

# LANGUAGE CHOICES OF DAYAK BIDAYUH UNDERGRADUATES IN THE FRIENDSHIP DOMAIN

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## **Abstract**

Sarawak is the largest of the fourteen states in Malaysia. The Dayak Bidayuhs form the fourth largest ethnic group in Sarawak after the Ibans, Malays and Chinese. There are four major Bidayuh dialectal groups and the major linguistic problem facing them is that there is no common Bidayuh language. The sociolinguistic norms of the younger generation of Bidayuhs today are also influenced by Bahasa Malaysia, Sarawak Malay dialect and English. The objectives of this research are to determine the extent of the use of these codes in the friendship domain across three dialect groups of the rural and urban younger generation of Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates and to investigate the reasons for their code/s selection. The data was collected through audio recordings and transcriptions of 32 casual conversations and face-to-face interviews.

*Keywords: language choice, Bidayuh, undergraduates, code-switching*

## **Foregrounding**

Sarawak is the largest of the fourteen states in Malaysia and is located on the island of Borneo. Sarawak or Land of the Hornbill has a population of 2.3 million and the Dayak Bidayuhs form the fourth largest ethnic group with a population size of 187,675 people, after the Ibans, Malays and Chinese. The homeland of the Bidayuh in Sarawak is termed *Bidayuh Belt* (Dundon, 1989), which spans across the districts of Kuching Division (covering Lundu, Bau, Padawan and Kuching districts) and Samarahan Division (covering Serian district). The biggest problem facing the Bidayuhs is that there is no common Bidayuh dialect amongst the 29 sub-dialectal groups. The 29 Bidayuh sub-dialects are classified into four main dialectal groups namely Bau-Jagoi (Bau district), Bukar-Sadong (Serian district), Biatah (Padawan district) and Salako-larra (Lundu district) i.e. according to the four main districts in the Bidayuh Belt where their ancestral homes are located. Nevertheless, there are lexical variations between these four main dialects and the problem still exists in the sense that the Bidayuhs in these different districts do not understand one another completely (Nais, 1989).

## Literature Review

The domain model which views linguistic choices as predictable on the basis of the domain in which they occur formed the main framework of this study. It describes the use of languages in various institutional contexts in a bi-multilingual society and is defined as:

‘...as a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community’ (Fishman, 1972).

Language choice involves code shifting, code mixing and choosing variations of the same code. In bi and multilingual societies the language choice made by the interlocutors during social interaction occurs because of personal needs such as differing proficiencies and the needs of social groups for identity. <sup>4</sup>In multilingual societies like Malaysia, language choice is influenced by both macro and micro variables. The macro variables represent macro pressures on language choice patterns among the ethnic minorities and include:- 1. Migration and economic change; 2. Urbanisation and improved transportation and communication. 3. School language and government policies (Fasold, 1984); 4. Small population size; and 5. Existence of many dialects within each ethnic community. At the micro level the factors affecting language choice are: 1. Exogamous marriages; 2. Attitude towards their languages; and 3. Religious conversion (David, 2003).

Codeswitching is a common phenomenon in multilingual societies. Codeswitching is a term used to ‘identify alternations of linguistic varieties within the same conversations, later it is defined slightly more technically as the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded language (or languages) in utterances of a matrix language during the same conversation. This definition is more fully developed in the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model where the matrix language (ML) refers to the main language and the embedded language (EL) the secondary or lesser one. However, within any stretch of intra-sentential codeswitching, one language can be seen as the main or matrix language into which items from other language varieties are embedded (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

In a multilingual context, it is therefore possible to have a number of embedded codes interacting and mixing. Given the complexity and fragility of the linguistic ecology of Sarawak, it is surprising to note that in relation to Borneo in general that so few indepth studies have been carried out to investigate the language usage patterns of the multilingual people (Muhlhausler, 1996). Research in language choice is also important, especially at the present time when ‘the linguistic communities of Sarawak are undergoing changes in their use of language arising from the Malaysian language policy’ (Omar, 1992).

## Aims

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the present language choice trends of Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates in Sarawak. The sociolinguistic norms of Sarawakians are influenced by:

- i. Standard Malay (Bahasa Melayu), the national language in the more formal domains such as education and the mass media;
- ii. Sarawak Malay (the lingua franca of interethnic communication in Sarawak, as distinct from the mother-tongue of the Malay people of Sarawak) in the more informal domains such as everyday conversation;
- iii. English, especially among the increasing number of educated Bidayuh speakers who have received post secondary level education in both formal and informal domains.

The research questions for this study are:

- i. What are the language choices across dialect group interactions in the friendship domain?
- ii. Is there a significant difference in the language choices between the rural and urban Bidayuh undergraduates?
- iii. What are the reasons for the code/s selected?

## Methodology

The respondents consist of 20 urban male, 16 urban female, and 17 rural male and 13 rural female Bidayuh undergraduates studying at a tertiary institution in Sarawak. Between January-July, 2010, the audiorecordings of 32 natural conversations which totaled 7 hours were conducted in the university to investigate language choices in the friendship domain. The audio recordings were made using Sony Cassette-corder TCM-150, Storm MPQT1303-512 MP 3 and Mp4 players. The recordings were later transcribed and analysed using the Matrix Language Frame Model as a point of reference, to determine the matrix and embedded codes used during discourse. After transcribing, the recordings were replayed to the participants followed by face-to face interviews seeking explanations to explain the reasons for the code/s selected by the interlocutors.

### *Language Choice of rural Bidayuh undergraduates*

#### **Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Bahasa Melayu**

Bahasa Melayu is used to represent the speech of the rural Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups. The variations in the Bidayuh dialects and the medium of instruction in Bahasa Melayu trigger an extensive use of Bahasa Melayu among the rural Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates. The rural Bidayuh undergraduates accommodate with one another by using the national language which is the

national language in Malaysia and also their medium of instruction in school for at the last eleven years or so (see Extract 1).

### Extract 1: Rural Bidayuh: Stand-alone Bahasa Melayu

*a) Rural Bukar-Sadong male (RBM)*

**RBM:** Pada akhir tahun 2010 semua guru sekolah rendah mesti ada ijazah. Jadi kalau gurubesar ini belum pensen dan masih tidak ada kelayakan susahlah. Mahukah kamu jadi cikgu. Gaji sekarang sik macam dulu. (*By the end of 2010 all primary school teachers must have a degree. If the headmaster has not retired and does not have such qualification it will be difficult. Do you want to become a teacher? The salary nowadays is better*)

Key: Stand-alone refers to complete utterances in one language

### Rural Bidayuh: More Bahasa Melayu and less Sarawak Malay

The second most frequent pattern of language used by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect group interactions is Sarawak Malay code-switches in dominant Bahasa Melayu (see Extract 2).

#### Extract 2: Rural Bidayuh: More Bahasa Melayu less Sarawak Malay

*a) Rural Bukar-Sadong male (RBM) with Rural Biatah male (RIM)*

**RBM:** Lorry itu jaguh jalan benar ke sik? (*Lorries are kings on the road, isn't it true?*)

**RJM:** Nyawa kamu sentiasa kenak ancam. (*Your life is always in danger*).

**RIM:** Tapi mun sudah langgar siap kamu, nasib mun dapat selamat. (*Once you get knocked, lucky if you are safe*)

Key: Underline: Sarawak Malay; Times New Roman: Bahasa Melayu

### Rural Bidayuh: More Bahasa Melayu and less Bidayuh

The third most frequent category of language used by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates is code-switching using more Bahasa Melayu and less Bidayuh. A total of 28 Bidayuh kinship terms from the Bau-Jagoi, Bukar-Sadong and Biatah dialects were identified in the data. Apparently, it is more polite to refer to family members using Bidayuh kinship terms. Many of these are so commonly kinship terms that even Bidayuhs from other dialect groups can understand them easily (see Extract 3).

#### Extract 3: Rural Bidayuh: Bidayuh code-switches for kinship terms

**RIM:** Ada saya rasa makanan **tuwak dayung** kamu.

(*I've tasted your aunt's cooking.*)

**RBF:** Umbu **amu** pun juga pandai pilih yang bagus. Bukan senang sekarang mahu dapat **dingan dayong** yang cantik dan bijak. (*Your brother is clever when it comes to choosing. It's not easy to get a pretty and intelligent girlfriend.*)

**RIM:** Lawak dia memang sesuai untuk semua orang. **Teyung** di kampung pun dapat faham juga. (*His jokes are for everybody. My grandmother can understand them.*)

Key: Times New Roman Bold:-Bidayuh; Times New Roman: Bahasa Melayu

Pronouns in Bidayuh are frequently used by the Bidayuh undergraduates during social interactions. Some of the Bidayuh pronouns used are as shown in Extract 4.

#### Extract 4: Rural Bidayuhs: Bidayuh code-switches as pronouns

**RJM:** Masih hidupkah **ioh**? (*Is he still alive?*)

**RIM:** Itu pun kalau **ara** mampu. (*That depends on whether or not we can afford it.*)

**RJF:** Cuba sapu badan **mu-uh** guna Vicks bila tidor. (*Try to rub your body with Vicks before going to bed.*)

**RIF:** **Puan kuu bara** datang kampus cari saya? (**Do you know they** came to the campus looking for me?)

**RIM:** Itulah **kuu** suka makan benda manis. (*That's why you like eating sweet stuff.*)

**RBF:** **Amu**, kalau pijak semut, semut memang tak mati. (*Even if you're to step on ants, they won't die*)

*Key: Times New Roman Bold:-Bidayuh; Times New Roman: Bahasa Melayu*

#### Rural Bidayuhs: More Bahasa Melayu and less English

The fourth most frequent category of language used by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates is code-switching using more Bahasa Melayu and less English (see Extract 5).

#### Extract 5: Rural Bidayuhs: English codeswitches in dominant Bahasa Melayu

*a) Rural Biatah male (RIM) with Rural Bau-Jagoi male(RIM)*

**RIM:** Hei Jay aku bingung lah, susah betul *exam* tu. Harap *lecturer* itu beri peluang.

(*Hei Jay, I'm so worried because the exam was difficult. I hope the lecturer will give me a chance.*)

**RJM:** Beri *chance* pada saya lagi. Jadi kalau kali ini awak tidak bagus satu *paper* tidak lah banyak kesannya. (*Give me a chance instead. As for you, doing not so well in a paper will not affect your performance*)

*Key: Times New Roman Italic: English; Times New Roman: Bahasa Melayu*

#### Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Bidayuh

After stand-alone Bahasa Melayu, the next most frequent code is stand-alone code Bidayuh (see Extract 6).

#### Extract 6: Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Bidayuh

**RBM:** **Beken aku de bakok**. Saya fikir tentang anak buah saya yang berusia tiga tahun. Mesti ada cara untuk jadi kan dia lebih pandai. (**I'm not a fool**. *I'm thinking of ways to make my three years old nephew smarter*)

*Key: Complete sentence in Bidayuh: Times New Roman Bold underline; Times New Roman: Bahasa Melayu*

#### Rural Bidayuhs: Code- mixing in a single utterance

The sixth category of language used by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates is code-switching using more Bahasa Melayu with less Sarawak Malay, English and Bidayuh (see Extract 7).

### Extract 7: Rural Bidayuhs: Code-mixing in a single utterance

**a) RBM:** Boleh kamu memohon KPLI yang satu tahun molah di college, **aba** bimbang. (*You can apply to do the one year KPLI course in college, so don't worry*)

*Key: Times New Roman-Bahasa Melayu; Times New Roman bold – Bidayuh; Arial – Sarawak Malay*

### Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Sarawak Malay

Complete sentences in Sarawak Malay only make up 2.5% of the total utterances made by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates (see Extract 8).

### Extract 8: Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Sarawak Malay

*a) Rural Bau-Jagoi male (RJM) with Rural Biatah male (RIM)*

**RIM:** Muka nok basik kedak kamu sepa maok. (*Nobody wants an ugly face*).

*Key: Complete sentence in Sarawak Malay*

### Stand-alone English

The least popular complete utterance is in stand-alone English (see Extract 9).

### Extract 9: Rural Bidayuhs: Stand-alone English

**a) RBF:** Buat saya lapar saja. *Bye and see you.* (*Makes me hungry...*).

*Key: New Times Roman bold; Complete sentence in English*

### Language Choice of Urban Bidayuh undergraduates

#### Stand-alone Sarawak Malay

Sarawak Malay is the main or matrix language for the urban Bidayuh undergraduates when coming into language contact with one another in the university. The issue of practical convenience due to dialectal variations is also the main reason for the urban Bidayuh undergraduates to choose Sarawak Malay across dialect groups when talking to other urban Bidayuh undergraduates. The urban Bidayuh undergraduates are merely transferring their *comfortability zone* from language used during social interactions in school to the university which is also located in the city of Kuching (see Extract 10).

### Extract 10: Urban Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Sarawak Malay

*a) Urban Bau-Jagoi male (UJM)*

**UJM:** Ujuknya sidak nya main juak (*They played a lousy game.*)

*Key: Times New Roman; Sarawak Malay*

### Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less English

The second most frequent category of language used by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups is English code-switches in dominant Sarawak Malay (see Exytact 11).

#### Extract 11: Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less English

*a) Urban Biatah female(UIF) with Urban Bukar-Sadong female (UBF)*

**UIF:** Kita jadi roommate ajak maok ke sik? (Why don't we become roommates?)

**UBF:** Aku dah kenak booking. Roommate aku awal udah madah ngan aku, selesa bah. (I have been booked. My roommate had told me earlier, and it's comfortable to be her roommate).

Key: Times New Roman Italic; English code-switches

### Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less Bahasa Melayu

The third common pattern of language used by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups is code-switching using more Sarawak Malay and less Bahasa Melayu (sees Extract 12).

#### Extract 12: Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less Bahasa Melayu

*a)Urban Bau-Jagoi female (UIF)*

**UIF:** Kelak aku datang sitok agik, baca ajak nota ko ia. Sebelum aku lupak malam tok kita ada perjumpaan di blok, jangan ko sik datang. (I'll come back and meantime you just read your notes. Before I forget, tonight there'll be a meeting in our block and remember to come.)

Key: Underline: Bahasa Melayu code-switches

### Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less Bidayuh

The fourth most frequent category of language used by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups is code-switching using more Sarawak Malay and less Bidayuh. The urban Bidayuh undergraduates use common Bidayuh words with Sarawak Malay dialect among close Bidayuh friends who can understand words in other Bidayuh dialects. Using Bidayuh, as much as they possibly can especially with new Bidayuh acquaintances will create closer rapport and result in friendships because it shows their Bidayuh identity in the university where the dominant race is Malay (see Extract 13).

#### Extract 13: Urban Bidayuhs: More Sarawak Malay less Bidayuh

*a) Urban Bau-Jagoi male(UJM)*

**UIF:** Nanga lok mun **sama'kuk** ngembak maok ajak. (It depends on **my father** whether or not he wants to bring us.)

Key: New Times Roman bold; Bidayuh code-switches

## Urban Bidayuhs: Stand-alone English

The fifth most frequent category of language used by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups is stand-alone English (see Extract 14).

### Extract 14: Urban Bidayuhs: Stand-alone English

*a) Urban Biatah female (UIF)*

**UIF:** Hello everybody, I'm already here. Aku udah sampe tok, ney dak lain. Where is she? (... I've arrived and where are the others? ...)

*Key: Times New Roman–Sarawak Malay; Times New Roman Italic underline - Complete sentences in English*

## Urban Bidayuhs: Stand-alone Bahasa Melayu

The less popular category of language used by urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect group interactions is stand-alone Bahasa Melayu (see Extract 15).

### Extract 15: Urban Bidayuhs Stand-alone Bahasa Melayu

*a) Urban Bukar-Sadong male (UBM) with Urban Bau-Jagoi male (UJM)*

**UBM:** Aktiviti universiti biasanya pelajar dalam tahun pertama dan kedua yang banyak terlibat. Nok udah lamak ia mula sidak gago dengan tesis sidak ia. Takut aku juak masa ia mun udah mula tesis, nang sik ada masa agik. Aku nengar ada urang sampe sik abis. (Usually first and second year undergraduates are involved in university activities. *The senior students are more concerned about their thesis. I know that of some them didn't complete)*

*Key: Complete sentence in Bahasa Melayu-Arial underline; Times New Roman: Sarawak Malay*

## Urban Bidayuhs: Code mixing in a single utterance

The least popular pattern of language used by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect group discourse is code-switching using more Sarawak Malay, less Bahasa Melayu, English and Bidayuh. (see Extract 15).

### Extract 15: Urban Bidayuhs: Code-mixing in a single sentence

*a) Urban Biatah female (UIF) with Urban Bau-Jagoi male (UJM)*

**UIF:** Berapa lama boleh stay **digijih?** (*How long can you stay there?*)

**UJM:** Seminggu mun sik ada urang numpang sia. (One week if there's nobody.)

*Key: Bidayuh - Times New Roman bold; English- Times New Roman italic, Bahasa Melayu-Arial underline*

## Discussion

From the results of numerous discussions with the Dayak Bidayuh interlocutors in the recordings, it is possible to summarise the reasons for language choices among Dayak Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect group interactions as follows:



## In order not to be misunderstood

The issue of practical convenience due to Bidayuh dialectal variations is the main reason for choosing stand-alone Bahasa Melayu or Sarawak Malay across dialect groups interactions in the friendship domain. As a relatively small group the Bidayuhs are facing strong linguistic pressures which can be expected to lead to them to choose either Bahasa Melayu or Sarawak Malay when communicating across dialect groups.

Although all the Dayak Bidayuhs undergraduates can speak their own Bidayuh dialects well, they are not proficient in other Bidayuh dialects. This lack of competence made them insecure to use stand-alone Bidayuh when conversing with Bidayuhs from other dialect groups. They do not want to impose their dialects on others as that will give the impression of them being egoistic and cause embarrassment. During the face-to-face interview, a Bau-Jagoi undergraduate (respondent 7) said:

*'I mix many codes in one sentence because it make(s) me easy to say what I want to say, bah (particle).'*

## Attitude towards Bidayuh, English, Bahasa Melayu and Sarawak Malay

Bidayuh is used more by the rural Bidayuhs compared to the urban Bidayuhs because using Bidayuh can create closer rapport with other Bidayuhs. When interviewed a Bukar-Sadong undergraduate (respondent 3) said:

*'Bila kita cakap Bidayuh, walaupun tidak sama dialek kita rasa macam saudara. (When we speak using Bidayuh, even though we speak different dialects, we feel related to one another). I cannot understand all tapi sikit saja (some). So we don't use difficult Bidayuh words all the time.'*

Although the urban Bidayuhs are only using Bidayuh code-switches, they serve as a marker of their urban Bidayuh identity when they mix it with Sarawak Malay. A Biatah undergraduate (respondent 15) said:

*'I cannot understand all the other Bidayuh dialects. But some words are common and I try to use them. I know my other friends are also doing the same. I think when we mix Bidayuh with Sarawak Malay, we can say we are Bidayuh people even though not fully use Bidayuh (not using Bidayuh completely).'*

All the Bidayuhs are proud of their own dialects and do not see the need to learn other Bidayuh dialects seriously. Compared to learning other Bidayuh dialects, mastering English will have more economic value and can also ensure them of employment in the future. A Biatah undergraduate (respondent 12) said:

*'Many graduates cannot get jobs. Why? They cannot speak English. I think it is sad. So, I think we should improve our English. Never mind, we can speak Bidayuh at home.'*

The urban Bidayuh are better exposed to the English language at home and among their social circles in their urban areas compared to the rural Bidayuh undergraduates. They were exposed to urban lifestyles where English is considered an elite language. A Bau-Jagoi undergraduate (respondent 9) said:

*'Speaking English makes me feel educated. All my friends speak some English mix with some Malay and some Bidayuh. Good to speak some English because it gives me **style** (makes me modern).'*

In sharp contrast, the rural Bidayuh are less proficient in English compared to the urban Bidayuh. They regard the university as a good venue to improve their English language proficiency. A Bukar-Sadong undergraduate said:

*'At home we always speak Bidayuh. In our school, last time also we spoke Bahasa Melayu and Bidayuh outside class. We didn't dare to speak English. Afraid people will laugh. Now alright because UiTM subjects are in English (It's alright to speak English now because the medium of instruction at UiTM is in English.)*

By speaking Bahasa Melayu the rural Bidayuh are transferring the language used as their medium of instruction in school before to the university during social interactions. When using Sarawak Malay across dialect groups the urban Bidayuh are also transferring the language use in the urban setting during social interactions.

The urban Bidayuh undergraduates are more comfortable with Sarawak Malay and think of it as the 'we code'.<sup>9</sup> It is their safest choice when interacting with other urban Bidayuh. The rural Bidayuh however are less proficient in Sarawak Malay and their safest choice is Bahasa Melayu when interacting with both the urban and rural Bidayuh. However, both the rural and urban Dayak Bidayuh do find it easier to discuss educational related matters in Bahasa Melayu.

### **For socialising functions**

The Bidayuh often mix codes when starting a conversation. For the urban Bidayuh, it is quite common for them to greet and take leave using English and Sarawak Malay. For the rural Bidayuh, it is also common to end a conversation using English and Bahasa Melayu. The Dayak Bidayuh use English when greeting and taking leave due to habitual use. During the interview a Bau-Jagoi undergraduate (respondent 13) said:

*'People in the university always use English when they greet. Maybe it's the common and modern way used by young people. It makes me feel good.'*

Sometimes when they are angry with their friends they will know which language to use when expressing their anger. Both the rural and urban Bidayuhs prefer to use more Sarawak Malay when scolding across dialect groups because it will not hurt. A Bukar-Sadong undergraduate (respondent 16) said:

*'When my friend scolding (scolds) me in Sarawak Malay, I'm very o.k lah (fine). Maybe he is not serious. But if my friend scolding (scolds) me in Bahasa Bidayuh (Bidayuh language), I think he must be very marah (angry) and I don't like it. Tak bagus (not good)'*

As for urban Bidayuhs, it is more natural to tease using more Sarawak Malay compared to the rural Bidayuhs who prefer to use Bidayuh. A Biatah undergraduate (respondent 19) said:

*'More cheeky if I use Sarawak Malay when disturbing girls, especially from the Kuching. If I use Bidayuh, they think I'm so kampung (I'm so rural)'*

## Conclusion

There are differences in language choices between the rural and urban Bidayuh undergraduates belonging to the three dialect groups. The Bidayuh dialects are more in the conversations of the rural Bidayuh undergraduates compared to the urban Bidayuh undergraduates. The Bidayuh dialects are used by the rural Bidayuh undergraduates not only when code-switching in dominant Bahasa Melayu but also as a stand-alone code. In contrast, the code preferred by the urban Bidayuh undergraduates across dialect groups is Sarawak Malay whilst the rural Bidayuhs prefer Bahasa Melayu. Discussion with the Bidayuh undergraduates to obtain reasons for code choices clearly indicated that the rural Bidayuhs used more Bahasa Melayu and the urban undergraduates use Sarawak Malay extensively in order to accommodate to one another when there is no common Bidayuh language. The ultimate reality is that, if there is no common Bidayuh language soon, and the Bidayuh dialects are not formally taught in schools, there will be no more agents to reinforce the use of Bidayuh once the older generation has passed away.

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