

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
HUMANITIES, PHILOSOPHY
AND LANGUAGE
(IJHPL)
www.ijhpl.com



FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION IN POLYGLOSSIC BIDAYUH COMMUNITY

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 17.10.2021

Revised date: 30.12.2021

Accepted date: 01.12.2022

Published date: 31.12.2022

To cite this document:

Kayad, F. G., & Ting, S. (2022). Functional Differentiation In Polyglossic Bidayuh Community. *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Language*, 5 (20), 25-38.

DOI: 10.35631/IJHPL.520003.

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Abstract:

Bidayuh is an indigenous group living in Sarawak, Malaysia. The study examined the functional differentiation of the Bidayuh language in the polyglossic Bidayuh community in Sarawak, Malaysia. Questionnaire data were obtained from 61 Bidayuh participants from Sarawak. Results showed 68.85% of the participants spoke Bidayuh almost every day but 18.03% did not speak Bidayuh at all. Over two-thirds of the participants could understand and could use Bidayuh in conversations on familiar topics. The language use results showed that the Bidayuh language was used for informal communication in the family, friendship, neighbourhood and transactions domains but less in the formal domains which were dominated by English, Sarawak Malay, and Malay. The participants believed in the symbolic value of the Bidayuh language as an ethnic marker but not in the instrumental importance of the language. They were inclined to attribute the importance of the Bidayuh language to institutional support from non-governmental organisations rather than the status of the Bidayuh community members. The Bidayuh language is not seen as a language for rural and old people, suggesting that there is room for the intergenerational transmission of the Bidayuh language to the younger generation in urban areas.

Keywords:

Bidayuh, Connotative Association, Ethnic Marker, Intergenerational Transmission

Introduction

Malaysia is a country where there is polyglossia or the coexistence of multiple languages and varieties of the same language in one geographical locality. The notion of polyglossia developed from diglossia, where there is a continuum ranging from H(igh) varieties through M(edium) varieties to L(ow) varieties (Ferguson, 1959). Malaysia has 134 languages, including 112 indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). Most Malaysians can speak at least two or three languages, which include their ethnic language, Malay (the official and national language) and English which is taught in the education system. Some Malaysians can also speak other local languages. Malay and English, being standard languages, are usually on the High end of the continuum but the position of indigenous languages on the polyglossic continuum is not well established. Thus far, Ting, Tinggang, and Metom (2020) have positioned Iban as the low language frequently used in family, religious, friendship, and transactions domains in an Iban-dominant region of Sarawak while Malay is the High language dominating the employment and education domains.

Sarawak, a Malaysian state located on Borneo Kalimantan, has at least 25 indigenous languages (Kheung & Aduce, 2018). Among the Sarawak indigenous groups, the Bidayuh group is of particular interest because the mutual unintelligibility of the language varieties (Noeb & Ridu, 2012) has been a hinderance to language planning and standardisation. Among the Sarawak indigenous groups, the Iban is the largest group, followed by the Bidayuh which has 217,800 speakers (Sarawak Government Portal, 2017). The Bidayuh are concentrated in the western region of Sarawak. The Bidayuh belt stretches through Lundu, Bau, Kuching and Samarahan (Dundon, 1989).

Bidayuh language is an Austronesian language. Past studies have indicated that the Bidayuh language is showing signs of gradual shift because of urban migration, mixed marriage and education whereby many Bidayuh have adopted dominant languages such as English and Sarawak Malay Dialect for family and social communication (Dealwis, 2008, 2010; Norahim, 2010; 2017; Coluzzi, Riget, & Wang, 2013; Kayad & Ting, 2021;). The higher the education level, the greater the awareness of the importance of language maintenance. The Bidayuh language is the most important ethnic identity marker for Bidayuh school students and working adults (Ting & Campbell, 2013). Bidayuh have generally positive attitudes towards their heritage language and there have been notable efforts to revitalise the language including community-based Bidayuh playschools in selected villages (Bongarrá & Siam, 2017). For the Iban, attitudes towards Iban language and Iban usage are not correlated (Ting et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the Bidayuh language still lacks official support as it is not used widely in mass media nor taught in school, unlike the larger indigenous language, Iban which is taught as a subject in school. It is for this reason that we posit that Bidayuh may not occupy the High continuum of the polyglossic situation. Although it is known that the Bidayuh language has symbolic importance as the carrier of the ethnic identity, other attributes of importance need to be investigated to understand the factors that may push the language towards higher level functions in the society.

This study examined the functional differentiation of the Bidayuh language in the polyglossic Bidayuh community in Sarawak, Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were the Bidayuh speakers' proficiency in the Bidayuh language, frequency of using Bidayuh, and the main languages used in nine domains of language use.

Literature Review

Research on language vitality of minority and indigenous languages shows that intergenerational transmission is crucial for language maintenance. Intergenerational transmission of a language can be influenced by a variety of factors such as perception towards the importance of the language. Jewell (2016) explored the extent to which variables such as age, sex, education level, household type, exposure to language in the home, and exposure to language outside the home affect the perceptions of language importance in indigenous groups in Canada. She found that age and education influence perception of language importance. Older and more educated indigenous individuals are more aware of language endangerment and the issues associated with colonialism. Indigenous languages spoken in the home increase chances of language transmission (Norris, 2004, as cited in Jewel, 2016) and increased exposure to the language outside the home may increase the perception of language importance.

In Malaysia, past studies have indicated that younger generation of the indigenous people are gradually shifting to dominant languages not only outside the home but inside the home domain (Coluzzi, 2016). While the Bidayuh language is used orally by all generations, many parents have reported that they no longer use the language at home with their children (Dealwis, 2008; Norahim, 2010; Coluzzi et al., 2013). This is particularly in situations involving spouses from different ethnic group or different Bidayuh language variety, and Bidayuh who live outside the Bidayuh belt or traditional community. As their children learn the dominant languages such as Malay and English in school, Bidayuh parents began to use these languages at home for more effective communication as they believed having proficiency in these languages is more advantageous for their children's future, compared to Bidayuh (Kayad & Ting, 2021). Thus, while they indicated highly positive attitude toward their heritage language, they were ambivalent about having Bidayuh as a subject in school. If Bidayuh is not used widely by their own community and not taught in school, the language maintenance will be at risk. Thus, there is an urgent need to examine the Bidayuh people's perception of the importance of their language to better understand their attitudes and behaviours concerning their language.

Method

The descriptive study involved 61 Bidayuh from Sarawak. Most of the participants were speakers of two Bidayuh varieties, namely 44.26% who spoke the Bau variety, and 40.98% who spoke the Biatah variety (Table 1). Only 9.84% spoke the Serian variety, and 4.92% spoke other Bidayuh varieties. The participants were mostly aged 32-40 (34.43%) and 41-50 (27.87%) and there was a balance of gender (52.46% female, 47.54% male). A majority of them (72.13%) had university degrees. More participants had Malay medium education than English at both primary and secondary levels.

Table 1: Demographic Background of Bidayuh Participants (N=61)

Demographic background		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 20	4	6.56
	21-30	8	13.11
	31-40	21	34.43
	41-50	17	27.87
	51-60	8	13.11
	61 and above	3	4.92
Gender	Female	32	52.46
	Male	29	47.54
Educational Background	Form 3	3	4.92
	Form 5	8	13.11
	Form 6	1	1.64
	Diploma	5	8.20
	Degree and higher	44	72.13
Medium of education in primary school	Chinese	4	6.56
	English	21	34.43
	BM	36	59.02
Medium of education in secondary school	Chinese	0	0
	English	22	36.07
	BM	39	63.93
Religion	Christianity	58	95.08
	Islam	3	4.92
Bidayuh language background	Bau	27	44.26
	Biatah	25	40.98
	Serian	6	9.84
	Other Bidayuh varieties	3	4.92

A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information and data on proficiency in Bidayuh, frequency of Bidayuh usage, language choice in nine domains, perceptions on reasons for the importance of Bidayuh language, and connotative associations of the Bidayuh language. The first researcher identified Bidayuh contacts and invited them to participate in the study via phone (WhatsApp) and email. They were sent the link to the Google form for the questionnaire. The questionnaire data were analysed and frequency, percentages and mean scores were calculated for the items.

Results and Discussion

Bidayuh Participants' Proficiency in Bidayuh

The use of the Bidayuh language for various functions depends on whether the community members have proficiency in the language. The results in Table 2 show that all 61 Bidayuh participants in the study could understand and speak Bidayuh, but to varying extents. Understandably their receptive proficiency in the language is higher (over 60%) compared to productive proficiency (about 16%); these percentages refer to Bidayuh participants who can use their ethnic language for conversations on complex topics. The details of their proficiency are described next.

Table 2: Proficiency in Bidayuh (N=61)

Ability to understand and speak Bidayuh		Frequency	Percentage
Ability to understand	Cannot understand Bidayuh at all.	0	0
	Can understand some Bidayuh words when people are talking slowly and clearly about themselves, family and activities.	4	6.56
	Can understand the topic of the conversation that is conducted slowly and clearly in Bidayuh.	0	0
	Can understand the main points of everyday conversation that is conducted clearly in a Bidayuh language familiar to me.	10	16.39
	Can understand a lot of what is said but may find it hard to participate effectively in a conversation conducted in Bidayuh.	9	14.75
	Can easily understand conversations conducted in Bidayuh, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics spoken at a natural speed.	38	62.30
Ability to speak	Cannot speak Bidayuh at all.	0	0
	Can say a few Bidayuh words.	12	19.67
	Can say simple sentences in Bidayuh to describe people, living or work conditions, daily activities, and likes/dislikes.	0	0
	Can speak Bidayuh quite well to describe something familiar.	15	24.59
	Can use Bidayuh to give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of topics I am interested in.	24	39.34
	Can use Bidayuh to give clear, detailed descriptions on complex topics and speak smoothly.	10	16.39

Note: Some totals do not add up to 100 due to rounding off

The participants' ability to understand Bidayuh is reasonable as 62.30% could easily understand conversations conducted in Bidayuh, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics spoken at a natural speed. Another 14.75% could understand a lot of what is said but might find it hard to participate effectively in a conversation conducted in Bidayuh. However, 16.39% reported that their level of understanding was limited to "main points of everyday conversation" conducted clearly in a Bidayuh language familiar to them. This might be due to the fact that some Bidayuh language varieties are not mutually intelligible as there is insufficient lexicostatistical overlap between them (Joyik et al., 2017). Consequently, both Bidayuh interlocutors would resort to a standard language such as English or Malay for effective communication. Further, some (6.56%) participants reported they had minimal, word-level understanding on familiar topics such as self, family and activities when spoken clearly and slowly.

The participants' ability to speak Bidayuh is considerably limited as only 16.39% could use Bidayuh to give clear, detailed descriptions on complex topics and speak smoothly. A larger proportion of Bidayuh participants did not have adequate productive skills to handle complex

topics. Although 39.34% could use Bidayuh to give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of topics, 24.59% could only describe familiar topics. A notable number (19.67%) of participants could only speak a few words in Bidayuh. Clearly, the participants' proficiency in the Bidayuh language is more towards receptive rather than productive skills as their ability to speak is much lower than their ability to understand the language.

Bidayuh Participants' Frequency of Using Bidayuh

To find out how essential the Bidayuh language is for the daily communication of the Bidayuh community, their frequency of speaking Bidayuh during the week was investigated. The results in Table 3 show that only one participant (1.64% of 61 participants) spoke Bidayuh every day, but 67.21% spoke Bidayuh almost every day. It is important to know that 18.03% of them do not speak Bidayuh at all.

Table 3: Bidayuh Participants' Frequency of Speaking Bidayuh (N=61)

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	11	18.03
1-2 times per week	6	9.84
3-5 times per week	2	3.28
Almost everyday	41	67.21
Everyday	1	1.64

Bidayuh Participants' Language Choice in Nine Domains

Table 4 shows the main languages used by the Bidayuh participants in nine domains of language use. For items 1 to 7, participants were asked to report "the main language" used in the home, neighbourhood, school, religious place, and mass media. However, for items 8 to 11, they could list a few languages because friendship, shopping, work place and government departments tend to have inter-ethnic interactions and the main language is not as obvious. Based on these results, the functional differentiation of languages for the Bidayuh community will be formulated.

Table 4. Bidayuh Participants' Language Use in Nine Domains (N=61)

Main language used	Bidayuh	English	Sarawak Malay	Malay	Chinese	Iban	Other languages
1. At home	28 (45.90%)	19 (31.15%)	9 (14.75%)	2 (3.28%)	1 (1.64%)	1 (1.64%)	1 (1.64%)
2. With neighbours	13 (21.31%)	14 (22.95%)	16 (26.23%)	14 (22.95%)	0	1 (1.64%)	0
3. In school	0	23 (37.70%)	21 (34.43%)	13 (21.31%)	0	0	2 (3.28%)
4. In religious place	11 (18.03%)	41 (67.21%)	4 (6.56%)	4 (6.56%)	0	1 (1.64%)	0
5. When reading newspapers	0	54 (88.52%)	0	7 (11.48%)	0	0	0
6. Listening to the radio	4 (6.56%)	52 (85.25%)	2 (3.28%)	2 (3.28%)	0	0	1 (1.64%)
7. In social media communication	3 (4.92%)	49 (80.33%)	5 (8.20%)	4 (6.56%)	0	3 (4.92%)	0
8. With friends	40 (65.57%)	52 (85.25%)	45 (73.77%)	60 (98.36%)	8 (13.11%)	18 (29.51%)	1 (1.64%)
9. When buying things	19 (21.15%)	50 (81.97%)	45 (73.77%)	38 (62.30%)	1 (1.64%)	10 (16.39%)	1 (1.64%)

10. With colleagues	23 (37.70%)	47 (77.05%)	37 (60.66%)	31 (50.82%)	1 (1.64%)	12 (19.67%)	1 (1.64%)
11. At government departments	8 (13.11%)	49 (80.33%)	31 (50.82%)	48 (78.69%)	1 (1.64%)	3 (4.92%)	1 (1.64%)

Note: Items 5 (newspaper) and 6 (radio) are on the mass media domain whereas Items 7 (social media communication) and Item 8 (friends) are on the friendship domain

The four frequently used languages are Sarawak Malay, English, Bidayuh and Iban. Sarawak Malay is a dialect of the standard Malay language called Bahasa Malaysia (BM) which is the medium of instruction in national schools in Malaysia. BM is referred to as Malay in this paper.

Bidayuh only dominates in the family (45.90%), but the percentage show that other languages are creeping into these informal domains. A sizable proportion of the Bidayuh participants used English as the home language (31.15%) while 14.75% spoke Sarawak Malay at home. This result concurs with past findings on the tendency of educated Bidayuh people to use other dominant languages like English for family communication (Dealwis, 2008; 2010; Norahim, 2010; 2017; Coluzzi, et al., 2013). The inclination is even stronger in households where there are mixed marriages or where the couple speaks different Bidayuh varieties.

Interestingly, Bidayuh is also used quite often with friends (65.57%) and colleagues (37.70%), but much less with neighbours (21.31%), when buying things (21.15%), in religious places (18.03%) and government departments (13.11%). Bidayuh is clearly a language for family and social interactions (friends, colleagues and neighbours). However, as Bidayuh is not a written language, it is minimally used for social media communication. The use of Bidayuh is limited to the community of Bidayuh speakers.

Next, the use of English for the Bidayuh participants in daily communication spreads across several domains of language use. English is used by a certain percentage of the participants in religious places (67.21%). English is frequently used in informal interactions, encompassing social media communication (80.33%), conversations with friends (85.25%), interactions with vendors (81.97%). Interestingly, English is also frequently used for formal purposes of communication with government officers (80.33%) and colleagues (77.05%), and for access to the mass media (newspapers, 88.52%; radio, 85.25%). While there is no newspaper in Sarawak Malay dialect, there is a local radio station called Cats.fm which uses predominantly Sarawak Malay in their programmes, with an afternoon segment in the Iban language daily. However, the Bidayuh participants preferred English radio programmes.

Sarawak Malay is the most frequently used language across many domains. The greatest use of Sarawak Malay was friendship (73.77%), transactions (73.77%), work place (60.66%) and government departments (50.82%). Even though Sarawak Malay is a dialect and not a standard and written language, its use is extensive. It is interesting that it occupies the formal domains (work, government). The relevance of Sarawak Malay in friendship and transactions domains is due to the ethnic mix of the people. The domains where Sarawak Malay is not relevant are religion and social media.

As for Malay, the results show that it is a language for interethnic communication and formal communication. Almost all (98.36%) of the Bidayuh participants reported using it with friends, indicative of interethnic social networks. Other domains where there are interethnic interactions are transactions (62.30%), and work place (50.82%). The emergence of Malay as

a language for interethnic communication shows the success of the national language policy because the national language was envisioned as a shared language to unite the diverse ethnic groups. Its designated role as the official language is clear too in the present study. The Bidayuh participants frequently used Malay at government departments (78.69%).

A portion of the Bidayuh participants could speak Iban because they reported using it in social circles. The Iban language is used with friends (29.51%), colleagues (19.67%), and when buying things (16.39%). The functional placement of Iban as an informal language for the Bidayuh speakers is clear based on the results.

Based on the results for the language choices in nine selected domains, the functional differentiation of languages for the Bidayuh community can be represented by Figure 1. Based on the results of the present study, the polyglossic continuum is from Bidayuh (Low) to English (High). Bidayuh is acquired from the family and used in informal spaces to interact with family and friends (including neighbours). English is a formal language used to access the mass media (newspaper, radio) and religion, and also new media (social media). The latter is perhaps not surprising because of the international edge of social media communication where English dominates. As we move away from the High end of the continuum towards medium formality in government institutions (government departments and schools), Malay and Sarawak Malay become important. Malay functions as the official language for formal situations of communication but Sarawak Malay functions as the language of solidarity for informal situations in government institutions. In the work domain (government and corporate settings), Iban is added as a language of solidarity.

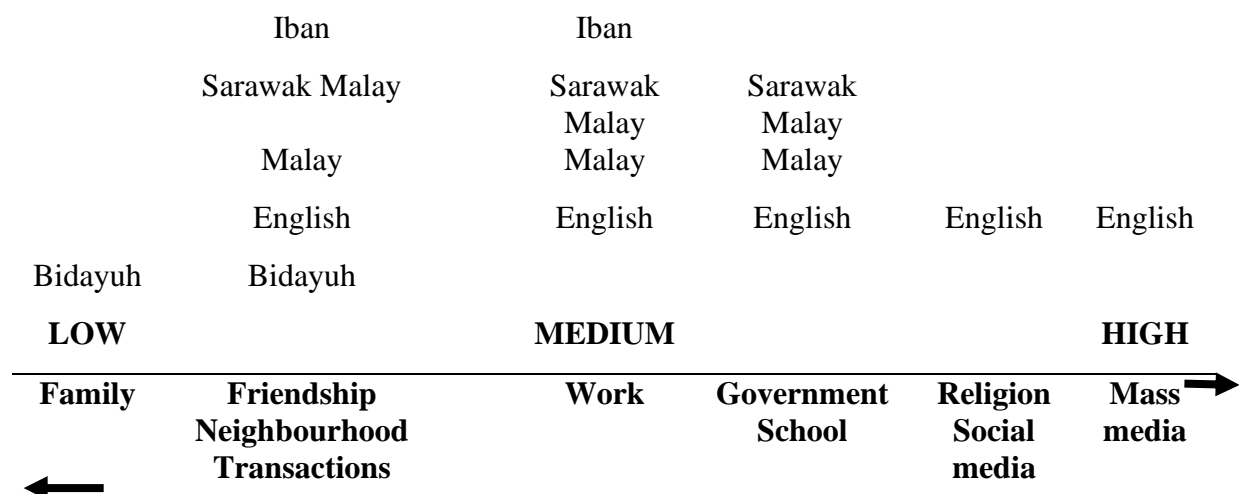


Figure 1. Functional Differentiation of Languages for Bidayuh Community

Ting et al.'s (2020) study on a Iban community in an Iban-dominant region also showed that the indigenous language (Iban) is a Low language. However, there are two major differences. In their study, Iban is not only used in the family, friendship, and transactions domains but also in the religious domain. In the Bidayuh community, the religious domain is dominated by English although the Bidayuh language has some role in informal interactions. This is because there is less regional variation in the Iban language and it facilitates standardisation of the Iban language. The Bidayuh varieties are almost mutually unintelligible, which is an obstacle to standardisation of orthography for production of religious and other written texts in Bidayuh.

Another difference in functional differentiation is that the Iban community has Malay as High language in employment and education domains, but the Bidayuh participants has Malay, Sarawak Malay and English occupying these domains. The functional differentiation of Bidayuh is unclear, unlike conventional situations of diglossia and polyglossia. For the Bidayuh, English transcends formality, and Sarawak Malay and Malay are of medium formality. Only Bidayuh is clearly an informal language for social interactions. Unlike the conventional situations where languages are clearly differentiated in functions, the case of the Bidayuh community indicates that they would not lack access to High languages in society and therefore are not deprived of access to educational and societal progress.

Perceptions on the Reasons for the Importance of Bidayuh Language

Based on the language use results in the previous section, Bidayuh is particularly important in the home, friendship and transactions domains, and important to some extent in the religion, work and government domains. This section presents results from the Bidayuh participants' perspective to find out the reasons for the importance of Bidayuh language (Table 5).

Table 5. Bidayuh Participants' Perceptions on Reasons for the Importance of Bidayuh Language (N=61)

Items	Mean score
1. It is important for me to speak the Bidayuh language because it shows that I am a Bidayuh.	4.43
2. I think the Bidayuh language will be strong if it is taught in school.	4.07
3. It is important for me to speak the Bidayuh language so that I can get closer to other Bidayuh people	3.98
4. I think the Bidayuh language is important because the Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak looks after the adat and the customary laws of the natives (undang-undang adat-istiadat).	3.74
5. I think the Bidayuh language is important because there is a Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) to preserve the Bidayuh language and culture.	3.69
6. I think the Bidayuh language is important because there are many highly educated Bidayuh people.	3.43
7. I think the Bidayuh language is important because there are many Bidayuh leaders (e.g., ketua kampung, politicians).	3.33
8. I think the Bidayuh language is strong because the Bidayuh population is big.	3.20
9. I think the Bidayuh language is strong because Bidayuh people are found all over Malaysia.	2.98
10. I think the Bidayuh language is important because there are many rich Bidayuh people.	2.70
11. It is important for me to know the Bidayuh language because it helps me to get jobs.	2.59

Note: On a five-point Likert scale of 1 to 5, the mid-point is 3 (1 for strongly agree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree, 5 for strongly agree)

Speaking Bidayuh was perceived most important to show that they are Bidayuh (mean of 4.43). The Bidayuh language is valued as an identity marker, and its importance rests in its symbolic value rather than instrumental value. This is because the Bidayuh participants felt that knowing the Bidayuh language would not help them to get jobs (M=2.59). In another study, Ting and

Campbell (2013) found that Bidayuh secondary school students and working adult participants ranked the Bidayuh language as number one ethnic marker. The language carries the ethnic identity, and creates solidarity when Bidayuh people speak their ethnic language with one another. This is shown by the results in Table 5 whereby the Bidayuh participants agreed that it is important for them to speak the Bidayuh language so that they can get closer to other Bidayuh people ($M=3.98$). In the earlier results on language use, the use of Bidayuh with friends, neighbours and vendors indicate that these are with other Bidayuh speakers. The use of the shared language can create good rapport among Bidayuh speakers who meet for the first time.

Further, the Bidayuh participants of this present study believed that the Bidayuh language would be strong if it is taught in school ($M=4.07$). Their perception on this makes even more sense when placed in the context of the language use results earlier because they did not speak any Bidayuh in school. Indeed, having the Bidayuh language taught in school as a subject is one of the main goals of the Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) initiated by the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) since 2001 (Bongarrá & Siam, 2017). To this end, DBNA has collaborated with significant organisations such as UNICEF and SIL Malaysia to conduct projects such as wordlist and dictionary development and the Bidayuh playschool and kindergarten under the Multilingual Education (MLE) programme in selected Bidayuh villages. However, it should be noted that past studies have indicated that while Bidayuh have generally positive attitudes toward their language, more Bidayuh from the younger generation felt that Bidayuh should only be taught as an optional subject up to primary school (Coluzzi, et al., 2013; Coluzzi, 2017) and as language enrichment classes for urban Bidayuh children to practise their heritage language (Kayad & Ting, 2021). Once Bidayuh children learn the standardised Bidayuh language and can write in Bidayuh, this will provide the foundation for more extensive use of the language.

The participants also perceived that the Bidayuh language is important because of the institutional support provided by non-government organisations set up to promote the wellbeing of the Bidayuh community and preserve their culture. The participants attributed the importance of the Bidayuh language to the work of two such organisations: Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak (MAIS) as the custodians of Bidayuh customary laws ($M=3.74$), and Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) for the preservation of Bidayuh language and culture ($M=3.69$). Besides the non-government organisations, the Radio Television Malaysia also provides institutional support for the Bidayuh language by having Bidayuh radio programmes. There are currently no printed newspapers or magazines in the Bidayuh language. This is why the participants turned to English for access to the mass media in the earlier language use results. Although there are blogs and other websites that promote the Bidayuh language, the main language that the Bidayuh participants use for social media communication is English, followed by Sarawak Malay and Malay.

As for the social status of the Bidayuh speakers, the results showed positive perceptions. The participants felt that the presence of many highly educated Bidayuh people ($M=3.43$) and many Bidayuh leaders ($M=3.33$) contributed to the importance of the Bidayuh language. The mean scores are slightly above the mid-point of three, showing marginal agreement. The results indicate that for the Bidayuh participants, the institutions are more important to raise the status of the language than the social status of the Bidayuh community. However, they did not attribute the importance of the Bidayuh language to the wealth of Bidayuh people ($M=2.70$).

The Bidayuh participants only marginally agreed that the Bidayuh language is strong because of the big Bidayuh population ($M=3.2$). They knew that the Bidayuh is a small group numerically. The Bidayuh population constitutes about 7.8% of the Sarawak state population of 2.8 million, compared to the Iban whose population is about 28.59% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). The participants disagreed that the Bidayuh language is strong because the Bidayuh people were spread all over Malaysia ($M=2.98$). While many Bidayuh have migrated to urban areas and other parts of Malaysia for various reasons, the majority of Bidayuh people still live in the Bidayuh belt which is the areas around Kuching.

The overall results show that the Bidayuh participants have a generally positive perception of their heritage language. The Bidayuh is perceived as important mostly for social cohesiveness and ethnic identity but not for instrumental purposes.

Bidayuh Participants' Perceptions on Connotative Associations of Bidayuh

The participants' perceptions on the connotative association of the Bidayuh language (Table 6) are consistent with the two sets of results described earlier on the language use and the participants' perceptions on reasons for the importance of the Bidayuh language.

Table 6. Bidayuh participants' perceptions on connotative associations of Bidayuh language (N=61)

Items	Mean Score
1. Bidayuh is a prestigious language.	3.21
2. Bidayuh is suitable for formal use (e.g., in meetings).	3.00
3. Bidayuh is a language spoken by rural people	2.98
4. Bidayuh is a language spoken by educated people.	2.80
5. Bidayuh is a language spoken by old people (e.g., those in their 70s and 80s).	2.64

Note: On a five-point Likert scale of 1 to 5, the mid-point is 3 (1 for strongly agree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree, 5 for strongly agree)

There is marginal agreement that Bidayuh is a prestigious language ($M=3.21$). The earlier set of results (Table 4 and Figure 1) showed that Bidayuh is a Low language in the context of polyglossia, meaning that it is used for informal communication. This could explain the reservation in rating the prestige of the Bidayuh language, which needs to take into consideration the status of other languages in the community, such as English and Malay – standard languages which are used as official languages in corporate and government sectors.

Next, the Bidayuh participants were neutral about whether Bidayuh is suitable for formal use such as in meetings ($M=3.00$). For this part, the language use results placed Bidayuh at the informal end of the continuum, more often used for interactions with family, friends, neighbours and vendors in the transactions domain.

Finally, the Bidayuh participants felt that their ethnic language is a progressive language. They disagreed that Bidayuh is a language spoken by rural people ($M=2.98$) and old people ($M=2.64$). In other words, young Bidayuh living in urban areas also speak Bidayuh, and this is true. The language use results (Table 4) shows that 45.9% of the participants spoke Bidayuh with their family, and many of them are living in urban areas. Interestingly, the participants

also disagreed that the Bidayuh language is spoken by educated people ($M=2.80$). This result suggests that the Bidayuh language is for the whole community and not exclusive. The Bidayuh language creates solidarity among Bidayuh speakers, and has a levelling effect in status differences when compared to English which may be associated with high education and certain arrogance. Certain quarters of the Malaysian public consider people who speak English as arrogant (Lee, 2010).

Conclusion

The study on the functional differentiation of the Bidayuh language in the polyglossic Bidayuh community in Sarawak, Malaysia showed that Bidayuh is at the informal end (Low) of the continuum while Sarawak Malay, and Malay has medium formality. English is at the formal end (High) but transcends formality and is used in all domains of language use. The educated Bidayuh living in urban areas have generally good proficiency in Bidayuh and positive attitudes towards Bidayuh language. The Bidayuh participants can largely understand and conduct conversations in Bidayuh, which is why almost 70% of them still speak Bidayuh almost every day. However, Bidayuh is the most frequently used language only in the family domain and for only 45.90% of the participants.

Our results are more positive than the dismal situation painted by past findings on the Bidayuh which showed that minimal use of Bidayuh for family communication (Dealwis, 2008; Norahim, 2010; Coluzzi et al., 2013). Sarawak Malay is the strongest competitor because it is the most frequently used language in four domains, namely, school, religious place, mass media (newspapers, radio) and friendship (social media communication). Interestingly, the neighbourhood domain saw almost balanced use of Bidayuh, English, Sarawak Malay and Iban, showing the greatest diversity of social contacts.

The participants felt that the Bidayuh language is important mostly for social cohesiveness and ethnic identity but not for instrumental purposes. The participants recognised the role of government agencies and non-governmental organisations in looking after the customary laws and culture of the Bidayuh. They are aware of the role of Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) and Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak (MAIS) in documenting and preserving the Bidayuh language. The participants believe that Bidayuh language would be stronger if it is taught in school. Some are aware of the importance of Bidayuh playschools in revitalising the language and they also know about the scarcity of written resources in Bidayuh. However, Kayad and Ting (2021) who specifically studied attitudes towards Bidayuh language kindergartens in Sarawak found ambivalent attitudes towards the necessity of having Bidayuh as a subject in school. To have Bidayuh offered as a school subject, there must be textbooks. Currently, the differences and lack of intelligibility among the varieties of Bidayuh is an obstacle to the standardisation of the Bidayuh language. In addition, if eventually Bidayuh is offered as a subject in school, there must be trained teachers and requests by at least 15 parents for the subject to be taught in a particular school. Going by Kayad and Ting's (2021) findings, the implementational issues are barriers towards having institutional support for Bidayuh in the form of an educational language.

The present study also shows that the Bidayuh participants' positive attitudes towards their ethnic language is anchored to its heritage value although they acknowledge that it is not a language for employment. They believe that Bidayuh is a prestigious language because of the presence of highly-educated Bidayuh and Bidayuh leaders in the community, as well as the

Bidayuh population in Sarawak. The increased perceived value of indigenous languages is vital for endangered languages' survival, and understanding how indigenous people value their language, and the factors that contribute to their perceptions, has very important political and cultural implications (Jewel, 2016). In the context of the Bidayuh of Sarawak, the language is an important distinctive marker of the Bidayuh identity. Further research using longitudinal studies and case studies would address the question of whether attributing greater importance to the Bidayuh language is linked with more fervour in using the language and transmitting it across generations.

Acknowledgement

The research was supported by the Dayak Research Chair awarded by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, F09/DRC/1812/2019.

The paper is a revised version of a conference paper. Kayad, F., & Ting, S. H. (2021, November 24-25). Perceptions of Bidayuh on importance of the Bidayuh language. Paper presented at 2nd Auckland International Conference on Social Sciences, Education, Entrepreneurship and Technology 2021 (AICSEET 2021), Massey University, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand.

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