits Times, June 10, 2017).

Contrary to what people believe, the increasing amounts of the ethnic's population have no correlation in the survival of the native language (The Star, December 18, 2008). As a matter of fact, the survival of a language actually depended on the amount of speakers that can converse in the said language, since the population of ethnic does not necessarily equal the acquisition of the native language as their main communication language might differ in every household. It has been estimated that more than half of the world's languages have disappearedin the last 500 years (Sasse 1990).Currently, the two largest ethnics in Sabah, which is the Kadazandusun and Bajau is facing an ever decreasing amount of speakers for their respective language.Parliament Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia urged leaders from indigenous backgrounds to persevere and fight for the preservation of their mother tongue before it faces extinction (The Borneo Post, April 8, 2015).Official language policies can be and have been a particularly decisive factor in language death. Western colonialism has proven extremely efficient in this respect, as can be gathered from the use of the term "glottophagie" in Calvet (1974).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The purpose of this preliminary study is to investigate the frequency of Dusun language usage among secondary school students in their daily conversation while also determining the leading factors that influence the rate of usage on Dusun language among secondary school students. Thus, this study sought to answer the following:

1. What is the frequency of Dusun language usage among secondary school students?
2. What are the determining factors that give influence on the frequency of the Dusun language usage among secondary school students?

1.2 Scope and limitation of the study

This preliminary study will only be focusing on the rate of frequency on student's usage of Dusun language in their daily conversation and the factors that influenced the usage of Dusun language among secondary school students. All of the participants for this study are considered as the newer generations

since they will be in the age range of 13 to 17 years old. All of the participants will be from those who are descended or live within a Dusun speaking community or family.

2. Literature review

Language can be considered as a mark of identity by many that can reflect on the culture and tradition of that particular group of people. Unfortunately, the survivability of a language is heavily dependent on the amount of speakers it have, as opposed to the amount of population that the language originated from. Through this, the threat of one's losing the ability to grasp and master their own native language increases as now there are more people favouring languages that is dominant in their country or those that possesses a higher commercial value than their own language. Isa, Ahmed and YaganaGrema (2014) stated that if people find it is easier to use language that is used widely in conducting businesses or in communication then they will see an increase of such language being used among the younger ones, instead of the native language that is synonymous to their origins.The phenomenon of language vitality is often present in multilingual communities, and is closely related to situations of diglossia (Dorian, 2009).

A similar research was conducted by Sa'aadiahMa'alip (2011) with the Narum community in Sarawak where respondents were asked to rate their proficiency in two languages, the native Narum language and Sarawak Malay language. The respondents in the age group of 36 to 56 self-rated their mastery in the Narum language as either good or very good, contrary to the younger generation which were aged around 13 to 25 years old, some of the respondents from this age pool had rated their mastery of said language to be poor or very poor. In addition, all of the respondents had rated that their mastery in Sarawak Malay language is good at the very least.

Another research by Mohammad Azlan (2011) was conducted also in Sarawak which studies the language choices of the Melanau community when they are separated into six different domains which are family, friendships, stores and markets, banks, hospitals and clinics, and sports and leisure. Mohammad Azlan (2011) revealed that when a Melanau is communicating with another fellow Melanau there are higher chances of them to choose Melanau language as the communicating language in all of these settings, whereas when a Melanau is communicating with someone outside of the community (i.e Malays, Chinese, Iban) they tend to favour using Sarawak Malay language, a mixture of Malay- Melanau language or Iban language to communicate instead in all of the domains.

Krauss'(1992) estimates on the number of dying languages appear to be the most plausible and are still largely accepted by linguists working with endangered languages More recent publications, such as Nettle and Romaine(2000) and Crystal(2000), attest to this., and the numbers are quite disturbing. When a language has a substantially small amount or next to no fluent speakers left, it will gradually be erased from the face of the earth and will eventually be considered as extinct. Sasse(1992) lists a number of external factors that lead to language loss including cultural, historical, economic and political forces.He also added that these forces in turn have an effect on how a speech community behaves; creating internal conditions which shift patterns of language use towards a majority language or foster negative attitudes towards the minority language which does not favors its use.

Furthermore, Dorian's (1981) study of East Sutherland Gaelic, for example, demonstrates how the fisher folk came under socioeconomic and political pressure to abandon Gaelic. The language is not allowed to be taught in schools, and speaking Gaelic was highly stigmatized by everyone. Semi-speakers no longer have a strong command of the Gaelic gender system: masculine pronouns appear where feminine pronouns should be, feminine diminutive suffixes wrongly appear in place of their masculine counterparts, and gender marking on adjectives is often faulty.

When a speech community shifts over time to the more dominant language(Language B) in a language-contact situation, the languagewhich is abandoned(Language A) usually dies a gradual death.To reiterate, the term "linguistic suicide" is somewhat related to the term "language suicide" which was first mentioned by Denison (1977). Furthermore, Denison (1977) also argued that the idea that language death is occasioned by structural impoverishment or decay until it reached the point where language is no longer a functioning linguistic system.Tsunoda (2012) came up with a suggestion that languages need to be documented because once a language is lost there would be no opportunity to record it. There is certainly a sense in which languages have lives. However, as explained in Mufwene (2004), they evolve more like species than like organisms, especially in the way they are born and in the way they die. As pointed out by Chaudenson (1992) and later works regarding creoles, languages cannot be issued birth certificates because nobody can determine precisely when they were born.

Among the earliest studies on Dusun was a lexicographical research study by Nothofer (1991). This study involved the collection of cognate words of the native languages and dialects of indigenous ethnic groups in Brunei, examining their lexical relations with Brunei Malay and between one another. Meanwhile, the earliest study considered as significantly focusing on the Dusun language was Kershaw's (1994) study on the use of the language in the delivery of traditional oral literature by the older generations of Dusun native speakers. Kershaw's research also found the practice of the Dusun language to be more concentrated among the older generations and less so in the younger generations. Later on, Kershaw (2000) found that the role of non-Muslim Dusuns in relation to the modern Islamic monarchy of Brunei had impacted the transition from their mother tongue to the convergent use of the more 'mutually understood' Brunei Malay. AsiyahKumpoh (2011) later confirmed Kershaw's findings on this. However, Dusun is also a communicative tool for the people of Kadazan in Sabah, Malaysia; and Bisaya in Limbang, Sarawak (Aini Karim, 2007). In spite of this, Yabit Alas (1994) claims the language spoken by the Dusun in Brunei is different to those spoken by the Kadazan and Bisaya, either in terms of pronunciation or lexis.

3. Methodology

The participants that have been selected to partake in this study are secondary school students in Sabah, and all of the participants are between the ages of 13 to 17 years of age.Due to the increase of intermarriage among different ethnics and races in the recent years, the race classification will be split into Malays, Chinese (Sino Kadazandusun), Indian and others to cater to those who are born into an interracial marriages. "Others" in this context will adhere to the Sub-groups of indigenous ethnics that reside in Sabah, such as Dusun, Bajau and Rungus. Each of the participants received a set of the prepared questionnaire that has been divided into two section which is section A and section B. For section A, each participant should score their answer based on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 – 5 which: 1 represents never, 4 represents rarely, 3 represents sometimes, 4 represents often, and 5 represents always. As for section B, it applies the same Likert scale ranging from1 – 5 which: 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means partially agree, 4 means agree and 5 means strongly agree.

The questionnaire is only distributed to those who started or currently in their secondary school level in 2018, which is from Form 1, Form 2, Form 3, Form 4 and Form 5 students in the year 2018. After all the data has been collected, a full report was generated by TYPEFORM in Microsoft Excel format and the data is analysed. The mean, standard deviation and percentage for each of the answers for the questions in the first and second section were calculated in Microsoft Excel in order to summarize the respondents' responses. The analysis then will be based on Oxford's related classification (1990) for understanding the mean scores on instruments with a response scale ranging from 1 to 5. Average scores of 3.5 to 5.0 ($3.5 > M > 5$) were defined as high means, 2.5 to 3.4 ($2.5 > M > 3.4$) were medium means, and lastly, 1.0 to 2.4 ($1.0 > M > 2.4$) were low means.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results and findings from all of the respondents regarding the frequency and factors of using Dusun language in their daily conversation. Microsoft Excel is used to help with the calculation and to complete the analysis of all the data that have been collected. The percentage of the answers from the respondents, mean and standard deviation of the answers are then calculated and tabulated in order to fulfil the research objectives stated.

Table 1: Respondents demographics

		No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	29	33.7%
	Female	57	66.3%
Age	13	1	1.2%
	14	2	2.3%
	15	8	9.3%
	16	23	26.7%
	17	52	60.5%
Race	Malay	6	7%
	Chinese	3	3.5%
	Indian	1	1.2%
	Others	76	88.4%
School area	Urban	44	51.2%
	Suburbs	42	48.8%

This section of the questionnaire collects the demographic data from all of the respondents that have participated. After analyzing the data, it is found out that 66.3% of the respondents are female while only 33.7% are male. The youngest respondents of 13 years old makes up for 1.2% of the questionnaire, followed by 14 year olds at 2.3%, 15 year olds at 9.3%, then 26.7% for 16 year olds, and finally 17 year olds make up the most respondents with 60.5%. As for the race section, Indian respondents make up for the lowest with only 1.2%, followed by Chinese respondents at 3.5%, after that Malays make up for 7% of the total respondents, and the majority of respondents are the others or native ethnics of Sabah with 88.4%. Then the schools are categorized into urban and suburbs areas, with urban areas respondents stands at 51.2% while the suburbs stands at 48.8%. The data for this finding can be found in table 1.

The next section of the questionnaire asks the respondents about the frequency of them using Dusun language in their daily life. This section contains 10 questions to determine which situation prompts them to use Dusun language more frequent. The results for mean and standard deviation are tabulated in table 2.

Table 2: Students frequency of integrating Dusun language in their daily life

No. of items	Questions	Mean	Standard deviation
1.	I found that the language is easy.	3.30	1.05
2.	I found that the language is accessible	2.78	1.19
3.	I found that the language is current/modern.	2.69	0.96
4.	I am interested in learning the language.	4.37	1.01
5.	I speak the language because it is a part of my heritage.	4.14	1.22
6.	I speak the language because I want to preserve it.	4.23	1.19
7.	I think that this language is civil and proper.	4.05	1.19

8.	I think this language possesses commercial value.	3.90	1.09
9.	I think that the language will benefit me in the long run. (preserving the language, job opportunities)	4.14	1.07
10.	I found the language to be very interesting.	4.45	0.88

Based on the results from table 2, there is one situation that were found to have the highest mean (3.5 > M > 5) among the 10 given, which is number 8. This can be concluded most of the students only use Dusun language frequently because they are living in a community that is mostly dominated by Dusun language speakers. From the tabulated results above for section A, it is noticeable that 5 items (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) scored a relatively low mean (1.0 > M > 2.4). In this situation, students find themselves using Dusun language in a lesser frequency compared to the other one. Meanwhile the remaining 4 items (items 1, 2, 3, 10) scored a medium mean (2.5 > M > 3.4) among all of the respondents. This could mean that it is situational to them as they can choose to freely switch between different languages to suit their needs.

For the next table, it will be addressing the factors that may have influenced the frequency of Dusun language usage among secondary students. This section of the questionnaire also contains 10 questions. The mean and standard deviation are calculated and tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors that may have influenced the frequency of Dusun language usage among secondary school students

No. of items	Questions	mean	Standard deviation
1.	I use Dusun language to communicate daily.	2.60	1.24
2.	I use Dusun language as the main communication language in my household.	2.55	1.39
3.	My parents communicate with me using Dusun language.	2.98	1.57
4.	I use Dusun language while communicating with my friends.	2.35	1.13
5.	I use Dusun language in school.	2.08	1.04
6.	I use Dusun language to communicate with my teachers.	1.63	0.89
7.	Dusun language is used as the main communication language in classroom.	1.48	0.89
8.	I live in a community where Dusun language is used frequently.	3.83	1.30
9.	I found myself using Dusun language more often than any other language while communicating.	2.31	3.30
10.	Dusun language is used almost all the time where I lived.	3.44	1.44

According to the findings in Table 3, 7 items (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) have scored high mean (3.5 > M > 5) as factors influencing why the students are even using Dusun language as a communication tool, with item no 10 being the highest with 4.45. The other 3 items (item 1, 2, 3) have obtain a medium score of mean (2.5 > M > 3.4) among students. Shockingly enough, none of the stated items above receive an average of low mean (1.0 > M > 2.4). This could only mean that most of the respondents who have taken part in answering the questionnaire have agreed on these being the major factors that are influencing their frequency in speaking the Dusun language.

4.1 Summary

To conclude all of the findings above, it can safely be said that most of the young generationonly tend to speak in Dusun language more frequently because of the external factor around them which is highly dominated by Dusun speaking residents. Whereas in a school setting, the respondents tend to switch into another language and prefer using it as appose to Dusun language, whether communicating with their

teachers or with their peers. In addition to this, respondents also found that they tend to use another language instead of Dusun while doing their daily communication in public.

5. Conclusion

This study is conducted to figure out how the younger generation of native language speakersperceive and impression on their own language. As seen on the results obtained through the execution of this study, it is clear that Dusun language is not widely used in communication in a more formal setting like in schools. As it would have it, the younger generations found it is necessary to use Dusun language only because they are living in a community with a large number of Dusun speakers. Another thing is that there is much more preferences on using any other language while communicating with their peers as supposed to using Dusun languageas shown on the results above in Table 2 (item 4, 5, 6, 7, 9). As for the factor of student's factor in the frequency of using Dusun language in daily conversation, it is prominent that most of them do notice the gap and the lack of mastery among the younger generation in Dusun languageand thus acknowledging that the language is being replaced by other languages which leads to the dwindling numbers of fluent speakers in this language. The lack of fluent speakers and practicing speakers of this language would mean that there cannot be a proper means to pass this language down from one generation to another due to the lack of mastery in said language. Hence, most respondents tried to learn and pick up more on the language as they felt it gives them a sense of identity.

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