

Malay Language And The Language Of Development: The Roles Of Print Media

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of new media has posed serious threats towards the existence of print media. This is evident as challenges arise in maintaining the popularity of conventional media such as printed newspaper. Younger generation prefers online news as a quick and easy access to happenings although its use of language is questionable. Malaysian newspapers, however, are still showing its relevance among readers as a force of empowering the national language. Thus, this paper investigates, analyses and further explains the interrelationships between the roles of print media, such as newspapers, in promoting and strengthening Malay language in conjunction with the process of preserving Malay identity. The scope of this paper is print media available in Malaysia. This paper will contain ideas and recommendations on how the mentioned print media can help in contributing to the enhanced used of Malay language for preserving our Malay identity.

Keyword: *Print media, Malay language, Malay identity, Development.*

INTRODUCTION

In order to interact, human beings have been using verbal and non-verbal communication for centuries. By communicating, individuals can utilize such attribute to empower the process of developing society. In other words, communication is used as means to accommodate individuals' participation in development activities. However, millions of people in developing countries are excluded from a wide range of information and knowledge, especially the rural poor. They have been isolated from both traditional/conventional media and new information as well as communication technologies which would improve their life.

Development communication refers to communication that can be used for development or improve a situation/condition. The messages which are designed to transform people's behaviour or for improving their life or socio-economic condition can be termed as development communication. Therefore, development communication can be defined as the use of communication to promote development (Patil, 2011). Media such as print media and electronic media plays a major role in development communication of a country. Even after the emergence of electronic media-like radio and television, the print media has not lost its charm or relevance. Print media has the advantage of making a long-lasting impact on the minds of the reader with more in-depth reporting and analysis (Sinha, 2011).

Additionally, print media contain current issues that are available for us in printed form and can be carried anywhere, in other words, they are portable. The major types of print media are books, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, posters, brochures, press releases etc. Books are the oldest medium among all the print media and they are still one of the most widely used among all. Newspapers is relatively a new form of print media which gained popularity and became common in the 20th century all over the world, thus becoming leading medium of mass communication (Patil, 2011). The advent of newspapers greatly helped in the communication at the local, national as well as global levels during the last two centuries. It can also be said that newspapers acted as an agent of globalization to a large extent (Ogunsola, 2005).

In a society that has access to multilingual and multicultural resources, Malaysia has the advantage in its ability to play an important social and economic role at the world stage. To gain this, Malaysia first of all need to educate its people in a language that most of them would comprehend and use in order to communicate, in this case, the Malay language. This method had long been practise in a developed country such as Japan, which has pride over the use of their national language to educate their people, yet still remain significant as the world's leading power in economy, politics and culture (Vail, 2014). With its ability to reach out to millions of readers in Malaysia, printed media, such as newspapers, is seen as an important tool towards enhancing and promoting such notion.

However, problems toward empowering the national language occur as the proliferation of information made available for the mass mainly focused on using English rather than being documented or reported in Malay. Seen as the universal language, English has become dominant in most texts because of its ease of use and availability of various vocabulary as well as expressions (Seidhofer, 2001). Nevertheless, it is not impossible to enhance the use of Malay language to a level of prestige as many have perceived for English. Its potential to be known as the world's forthcoming lingua franca is plausible as it has been spoken over by 300 million speakers across the globe (Chong, 2012). Despite challenges faced by authorities to uphold this national language, (such as improper use of short forms, slangs, codemixing, etc.), efforts have been carried out through publications of academic titles to ensure that it becomes a channel for our country's progress and development (Muhyiddin Yassin, 2012). This is in accordance to Ball (2011) in which he believed that language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group. Thus, it has become the researchers' main objective to study the role of print media in preserving and developing an identity of a country, namely, Malaysia.

In order to study the relationship between the national language and development of the country, the research questions are as follow:

RQ1: What is the importance of the national language in developing Malaysia?

RQ2: What are the roles of print media in developing the national language for the development of Malaysia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND PRINT MEDIA

To enhance the usage of national language, print media would be the most appropriate tool to be utilised. This is because through print media, such as Malay-language newspaper, the public would have access over it in order to gain information or latest happenings across the country. Its convenience in terms of language, price and portability,

makes newspapers as the main source of information for urban and rural community (Muhyiddin Yassin, 2012).

PRINT MEDIA ROLES IN DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIA

By promoting it through media, younger generation, especially students, can be aware of the importance of the national language. Print media can also enhance the Malay language usage and let others appreciate its' beauty via knowledge-filled and interesting articles. The print media will also be a great help in preserving Malay cultures for the youth. Malaysia is known for its diverse ethnic populations of various cultures as well as languages. The variety of cultures and languages of these ethnic groups may affect the use of mother tongue negatively. As mentioned by Walter (2015), the insurmountable obstacles to mother tongue education would be the mixing of ethnic populations and languages. Consequently, the mother tongue will be forgotten and not be used effectively due to lack of enforcement of its usage. Furthermore, thousands of languages are endangered when parents no longer teach their children via their mother tongue or even not using it in their daily conversation. Hence, print media, such as newspapers, will be the perfect tool to promote the national language especially to our new generation.

COMMUNICATION THEORY

The researchers believed that the relevant theory related to this topic would be the Agenda Setting Theory. The Agenda-Setting Theory comes from a scientific perspective, as it predicts that if people are exposed to the same media, they will place importance on the same issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1973). In this study, the researchers would like to use agenda setting theory as the study's communication theory. This theory describes a very powerful influence of news media and its ability to tell the public on what issues are deemed as significant and important. Thus, this theory is chosen due to the fact that media give a deep impact to the public, in this case, the importance of preserving the national language. They can be influenced by the information written in the print media, especially in newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. This qualitative research is designed with the aim of revealing the target audience's range of behaviour as well as the perceptions that fills it with the reference to specific topic and issues.

For further information on the matter, the researchers also carried out an in-depth interview which consists of conducting individual interviews with a small number of respondents to elicit more about their perspectives on a topic or situation. This method is proven to be useful in searching for detailed information on a person's thoughts and behaviours as well as exploring new issues that occur in depth. It is also often being used with the purpose of providing context to other data or offering a more complete picture of what had happened during the program and why did it occur.

The interviews are conducted face to face between the interviewer and interviewee. The questions used in interviews were in the form of open-ended question as well as the semi-structured questions. Besides that, during the interview, the researchers also followed the impromptu style of interviewing as to allow new questions to be asked during the

interview session. The interview held with each of the informants took place at different locations.

In addition to that, different people have different views even though they perceived the same information, events, or situations. According to Leininger (1985), thematic analysis is defined as the combination of data in which it is already themed together and more beneficial compared to standalone information. It is an analysis that sees which answer or finding is the most popular or frequently given by the informants. The most frequent answer given by the informants will be concluded as the findings for this research.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

RQ1: What is the importance of the national language in developing Malaysia?

Mother tongue acts as a communication tool. Mother tongue is the first language learned since childhood. Apart from that, mother tongue also refers to the main language used by the majority of the citizens in a country. In Malaysia, *Bahasa Melayu* is the conceived mother tongue which is used dominantly by Malays, Chinese and Indians. There are many reasons why mother tongue is very crucial in developing the country. First, our mother tongue is our daily communication tool. “*To understand human and humanity, it is very important to know the characteristic of the language as language is a life source and it shows the power of its users,*” said *Informant 1*, a language lecturer in UiTM Campus Alor Gajah, Malacca. Every race in the country is using *Bahasa Melayu* to communicate with each other. As in Malaysia, the largest population who speaks originally in *Bahasa Melayu* are Malays and to enable other races like the Chinese and Indians to communicate with them, they have to be fluent in the language too. This will ensure the smooth operation of daily activities such as transactions, negotiations or consultations as effective communication takes place.

Mother tongue as our national identity. Mother tongue has a very powerful impact on human life. It shows our national identity. Wherever we go, our mother tongue is always with us. No matter what kind of language that we learnt, our mother tongue will always be the first. In Malaysia, *Bahasa Melayu* is used extensively in the government sector and it is a must to use it in formal occasions or events among government staff. For example, when in court or parliament, it is a must to fully utilise *Bahasa Melayu*. It shows that the constitution has been implementing such policy in order to preserve the privilege of *Bahasa Melayu*. This is stated by *Informant 2*, who is a head editor for Utusan Malaysia, Malacca branch.

Mother tongue as a tool of unity. In Malaysia, we have various races and beliefs. Each races have their own respective language and culture. In order to avoid factionalism, the use of mother tongue is very crucial. This is because the language itself will unite them as they comprehend and respect the language. Thus, negative sentiments among these races can be avoided as they speak the same language. This is taken from *Informant 3*, an administrative officer from Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara, UTC Malacca.

RQ2: What are the roles of print media, specifically Malay-language newspapers, in developing the national language for the development of Malaysia?

Language literacy society. Language depicts a speaker’s ability to communicate, expressing feelings and thoughts as well as carrying out other language functions. If one has problem in communicate in his or her own mother tongue, it will reflect a negative image towards the society. For example, the usage of filthy and disrespectful words will give a bad impression on Malaysians who are well-known for humble ethics and manners. By not being

language literacy, one might use inappropriate words while in conversation thus giving a whole lot of different meaning to the things that one really wanted to say. *Informant 2* said that what we wrote mirrored ourselves. So, print media, such as newspapers, should be aware on how they construct and write information for the public.

Language-favoured society. By reading, we can inculcate our society with aesthetic values and learn to love and appreciate language as well as reading. In correspond to government sentiment of wanting to create a society, who loves reading, the publisher should print out more reading materials in *Bahasa Melayu*. *Informant 1* commented on this matter, saying that nowadays in the market, there are various English books compared to *Bahasa Melayu*. From this scenario, we can see that our society is more interested in reading English materials compared to *Bahasa Melayu*. Plus, we can see a lot of young writers, who started out as online novel writers, begin to publish their own novel in the market. This shows that younger generation has started to favour the use of mother tongue language as they find it easier to express their ideas and thoughts productively. Besides, in newspapers, there are columns where people who are talented in writing poems, short stories and literary compositions in *Bahasa Melayu* which provide these writers the chance to publish their work. By doing so, the readers will have the opportunity to immerse themselves into linguistic mechanics embedded within the writings. This will then make them learn their mother tongue thoroughly, thus, becoming a language favoured society.

Giving awareness on the importance of national language to society. Malaysia has dedicated a whole month to celebrate its national language which is called '*Bulan Bahasa Kebangsaan (BBK)*'. It is celebrated every October. Many activities are held through this month. The objective of celebrating *Bulan Bahasa Kebangsaan* is in line with the development of the country. How so? By consolidating, strengthening and showing the pride and image of Malaysian race through the usage of our mother tongue. Plus, print media should take an immediate action by promoting it and conducting contests about the national language. As more public participate in the contest, they will get a better chance to enrich their mother tongue vocabulary. In short, we as Malaysians are depicting to the outside world that we appreciate our mother tongue by maximizing its usage and adapting it in everyday life not only during celebration month.

Upholding the mother tongue. New word is created as we kept using and adapting it in daily conversation. Furthermore, a new word is also created as we learn new knowledge. Thus, the numbers of existing and new words keep on increasing as time passes. The increase of words shows that how our national language keeps on developing. However, for those who love to communicate in foreign languages, they might feel uncomfortable to communicate in *Bahasa Melayu*. Some might even say that they feel comfortable in using English as it helps them improve their confident level. Here, print media, such as newspapers, should take part by making them realize that our mother tongue does have the same effect too and it deserves a better chance to prove this claim said *Informant 2*.

Upholding the mother tongue language by writing reading materials in *Bahasa Melayu*. By writing those materials using the national language, people will be more attracted to the language. They will also care and love for the mother tongue language in order to preserve its aesthetic value. Print media can help to remove the stereotype thinking of society that *Bahasa Melayu* is intended for Malays use only, whereas, it is universal in nature. Through the national language, everybody will come together under the spirit of 1Malaysia. This is commented by *Informant 1*.

Publishing, translating, and printing more reading materials in the national language. The publisher should publish more printed materials in the mother tongue language. As for

NGO and government body which are involved in translating materials, they should increase their translating activities of foreign language to the mother tongue language. Why print media should increase reading materials in national language? This is to attract more people towards reading print media as they are now interested in reading online materials. When people are distracted by online materials, they tend to neglect the importance of seeking knowledge through print media, namely newspapers. This is stated by *Informant 2*.

Diversifying reading materials to suit all ages of the society. To create a reading generation that can contribute to the country, the print media should diversify the reading materials that suit all ages of the society. As more types of reading materials made available, people will find it more interesting in pursuing print media and do not have to stick to only one material. *Informant 1* said that diversifying of reading material will enhance vocabulary besides gaining useful knowledge that can be used in the near future to develop the country. The various type of reading materials of different field of studies will expose people to various knowledge, said *Informant 2*. As a result, Malaysians can become multitalented or even skilled workers. Thus, the development of country will not only be generated by certain sectors or industries but through various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, construction, and many more.

Reducing non-educational material. This type of material has a detrimental effect on the usage of our mother tongue language. The usage of word in such material is not up to the standard of our national language in which it is more of colloquial in nature. It is filled with distracting materials such as gossips, inappropriate pictures and information. For example, the magazine 'Mangga' is banned due to publishing such contents. As the printing and publishing of non-educational materials are being reduced, print media, such as newspapers, can focus more on educational materials. When younger generation reads more educational materials, they will gain a lot of insightful knowledge that can help in developing their mind. Hence, they can be shaped into becoming excellent future leaders and later contribute towards our country's development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have to make conscious efforts to ensure that, we do not lose touch with our cultural heritage. The ability to speak one's mother tongue is important to the cultural identity. By using the mother tongue, it is very easy to speak or to express one's own thoughts or ideas rather than using a different language. We can promote positive values of our culture via the national language. This is because we would be equipped to resist external negative influences that may otherwise sway towards us. Other than that, we can also have a cultural identity of our own that would help us to understand better how other people value their own language and tradition to develop their country. The government should come up with many activities for the community especially the ones that involved the mother tongue as a basic language exposure program.

As a recommendation or suggestion for future studies, researchers could use this study as a reference in interviewing more informants to obtain stronger responds and findings. In addition to that, researchers also should increase the timeframe of their research as to conduct more research based on the same topic so that they can get better understanding on the subject matter. Future researches can also be conducted from outside of Malaysia to gain responds and perspectives on the respective topic from people living overseas.

English is generally the language adopted to ease communication in various sectors. However, this does not mean that we should neglect our own mother tongue, namely *Bahasa Melayu*, as it symbolises our country's identity and represents the element of development towards a better future.

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