

SUSTAINABILITY OF *LANGKAT* MALAY LANGUAGE A STUDY OF COMMUNITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN STABAT, *LANGKAT* REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the sustainability of the *Langkat* Malay Language (*Bahasa Melayu Langkat* abbreviated as BML) spoken by the speech community of young people based on language choice, language attitude, language dynamics and influential socio-cultural and socio-ecological factors. 230 (two hundred and thirty) young people were used as the samples in this study. The data needed were obtained by documentation, survey, interview, and participatory observation methods.

The findings show that there was a shift from BML to Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia* abbreviated as BI) in every domain of use and in various situations of communication. As far as BML is concerned, some internal shifts were also found. The intention to adjust the BML forms to the forms and meanings of BI in phonological, lexical and grammatical levels was responsible for this. Both the internal and external factors led to the shifts of BML to BI. The influential internal factors included (1) high tolerance of other ethnic groups; (2) high social mobility of the young people; (3) the decrease in cultural traditional activities; (4) the decrease in the concept of Mel ecology; (5) the attitude of not being observant to BML, and (6) no simultaneity between traditional processions and the BML use. The external factors included (1) the new coming ethnic groups, especially the ethnic group of *Eja*, were getting more dominant; (2) the residing pattern was getting mixed; (3) as the National Language, BI was more widely used, understood by bilinguals, gave prestige in social intercourse; and (4) there was a high interaction between the community of young people and the other communities coming from different ethnic groups and speaking different languages. Ecologically, the domains of meanings referring to particular referents in BML went down as far as the concepts of its speakers are concerned. Such a fall resulted from (1) the limited interaction between the community of young people and the Mel ecology-featured entities; (2) the entities were so scarce that they were not included in the speakers' minds; (3) and the lexical concepts internalized by the speakers, as far as those entities are concerned, were excluded in BML but included in the other languages. The shift from BML to BI made by the young speakers made BML get highly less sustainable. By referring to the criteria introduced by Wurm (in Crystal, 2000: 20) concerning the extinction of languages, it may be stated that BML is already in stadium 2, that is, a language which is almost getting extinct.

Key words: *sustainability, domain, language choice, language attitude, river ecology, Malay community, young people, language shift.*

1. Introduction

The sustainability of *Langkat* Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu Langkat* abbreviated as *BML*) in *Sabat* can be viewed from the regeneration process of its speakers. There are some indicators that its young speakers do not master a number of its words resulting from the disappearance of some socio-cultural and socio-ecological elements of the Malay community in *Stabat*. The cultural change (from the traditional culture into modern culture) or the ecological change (from rural area into urban area) has been responsible for the disappearance of some lexical icons. It is predicted that the number of words indicating animals, plants, traditional equipment, terms of address, household equipment and so on has gone down. Those words are predicted to get extinct. Such a fall or extinction has been assumed to have resulted in the disappearance of particular concepts used to refer to particular entities. In addition, the multiethnic socio-culture in *Sabat* has been responsible for the language choice made when interaction takes place. The macro linguistic effect of this condition is that diversity of languages has appeared and that the developing languages have shifted with regard to the domains in which they are used.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is a sociolinguistic one in which the theory of ethnography (Hymes, 1974), ecolinguistics (Haugen, 1974; Bang and Door, 2000) and the theory of socio psychology (Lambert, 1960) are mixed. The theory of ethnographic communication refers to the theory which considers that a speech is a cultural behavior; therefore, it is necessary to highlight that the relationship between language and culture is a psychological phenomenon or cognition (socio psychology). Then, Palmer's insight (1996: 46-52) into mental imaginary (conceptual insight) which is knitted in the theory of ecolinguistics in this study adds a new variable in sociolinguistic studies, making sociolinguistics not only concerned with the relationship between language and community but also concerned with mutual relationship among language, community and environment.

3. Research Method

The primary data in this study are in the form of quantitative data and the secondary data are in the form of qualitative data. The primary data were obtained through self report and BML lexical competence test done by the respondents. The qualitative data are in the

form of lingual data and the speakers' perception of BML. The methods employed to get the data were the methods of documentation, survey, interview and participatory observation. The quantitative data were obtained by using the instruments of questionnaire and test, and the qualitative data were obtained through documentation, unstructured interview and participatory observation, and the techniques used were recording, elicitation, camouflage and getting involved in dialogues.

4. Discussion

Together with the turn of era, the paradigm and pattern of the Mel societal life in *Stabat* have also changed. The river has not been the income generator any longer. The residing pattern, the form of houses, the people's occupations, their traditional equipment, and their tradition do not have anything to with the river any longer. Such a change has also been indicated by the disappearance of the natural and cultural elements. In linguistic domain, the disappearance of natural and cultural elements has been responsible for the disappearance the concepts which are used by the young speakers to refer to the natural and cultural entities. Furthermore, the community of young speakers has not been able to speak BML, their native language. The linguistic fact, as far as the young speakers of Mel in *Stabat* are concerned, shows that there has been a shift from BNL to BI. In addition, internal shift has also taken place, that is, the shift in lingual forms and meanings of BML which has been influenced by BI.

The linguistic shift made by the community of young speakers has also been indicated by the pattern of their bilingualism. Culturally and linguistically, the population is composed of *EMel*, *Eja* which is dominant, and other ethnic groups making the community of Mel in *Stabat* bilingual. There are three types of environment based on the composition of ethnic groups in the five areas where the research was conducted. They are *Kel Per* which is dominated by *Eja*, *Araco* and *Pami* villages which are dominated by *EMel*, and *Kel STBB*, which is ethnically composed equal. The dominance of one ethnic group in one area has been responsible for the language chosen in that area. The respondents taken from the environment dominated by Mel totaled 170 (73.9%). Among them, 124 respondents (53.9%) stated that BML was the dominant language and 46 respondents (20%) stated that BI was their dominant language. This shows that in the Mel dominated environment, BNL was not dominantly used. The consequence was that many young speakers did not

understand BML and could not speak it fluently. Only 35.22% of the respondents understood BML and could speak it fluently. In the environment not dominated by Mel, 10 respondents (4.3%) had mastered BML since they were good at speaking. 23 (twenty three) respondents (10%) did not master BML. In addition, 27 (twenty seven) respondents had mastered BML after their childhood and after they started school. This has been responsible for the disappearance their B1, that is, BML. More or less 18.8% lost their B1, that is, BML, as they did not understand it and could not speak it fluently.

The linguistic shift was also shown by the language chosen in various domains. The language selected in the domains of family, neighborhood, friendship, tradition, transactions, religion, and education was BI. Generally, the young respondents spoke BI with all their interlocutors, except when they talked to their grandparents or to those who were older than them in the domain of neighborhood. If related to the parents' occupations, BML was chosen in the domain of family if the parents were farmers. This shows that BML is strongly maintained in the families who are farmers. As far as the friendship is concerned, the younger people preferred to speak BI to BML, even when they spoke to their friends belonging to the same ethnic group. This shows that there had been a diglossic leakage, in which BI was used instead of BML. This leakage had taken place in such a way that it had reached the domains where it should have been strongly maintained such as the domains of family, friendship and tradition.

Together with the diglossic leakage which took place in all domains, the expressions used by the young people in various situations of communication also tended to be dominated by BI as well. It can be generalized that when the young people got angry at home, at school and with neighbors and their friends, they more dominantly use BI than BML. Similarly, when they told something funny, abused other people, mumbled and so forth, they also used BI. Being not observant to BML was also indicated by their tendency to choose BI. Knowledge and technology, pressure from the other more dominant ethnic groups and high tolerance of them were responsible for this.

The bilingual situation also resulted in code switching and code mixing, which took place within sentences and inter sentences, as the other consequence. In code mixing, the mixed forms between BML and BI, which tended to be caused by the similarities in phonological and morphological structures between BML and BI, were observed.

The socio cultural and socio ecological activities were also closely related to the language shift made by the young people in *Stabat*. The activities they did related to Mel tradition in *Stabat* can be stated low. This resulted from the fact that there were no strong permanent traditional organizations as far as the Mel community in *Stabat* is concerned. The number of Mel cultural processions decreased. However, the remaining ones, which were watched by the young people, were performed using BI. No simultaneity between culture and the language use was responsible the position of BML, which was getting weaker. The results of the competence test of BML lexical items done by the young people proved that socio ecologically most of them lost many lexical concepts in BML. Apart from the low involvement of the respondents in various cultural events, the following things were also responsible for such a loss. (1) The interactions between the young people and the entities related to the Mel ecology were getting less; (2) such entities were getting less in number making them not internalized in the minds of the young people, as the speakers of BML; and (3) the lexical concepts referring to such entities were not available in BML but in the other languages instead.

It was also found that internal shifts also took place in BML. In phonological level, the shifts of [U], [I], and [R] took place. The tendency in adjusting the sounds in BML to those in BI can be reflected by the shift of vocal [u] in initial position to []. Such a shift took place if the meaning of the BML word is identical with the meaning of BI one. Lexical shifts were also found in BML. Such shifts were found in (1) the BML words which were synonymous with those in BI; (2) in the words which had particular meanings or hyponymy; (3) in the words whose referents had changed; (4) in the words used to express traditional expressions; (5) words used to express wrong perceptions; and (6) in words used to express 'highly'. Shifts were also found in grammatical aspects such as in the forms which were similar to those found in BI. In this case, new forms which were combinations of BI and BML were found. This can be illustrated by the forms *dipulangkannya*, *mulangkannya*, and *ngelehnya*.

There were several factors which were responsible for the language shifts made by the Mel young people. The factors which were identified are classified as internal and external factors. The internal factors included (1) high tolerance of other ethnic groups; (2) high social mobility made by the young people; (3) the decrease in socio cultural activities; (4) the fall in ecological concepts of Mel; (5) being not observant to BML; and (6) no

simultaneity between the traditional processions and the BML use. The external factors included (1) the dominance of new coming ethnic groups, especially the ethnic group of *Eja*; (2) the residing pattern which was getting mixed; (3) the existence of BI as the national language, which was more widely used, understood by all bilinguals and had high prestige; and (4) high interaction between the young people with the other communities belonging to different ethnic groups and speaking different languages.

5. Novelties

This research proves that there were some shifts from BML to BI made by the young people in *Stabat*. The factors which were responsible for this can be classified as external and internal. The external factors included (1) high tolerance of other ethnic groups; (2) high social mobility made by the young people; (3) the decrease in cultural activities; (4) the decrease in ecological concepts of Mel; (5) not being observant to BML; and (6) no simultaneity between the traditional processions and the BML use. The external factors included: (1) the dominance of new coming ethnic groups, especially the ethnic group of *Eja*; (2) the residing pattern which was getting mixed; (3) the existence of BI as the national language, which was widely used, understood by all bilinguals, and had high prestige; and (4) high interaction between the young people with the other communities belonging to different ethnic groups and speaking different languages. In addition, in phonological level, some shifts were also found as far as [], [I], [R], and [u] are concerned following speech attitude in BI. With regard to lexical items, many shifts were also found. They are (1) the BML words which were synonymous with BI ones; (2) the word with particular meanings; (3) the words whose referents had changed; (4) the words used to express traditional expressions; (5) the words which were used to express misperception; and (6) the words used to express 'highly'. Such shifts resulted in new forms, that is, the forms which were combinations of BI and BML. This can be exemplified by *dipulangkannya*, *mulangkannya*, and *ngelehnya*. Socio ecologically, the dip in the concepts used to express Mel ecology was also found in the community of young people. Apart from the low involvement of the young people in cultural events, such a dip also resulted from (1) less interaction between the community of young people with the entities related to the Mel ecology; (2) the scarcity or the disappearance of such entities making

their concepts not internalized in the minds of the young people; (3) the lexical concepts referring to those entities, if available, were not in BML but in other languages.

6. Conclusions

The results of the research on the community of Mel young people in *Stabat* show that there were some language shifts from BML to BI. Internal shifts also took place, that is, the shifts in forms and meanings within BML influenced by BI. The shifts took place in phonological, lexical and grammatical levels.

Internal and external factors were responsible for the language shifts taking place in the community of Mel young people in *Stabat*. The influential internal factors included (1) high tolerance of the other ethnic groups; (2) high socio mobility made by the young people; (3) the decrease in cultural activities; (4) the fall in the concepts referring to Mel ecology; (5) not being observant to BML; and (6) no simultaneity between the traditional processions and the BML use. The external factors responsible for the language shifts made by the community of young people in *Stabat* included: (1) the dominance of new coming ethnic groups, especially the ethnic group of *Eja*; (2) the residing pattern which was getting mixed; (3) the existence of BI as the national language which was more widely used, understood by all bilinguals, and had high prestige; and (4) high interaction between the young people with the other communities belonging to different ethnic groups and speaking different languages.

The linguistic condition, which is in the form of shifts from BML to BI made by the young people caused BML to be less sustainable. By referring to the criteria introduced by *Wurn* (in Crystal, 2000: 20) concerning the languages which are getting extinct, it can be stated that BML is already in stadium 2, that is, the language which is getting less sustainable. The language which is getting less sustainable is the language which is in the condition in which only a few or no young people learn it or the language whose fluent speakers are adults who are relatively young.

7. Acknowledgments

The completion of this dissertation cannot be separated from the parties who have been very helpful to the writer. Therefore, in this opportunity, the writer would like to thank the Rector of Udayana University, Prof. Dr. dr. I Made Bakta, Sp.PD (KHOM),

Director of Postgraduate Program of Udayana University, Prof. Dr. Ir. Dewa Ngurah Suprpta, M.Sc., Head of the Doctorate Program of Linguistics, Prof. Drs. I Ketut Artawa, M.A., Ph.D., and Secretary of the Doctorate Program of Linguistics, Prof. Dr. Drs. Ida Bagus Putra Yadnya, M.A., who have provided the writer with the educational opportunity and academic services. The writer would also like to highly appreciate Prof. Drs. I Made Suastra, Ph.D., as the Promoter; Prof. Dr. I Wayan Jendra, S.U., as Co-promoter I; and Prof. Dr. Made Budiarsa, M.A., as Co-promoter II for their guidance and supervision during the completion of this dissertation. High appreciation is also extended to the board of examiners such as Prof. Dr. Aron Meko Mbete, Prof. Drs. Ketut Artawa, M.A., Ph.D., Prof. Dr. I Wayan Pastika, M.S., Dr. I Ketut Darma Laksana, M.Hum., and Prof. Mahyni, M.A., Ph.D. for their criticism and contribution for the improvement of this dissertation. Finally, the writer would also like to thank all the teaching staff, administrative staff, and all the parties whom cannot be mentioned one by one and who have played roles in the competition of the writer's study in the Doctorate Program of Linguistics, Postgraduate Program of Udayana University.