

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

LANGUAGE SHIFT AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AMONG  
THE BIDAYUH YOUNGER GENERATION  
AT KAMPUNG SEMEBA, KUCHING, SARAWAK

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## Abstract

The Bidayuh people in Kampung Semeba are in the process of assimilating themselves into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through the world of globalization. These changes create new challenges for them and their dialects, for they have to master the prominent languages like Bahasa Malaysia and English for better prospect in socio status, economy, education, harmonious relations with other ethnic groups and political stability. In the pursuit, the Bidayuh of Kampung Semeba slowly shift their indigenous language to the dominant language. Thus, the research aims to investigate factors that possibly contribute to language shift among the Bidayuh community in Kampung Semeba. This study employs qualitative and quantitative methods. The study reveals that the language policy such as Bahasa Malaysia, English and other dominant languages like Sarawak Local Malay Dialect and Iban Language hasten the people of Kampung Semeba to shift their language. The study is significant especially to the younger generation as they were found to use a lot of borrowed words from other languages. In addition, they were also found to use a lot of code-switching and code-mixing during their social interaction in formal and informal settings due to the lack of words in Bidayuh. The findings are prevalent due to their demographic background, modernization and rapid development in Sarawak. In spite of that, it was found that they have positive attitude towards their language and are aware of the importance of Bidayuh as a mark and symbol of their identity. The research managed to identify some of the language maintenance efforts carried out by the Semeba community in order to maintain and preserve their heritage language from extinction. As such, some implications of language shift towards the Bidayuh community were identified and several recommendations were suggested to maintain the Bidayuh Language from shifting. It is recommended that all the Bidayuh to cooperate including, the organizational bodies, political parties, the government and NGOs, and to play their role in addressing the issue with concern for the betterment in preserving the Bidayuh's communication tool heritage.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

Language plays a fundamental role in human beings' lives and it affects culture in multiple and complex ways. Through language, people identify themselves as members of a society. Yet language can disappear if it is taken for granted. Notably, the world constitutes about 6000 languages and it is estimated that at least half will be extinct within a century according to the latest reports gathered from various sources. Among these languages, Bidayuh Language is considered to be endangered because only a minority speaks the language. The language is at its highest risk and may end up extinct if the Bidayuh themselves fail to preserve it.

The study looks into various aspects of language use among the Bidayuh community in Kampung Semeba because it represents the indigenous language speakers in Sarawak and the fact that this residents also reside close by the city. The study is vital as it witnesses how vast development and expanding diverse economic growth in Sarawak affect the language use among the Bidayuh community, particularly in Kuching Division.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Kampung Semeba is situated in the first Division of Sarawak and it is in Padawan District Municipal Council (see map in Appendix C). It is one of the Bidayuh village that resides quite close to the Kuching urban centre. A majority of the villagers are working with the government, private sector or self-employed. The people of Kampung Semeba come from different socio-economic background and regard education as their basic means for a better life. The statistics obtained from the

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents reviews of literature related to language shift and language maintenance among the Bidayuh younger generation of Kampung Semeba community. In the earlier part of this review, the roots of Bidayuh Language are discussed. In addition, factors contributing to languages shift and ways of maintaining the language are reviewed for a better understanding of the research. Finally, the summary of the review is laid out.

#### **2.1 The Origin of the Bidayuh**

In respect to the origin of Kampong Semeba, it was reported by Chang (2000) that it was from Kampung Peninjau, Dinding, Seniawan, Bau (refer to map in Appendix C). The Bidayuh left in 1870 for Meba River which is now known as Kampung Semeba. Regarding their root, generally, up to these days, nobody really knows the origin of the Bidayuh in specific details since there are no proper recorded materials kept by their ancestors. Moreover, there seems to be numerous and different opinions about their origin expressed by the earliest Bidayuh. Besides, the earliest European writers who came to Sarawak also had different explanations pertaining to the Bidayuh's origin. Kepel (1846), cited in Minos (2000), states that they were believed to be originated from Polynesia because of the several similarities of the root words in their dialects that are close to those from Polynesia. Kepel (1846), cited in Minos (2000), argues that if the Dayak of Borneo and Arafuras of Celebes and New Guinea speak a dialect of Polynesia, this indicates the original language determines the origin of the people. Concurrently, Low (1947), cited in Minos (2000), shares the same view that their knowledge of paddy cultivation indicates their origin from Celebes Island. Geddes (1957), on the other hand, believes that the Bidayuh were the original Dayak group and