

THE VITALITY AND REVITALISATION OF MINORITY LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF DUSUN IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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Abstract

Language extinction or language death is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is often discussed among linguists or speakers in general (Crystal, 2000; Aitchison, 2001; Dalby, 2003; Fishman, 2002; 2007; Mufwene, 2004; Nelson, 2007). Due to rapid globalisation, the effect of 'superstratum and substratum' languages is inevitable (Crystal, 2003), particularly with regard to the languages of ethnic minorities; those in Brunei Darussalam are no exception (Martin, 1995; Noor Azam, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009; Clynes, 2012; Coluzzi, 2012). These minority languages are susceptible to becoming endangered due to urbanisation, the educational system, migration and other factors; all of these factors lead to language shift and, consequently, to extinction. Brunei Darussalam is a multilingual country that has a diverse population and cultures which generate variations of language and dialect (Nothofer, 1991; Fatimah Chuchu & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Jaludin Chuchu, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). Recognised as one of the seven indigenous ethnic groups in Brunei under the Citizenship Status Laws 1961 of the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*, the Dusun ethnic group are alleged to have and practise their own code of dialect. In Brunei Darussalam, all dialects and languages spoken by indigenous ethnic groups are regarded as minority languages, except for Brunei Malay. By focusing on the Dusun language, this paper discusses the current situation of its language use and the perceptions of the native speakers. The current study reports on recent fieldwork research carried out on the practice of the Dusun code by Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c). This paper also reviews the efforts made to revitalise the Dusun language in the face of globalisation. The results show that the Dusun language is still being practised as an identity marker among the older generations, but its use has declined among the younger generations. Nevertheless, these native speakers are still aware of the importance of their mother tongue. Efforts to revitalise the Dusun language are constantly being executed, and interest towards this linguistic variety has also increased over time.

Keywords: Language vitality, language revitalisation, language extinction, ethnic minority, Dusun, Brunei.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brunei Darussalam (henceforth, Brunei) is known as a multilingual state with diversity in its population and cultures which has generated variation in the languages and dialects spoken (Nothofer, 1991; Fatimah Chuchu & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Jaludin Chuchu, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). These include the languages and dialects spoken by Malay indigenous ethnic groups, permanent residents as well as immigrants (Sercombe, 1996). Based on the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*, from The Citizenship Status Law Act 1961, Section 4 (1)(a), the recognition of indigenous ethnic groups in Brunei focuses on seven ethnic groups of Malay descent: Bruneian Malay, Kedayan, Murut, Dusun, Bisaya, Belait and Tutong (Brunei Citizenship Status, 1961). Aini Karim (2007) and Fatimah Chuchu (2009) claim that every ethnicity has their own specific code and practises a specific language and dialect. Nevertheless, it is clearly known that Brunei Malay is not only used as a code for everyday communication in intercultural communication, but also is predominantly practised in formal contexts. Previous studies have shown that Brunei Malay continues to maintain its prestige as the 'lingua franca' among the public in Brunei (Gunn, 1997), contrasting with the standard Malay language that acts as the official language, and the instrumental value of the English language (David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009).

Sociolinguistic phenomena in Brunei are closely related to triglossia, consisting of: 1) the coveted language of English, which has the highest prestige based on its role in employment, international relations, and education; 2) Standard Malay with its medium level of prestige as the official language and; 3) Brunei Malay, which is considered to have low prestige (Fatimah Chuchu & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). The triglossia and prestige of languages are closely intertwined with the prevalence of their use and practices, as well as the attitudes of the speakers of the languages (Fishman, 1991a; Derhemi, 2002; Mufwene, 2002; Meyerhoff, 2006); consequently, this affects the vitality and maintenance of these languages and dialects (Derhemi, 2002). The vitality of a language/dialect refers to the maintenance of a language and whether or not it is likely to be used continuously in various social functions in everyday communication. This involves influences such as institutional and social factors and the demographics of the speakers of the language (Meyerhoff, 2006). Meanwhile, revitalisation refers to the effort of certain parties to increase the importance of a language and its use, thus preventing the language from undergoing total transition and extinction (Crystal, 2002; Tsunoda, 2005; Nelson, 2007; Laoire, 2008). Hence, it is also closely related to the maintenance of a dialect or language in multilingual settings.

The phenomenon of language vitality is often present in multilingual communities, and is closely related to situations of diglossia (Dorian, 2009). Therefore, the concern with language extinction, in particular those languages spoken by ethnic minorities, has always been the focus of discussion among language experts or speakers of the language itself (Crystal, 1997, 2000; Trudgill, 2000; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). Previous studies have shown considerable interest in the vitality of languages and dialects, and the efforts made to revitalise them, especially when dealing with globalisation (Fishman, 1991b; Crystal, 1997, 2000; Mufwene, 2002). This paper is not an exception. Focusing on a minority language spoken by the indigenous Dusun ethnic group in Brunei, this paper demonstrates its current vitality based on the local practices of the native speakers, and simultaneously explores the efforts made to revitalise the language. As an extrapolation of research studies conducted earlier, this paper focuses on the findings and results of Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c),¹ with a further complementary investigation.

2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

Language extinction allegedly emerges in multilingual settings; linguists believe that approximately 6,000 languages spoken around the world today will face 'death' (Crystal, 1997; Wolfram, 2004; Nelson, 2007). An endangered language expert, Michael Krauss, predicts that 90 percent of spoken languages will face endangerment by the end of this century (Hale *et al.* 1992; Krauss, 1992). David Crystal (2000, 2003) states that every two weeks a world language is expected to become extinct. In addition, an international foundation dedicated to endangered languages, the Foundation for Endangered Languages, also claims that half of the languages spoken around the world are dealing with the issue of extinction as most of these languages have not been transmitted to the younger generations (Nelson, 2007). This statement is consistent with the study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which reports that of the 6,800 languages spoken in 190 countries and territories in the world's population of six billion, only 3,000 languages can be written and the rest are only spoken – though this is lessening (Finaz Daniel, August 30, 2010). Various aspects in multilingual societies could influence the extinction of languages, and these are often justified from various levels, involving its native speakers to the new generations who are expected to maintain their mother tongue. As every language has a role in communication, cultures and identity, its function will diminish when it is no longer being practised (*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, 2000a; Derhemi, 2002; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011).

Nevertheless, investigating the vitality and revitalisation of the Dusun language based on its practices has had little attention in the past. Therefore, this paper takes the opportunity to review the current situation of the Dusun language in practice, by focusing on the target population of its native speakers. This paper attempts to examine the following objectives: a) to review descriptive evidence of a language in use among the native speakers of Dusun in Brunei; b) to identify the motivations or reasons for the occurrence of

¹ Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c) report on sociolinguistic field studies undertaken to identify code choices within intercultural and interethnic communication in 2013. By involving a number of native speakers of certain ethnic minorities in Brunei, the fieldwork for both the 2013a and 2013b studies was conducted around the villages in Mukim Ukong, whilst the 2013c study was carried out within the neighbourhood of Kampong Kiudang and Kampong Mungkom in the Tutong District. The empirical studies were conducted by implementing methodologies of ethnographic observation, questionnaires and interviews. Most of the study populations were composed of native speakers of Dusun, which involved young people, youth and elders. See Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c) for further information.

language transition from the Dusun language in the current situation, and; c) to review and analyse the current revitalisation efforts to maintain the Dusun language as one of the local languages that should be retained.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Model of Ethnolinguistic Vitality by Giles *et al.* (1977) provides a guideline on how to explain the vitality of a language and to evaluate its current situation as well as its practices, through examining three major crucial factors related to the vitality and efforts of language revitalisation. The three major elements are: (i) the status of the language (of a variety or of the speakers of that variety in different contexts), (ii) the demographics of the identified group that impact the language; and (iii) the approach and efforts of institutional measures to support and provide strong resistance to the linguistic erosion (Meyerhoff, 2006). See Figure 1 for an illustration of the Model of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (1977). Based on this theoretical framework, the current study will not discuss each component in the vitality model in specific details but the model is implemented by focusing on reviewing aspects associated with language status and current trends, based on the code selections of the Dusun natives. The current study also explores the efforts of various parties involved in revitalising the usage of the Dusun language among these indigenous ethnic speakers.

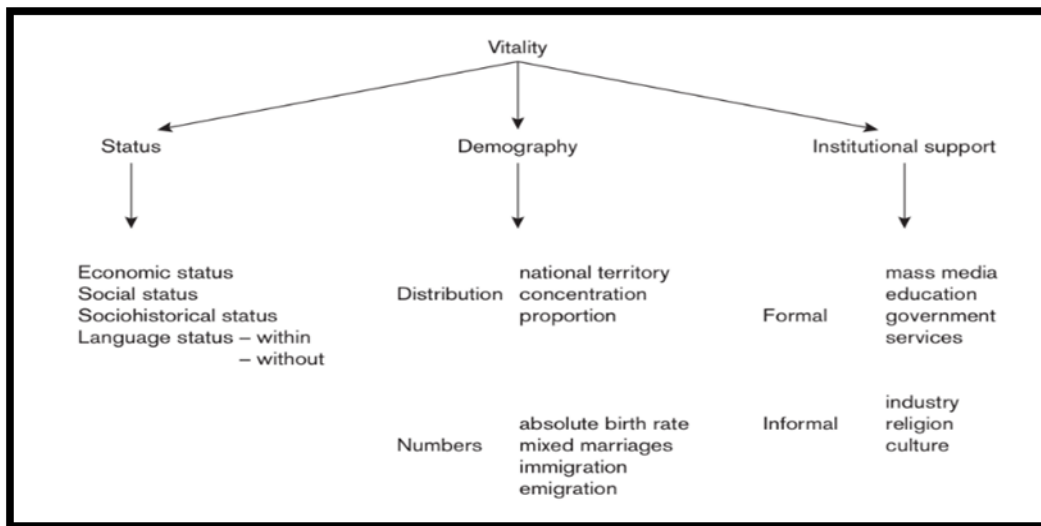


Figure 1: The Model of Ethnolinguistic Vitality by Giles *et al.* (1977) in Meyerhoff (2006: 108)

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on the Dusun community over the last decade, but comparable to other languages and cultures, there have been fewer studies focusing on the language and culture of the Dusun ethnic group in Brunei (Martin, 1994). Among the earliest studies on Dusun was a lexicographical research study by Notoher (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, Kershaw (2000) also 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. Asiyah Kumpoh (2011) also confirmed Kershaw's findings.

Based on our preliminary observations, the study of language contact and socialisation within the Dusun community has indeed been under-researched in Brunei; in addition, the sociolinguistic aspects of communicative codes have also been less prominent in the conducted studies. For instance, studies on minority languages, including the language of Dusun in Brunei, have typically reviewed its linguistic structures and linguistic system (Yabit Alas, 1995; Aini Karim, 2008; Chong Ah Fok, 2008; Dayangku Rosenani Pengiran Halus, 2009), or have compared it to the Malay language (Aini Karim, 2007), as well as studying factors associated with historical linguistics (Yabit Alas, 2009). Studies on the selection of

communicative codes by the minority Dusun speakers in a multilingual setting have been conducted recently by Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c). Supporting the findings of Kershaw's earlier study (1994), these studies found that the use of the Dusun language is concentrated among the elderly and less so among young people, as today's generations employ the Malay language or English. However, these populations prefer to use Dusun to represent their identity as an ethnic group of Brunei. Based on the findings and results of the earlier studies of Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b,c), this paper explores the choice of communicative code in the Dusun community that highlights the current situation and the vitality of this native language, based on sociolinguistic perspectives.

5 DUSUN SPEAKERS IN BRUNEI

There are no specific statistics on the size of the Dusun population in Brunei to date. However, based on the entire population in 1998, from the estimated 323,600 people, a total of 19,400 people (or 6.0%) is made up of indigenous minority ethnic groups in Brunei – Dusun is one of these groups (Aini Karim, 2007). This population is expected to increase over time as the Minority Rights Group International Report (2008) states that the Dusun population accounts for 6.3% of the total population;² it used to practise animism and now has begun to embrace Islam. Hypothetically, we acknowledge that these populations are regarded as the native speakers of Dusun.

Based on the distribution of the native Dusun population, the majority of these Dusun natives are believed to reside in the Tutong District (Nothofer, 1991; Asiyah Kumpoh, 2011). Aini Karim (2007) confirms that several groups of Dusun natives can be found in the peripheral areas of the Belait and Tutong Districts, in areas such as Mukim Bukit Sawat, Kampong Sungai Mau, Meranking, Kampong Bukit Sawat, Kampong Sungai Liang, Kampong Ukong, Mukim Kiudang, Lamunin, Rambai and Telisai. A smaller number are also found in the interior part of the Brunei Muara District, namely, around Kampong Batang Mitus and Kampong Bebuloh. See Figure 2 for a map of the distribution of Dusun speakers in Brunei Darussalam by Aini Karim (2007: 19). As previously mentioned, the language of Dusun is one of the spoken mediums of the minority Dusun indigenous people in Brunei. However, Dusun is also a communicative tool for the people of Kedazan in Sabah, Malaysia; and Bisaya in Limbang, Sarawak (Aini Karim, 2007: 10). In spite of this, Yabit Alas (1994) claims the language spoken by the Dusun in Brunei is different to those spoken by the Kedazan and Bisaya, either in terms of pronunciation or lexis. The focus of the study in this paper is to review the language of Dusun natives in Brunei.



Figure 2: Map of the Distribution of Dusun Native Speakers in Brunei by Aini Karim (2007: 19)

² However, Bernstein (1997) states that the population of the ethnic Dusun group in Brunei cannot be expressed in specific figures as it is quite dynamic periodically.

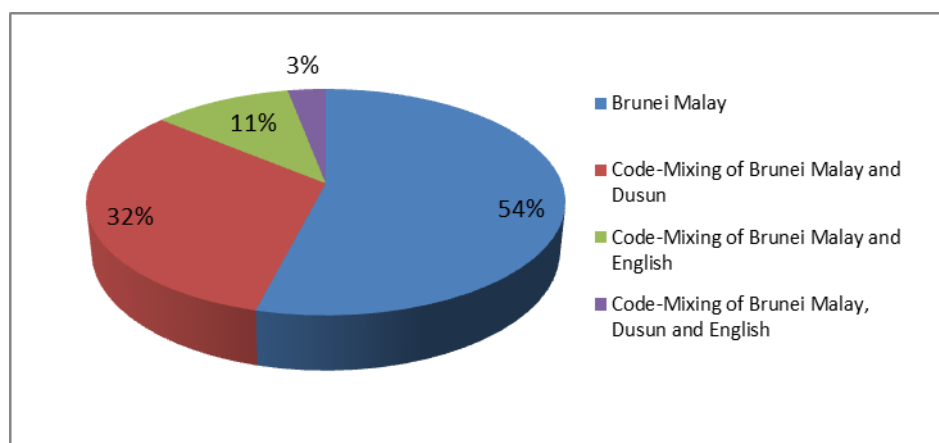
6 CURRENT SITUATION AND VITALITY OF DUSUN IN BRUNEI

As previously mentioned, the vitality of the Dusun language has never been specifically discussed. Nevertheless, a few studies have indirectly approached the current situation of Dusun, which has involved a brief description of the language.

The vitality of indigenous ethnic languages in Brunei was briefly reviewed by Martin (1995). Based on the collected data and the language used among native speakers, with the rate of language vitality measured on a scale from 0-6 (6 being the highest level of retention of the language), Martin classified the Dusun language as '2', i.e. that it could become extinct. Even though Aini Karim (2007) did not include a vitality scale in her study, she points out that the Dusun language in Brunei is indeed declining and facing extinction. The use of the Dusun language was found to be limited to the older generations, while young people prefer to code-mix Dusun with the Malay language. The Dusun language was normally employed when communicating with the older generations. Discussing the linguistic ecology of Brunei, Coluzzi (2012) points out that there is no use of minority languages, in particular, the ethnic languages and dialects, on public signboards. Thus, he concludes that these languages do not present any value or prestige compared with standard Malay and English or the local vernacular of Brunei Malay. This also is reflected in the infrequent practice of ethnic languages in public. The same findings were put forward by Noor Azam (2005), which shows that the status of ethnic languages in Brunei is low and declining in practice. The Dusun language is no exception.

The recent studies by Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b) also involved examining the vitality of the Dusun language. With a preliminary focus on code choice within intercultural communications involving a number of Dusun native speakers, these studies describe the language used, the current situation, language shift and the motivations for the use of the Dusun language among its native speakers. Based on interviews with 35 Dusun natives, a total of 21 respondents (60%) said that they would choose the Dusun code when conversing with older speakers, such as parents, grandparents, etc. Those respondents were aged 40 years and above. However, none of them speak Dusun to younger speakers, such as their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren or younger relatives, and they tend to use Brunei Malay or practise code-mixing. Most young natives prefer to use Brunei Malay or mixed code during conversations. A summary of the code practice of the younger generations can be seen in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Code Choice of the Dusun Ethnic Group when Speaking with Younger Interlocutors



Reasons for these native speakers adopting Brunei Malay over Dusun can be seen in the following responses:

(1) "*Anak-anak baru mesti kami cakap Melayu. Durang faham tapi durang membunyikan percakapan atu inda lurus, inda ngam, macam karau bunyinya, percakapan inda tepat, iatah pakai Melayu saja*" <Awg. Tawar; 60 years old; UKO13-MN-8; 9:03>

[English Translation (ET): I must speak Malay with the younger generations. They do understand the Dusun language, but there will be problems here and there if they started to speak it. Their accents and pronunciations are not correct and precise. So, it is much easier to use Malay].

(2) "*...Dusun aku inda berapa, inda pandai membalas. Faham tapi inda pandai membalas. Pakai Melayu saja*" <Dyg. Nurul; 19 years old; UKO13-MN-9; 2:05>

[ET: I cannot speak Dusun that well. I do not know how to respond to them. I understand them but I could not reply in Dusun. Thus, adopting the Malay language would be the most convenient way].

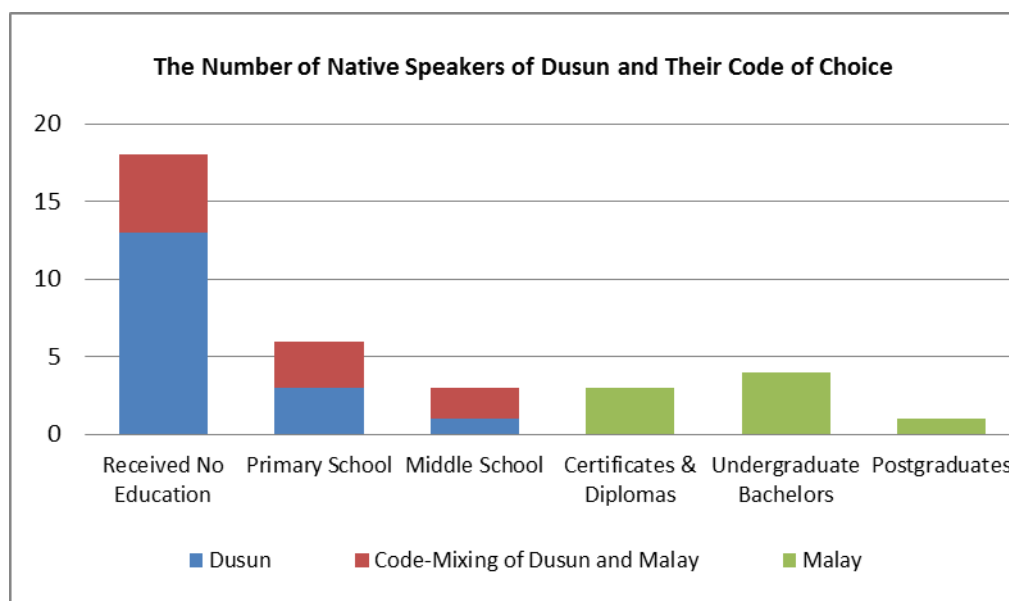
(3) “*Anak-anak masa ani cakap Melayu saja tapi durang merati pulang tapi aku bercakap ani cakap Dusun pulang tapi durang merati jua tapi balasnya cakap Melayu, awu, awu cakap Dusun atu ia tau bah*” <Awg. Mokti; 83 year old; UKO13-MN-8; 1:54>

[ET: Nowadays, our young people can speak Malay only. However, they understand Dusun. I personally speak Dusun with them, but then, they will reply in Malay. Yes, they do understand Dusun].

Extracted from Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b).

Based on these findings, it can be stated that Brunei Malay is dominantly preferred by the Dusun native speakers, in particular those of the younger generations. This supports the findings of Martin (1995), Noor Azam (2005) and Aini Karim (2007). The respondent statements in (1) and (3) above also suggest that the intergenerational transmission of Dusun has also significantly reduced – or perhaps is not present at all. These native speakers believe that accommodation to Brunei Malay will ease communication with other speakers without realising the adverse effect of the endangerment of the Dusun language. If this continues on the individual level or in the institution of the family, we can conclude that the Dusun language is an endangered one. Moreover, Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid’s (2013a,b) studies also found that speakers’ level of academic achievement also plays a prominent role in language shift from their mother tongue to a “more prestigious language”. Chart 2 shows speakers’ daily code choice based on their level of academic achievement.

Chart 2: Code Choice in Daily Communications Based on Speakers’ Academic Status



Based on the code choice shown, Dusun is evidently more practised among the less educated. These Dusun natives are also those of the older generations who previously stated that they prefer to speak their mother tongue. This finding also shows that there is an inclination among younger native speakers who are exposed to mainstream education to use Brunei Malay, standard Malay, as well as English, notably among those who are highly educated. It is generally known that Malay and the English language have a higher instrumental value than the native languages or dialects (Fatimah Chuchu & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; Gunn, 1997; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; David, Cavallaro & Colluzzi, 2009; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). The Dusun language is considered to have a relatively low status and is underused by those who have a high level of academic achievement.

These findings also suggest that the lower prestige of the Dusun language is due to the superstratum effect of the assimilation to Brunei Malay that constantly acts as the local vernacular in Brunei. In this case, the extinction of minority languages is more likely to occur due to the profound influence of dominant languages, which later might result in language shift (Fasold, 1984; Noor Azam, 2005; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). This is comparable to previous studies on Western languages where the languages of ethnic minorities often suffer

the consequences of language shift from the effects of globalisation and the superstrate English language (Crystal, 1997, 2000; Trudgill, 2000). Previous studies have also claimed that the shift from the mother tongues to Brunei Malay is due to its prestige as the lingua franca of various ethnic groups in Brunei (Hassan Salikin, 13 November 1991; Martin, 1996a; Gunn, 1997; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Muhammad Awang Jambol, 2001; Noor Azam, 2005; Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid, 2013a,b,c). This is in addition to the following responses among the native speakers interviewed:

(4) "Aa, kebiasaan sudah juakan cakap Melayu jadinya gunakan saja cakap Melayulah, lebih mudah untuk berkomunikasi jua bah, orang pun paham"

<Dyg. Nie; 34 years old; UKO13-MN-14; 0:27>

[ET: It has become habitual for me to speak in Malay, so, I will speak Malay. Thus, the communication will flow smoothly, and other people can comprehend me easily].

(5) "Kalau for me, I prefer to speak in Malay saja, I mean, I've been exposed to Malay since I was a kid, walau ada kadang-kadangnya my mum speaks Dusun with me but I'd rather speak Malay. My Dusun sounds very weird"

<Dyg. Katie; 28 years old; UKO13-MN-15; 1:21>

[ET: "For me, I prefer to speak in Malay only. I mean, I have been exposed to Malay since I was a kid, even though my mother speaks Dusun sometimes, I'd rather speak in Malay. My Dusun sounds very weird].

Extracted from Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b).

Both statements (4) and (5) clearly show that it has become a "norm" for these natives to employ Brunei Malay over Dusun. This might cause the vitality of Dusun language to weaken over time. Furthermore, the diminishing intergenerational transmission of Dusun in family institutions and the tendency of older generations to teach Brunei Malay to their youngsters have lessened the practicality and the importance of their native tongue. These findings are comparable to Martin (1996b), who reported that the endangered Lemeting language (a dialect of the indigenous Belait ethnic group) had experienced major language shift to the dominant Brunei Malay due to less practice and the lack of intergenerational transmission. As the Dusun language is more concentrated among older speakers, this does not help to maintain it as it is not transmitted to future generations. This corresponds to the statement by Fishman (1991b) and Reyhner (2007) who stated that the efforts to save languages must ultimately deal with the intergenerational transmission of mother tongues. In this case, the role of the family and social institutions is crucial to prevent total language shift.

The study by Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013a,b) also elicited language attitudes and perceptions among the 35 Dusun native speakers studied. All of the interviewed respondents believe that the use of the Dusun language will decrease in the future as the next generations would prefer Malay or English. Nevertheless, 97% (34 native speakers) claim that the language is important as a Dusun identity marker. This was also found in Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2013c), where all indigenous ethnic groups studied (including the Dusun) also expressed that their languages and dialects are important as a form of identification. Noor Azam (2005) had a similar finding, where the majority of the indigenous ethnic groups believed that their languages and dialects are essential for their identification as being of the Bruneian ethnicity, even though they do not really practise these languages. Still, this would not help in maintaining the Dusun language in present multilingual settings. A language should be practised and used for the purpose of communication to maintain its status in the community and not just for affective purposes. This simultaneously shows that the vitality of Dusun is increasingly under threat.

The current situation of the Dusun language also has a number of features claimed by Campbell and Muntzel (1989) to constitute 'the gradual extinction of the language'. This refers to language extinction that often occurs in a multilingual setting as it involves the gradual transition of minority languages to the more dominant language (Sasse, 1992; Wolfram, 2004). Dorian (1977) also states that there is a continuum of significant differences in the language used between generations of speakers. The new generations are referred to as 'semi-speakers' as they often have poor language competence compared with the older generation. This is evidently found in the language used among Dusun natives discussed earlier.

7 LANGUAGE REVITALISATION OF DUSUN IN BRUNEI

The extinction of a language (particularly involving those spoken by minority groups) is a universal phenomenon (Wolfram, 2004; Nelson, 2007; Dorian, 2009; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). Nevertheless, this can

be feasibly avoided through language maintenance and revitalisation via various strategies implemented to prevent languages from total extinction (Fatimah Chuchu, 2011).

David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi (2009) state that even though the importance of maintaining the languages of ethnic minorities is often emphasised by Brunei authorities and non-governmental sectors, large-scale efforts to prevent the erosion of these minority languages and dialects in favour of the dominant languages (Malay and English) have never been applied. These ethnic languages and dialects are also found to have a lower to no status compared to the Malay language (referring to the use of standard Malay as a medium of teaching and learning in schools and by officials) as well as English being the focus of the bilingual education policy in Brunei. Even so, David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi's study lists some of the revitalisation efforts that have taken place implicitly. For instance, the official Institute of Language and Literature of Brunei (*Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*) has published several articles, reading materials and references in the ethnic languages and dialects of Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Tutong and Belait. The Dusun language, on the other hand, is applied as a medium of writing for a limited number of folk tales.

Noor Azam,³ an expert in the language and sociolinguistics of Brunei, was interviewed in 2013. In the interview, he argues against the statement made by David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi (2009), stating that the effort to revitalise the use of ethnic languages, in particular Dusun, has broadened. According to him, even though these ethnic languages still do not have the same status as Malay (the official language is preserved through the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*), diverse efforts have been made to create awareness about the importance of supporting these languages. For instance, the higher education institution of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, through its Central Division of Language (Language Centre) has established a Dusun language course as one of the elective courses offered, which is taught by a Dusun expert who is also a native speaker. This course is offered not only to the generation of Dusun natives but to any interested students, and it has since gained interest among students. Although its implementation is still limited to that of an 'elective' course, it can perhaps be considered an effective way to prevent the extinction of a language. This is comparable to what has been reported in the studies by Malone (2004, 2007), Laoire, (2008), David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi (2009), and Jaap de Ruyter, Saidi and Spotti (2009).

Noor Azam (2013) adds that in recent years, mass media also have also increased their interest in exposing the languages and dialects of ethnic groups to the public. For instance, the official government broadcaster, Radio Television Brunei, also produces local radio programmes such as "*Bahasa Mengenal Bangsa*" (ET: "To know your language is to know your ethnic group") that presents the Dusun language in terms of its lexical and general use. Furthermore, the official Institute of Language and Literature of Brunei also continues to promote and publish writings about the Dusun language, thus increasing its interest and status.

As the Dusun language and its culture are said to be facing extinction, the alliance of the Sang Jati Dusun Association (PSJD) was established by the conglomeration of Dusun communities in Brunei. Various activities and planning are conducted annually to unite these ethnic natives, reminding them of the importance of their origins as indigenous ethnic Dusun people, while preserving its culture and language among every generation (Yaw Siew May, May 23, 2007). In addition, several seminars to introduce the Dusun way of life, including exposure to the language, culture, diet, medicine, crafts and dance are continuously organised by the Majlis Perwakilan Kampung (ET: "The assembly of village representatives") (Sharlene Othman, June 25, 2011). These efforts to increase awareness, among others, are believed to enhance the status of a revitalised language by providing more confidence and economic value to the language, as well as to the native speakers (Pandharipande, 2002).

Enhancing awareness of the language used should not only be limited to formal institutions, but can be achieved by local individuals and the native speakers themselves. In Brunei, this can be seen from the use of technology, such as several personal blogs written by Dusun natives which aim to educate the Brunei society about the language. For instance, a blog⁴ by "Sang Jati" (ET: "The native of Dusun") shows the

³ Noor Azam OKMB Hj. Othman is one of the language experts in Brunei who is actively involved in sociolinguistic studies. Among his research activities he has been involved in issues associated with minority languages, language shift, bilingualism and multilingualism in Brunei. He was the former Director of the Language Centre at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and currently serves as a senior lecturer and the Dean of the Faculty of Art and Social Sciences at the same university. He is also one of the board members of the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (RELC) and holds the position of Senior Editor for the Journal of South – East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal (UBD).

⁴ The blog "Khazanah Bahasa Sang Jati Dusun" (ET: "The Treasure of Dusun Language") is accessible through the following website address: <http://khazanahbahasasangjatidusun.blogspot.com>. Established in

Dusun language in daily use by the native community in Mukim Bukit Sawat, Belait. It presents various aspects of the Dusun language, whether in terms of lexis, semantics, and modern or rare classical Dusun expressions. Even though this effort is considered informal in nature, it is perhaps an effective approach to broaden the knowledge and use of Dusun, as there was little documentation on it in the past. In this case, it is observed that the effort of revitalising the Dusun language is gradually gaining attention from various parties in Brunei. Nevertheless, it is often questioned: how long will these efforts be undertaken? Are existing efforts sufficient to maintain competence in Dusun? At what level will these efforts succeed? Moreover, language revitalisation takes time. Therefore, this paper also suggests a number of actions that are considered feasible for maintaining the native language of ethnic minorities, based on the contextualisation of the Dusun language in Brunei.

Based on previous studies that have been conducted internationally on maintaining the status and economic value of indigenous ethnic languages and dialects (Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Burnaby, 2007; Crawford, 2007), it seems that the status and use of the Dusun language can be maintained among the Dusun natives through the implementation of a language policy that also concerns the role of minority languages in Brunei. This is not to suggest that these minority languages should be elevated into that of the official language, like standard Malay, but the formulation of such a language policy would definitely promote ethnic languages, so that they can be practised proactively among ethnic groups, particularly within family institutions (Fishman, 1989). The involvement of more parties in language planning will undoubtedly bring about awareness and confidence among speakers to employ their native language without insecurities (*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, 2000b). However, the implementation of the language policy should be planned carefully with regard to the preservation of minority cultures and habitats (Romaine, 2002).

Language documentation is deemed to promote effective revitalisation of extinct languages (Crystal, 2002; Burnaby, 2007; Fishman, 2007; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). In this case, the Dusun language documentation should be disseminated immediately as it can be recorded, discussed and revealed to the public. The documentation can later be used as a medium for general reading or for research purposes, as well as for further learning in the future. This can assist native speakers or others to obtain references or the spelling system which would help to improve the literacy rates of this language (Zaharlick, 1982; Crystal, 2002). The involvement of multiple parties is crucial to sustain and enhance the value and importance of the Dusun language. Continuous activities such as forums, road-shows and language programmes for native speakers, which engage the surrounding community, institutions and the public, can be accomplished through an effective action plan. In this regard, the efforts should not be limited to governments and non-governmental organisations but also should involve the individual consciousness of native speakers to maintain their languages and cultures, as nowadays our lives are vulnerable to globalisation. This was reinforced by Austin and Sallabank (2011) who pointed out that linguists, members of endangered language communities, government and non-governmental organisations, as well as international organisations such as UNESCO and the European Union, are actively working to continue, preserve and stabilise endangered languages through multiple actions and efforts that have been planned thoroughly. This will preserve the cultures, thoughts, identities and originality of the way of life of communities.⁵

8 CONCLUSION

Based on the comparatively small demographic population of indigenous Dusun people to the overall population in Brunei, the composition of its native speakers is also relatively small, thus classifying it as one of the minority languages. These minority languages are often vulnerable to extinction due to their lower competence and practicality compared to dominant languages which have more instrumental value or importance. The use of the Dusun language among Dusun natives has significantly reduced, and is now only concentrated among the older generations. Its use is limited among the younger generations who are perceived as 'semi-speakers' who cannot speak or lack knowledge about the use of their mother tongue. This inevitably puts the language of Dusun into an endangered category and makes it vulnerable to extinction.

2012, the author of the blog claims he is a native speaker of Dusun. Born and raised in Mukim Bukit Sawat, Belait District, he has served as an invited speaker at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Teachers Training College (BTTC), College of Nursing and Sinaut Agriculture Training Centre.

⁵ Further reading on the suggestions of revitalising local minority dialects in Brunei through language planning can be accessed in Coluzzi (2013).

There are several grounds which weaken the vitality of the Dusun language. Among the main factors is the dominant effect of the Malay language and English, which cause native speakers to shift to dominant languages, without any effort to use their mother tongue as a medium of communication among individuals and families, or when speaking with younger generations. The status of the Dusun language is also relatively low compared to the official language of standard Malay, the vernacular Brunei Malay and the English language, which is causing adverse effects, especially among those who are exposed to education and globalisation and are thus predisposed to immense accommodation and assimilation. The future of the Dusun language is not guaranteed, especially when dealing with the forces of globalisation. There are other factors such as migration and religion that also affect the vitality of the Dusun language. Nevertheless, further discussion and research are needed to prove the effect of these factors.

In conclusion, the survey on the vitality of the Dusun language as a minority language of the ethnic Dusun group in Brunei has proved that it is facing gradual extinction. Therefore, various responsible parties, either at a personal level or a formal institutional level, should constantly take effective measures to prevent this language issue – which is not only limited to the Dusun, but applies to other indigenous ethnic languages as well. However, extensive studies involving more respondents, reviewing and discussing various aspects as well as focusing on a wider geographical distribution, should be conducted in the near future to provide more exact and holistic information on the present situation that involves the issues of language extinction.

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