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Language Maintenance and Shift in One Semai Community in Peninsular Malaysia

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For the Semai of Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the reported language use of one bilingual Semai community, a linguistic minority in Peninsular Malaysia. The Semai is the largest indigenous group in the peninsula and the language, Semai, is generally an oral language. Semai bilingual speakers are faced with choices in language behaviour that will determine whether or not the Semai language will be maintained. Given the fact that the future of the Semai language depends on its actual use, this study was undertaken to examine the reported language use patterns and the factors that contribute to maintenance or shift in one Semai community. Data for this study were collected primarily through self-administered questionnaire as well as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that there are no gender and age effects in the reported pattern of language use and that the community is experiencing stable diglossia. While Semai functions as the in-group language, Malay is reserved for out-group communication and used in formal domains. Additionally, results show that there is intergenerational transmission of the language to the younger generation. The reported language use patterns in the sample population appear to suggest a trend towards maintenance. Findings in the study also reveal that respondents in the sample population have a high perception of Semai vitality and a positive attitude toward their language, which they perceive as being a substantial part of their cultural identity. These findings suggest that socio-psychological factors are important and contribute to maintenance efforts in the community. This study concludes by positing that demographic factors, the values and attitudes of the people and religious homogeneity found in the community play an important role in the maintenance of the Semai language.

Key words: Bilingualism, Diglossia, Maintenance, Shift, Semai

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of research

Research on language maintenance and shift investigates a range of issues including the motivations for specific language use among different linguistic populations. The basic approach in many case studies is to look at patterns of language use and the factors influencing them. If a linguistic minority group shifts from using its mother tongue to the majority language, there must be reasons for it. If another group does not undergo this kind of shift, there must be other factors at work. Although most studies indicate that language shift is common among cases of prolonged contact between different ethnic groups (Weinreich, 1953), it is by no means the only option in such cases (Fishman, 1991; Ben-Rafael, 1994). There have been studies documented in the literature that report ethnic minorities maintaining their language despite all odds. The same factors that promote language shift in one group may lead to language maintenance in other ethnolinguistic groups. The identification and analyses of factors contributing to minority language maintenance and loss in contexts where majority and minority groups are in contact have attracted a considerable amount of attention among sociolinguists

recently. However, models predicting language maintenance and language shift have mostly been limited to immigrant groups and have been primarily derived from large-scale group studies (Fishman, 1971; Cocklin and Lourie, 1983; Veltman, 1983; Tollefson, 1991). These studies have identified a large inventory of factors that influence individual decision about first language maintenance.

1.2 Research setting

This study is an attempt to investigate the language maintenance or shift of one indigenous minority group in Peninsular Malaysia and the factors influencing their choice of language. The Semai community is the largest aboriginal group in Peninsular Malaysia with approximately 26,000 people. They are also known as the *Orang Asli* or original people of Malaysia. The Semai community has generally been committed to the sedentary swidden farming of grain and root crops and the people are mainly distributed in the southern state of Perak, south west of Pahang, Selangor and the central range of Peninsular Malaysia. Semai-Malay bilingualism is the norm for the Semai communities living in semi-rural areas. This is partly due to the increasing contact with other ethnic communities in the surrounding areas and the implementation of the national language, Malay or *Bahasa Malaysia*, in all schools.

Although there have been sociological and anthropological studies of the Orang Asli focusing on their social organisation (e.g., Carey, 1976), economic activities (e.g., Dentan, 1968), religious beliefs and practices (e.g., Robarchek, 1980) and language descriptions (e.g., Diffloth, 1977; Benjamin, 1999), there has been few analyses of the language behaviour of the Semai minority group (Smith, 2003). While there have been several studies recently (David, 2002, 2003) on the sociolinguistic situation of indigenous and non-indigenous minorities in Malaysia, little attention has been given to the current language use of the indigenous minor-

ity communities such as the Orang Asli. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill that gap by investigating one Semai-speaking community language use and their motivations in maintaining or abandoning their language.

1.3 The purpose of the study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate Semai language maintenance within a Malay context. The study examines the language behaviour of one Semai community through self-reported language use, interviews and participant observation, focusing on the determinants affecting language choice which may account for language maintenance or shift. This requires identification of the basic patterns of language use within the community and an analysis of the factors influencing their language choice. As a significant aspect of diglossia is the distribution of more than one language variety to serve different communication tasks, bilingualism in the community can be determined by examining the degree of diglossia in the community. The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the patterns of language use by identifying the domains of use for each language
- To examine the degree of diglossia in the community and describe the extent of bilingualism in the community
- To investigate if socio-psychological determinants such as perceived vitality, language attitude and group identity promote language maintenance or shift in the community
- To determine if the Semai language is being maintained or if shift is already occurring in the community

1.4 Research questions

With these objectives in mind, four research questions were formulated. This study was motivated by the following questions:

1. What is the pattern of language use in the Semai community? Is there intergenerational transmission of the language?
2. What type of bilingualism exists in the community? Is the community experiencing stable diglossia?
3. What factors influence speakers' language use in the community? Do factors such as perceived vitality, attitude and group identity contribute to language maintenance or shift in the Semai community?
4. Is the Semai language being maintained or is the community experiencing language shift?

In pursuit of these questions, I adopted a sociolinguistic approach to data collection and analysis. Questionnaire survey, interviews and observations were employed to gather empirical data of the language use of one Semai community. The quantitative data were subjected to statistical analyses in order to determine the pattern of language use and factors that contribute to language maintenance and shift at the community level. In order to further understand language use among the Semai, qualitative data based on interviews and observation were analysed.

1.5 Organisation of the thesis

This study is made up of eight chapters. This chapter introduces the background and the purpose of the study. A brief description of the research background

is presented and the research questions listed. The final section of this chapter outlines the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical overview of the literature on language maintenance and shift. This chapter is divided into two sections. In order to provide a framework for this study, the first section of the chapter will clarify some of the definitions and descriptions used in the literature to describe the phenomena of language shift, maintenance and death. The chapter also examines concepts such as domains and diglossia in relation to language maintenance and shift. The second section of the chapter focuses on three factors that usually contribute to language maintenance and shift. I examine how language vitality as perceived by community members can contribute to maintenance and shift. By drawing on case studies I explore the relationship between language and identity and demonstrate their relationship to language behaviour and language choice and finally I discuss the importance of attitudes and their bearing on language use.

Chapter 3 provides a brief background of the Orang Asli communities and introduces the Semai community, which is the focus of this study. I also describe the language policy in Malaysia and discuss how this policy affects other indigenous-related policies. In Chapter 4 the data gathering procedures and methods of analysis are explained. This chapter first justifies the case study approach, then describes the pilot study and highlights some of the findings that helped shape the final research instruments. Next, the chapter discusses the research design and the methodological decisions made for the current investigation. The ethical considerations are also presented. The research instruments and statistical procedures are described in the final part of this chapter.

I present the results of the data in Chapters 5 and 6. Due to the nature and organisation of the analyses, I first describe the results of the quantitative data in Chapter 5. This chapter describes the language pattern found in the sample and explores the correlation to language use and three socio-psychological variables. In

Chapter 6, I describe the result of the qualitative data gathered from interviews and observations. I highlight significant themes that emerge from the interview data and describe my observations of actual language use in the community.

Chapter 7 turns from analysis of data to interpretation. A discussion of the findings and the implications is found in this chapter. The discussion is organised according to the research questions raised in this study.

Finally, in Chapter 8 the conclusion of the study is presented. The chapter begins with a summary of the findings and a discussion of the possible factors contributing to language maintenance in the community. I close the chapter with an examination of the limitations of the study and identification of avenues for future research.

It may be useful at this introductory stage to explain briefly the term *Orang Asli* which is the Malay word for aborigines. The Malaysian Government, many years ago, felt that the word ‘aborigine’ had certain pejorative connotations; it was associated with concepts such as backwardness, under-development and primitiveness. The Malay word, *Orang Asli*, however, do not have these connotations. The word *orang* means ‘people’ and the term *asli* comes from the Arabic word ‘asali’ meaning ‘original’, ‘well-born’ or ‘aristocratic’ (Carey, 1976). The term Orang Asli has been well received by the people themselves and it has been widely used and firmly established. Therefore the term Orang Asli is used throughout this thesis.

In the next chapter I examine the related literature on language maintenance and shift and discuss some of the concepts that form the basis of the theoretical framework of this study. I also draw on case studies of small speech communities to illuminate factors that contribute to language maintenance and shift.

Chapter 2

Language maintenance and shift in minority contexts

This chapter reviews the sociolinguistic literature that forms the basis for the theoretical framework of this study. As there is much literature in the area of language maintenance and shift, the discussions in this chapter is largely drawn from selected literature that provides an emphasis on language maintenance and shift in minority contexts. The first section of this chapter is an attempt to unravel some of the definitions and descriptions used in the literature to describe the phenomena of language shift, maintenance and death. As many case studies show that bilingualism is an indicator of potential language shift I will discuss concepts such as domains and diglossia in relation to language maintenance and shift. In this chapter I will also show that there exist clusters of factors that influence language maintenance or shift in most minority contexts. I will focus particularly on three factors that seem to emerge from the literature that favour language maintenance; perceived vitality, identity and attitude and discuss their relationship to language behaviour and language choice.

2.1 Determining shift, maintenance and death

The phenomena of language maintenance, shift and death are described in many ways in the literature. The complexity of the field has led to the development of the notions of *language shift*, *maintenance* and *death* within the sociolinguistic literature. In the following discussion I attempt to describe these phenomena by drawing on the relevant literature.

2.1.1 Language shift

The best starting point in understanding the complexities of this phenomenon is perhaps Weinreich's (1953) definition of *language shift* as '...the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another'(p.68). Many studies of minority language behaviour by sociolinguists are based on this definition or others closely resembling it. Fishman (1972a) uses the term to refer to the situation when a community gives up entirely its language in favour of another one. Fishman later used it to describe the process in which minority populations switch from the mother tongue to another language in every day use 'whether or not at the same time they also gave up a language variety that they had previously used' (1972b: p.107).

These two definitions by Weinreich and Fishman do not address the issue of *choice* in their definitions. Although immigrants, refugees and sojourners have no alternatives as such people have to change their habitual language use to that of the surrounding community, there are many settings in which members of language communities (usually minorities) do have a choice. In discussing this issue, Fasold (1984) argues that language shift is the long-term results of a community's language choice. He notes that when a new language comes into a community, the people decides whether to maintain the old language or shift to the new one. Adding to this discussion of language choice, Fase et al. (1992) argue that change

in language choice in inter-ethnic communication does not necessarily lead to language shift; shift only occurs when *intra-ethnic* communication in the mother tongue disappears. They stress the importance of studying change in language choices in intra-group situations in order to understand the process of language maintenance and shift.

2.1.2 Language maintenance

In describing the term *maintenance* De Vries (1992) notes that language maintenance is not merely the absence of language shift. The term is used to refer to the situation where a speech community continues to use its traditional language in the face of a host of conditions that might foster a shift to another language. In a similar vein, Fasold (1984) points out that in language maintenance, the community collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used. He adds that language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one. The ultimate result of language shift is language 'death' which takes place when 'a community shifts to a new language totally so that the old language is no longer used' (Fasold, 1984: p.214).

Fasold et al. (1992) make the distinction that language maintenance relates to the continuing use and proficiency in a language concerning both groups and individuals, in the face of competition from another language. Language 'loss' is to do with a reduction in language proficiency and is particular to an individual. Thus while the question of shift is mainly related to the group, the question of 'loss' is basically one that relates to the individual. It is the individual losing the ability to use the language. In as much as the loss of language within the minority

group is discussed, this loss no longer relates to the change of norm characteristic for a group, but to an aggregate of the loss that occurs within each individual in the group.

2.1.3 Language death

In more recent literature (Crystal, 2000; Nettle and Romaine, 2000; Dorian, 1989) the term *death* is used to describe the extinction of many minority or 'small' languages. Crystal (2000) reports that languages are 'dying' at an unprecedented rate. In explaining 'language death' Crystal says that a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore. He adds that 'a language is really alive only as long as there is someone to speak it to' (p.2). The dead language usually has effectively died long before the death of the last speaker of that language. This generally means that when a language no longer has any native speakers the term *language death* is used. In other words, language death refers to the complete disappearance of a language. Only in extreme cases will the death of a language be the result of the sudden death of a whole community of speakers. More often, language death comes by in a situation of languages in contact and shifting bilingualism (Romaine, 2000; Fishman, 1991; Fasold, 1984). The phenomenon of language death has been considered under a number of labels; some studies address the issue under the specific label of *language death* or sometimes *language demise*, but much of the relevant literature can be found under the labels of *language drift*, *language shift*, *language replacement* or *language obsolescence* (Fishman, 2001).

In a broader perspective, and in a less alarmist sense, Sercombe (2002) conceptualises the terms *maintenance*, *shift* and *death* in the following description, 'the study of language maintenance and shift deals with the extent of change or retention of language and language features among a group that has more than one code for communication both within and outside the group' (p.1). He adds that

the emerging overall term *language death* which generally includes the notions of maintenance, shift and loss, is closely linked with language viability. The implication is that language shift and loss go hand in hand. The two processes reinforce each other with the ultimate result of language death, when no other community speaks the language in question.

2.1.4 Summary

To end this brief discussion of the various phenomena, several points are extractable from the above descriptions to form an understanding of the complexities of the study of language maintenance and shift. Firstly, when language contact occurs in a multilingual or a previously monolingual community, either because of the natural process of industrialisation and urbanisation or forced intrusion, two outcomes are frequently observed: language maintenance and language shift.

Secondly, language maintenance and shift are terms that generally refer to a choice made by individuals or a society as to which language will be used for certain functions. This choice may lead to the death of another language in totality, leaving no speakers of the language, or death of the language in a specific community only. If this shift does not occur, or if it occurs only in certain domains of a society, then some degree of language maintenance exists. As Fasold's (1984) definition clearly points out, language maintenance and shift are the long-term results of a community's language choice. In other words, when a new language comes into a community, the people usually decide whether to maintain the 'old' language or shift to the 'new' one.

Thirdly, language death and loss is often used in terms of loss in the speaker's competence in the language. Language loss is closely related to research on language shift. It is obvious that both processes are linked. If an individual loses the ability to use their own language, they will automatically shift towards other

means of expression. In this sense, loss of proficiency can also be studied as an indicator of language shift. The ultimate result then is ‘language death’ which takes place when a community shifts to a new language totally so that the old language is no longer used.

This study is concerned with examining language use among one indigenous minority group where bilingualism is the norm. A preliminary study (Boucher-Yip, 2002) indicates that the community’s language, Semai, is in no threat of extinction or ‘death’ but there is a potential for shift to the majority language, Malay. The remainder of the discussion in this study, therefore, focuses on language maintenance and shift within a minority context.

It is one of the few points of agreement in the literature that there is no single set of factors that can be used to explain the complex phenomena of maintenance and shift. Most sociolinguists agree that a shift from one language to another is usually not without an intervening period of bilingualism or multilingualism in the shifting community (Fasold, 1984, Fishman, 1991, Romaine, 2000). One of the most coherent analytic models which has been widely used in the study of language maintenance and shift has been Fishman’s (1967) ‘domain analysis’ which focuses on the habitual language use of individual speakers. It has thus become a useful approach in describing the use of the languages in a bilingual or multilingual community.

2.2 Two concepts: domain and diglossia

In order to form a framework for this study of the pattern of language use in one indigenous speech community that is becoming increasingly bilingual, a discussion of the relevant concepts in the study of bilingualism is necessary. Two concepts that will be explored in more detail in the following section are Fishman’s (1971) notions of *domain* and *diglossia*, in relation to language maintenance and shift.

2.2.1 Bilingualism and domain of language use

Fishman (1967) proposed that there were certain institutional contexts, called ‘domains’ in which one language or language variety is more likely appropriate than another. He defined *domain* as ‘a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicator, and locales of communication in accord with the institutions of a society and spheres of a speech community’ (p.17). In other words, domains are taken to be a group of factors such as location, topic and participants. Domains analysis was first introduced by Fishman (1967) and used in the study by Fishman et al. (1971). Fishman’s study was dominated by the insight that bilingualism is more likely to be stable if the two languages used serve different functions. In other words, if each language is used in predictable domains, it is likely to be maintained.

Fishman and his colleagues studied several domains by different types of data collection in a bilingual Puerto Rican community in New Jersey, USA. They administered a large array of questionnaires and interviews, tapping language proficiency and language use. The researchers gathered real language data used by those living in the target area and engaging in regular contact with the subjects. Fishman et al. (1971) discovered that more Spanish was used in the private domain (family, friends, sometimes church) whereas more English was used in the public domain (school, work, sometimes church). This resulted in a societally grounded analysis of language maintenance and shift, showing forces within the society which made it more likely for the individual to use the mother tongue versus the majority language at least in some predictable domains of use.

Fishman et al. (1971) also described the significance of the role relations within the domain where parent-child relations, for example, call for a particular language to be used, whereas the employee-employer relation at work may have different criteria for language use. Depending on the interlocutor, dependency issues and

other group pressures, individuals thus choose to use their mother tongue or the majority language. Romaine (2000) observes that pressures such as economic, administrative, cultural, political and religious can influence the bilingual towards use of one language rather than the other.

Although the notion of *domain* proposed by Fishman has been argued in the literature as being too deterministic in that it demarcates domain boundaries too rigidly and views the functional distribution of languages only in terms of 'norms of appropriacy' (Holmes, 2001: p.10), many studies of language use have found it helpful to investigate language choice of minority speech communities by analysing the domains of language use. One of the more crucial domains in which to measure the degree of disruption and shift a community has experienced or is experiencing is in the use of language in the home domain.

Fishman (1991) found that the inability of minorities to maintain the home or family as an intact domain for the use of their language has often been decisive in language shift. In his discussion of how language shift might be reversed, Fishman (1991) emphasised the significance of the home domain for intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue. He proposed a scale to measure the degree of disruption and shift which a community has experienced in the use of its language. He calls this the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale. There are eight stages, with the highest representing a community whose language is no longer spoken by younger community members. Only when a language is being passed on in the home is there some chance of long-term survival. Otherwise, according to Fishman (1991), other efforts to prop up the language elsewhere, for example, in school or church, may end up being largely symbolic and ceremonial.

In sum, the concept of domain proposed by Fishman (1967) is generally based on the idea that the various codes in a multilingual or bilingual speech community usually fulfil complementary functions. They are used differentially according to the interlocutor, topic and role. The community is in a state of 'diglossia' if

different varieties or languages co-occur throughout a speech community, each with a distinct range of social functions in complementary distribution (Hamers and Blanc, 1989).

2.2.2 Bilingualism and diglossia

Where shift does not take place, it could be that the speech community is in a diglossic-like situation (Ferguson, 1959; 1996). Ferguson originally used the term *diglossia* to refer to a specific relationship between two or more varieties of the same language in use in a speech community each having different functions. In Ferguson's concept, there are two moderately distinct varieties of the same language, of which one is called the 'High' dialect or simply H and the other the 'Low' dialect or L. The functional distribution for H and L means that there are situations in which only H is appropriate and others in which only L can be used, with very little overlap. The functions reserved for H are formal and guarded and those reserved for L are informal (in Fasold, 1984). In other words, there is a functional complementarity in which two related language varieties coexist side by side.

Since Ferguson's initial characterisation of diglossia, there have been a number of revisions to the model and the notion of diglossia has been extended to include languages not genetically related to one another. Fishman (1972b) broadened Ferguson's concept of diglossia by applying it to a bilingual and multilingual situation in which the specialisation of functions take place between different languages. While Ferguson's view of diglossia is limited to two language varieties, Fishman's idea of diglossia strongly relies on the concept of domain. Nonetheless, both scholars suggest the basic concept of H varieties is used for formal purposes and L varieties is reserved for less formal uses.

A study that utilised domain analysis and showed a diglossia-like pattern of language choice is Parasher's (1980) research among 350 educated people in two cities in India. Parasher used self-reported questionnaire data and attempted to determine the people's language use in several domains. He asked about language use in domains such as family, friendship, neighbourhood, transactions, education, government and employment. Of his seven domains, it would appear that family, friendship and neighbourhood might be Low domains whereas education, government and employment might be High domains. It was expected that the mother tongue is dominant in the three Low domains and English, Hindi or the regional language to be dominant in the High domains.

Parasher (1980) found that the family domain was the only domain where the mother tongue, or any language other than English, dominated. It was not surprising that English scored high in the education, government, and employment domains since the research was conducted among educated Indians and where English tends to be favoured. It was surprising to Parasher, however, that English dominated in the friendship and neighbourhood domains. He found that since the bilinguals in the sample did not share a mother tongue with their friends and neighbours, English was the inevitable language of choice. The language understood or shared by participants is the crucial factor in language choice. Parasher's use of domains to examine language use thus allowed him to conclude that the community is in a state of diglossia.

The importance of compartmentalisation as a means to maintain stable societal bilingualism, is stressed by Fishman (1991, 2001) in his discussion of reversing language shift. He emphasised that the attainment of diglossia (the use of different languages in different domains) is crucial to the maintenance of minority languages. Fishman's assumption about the relationship between stable and unstable bilingualism and diglossia presupposes that there are a number of basic types of bilingual communities. At one extreme there is the community, which has

strict separation of domains, and bilingualism is stable, while at the other there is the community, which is highly unstable (and also rare), where both languages are used in all domains. Fishman's schematisation of the relationship between diglossia and bilingualism can be summarised as follows:

1. Bilingualism and diglossia: Both languages are acquired separately. The first language is acquired at home and is used in familial and familiar interactions, while the second is never learnt at home and is related to educational, religious and government institutions. Almost everyone in the language community would have to know both languages.
2. Diglossia without bilingualism: This situation usually obtains in a community in which two disjunct groups live with a single political, religious, and/or economic entity. One is the ruling group and speaks only the 'high' language. The other, normally a much larger group has no power in the society and speaks exclusively in the 'low' language.
3. Bilingualism without diglossia: Both diglossia with bilingualism and diglossia without bilingualism are relatively stable, 'long term arrangements' (Fishman, 1967: p.8-9). However, in many cases such situations may be characterised not only by language spread but also by language shift. This is the result of the lack of compartmentalisation between both languages, which also leads to a situation in which the two varieties compete in the same domains. It is the result of 'leaky' diglossia, that is, one language 'leaks' into the functions formerly reserved for the other. One of the outcomes is replacement or shift.
4. Neither bilingualism nor diglossia: This situation is the result of 'uninterrupted (i.e. uncompartimentalisation) bilingualism without diglossia' (Fishman,

1967: p.9). For such a situation to exist, a very small, isolated and egalitarian speech community is required.

Fishman observes that both diglossia with and without bilingualism tend to be relatively stable, long-term arrangements. Similarly, Ferguson (1972) cited that one of the three outcomes for diglossia is that it may simply remain stable for a long time. Under certain conditions, however, pressure may arise that leads to its demise. Ferguson states increased literacy and broader communication throughout the country as two such pressures. Fasold (1984) adds that tension between H and L in diglossia is relieved to some extent by the development of mixed, intermediate forms of the language, which share the some of the features of both H and L.

While diglossia is cited as an extremely stable phenomenon by some researchers Romaine (2000), however, argues that *stability* is a subjective notion. For example, there are many bilingual situations which do not last for more than three generations. In some cases intrusive languages such as the majority language, can swamp the minority language. Such is the case among the Aboriginal languages of Australia and the Celtic languages of the British Isles (Romaine, 2000). Furthermore, this has been most clearly demonstrated in Gal's (1979) investigation of the use of German and Hungarian in the Austrian village of Oberwart. This seminal case study serves an example of a bilingual community in a developed nation in the process of language shift.

2.2.3 A case of shift and choice

Using data from participant observation and interviews Gal's (1979) study of Hungarian-German bilingualism in a small village of Oberwart is an instance of language shift. According to Gal, the villagers who were formerly Hungarian monolinguals have over the past few hundred years become increasingly bilingual, and during the time of her study the community was in the process of a shift

to German. For a while in the community Hungarian was the linguistic symbol of group identity for the Oberwart peasants and German was the language used when dealing with outsiders. Gal believed that the use of the two languages by bilinguals could be predicted on the basis of interlocutor only. Thus in her study she analysed the patterns of language choice made by different groups of speakers in the community by looking at which language was used for a given category of interlocutor, for example, grandparents, age-mates and government officials.

She found that the difference in choice between German and Hungarian reflected the social contrast between modern urban worker and traditional peasant. Although bilingualism persisted, the use of German began to expand into domains which were formerly Hungarian and Hungarian eventually became a marker of the increasingly disparaged peasant class. Her findings also revealed that German was used in high-status settings and by the majority of people. The pattern of language use suggested that German was gaining at the expense of Hungarian as time went on.

Gal's study shows that once the process of shift has begun in certain domains and the functions of the language reallocated, the prediction is that it will continue until the whole community has shifted, in the Oberwart case, to German. However, Gal is careful to point out that we cannot necessarily conclude that historical change has taken place. The findings could just represent a cyclical phenomenon related to the age of individuals. It could be that speakers regularly change their patterns of language choice, as they get older, so that in each generation young people use more German and then switch to Hungarian when they get older. Nonetheless, this study shows how the social behaviour of members of a community has changed the linguistic structure of the Hungarian-German bilingual group to what will eventually be a monolingual German speaking community.

2.2.4 Diglossia as a language maintenance strategy

Fishman (1967) mentioned the social origins of the functional division of the two languages when he first expanded the notion of diglossia. He regarded diglossia as something to be achieved in language maintenance. He argued that,

...bilingualism without diglossia tends to be transitional... Without separate though complementary norms and values to establish and maintain functional separation of the speech varieties, that language or variety which is fortunate enough to be associated with the predominant drift of social forces tends to displace the other(s).

(Fishman, 1967: p.36)

Many critics of the notion of diglossia have questioned the extent to which the domains originally postulated by Ferguson are unequivocally associated with particular languages. The presence or absence of social compartmentalisation in language use leads to different societal arrangements with respect to bilingualism. Martin-Jones (1989) argues that diglossia as a language maintenance strategy overlooks the direct and interdependent relationship between language maintenance and the struggle for power in institutions. She adds that in a diglossic framework the power factor becomes marginalised and little attention comes to be paid to the social origins of the functional division of 'labour' between the languages, that is the superposed and vernacular languages, 'the [diglossia] model merely represents this division of labour as a natural form of social and linguistic order, thereby implicitly reinforcing the legitimisation of the H[igh] language' (p.109).

Williams (1987) also argues that in so far as the domain segregation found in diglossia goes it is nothing more than a manifestation of the power differential between 'high' and 'low' languages. Similarly, McConvell (1992) points out

that the fundamental problem of the notion of diglossia in the expanded sense, is the marginalisation of the direct relationship between language maintenance and the struggle for power in institutions. This imbalance of power is noted by Nakamura (2000) who argues that the unequal power relationship between dominant and minority languages is concealed in the notion of diglossia expanded by Fishman. The sociolinguistic inequality originates in the situation where the dominant language monopolises 'public' spheres of the community and the decision-making processes in these spheres.

Eckert (1980) points out that the dominant language brings such spheres with it when it is introduced into a minority language community. These spheres become part of the justification for the introduction of the dominant language on the population. She comments on this sociolinguistic 'introduction' in the following way,

Diglossia does not arise; it is imposed from above in the form of administration, ritual or standard language. By virtue of its political and economic status, this language becomes requisite for access to power and mobility within the society. Therefore, diglossia cannot be socially or politically neutral. . . The functions of the standard language exist in opposition to those of the vernacular, and this opposition can operate as a powerful force of assimilation, by interacting with and reinforcing social evaluation of the domains in which the two languages are used.

(Eckert, 1980: p.1056)

As a result, the minority language arguably comes to be always regarded as 'trespasser' or 'inadequate' (p.1060), even among the language speakers themselves. It is here that diglossia characterised by the structured coexistence can create the dynamics for change leading to language shift.

While some aspects of Fishman's claims have been criticised, particularly the association between just one language and one domain not hold in some communities, several researchers have, like Fishman, been concerned to establish patterns of language use at a general (societal or community) level. Such research has often relied on large-scale surveys investigating speakers' reports of their language use such as Fishman et al. (1971) and Parasher's (1981) study.

2.2.5 Summary

In this section, I have tried to show that the 'shift' process includes several phases of differing levels of bilingualism. In most cases of group shift, the rate of shift may vary with several bilingual generations. I have also demonstrated that the concept of domain is a useful approach in describing the use of the languages in a bilingual or multilingual community. Shift is in process when there is a redistribution of language use over certain domains. By maintaining the use of the mother tongue to as many domains as possible it is possible for minority groups to survive linguistically.

Although it has been argued that bilingualism is a prerequisite for shift, bilingualism in a community can be a stable condition only when there exists important domains of use for each language. The discussion above has showed that the home domain is the most crucial of all domains in the transmission of the language, and ultimately the survival of the language. It was also highlighted that diglossia is a concept where languages are related to functionally differentiated domains of social activity. I discussed that while diglossia may be a necessary condition for a minority group to maintain its language, bilingualism *without* diglossia is said to contribute to language shift.

2.3 Language shift in the 'Malay' world

Much of the literature describing language shift among minority groups has reported a general trend toward the majority or dominant language. For most of the developing nations it is toward the national language (Errington, 1998) and in some states in Southeast Asia, researchers note a shifting process away from the mother tongue particularly in traditional domains, such as the home (David, 2003; Martin, 1995; Lasimbang et al. 1992). In the absence of any in-depth studies on language use among the Orang Asli of Malaysia, a brief discussion of two related studies in the 'Malay' world at this point would serve as a useful comparative aspect to this study. It should be pointed out that both Sarawak and Sabah are states in (East) Malaysia.

Martin and Yen (1994) in the study of language use among the Kelabit, an indigenous community in Sarawak, found that a process of shift away from the Kelabit language has occurred particularly among those Kelabit who are working in towns along the coast. Using data largely drawn from observation and questionnaires, they noted that in the family domain, where both spouses are Kelabit, 85% reported the use of Kelabit as the main means of communication. However, in mixed marriages, only 33% reported the use of Kelabit whereas 45% use English and 14% Malay. They observe that the relatively low percentage of Kelabit transmission to children appears to be a major factor in the on-going language shift. Martin and Yen's study suggests that both Malay and English have gained a foothold and 'have encroached into the domain of the family, the very bastion of mother-tongue maintenance' (p.158).

A similar pattern of language use is found in another indigenous group in Sabah. Lasimbang et al. (1992) note a changing pattern of language use among the language community known as Kadazan or Dusun. They found that families in which the 'major wage earner has been employed in civil service, business or

education and who have lived in housing provided by the government or in mixed language situations tend to have switched to Malay or English in all domains' (p.336). Their study reveals that some parents shift to using English or Malay in the home domain in the belief that they will help their children to succeed in school. Using primarily survey results, the researchers noted that 70% of Kadazan parents who said that their children spoke only a little or no Kadazan reported that their children spoke Malay very well (23%) or well (47%). In rating their children's ability in the two languages, 40% said that their children spoke both languages equally well; 35% reported their children to be better in Malay than Kadazan and 25% rated their children's ability as being greater in Kadazan than Malay. Clearly from these two studies, the shift away from the mother tongue can be attributed to the shrinking domains of language use, particularly in the home setting. While language shift among these minority groups, especially in developing nations, are usually the result of modernisation, urbanisation and language policies (Sercombe, 2002), factors that promote language maintenance are very much under-researched.

The literature, arguably, weight more on shift processes than maintenance to the extent where Dorian (1998) points out 'currently we understand the motivating factors in language shift far better than we understand the psychosocial underpinnings of language-sustained maintenance' (p.17). Indeed little is known of the psychological dimensions and motivations of communities where the minority language is sustained. However, one approach that would seem useful in understanding language behaviour was first proposed by Giles et al. (1977) who suggested some usefulness for predicting language maintenance and behaviour among groups. Factors such as ethnolinguistic vitality, identity and attitudes are significant variables in their model. As part of this study is an attempt to understand the language behaviour of one Semai community, the model suggested by Giles et al. provides a useful framework for this study. In the next section, I will discuss how they can relate to language behaviour and affect language choice.

2.4 Factors determining maintenance and shift

A community-based approach to research on language maintenance and shift was proposed by Giles et al. (1977) in the form of ethnolinguistic vitality and further developed ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles and Johnson, 1981). Giles et al. (1977) define the language contact situation using the concept *vitality* which encompasses members' perceptions of group boundaries, group vitality and ethnic self-identification. Case studies of ethnolinguistic vitality have suggested some usefulness for predicting language maintenance and behaviours among groups who might be in the process of language shift. In this section, I discuss the notions of 'objective' and 'subjective' vitality and how these ideas contributed to the theory of ethnolinguistic identity theory. I also explore how factors such as identity and attitudes affect language choice.

2.4.1 Objective and subjective vitality

Giles et al. (1977) proposed a combination of three factors (status, demographic and institutional support) into one factor, which they called 'ethnolinguistic vitality'. They defined *ethnolinguistic vitality* as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations' (p.25). From this, it is argued that ethnolinguistic minorities that have little or no group vitality would eventually cease to exist as distinctive groups. Conversely, the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group has, the more likely it will survive and thrive as a collective entity in an intergroup context. With respect to the minority language, this means that high vitality will lead to maintenance, or even shift towards extended use, and low vitality will result in shift towards the majority language.

The key concept in the model of Giles et al. (1977) is *vitality*. The more vitality a group has, the greater its chances for survival as a distinctive linguistic community within its bilingual or multilingual context. The model shows three

main dimensions of structural variables most likely to influence the vitality of the ethnolinguistic groups. They suggest that vitality could be 'objectively' assessed on the basis of information about these dimensions that describes the situation of the group within its broader societal context: (1) the social status accorded members, their language, and their culture (2) demographic characteristics and (3) the degree of institutional support for the group's existence.

The first aspect of Giles' et al. taxonomy is *status*. This refers to the speech community's economic wealth, social standing, sociohistorical prestige and the status of a language used by the community. According to Appel and Muysken (1987), economic status is a prominent factor in nearly all studies on language maintenance and shift. Where groups of minority language speakers have a relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift towards the majority language. It was proposed that the more status a linguistic community has the more vitality it could be said to possess as a collective entity.

The second factor is *demography* which refers to the number of members in a speech community and their distribution throughout a particular urban, regional or national territory. They suggest that the fewer members there are of a given linguistic community, the less likely that its language will survive. The absolute number of speakers of a certain language becomes important when it decreases. Such a development implies decreasing usefulness of the language in question, which in turn will give rise to language shift away from the minority language. The geographical distribution of minority group members generally affects language maintenance and shift considerably. As long as they live concentrated in a certain area, minority groups have better chances of maintaining their language. The final category is *institutional support* which refers to the extent to which the language of the minority group is represented in the various institutions of a community, region or nation. Maintenance is supported when the minority language is used in various institutions such as government, church and cultural organisations.

This cluster of factors proposed by Giles et al. (1977) suggest that the stronger the language is on these structural variables, the higher the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group speaking it. However, the model does not provide a grading of the more important variables or a distinction between more crucial and less crucial variables that will support the survival of the linguistic group. Nonetheless, these 'objective' ethnolinguistic vitality factors are thought to underlie observed patterns of language retention and survival (Harwood et al., 1994; Sachdev and Bourhis, 1993). However, analyses promoting the primacy of such 'objective', non-psychological factors ignore the significance of language survival being 'effected through the minds and acts of individuals' (Giles et al., 1991). They neglect the important effects of social psychological variables such as perceptions, attitudes and identities. While acknowledging the predictive power of 'objective' vitality, Bourhis et al. (1981) argued that group members' 'subjective' assessments of own-group (ingroup) and other group (outgroup) vitality may be as important in determining sociolinguistic behaviour as the group's 'objective' vitality.

The ethnolinguistic vitality model has not been without its critics. Husband and Khan (1982) pointed out that a possible drawback of the vitality theory is that it assumes that division amongst ethnolinguistic groups can be clearly made. They questioned the ability to clearly define these dominant (majority) and subdominant (minority) groups. Though they admitted that with subjective vitality there is a need for a 'dynamic reactive element showing that subjective perspectives are in part a product of the reaction to the dominant groups definition of the subordinate group's vitality' (p.200). Furthermore, they argue that the ethnolinguistic vitality model is a dominant-centric biased and monolingual/monocultural biased.

According to Tollefson (1991), vitality of a group cannot be viewed independently, but has to be part of the historical relationship between the majority and the minority group. Thus some demographic and societal factors considered in ethnolinguistic vitality theory may not be real choices for the individuals in ques-

tion due to issues of 'hegemony' (Yagmur, 1997, p.30). In Tollefson's view it is not necessarily the way the group views itself internally, which determines its language maintenance efforts, but rather the historical dependencies between the minority and majority group which will determine the degree to which the minority group can exercise language maintenance efforts without risking political or economic losses for the whole group.

Allard and Landry (1986) extended the vitality model further by proposing that the predictive power of the 'subjective' vitality would be greatly increased were it considered a belief system that reflects individual predispositions and orientations about vitality. Their findings showed that 'ego-centric' beliefs (e.g., identification, personal goals) were more predictive of linguistic behaviour than 'exo-centric' beliefs about vitality (e.g., estimates of current general ingroup vitality and normative beliefs about 'what should be' the ingroup vitality) (Allard and Landry, 1994). Additionally, Landry and Allard (1994) incorporated the important variable of group contact (Hewstone and Brown, 1986) in their models by arguing that the development of ethnolinguistic identities and other cognitive-affective dispositions (e.g., belief about vitality, attitudes), like the development of linguistic competencies is rooted firmly in contact variables. Sachdev (1998) has argued that the relationship between variables of contact and identity is likely to be one of mutual causality, and that ethnolinguistic identity and vitality perceptions may directly (and reciprocally) affect the quantity, quality and composition of contact networks.

2.4.2 Ethnolinguistic identity

In order to understand the social-psychological processes underlying the complexities of language and identity phenomenon, Giles, Rosenthal and Young (1981) proposed a theory of 'Ethnolinguistic Identity' which has received wide support in

the literature of minority languages (Giles and Johnson, 1981; Giles and Coupland, 1991; Sachdev and Bourhis, 1993). This theory proposes that intergroup social comparisons occur when individuals define themselves as group members. Social comparisons are made on dimensions such as language, which group members perceive as important. Group members attempt to establish favourable comparisons in order to fulfil positive in-group identity needs. When in-group identity is salient, and language is perceived to be an important dimension of that identity, in-group members are likely to adopt various strategies of 'psycholinguistic distinctiveness', such as accentuating their speech styles, switching to their in-group language and using their in-group language to a greater extent. The salience of ethnolinguistic identification is heightened by high-perceived ingroup vitality, perceptions of cognitive alternatives to the status quo, and by the perceived 'hardness' (impermeability) of intergroup boundaries. Empirical testing of this theory suggests that language use and identity are related reciprocally. In other words, language use influences the formation of group identity and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Sachdev and Bourhis, 1993).

Johnson and Ransom (1983) suggest that the usefulness of knowing both the 'objective' and 'subjective' vitality of an ethnolinguistic group, is that they provide a starting-point from which the difficult link between sociological (collective) and social-psychological (individual) accounts of language, ethnicity and inter-group relations can be explored. In the last two decades, empirical work has begun to test the usefulness of the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality as a research tool (Bourhis and Sachdev, 1984; Giles et al., 1981; Pittam et al., 1991; Willemyns, 1997). The findings of these studies claimed strong empirical support for the social-psychological nature of the concepts of both objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality.

However, there is also considerable discussion of various aspects of the theory and its application in empirical research. The most controversial issue in vitality studies is the operationalisation of the constructs and the obtaining of the dimensions underlying the proposed variables in a questionnaire. Nonetheless, other research findings, such as social-psychological research, seem to support the notion that 'ingroup' identification and positive language attitudes are important precursors of language maintenance, learning and revitalisation (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Giles and Coupland, 1991). According to Wurm (2002) speakers of indigenous languages often regard language as the most important symbol of their identity.

This issue of identity in the field of sociolinguistics has long been seen as important for evaluating maintenance and shift. Fasold (1984) states '[l]anguage shift will occur only if, and to the extent that, a community desire to give up its identity as an identifiable sociocultural group in favour of an identity as part of some other community' (p.240). In arguing his point, Fasold explains that most often the other community is the larger social group which controls a society where the first group is a minority.

In Gal's (1979) study in Oberwart, her subjects' choice of using German, particularly by women seeking German-speaking marriage partners, is an expression of their preference for the newer social identity by comparison with the more traditional one associated with Hungarian, which, in turn, is linked with peasant status and male-dominated subsistence agriculture. A similar conclusion was found in Dorian's (1981) study of an East Sutherland (Scotland) fishing village. The people's identity was marked by others and themselves, in terms of their occupation and their language, Gaelic. To a greater degree than Oberwart, the lower social status of the fishing communities was forced on them by the refusal of other members of the wider communities to accept them. As long as the fisherfolk remained members of a distinct sociocultural group with Gaelic as a linguistic symbol, the language would be learned and used. However, Dorian found that

when social mobility became possible, and the people abandoned fishing in search of more economically stable work, they also gave up their 'fisher' identity and abandoned Gaelic (in Fasold, 1984).

In discussing the same issue, Spolsky (1998) points out that ethnic groups regularly use language as one of their most significant identifying features. Commonly, the name of an ethnic group and its language are the same. Most ethnic groups believe that their language is the best medium for preserving and expressing their traditions. Contemporary examples of language associated with group identity can be seen among the French-speaking people of Quebec and the Catalan-speakers in Catalonia. There is a strong separatist movement in both groups and language is the foremost marker, which distinguishes them from Canadians and Spaniards, respectively. Often language is associated, not only with the basic daily interactions of life, but also with the essence of being part of a particular group. Pattanayak expresses a similar view in discussing mother tongue maintenance. He notes that,

a mother tongue is the expression of the primary identity of the human being. It is the language through which initial concept formation takes place. The child is acclimatised to its environment through naming each object, phenomenon, and mood of changing nature. . . the medium through which the child also establishes kinship with other children and adults.

(1986: p.7)

In developing nations, researchers such as Lasimbang and Miller (1992) observe that 'for many groups [in Sabah, Malaysia] the role of the vernacular language in maintaining cultural norms is seen to be crucial' (p.129). Similarly, in Kulick's (1992) study among the inhabitants of Gapun, Papua New Guinea, he found that language is perceived not just as a medium of interaction but also as a symbolic

system. In his study, however, he found that a language shift had occurred because the 'symbols' have altered along with the Gapuners' views of themselves and the rest of the group (in Sercombe, 2002). The assertion that identity might be maintained without the use of the mother tongue is also supported by the results of an attitude questionnaire administered by Trudgill and Tzavaras (1977).

In the study the researchers asked the Arvanites people in Greece whether it was necessary to speak Arvanitika to be Arvanite. Interestingly, they found that in all age groups but the youngest (ages 10-14), a majority answered that it was not necessary. The researcher interpreted these results in light of the fact that Arvanitika is dying out. The older people, in the hope that their ethnic identity will not die out with the language, appear to be making concessions for the younger generation who do not speak Arvanitika. The youth, however, seem to be identifying themselves with Greek speakers by saying that it is necessary to speak Arvanitika, which they neither speak or seem to want to. The finding supports Edwards' (1995) argument that a decline in the existence and attraction of traditional lifestyles also inexorably entails a decline in language associated with them. In a similar vein, Sercombe (2002) notes that in traditional societies language and identity are more often inextricably linked than in modern societies where this link need not necessarily be present such that members of a group 'may retain their ethnic identity but not their language' (p.10).

Despite the lack of a unified perspective the dynamics of the language-identity relationship a recurring theme in the literature suggests that language is a common but not a necessary marker of groupness. However, as Edwards (1985) maintains, language remains a vital factor of ingroup identity. He also observes that minority-group members, whose identity appears at risk, are more likely to stress their groupness than majority-group members.

2.4.3 Language and attitude

Another aspect that plays a significant role in language maintenance and shift is the individual and community's attitude towards a language. Allport defines an attitude as 'a mental and neutral state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's responses to all subjects and situations with which it is related' (in Gardner, 1985, p.132). An attitude, in other words, is created by experience, and it influences behaviour. The hypothesis is that once an individual's attitude to some object is known, there is a better chance of understanding and predicting his/her behaviour toward the object. Gardner (1985) cautions, however, that one should not over-evaluate attitudes because there may be other factors influencing behaviour.

In explaining the importance of attitudes toward language, another important dimension is 'ingroup solidarity' or language loyalty. Although this dimension has been addressed less frequently, it reflects the social pressure which operates to maintain language varieties, even in the absence of social prestige. The language or dialect of one's family life, intimate friendships and informal interactions acquires vital social meanings and comes to represent the social group with which one identifies. One's native language typically elicits feelings of attraction, appreciation and belongingness (Ryan and Giles 1982, p.9). The attitudes of the individuals are formed by close family members and friends who directly through their language use include him or her in the group. This feeling is generally experienced as positive and the individual is thus said to have positive attitudes toward that language or language variety.

Bradley (2002) emphasised that language attitude is the key factor in language maintenance. However, he points out that there are some specific attitudinal problems that confront endangered languages. One such problem is noted in Schmidt's (in Bradley, 2002) work on Australian Aboriginal languages. According

to Schmidt, the recognition of language loss is often delayed in these communities. He found that speakers feel that their language is healthy enough within the in-group network until the remaining speakers are all old. This attitude is prevalent even when the younger people are semispeakers, passive understanders or have no knowledge of the traditional language and normal transmission had stopped a long time ago. By the time the community becomes aware of impending language loss, it may be difficult to reverse (Bradley, 2002).

Another kind of attitudinal problem that often confronts communities is when the younger speakers of the language speak a variety which is radically different from what is spoken by fluent elders. This results in the widely-observed phenomenon of extremely rapid change within an endangered language (Bradley, 2002). If the speech of the younger people is regarded by the elders as inadequate because of puristic attitudes, the younger people may be discouraged from continuing to speak the language. This observation was made by Bradley (2002) in his study of the Bisu and Gong languages in Thailand. He believes that if the 'semispeaker' version (see Dorian, 1981) of the language is accepted within the community, even by the elders, the changed version may persist or rapid change may continue. His observations suggest that such changed varieties have been simplified and have converged towards the structure of the replacing language, in which all or most speakers are likely to be bilingual.

While some language-attitude studies are strictly limited to attitudes towards the language itself, most often the concept of language attitude includes attitudes towards speakers of a particular language. If the definition is even broadened, it can allow all kinds of behaviour concerning language to be treated, such as attitude towards language maintenance and planning efforts (Fasold, 1984). Studies have shown that attitudes are crucial in language growth or decay, in restoration or destruction. The status and importance of a language in society and within an individual derives largely from adopted or learnt attitudes (Edwards, 1985). An

attitude is individual, but it has origins in collective behaviour. According to Edwards, attitude is something an individual has which defines or promotes certain behaviours. Baker (1996) stresses the importance of attitude in the discussion of bilingualism. He maintains that attitudes are learned predisposition, not inherited and are likely to be relatively stable. He also notes that they have a tendency to persist. However, attitudes are affected by experience and attitude change is an important notion in studies of bilingualism.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) stress the importance of the nature of intergroup relations in the discussion of the language attitudes and uses. They vary as the nature of intergroup relations changes. When relations change, status relationships and therefore perceptions, attitudes and uses, changes. Speakers select their code from a variety of socially marked models. Change takes place when the social values of the model change and the behaviour of the speech community also changes. They stress that when studying language attitudes in relation to language learning, the concept of motives is important. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) introduced two basic motives which are called instrumental and integrative models. If the majority language acquisition is considered as instrumental, the knowledge of a language is considered as a 'passport to prestige and success' (p.32). The speaker/learner then considers the speaking/learning of the majority language as functional.

On the other hand, if a learner wishes to identify with the target community, to learn the language and the culture of the speakers of the language in order to perhaps be able to become a member of the group, the motivation is called integrative. In general, research has proved the integrative motivation to be more beneficial for the learning of another language.

However, Gardner (1985) found that where the majority language functions as a second language (i.e., it is used widely in the society) instrumental motivation seems to be more effective. Moreover, motivation derived from a sense of academic

or communicative success is more likely to motivate one to speak a foreign or second language.

Given the methodological differences between all these studies, the results support the notion that identity and attitude are important variables in language maintenance efforts. However, it must be noted that almost none of the factors cited in the studies connected with language shift and maintenance are on its own a reliable predictor of the outcome of any particular situation of language contact. Ultimately, the community's attitude as to how important their language is to the preservation of their identity will have serious implications for language maintenance or shift.

In this section, I discussed the concepts of vitality, identity and attitude in relation to language maintenance and shift. These factors are significant in understanding the social psychological processes underlying the complexities of language behaviour. I have also tried to show that language use influences the formation of group identity and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage. While ethnolinguistic vitality theory has provoked debate in the literature, the combined notions of 'objective' and 'subjective' or perceived vitality have remained useful as a conceptual tool for discussing a broad range of applied and theoretical issues within the sociolinguistics literature. These notions have been most fruitfully applied to issues related to language attitudes, ethnolinguistic identity and language maintenance and loss. The discussion in this section also highlighted observations that suggest ingroup identification and positive language attitudes are important precursors of language maintenance.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I attempted to highlight, from the vast literature on language maintenance and shift, some of the relevant concepts and models that formed the basis

for the theoretical framework of this study. I described the different phenomena of language maintenance, shift and death and unraveled some of the definitions used in the literature. I discussed concepts such as domains and diglossia and highlighted studies that found them useful in examining patterns of language use. One of the crucial domains in which to measure the degree of maintenance or shift in a community is the home domain, and that the attainment of diglossia or the use of different languages in different domains is crucial for the maintenance of a minority language. One model which suggests socio-psychological factors such as perceived vitality, identity and attitudes in understanding language behaviour was also described in some detail.

In light of the dearth of literature on the linguistic situation of the Orang Asli in general and the Semai people in particular, this study was designed to investigate the pattern of language use in one community and factors that influence their language choice. It has been argued that the type of bilingualism displayed by a community has a bearing on whether the community will maintain their language or shift to the majority language. The literature suggests that one of the most important factors for the maintenance of a minority language is the attitude of the speakers towards their own language and the importance which they attach to it as a major symbol of their identity. Thus the investigation of the type of bilingualism displayed in the identified community and whether factors such as perceived vitality, attitude and ethnic identification influence language use would shed light on what motivates an indigenous minority group to maintain their mother tongue or shift to the majority language. The next chapter provides a brief background of the Orang Asli communities in general and introduces the sociolinguistic background of the Semai community in particular.

Chapter 3

The research context

This chapter discusses the context of the study. First, a brief background of Malaysia is presented with a particular focus on the language and educational policies. Then a general description of the Orang Asli population is presented while the later part of the chapter describes in detail the Semai community that makes up the research setting.

3.1 Malaysia: linguistic and ethnic background

Malaysia extends over 328,550 square kilometres and comprises two areas, separated by about 667 kilometres of the South China Sea. One of these areas is Peninsular Malaysia, which extends from the Thai border down to the border with the island nation of Singapore. The other area comprises Sabah and Sarawak which are located along 1500 kilometres on the north and west sections of the island of Borneo. Malaysia is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual with a population of about 22 million in the year 2000 (Department of Statistics, 2002). The Malays are in the majority with over 60 per cent of the total population, then the Chinese with approximately 32 per cent and the Indians nearly 8 per cent.

In Peninsular Malaysia there are a number of language communities, each one speaking its own language(s). There are also 18 aboriginal language groups in Peninsular Malaysia. The languages of Sabah and Sarawak are more numerous. In an early 1980s' language survey, 54 indigenous languages (excluding dialects) have been identified in Sabah (Grimes, 2002). In Sarawak, the exact language situation is not known but it is estimated to be linguistically as diverse as Sabah.

According to Asmah (1982), 'Malay has always been the lingua franca for intergroup communication' in Malaysia (p.58). In the colonial days, Malay was used in the market place and in daily life between ethnic groups. Although during this time the language of the government was English, public notices and important documents were published in Malay, Chinese and Tamil as well as in English. This reflected the three main ethnic groups recognised under British colonial rule for communication and education. These four languages represented four types of schools using four different curricula. There have been Chinese primary schools since 1904 and Tamil primary schools since 1913.

Asmah (1982) states that language planning in Malaysia began in 1956. The Report of the Education Committee was concerned with education in general and specifically the policies governing the uses of English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese. She goes on to say that it paved the way for the education system of Malaysia to transform into one that was national in nature. She adds that, 'people speaking a common language acquire through this language a feeling of unity and a common identity' (p.34).

After Malaysia became independent in 1957, the National Language Policy was drafted in Article 152 of the Constitution. This policy established Malay as the only national language with the purpose of developing national unity and identity. This policy also wrote in provision for the mother tongues of other community languages. It stated that the 'pupil's own language' could be taught in the schools if the parents desired and there were at least 15 students to make up a class. Tamil

and Mandarin were first taught in schools and Iban, an indigenous language, was introduced in schools in the state of Sarawak.

3.2 Language and education policies

According to Gaudart (1987) forms of multilingual education are not recent phenomena in Malaysia. At least since the 16th century, there has been a second language taught in schools. An early form of bilingual education existed, for example, when pupils in Quranic schools were taught Arabic and not their mother tongue dialects. In fact, 16th century Malaya preferred her people to learn a foreign language like Arabic to learning Malay (Asmah, 1976; Ibrahim, 1979). Today, language and education play a crucial role in Malaysian society and are much more overtly political than they used to be in the 15th and 16th centuries (Gaudart, 1987). Language is viewed as a crucial part of ethnicity. Language issues have played an important role in modern Malaysian history and, in almost every racial crisis, language has proved to be one of the controversial issues (Asmah, 1979). By the Sedition Act of 1971, language was regarded as a 'sensitive' issue and discussion of it meant a jail sentence. The government hopes that through this act, peaceful co-existence among the various races would be achieved (Asmah, 1979). Education on the other hand, has been seen as a means of upward social mobility, redressing economic imbalances and influencing young minds into target attitudes of the future. It is inevitable then, that language in education is an important facet of the Malaysian social scene (Gaudart, 1987).

After independence the new nation placed a heavy emphasis on the acquisition of Malay with the ultimate purpose of achieving national unity. In 1971, the Government of Malaysia passed the Education Enactment Bill to work towards a common education system for all, using Malay as the medium of instruction up to the university level. With the passing of the bill the notion of a common curriculum

with a socio-political base was introduced. While Mandarin and Tamil medium primary schools were retained, the sole medium of instruction in secondary schools became Malay. Gaudart (1987) states that the current official view is that there is now a common national curriculum through which children in all language media of education will learn the same skills and acquire similar knowledge.

Language planners in Malaysia have discussed the special needs of the indigenous language communities and the various strategies for meeting these needs. In his research, Nik Safiah (1981) discusses the situation of the indigenous minority groups, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia, who struggle with the competing value systems of their own society and that of the majority. According to Asmah (1976) the concept of 'consecutive bilingualism' which uses the 'mother tongue before a second language is one that has all the time been endorsed by Malaysia' (p.58). However, Asmah points out that 'there has not existed in any policy proposed by the Malaysian government a bilingual system of education where two languages are equal partners or ... a system which provides for full biliterate bilingualism' (p.53).

3.3 Orang Asli in the Malaysian mosaic

The Orang Asli had lived in the Malay Peninsular long before the arrival of the other races, that is, the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. In this sense, and in line with their name, the Orang Asli are the original inhabitants of Malaysia. The following discussion is an attempt to provide an overview of the Orang Asli people, with a particular focus on the Semai community.

Table 3.1: The Orang Asli population in the year 2000 (source: JHEOA, 2003)

Main Group	Subgroup	Population
Negrito	Kensiu	224
	Kintak	235
	Lanoh	359
	Jahai	1 049
	Mandriq	145
	Batiq	960
Senoï	Temiar	15 122
	Semai	26 049
	Semoq Beri	2 488
	Jahut	3193
	Mahmeri	2 185
	Chewong	403
Proto-Malay	Temuan/Belandas	16 020
	Semelai	4 103
	Jakun	16 635
	Orang Kanaq	64
	Orang Kuala	2 492
	Orang Seletar	801
Total		92 529

3.3.1 Population

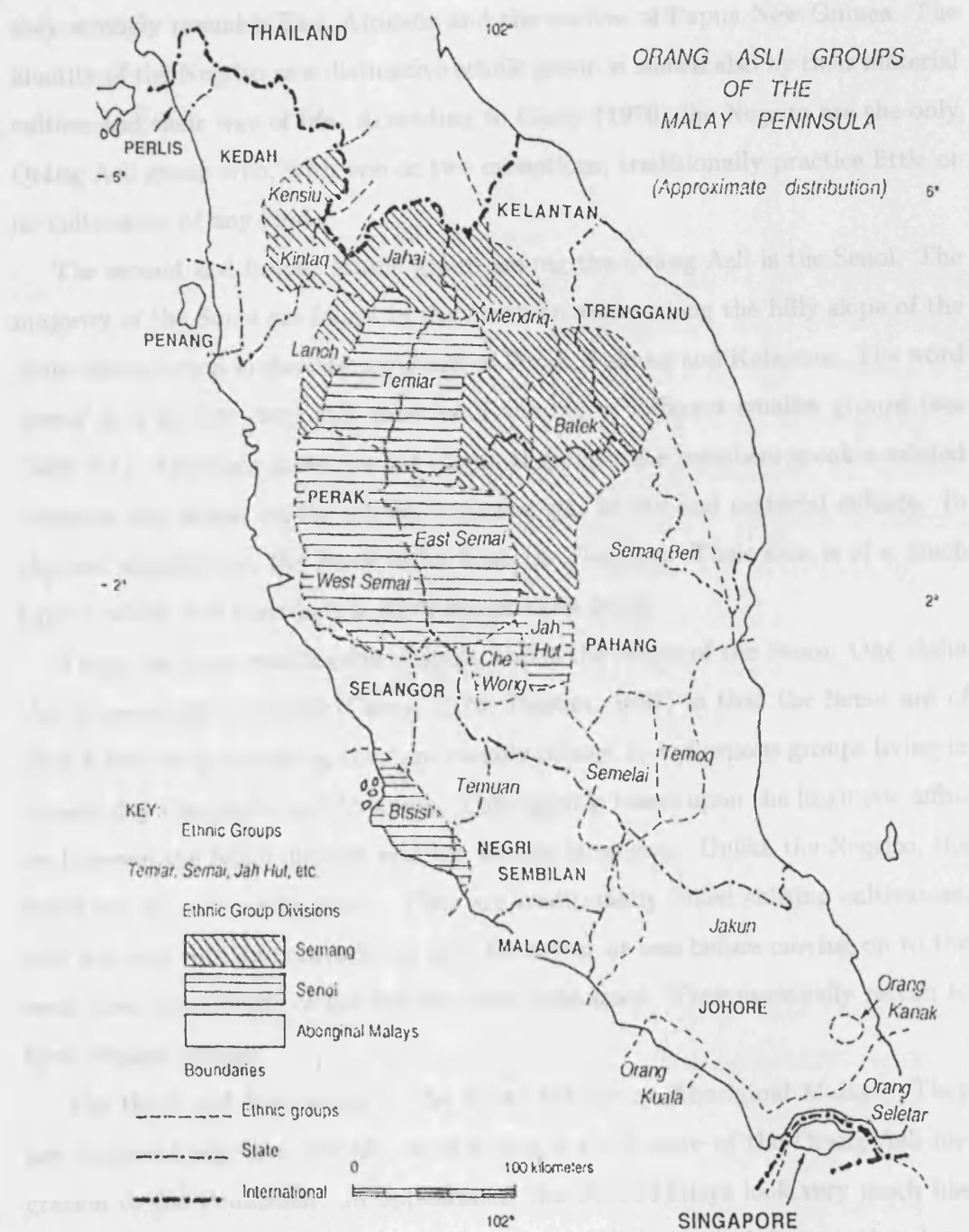
Orang Asli refers to the indigenous minority peoples of Peninsular Malaysia. The name is a Malay term which means 'original peoples'. It is a collective term introduced by anthropologists and administrators for the 18 ethnic sub-groups. They are generally classified for official purposes under three categories: Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malay. According to Carey (1976) these classifications are not satisfactory because there are several borderline groups which are culturally and linguistically very mixed which do not really fit into such neat distinctions. The Orang Asli population numbering less than 100,000 in the year 2000 represents a mere 0.5% of the national population. As shown in Table 3.1, in the year 2000 there were about 92,529 Orang Asli in Malaysia. Of these, about 2,927 were classified as Negrito, 49, 440 as Senoi and nearly 40, 117 as Proto-Malay.

3.3.2 Ethnic division

In Figure 3.1 the distribution of the Orang Asli groups throughout the peninsular is illustrated. Each group varies in sizes from about 100 to 20,000 people and they differ in language, social organisation, economy, religion and physical characteristics. What these groups have in common is that they are non-Malay indigenous peoples, descendants of peoples who occupied the Malay Peninsular before the establishment of Malay kingdoms during the second millennium A.D. (Dentan et al., 1997).

The first and smallest of the Orang Asli groups is the Negritos. It is generally believed that they are the oldest or the first inhabitants of the Malay Peninsular (Carey, 1976). However with the absence of recorded history and written documents, it is difficult to give convincing evidence to support this claim. Negritos are found in the north of the peninsular, particularly in the interior states of upper Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. In addition, there are small groups of Negrito living

Figure 3.1: Map of Orang Asli groups distribution (from Benjamin: 1985)



in southern Thailand. The physical appearance of the Negritos is distinctive which sets them apart from the other Orang Asli groups. It is generally reported that they strongly resemble East Africans and the natives of Papua New Guinea. The identity of the Negrito as a distinctive ethnic group is shown also by their material culture and their way of life. According to Carey (1976) the Negrito are the only Orang Asli group who, with one or two exceptions, traditionally practice little or no cultivation of any kind.

The second and largest ethnic group among the Orang Asli is the Senoi. The majority of the Senoi are found in the northern states along the hilly slope of the Main Range found in the interior states of Perak, Pahang and Kelantan. The word 'Senoi' is a generic term and used for a number of different smaller groups (see Table 3.1). Although these are not identical groups, the members speak a related language and share, on the whole, a similar way of life and material culture. In physical appearance, the Senoi differ from the Negritos. Their skin is of a much lighter colour and their hair is wavy rather than frizzy.

There has been considerable dispute about the origin of the Senoi. One claim that is generally accepted (Carey, 1976; Dentan, 1997) is that the Senoi are of Mon-Khmer origin, that is, they are racially related to indigenous groups living in present day Cambodia and Vietnam. This claim is based upon the linguistic affinity between the Senoi dialects and the Khmer languages. Unlike the Negrito, the Senoi are not a nomadic group. They are traditionally called shifting cultivators, who live and cultivate crops in an area for a year or two before moving on to the next when the fertility of the soil has been exhausted. They eventually return to their original village.

The third and final group is the Proto-Malays or Aboriginal Malays. They are comparatively late arrivals, constituting a third wave of the Orang Asli migration to the Peninsular. In appearance, the Proto-Malays look very much like the Malays. The colour of their skin varies from light to dark brown, they have

straight hair and 'Polynesian' features (Carey, 1976). There is a great deal of variation in the way of life of the Proto-Malays. Some of them, living in the remote areas of the jungle of Pahang, lead a semi-nomadic existence. Other groups that are found in the states of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor, lead a settled existence and their way of life is similar to that of the Malay villagers.

3.3.3 Languages

Each Orang Asli group speaks its own language. According to *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Asher, 1994) the indigenous languages in Malaysia are from two different stocks. Malay along with the languages in Sabah and Sarawak are from the Austronesian stock, whereas some of the other aboriginal languages found in Peninsular Malaysia are from the Austroasiatic stock. According to Bright (1992) the primary split of the Austro-Asiatic language is between the Mon Khmer and Munda families. The term *Aslian* was introduced by Difloth (1977) and Benjamin (1976) to refer to a distinctive group of approximately twenty Mon-Khmer languages spoken in Peninsular Malaysia and the Isthmian parts of Thailand. According to Dentan (1997), as most Orang Asli groups speak Mon-Khmer languages, there is evidence that there is an ancient connection with mainland Southeast Asia to the north, where most Mon-Khmer languages are found. Further research (Bright, 1992) shows that the Aslian branch of interior Peninsular Malaysia clearly fits within the Mon-Khmer family and may actually form a southern division of the family.

Benjamin (2001) also mentions a north Aslian and south Aslian sub-branch and calls the branch with the Semai language, the Senoic sub-branch. He points out that the linguistic term Aslian does not cover all of the languages spoken by the Orang Asli, but only those that belong to the Mon-Khmer family. According to Benjamin, some Southern-Aslian speakers can be observed at the present day

to be shifting to Malay. This observation is also made by Dentan (1997) who notes that, 'the more southerly groups have lost their aboriginal languages and now only speak Malay' (p.11). However, this phenomenon of language shift and loss is not found in speakers of Central and Northern Aslian who seem to still resist the loss of their languages although they speak excellent Malay when communicating with outsiders (Benjamin, 2001). Benjamin's investigation, however, does not reveal the reasons for the maintenance of the Central and Northern Aslian languages.

The shift to Malay is not surprising as Orang Asli have far more contact with Malays than with the other major ethnic groups, the Chinese and Indians (Dentan et al., 1997). In discussing bilingualism among the Orang Asli, Nik Safiah (1981) notes that there is usually one in-group language and one out-group language used in the communities. She observes that the former is the native language of the community and the latter, almost always Malay. This is not surprising as most rural Orang Asli villages are often near Malay villages. Even forest-dwelling groups like the Batek have dealings with the Malay farmers and traders. Most government officials they meet are Malays, including staff from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, police, game wardens and forestry officers. Dentan (1997) observes that that Orang Asli life exists in the shadow of Malay culture. According to him when Orang Asli describe their own culture they tend to contrast how they do things with how Malays do them. Yet, despite and because of this pervasive opposing of the two ways of life they tend to see the world through the filter of Malay culture (Hood Salleh, 1984).

3.4 The administration of the Orang Asli

As part of the modern state, the Orang Asli are the concern of a particular department of the national government, the Department of Orang Asli Affairs or *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* (JHEOA) which exercises substantial control over all facets

of Orang Asli lives and future. It is worth mentioning that this department has no counterpart in administering the affairs of the indigenous peoples in Sabah and Sarawak. The JHEOA was established in 1954 under the Enactment known as the 'Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance No.3 1954'. Revised in 1974, the Act is unique in that it is the only piece of legislation that is directed at a particular ethnic community.

3.4.1 Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA)

One reason the government chose the single agency approach was that over 60 percent of Orang Asli still lived in isolated areas, distant from normal government services like education and medical care. While the Malaysian poverty rate (monthly household income between RM 501- RM 1,001) for the Orang Asli is 81.4 percent, their hardcore poverty rate (monthly household income less than RM 500) is 56 percent (Yeang, New Sunday Times, November 16, 2003) The department's powers and functions, defined by the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance and revised in 1974, provides for the aboriginal peoples' protection as well as for the promotion of their socioeconomic development. The JHEOA deals with matters such as health, education, housing agriculture and forest policy. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, under the JHEAOs 'regroupment plan', the peninsular aborigines are settled in villages and given housing, and land for crops and animal husbandry. These crops are rubber and oil palm and the animals are cattle, goats and chickens. The JHEOA's aim is to integrate the aborigines and encourage them to settle while respecting their desire to maintain their own cultural traditions. The policy of the government towards the Orang Asli is their integration into the wider society. In particular, the JHEOA was 'to adopt suitable measures designed for their [Orang Asli] protection and advancement with the view to their ultimate integration with the Malay section of the community' (Nicholas,1997: p.4).

3.4.2 Status of the Orang Asli people

The Orang Asli arguably occupies a unique and disadvantaged status in Malaysian society. While generally acknowledged as the earliest inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula they are not accorded any of the binding special privileges that are provided in the Constitution to the other indigenous people, the Malays, and the native peoples of Sabah and Sarawak (Rachagan, 1990). The applicability of the designation *bumiputera*, that is 'native peoples', to the Orang Asli is ambiguous (Dentan, 1997). Although the Malaysian government sometimes seeks to include the Orang Asli in the category of 'bumiputera' it does not extend to them the special economic and educational benefits accorded the Malays and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. The only special rights Orang Asli have, beyond those of other citizens, are qualified rights to hunt protected game and collect forest products for their own consumption when living in game or forest reserves (Dentan, 1997). They do not have the privileged access to places in educational institutions, scholarships, jobs in the public service, or commercial licenses, which the Constitution guarantees to Malays and Borneo natives (Malaysian Federal Constitution, Article 153 in Rachagan, 1990).

In discussing the impact of development in Peninsular Malaysia on the Orang Asli, Dentan et al. (1997) highlight the fact that the Orang Asli have not only been left behind in the rising prosperity of the nation, their economic conditions have also deteriorated. They argue that '[Orang Asli] have been transformed from economically independent food and commodity producers to landless wards of the state, confined more and more to the dusty regroupment villages where they eke out a living from casual wage-labour, rubber-tapping and collecting rapidly dwindling supplies of forest produce for sale' (p.7). They add that the plight of the Orang Asli remains the same despite the fact that a special government agency concerned with their welfare, the JHEOA, has existed since 1954.

3.4.3 The government's goal

The Orang Asli are indeed a small and politically powerless group of peoples and the government policy towards the Orang Asli is generally one of assimilation. The Ministry of Interior's Statement of Policy of 1961 states that the government's goal is the 'ultimate integration [of the Orang Asli] with the Malay section of the community' (Ministry of the Interior 1961 in Rachagan, 1990: p.4). It adds that 'special measures should be adopted for the protection of the institutions, customs, mode of life, persons, property and labour of the aborigine people' (Rachagan, 1990: p.5). The Ministry specifically advocates measures which, however, were never implemented (Dentan, 1997) to preserve and teach Aslian languages, to educate the public to counteract prejudice against Orang Asli, and to allow nomadic groups to continue their foraging life. This suggests that the government originally envisioned Orang Asli entering into a close relationship with the Malays, but remaining culturally distinct from them (Mohd Tap, 1990).

While the JHEOA has been given the mandate to bring the Orang Asli into the Malaysian mainstream, unofficially it interprets this mandate as to mean converting them to Islam and assimilating them as Malays (Dentan et al., 1997; Endicott and Dentan, 1994; Jimin et al., 1983). To be a Malay in Malaysia, according to the constitution, one must habitually speak the Malay language, be a member of the Islamic faith and follow Malay customs. Adherence to the Muslim faith is an essential part of the definition of Malay. Clearly, the essence of the Malay identity is the closeness of Islam (Bernstein, 1997).

As most Orang Asli already speak the Malay language it is almost inevitable that the pressure they now face is to convert to Islam. Written JHEOA policy is clear that no coercion is to be used in proselytising. However, given that the JHEOA controls access to government benefits, the implied threat is clear. Still, the Orang Asli have no interest in becoming Malays and do not identify with them.

According to Martin's (1994) observation of indigenes in Southeast Asia, becoming Malay or 'masuk Melayu' has always meant the rejection of previous ways of life. In addition, Endicott (1987) points out that among the indigenous non-Malay peoples, religion has been a major dimension of externalised self-identity. The ultimate act of cultural accommodation is to convert to Islam (Endicott, 1987). Thus it remains possible that some Orang Asli will resist Islamisation and assimilating to the Malay group by converting to other world religions such as Christianity. According to Dentan (1997) conversion to Christianity among the Orang Asli, especially the Semai, seems largely a tactic to avoid conversion to Islam. The implication of this strategy will be discussed further in Chapter 7 in relation to language maintenance.

It must be pointed out that that most Orang Asli groups have religions of their own, which makes sense of their world and give meaning to their lives. Their beliefs, prohibitions and rituals are intricately woven into their everyday lives. West Semai religion involves warding off illness and misfortunes by following prohibitions and using shamans who can enlist the help of spirits to find lost souls and combat dangerous spirits. However, in Mohd Tap's (1990) research among the Orang Asli he found that some west Semai have become Christians and Bahai as a defence against Malay pressures on them to become Muslims. Although the government tries to keep non-Muslim missionaries away from the Orang Asli, a large majority of the west Semai concentrated in Perak are Christians (Dentan et al., 1997). This is largely due to proselytising efforts of Christian Semai and the church. Unlike the restrictions and prohibitions imposed by Islam, Christianity in their view, does not seem incomprehensible and alien to many Orang Asli (Dentan et al., 1997). In fact, according to one Christian Semai informant in this study, there are less prohibitions in Christianity than in their indigenous religions and Christian Semai need no longer practice traditional rituals which have been restricted by the government in their new settlements.

3.4.4 Orang Asli education

The JHEOA provides school buildings and, until recently, teachers in the regroupment schemes. Under the regroupment scheme the government plan is to settle down the Orang Asli in one place. The schemes are intended to be relatively self-contained communities with an administrative centre. Most JHEOA schools cover only grades 1 to 3, after which children must go to boarding schools. Schools are usually housed in prefabricated buildings with plank walls, corrugated metal roofs and wire mesh on the windows (Dentan, 1997). Central primary schools (grades 1 to 5) also have dormitories for students outside the immediate area. Until recently teachers in the smaller schools were JHEOA field staff who are mostly Malays and a few Orang Asli. They were not trained teachers, and most had low level education themselves. Teachers in the central primary schools were Malays from the Ministry of Education.

The JHEOA's educational programme was a 'dismal failure' (Carey, 1976: p.301, 333; Jimin et al., 1983: p.70; Mohd Tap, 1990: p.260-270; Juli Edo, 1991). On average, a quarter of the children who started primary school drop out in the first year. About 70 percent of all students drop out by the end of grade 5 (Mohd Tap, 1990: p.265). This means that less than 30 percent of Orang Asli (including those born before education was available) are functionally literate according to UNESCO standards and therefore able to qualify for jobs in the modern sector (Mohd Tap 1990: p.265). However, as of 1984 no graduate of JHEOA schools had ever gone beyond secondary school; 'the tiny handful of Orang Asli who made it to tertiary level education were all products of State schools' (New Straits Times, in Dentan et al., 1997). Recognising the failure of its educational programmes, the JHEOA turned over its responsibility for education to the Ministry of Education in 1996. Work on the introduction of Semai into the national curriculum began when the Ministry of Education took over the Orang Asli schools.

The past lack of institutional support for indigenous languages is slowly changing in the country. The formal teaching of Iban in Sarawak and Semai in Peninsular Malaysia has been introduced into the school curriculum, though it takes place mainly in the early years. Smith (2003) reports that these languages are taught as subjects while the school curricula are evolving amidst shortages of suitably qualified and trained staff and teaching materials. There remains, however, minimal support for Semai language development from the government and only recently have a few schools introduced Semai in their curriculum. Smith (2003) found that these are at introductory stages and there lack staff and materials to fully implement Semai as a school subject. Beyond these slender efforts there is no government institutional support for Semai language development.

3.5 The research setting: the Semai people

According to the official record provided by the JHEOA website, the Semai people number around 26,000. This makes the Semai the largest Orang Asli sub-group in Peninsular Malaysia. However, the official figures provided by JHEOA are not the number of speakers but of members of the ethnic group. It is not possible, given the lack of information, to estimate the number of Semai speakers in the peninsular.

3.5.1 Geographic and demographic distribution

The Semai live in a large area on both sides of the Perak-Pahang border (see Figure 3.1), from isolated valleys in the central mountain range to the western foothills in Perak. The Semai resemble other Southeast Asian hill peoples, being less than five and a half feet tall with golden brown skin and black wavy hair (Dentan, 2000). Their language, which is in the Central Aslian division of Mon-Khmer, com-

prises approximately forty dialects, because their settlements are scattered and the rugged terrain makes communication between them difficult. While Semai share many fundamental beliefs and attitudes, there are also major cultural variations among different groups.

Like most peoples of the world, the Semai called themselves simply 'people', *sn'ooy* or *sng'ooy*, terms which Europeans wrote as Senoi or Sengoi. They also called themselves 'hill people', 'forest people', people of a particular basin and so on. According to Dentan (1997) in the 1960s Semai in the Perak foothills called Semai in the Pahang mountains 'those Temiar' (another Orang Asli people) and Pahang Semai called those in Perak 'those Malays' (p.8). These perceptions reflect the differences between 'east Semai' ways of life, based on swidden ('slash-and-burn') farming and 'west Semai' ways, dependent on the mixture of subsistence farming and production of commodities (Dentan, 1968; Gomes, 1989). These two economic systems, which are called 'swiddening' and 'mixed horticulture' for short, involve distinct social arrangements, political systems and outlooks on life. The most striking difference between the east and west Semai is the great extent to which the west Semai economy is involved in market exchange. A detailed study of the Semai families near Tapah between 1982 to 1984 (Gomes, 1986, 1989) showed that families bought 88 percent or more of their food. They spent about three times as much time on money-earning work, commodity production and wage labour, as on subsistence.

The focus of this study is on the 'west' Semai whose economy is partially devoted to subsistence and partially to supplying commodities and labour to the market economy. The 'case' or primary unit of analysis in this study is one Semai community comprising 600 - 700 people located in one settlement in the state of Perak. A large number of Semai are wage-earners and are employed by several large rubber estates and factories in nearby towns. This settlement is surrounded by rainforest and is close to the steep mountain slopes of Cameron Highlands. The

closest town or urban centre is 45 kilometres away and most villagers commute to town daily by motorcycles. Like other Semai settlements in Perak the state government has built a primary school, mosque and a community hall for the villagers. Most of the teenagers in the settlement attend secondary school in nearby towns such as Kampar or Gopeng. For most Christians in this community, religious activities take place in the community hall, including the weekly worship service.

Groves of rubber and fruit trees surround the settlement and the hillsides are dotted with swiddens at various stages of regeneration. Some villages also have a few rice paddies in low-lying areas. Nuclear families in this community generally live in separate, single-family houses, modeled on those of rural Malays (Hooker, 1967 in Dentan, 1997). Some houses have plank floors and corrugated iron roofs instead of thatch. A few rich families even have concrete houses with tiled roofs and glass windows. The houses of closely related families cluster together, forming homestead groups similar to the house groups that live together in the larger east Semai houses. In sum, many west Semai have integrated themselves into the Malaysian mainstream. In principle, their way of life is the kind the government wants all Orang Asli to adopt, because it is settled, makes efficient use of land and is integrated into the market economy (Dentan, 1997).

3.5.2 Language situation

While there has been scholarly interests in the non-violent nature of the Semai people (e.g., Dentan, 1968), according to Smith (2003) attention to language use has been slight. There are, however, some studies which describe the Semai language. As noted earlier, the Semai language is split into more than forty quite variable dialects (Diffloth, 1977), and only some of which are mutually intelligible. According to Diffloth, 'this greatly reduces the likelihood of the continued exist-

ence of Semai as a language. Each dialect with an average of around 700 speakers each, is therefore on its own' (in Benjamin, 2001: p.12). The Semai language is almost entirely oral and very little of its literature has been published in the original language. Although a dictionary of the Sengoi or Semai language was published by the Means family in 1986, and is lexically quite rich, it is based on 'insecure' analysis which can only be used by those who already know something of the language (Benjamin, 2002). Language maintenance efforts on the government's part such as the implementation of Semai language in schools has largely not been successful 'because of the dissimilarities in the lexicon of the Semai dialects... leading to differences in understanding among students with regard to the lexicon chosen for teaching' (Hamid, 1999 in Smith, 2003). It is necessary to point out, however, that some form of written Semai produced by the Methodist Mission is available in the form of song sheets and Christian literature, including parts of the Bible. The significance of these materials in the community will be discussed in detail in the Discussion chapter.

According to several studies conducted by Dentan (1997) and Benjamin (1976), monolingualism among the Orang Asli is a rarity confined to older generations in isolated rural communities. There are still monolingual Semai speakers, especially among women in remote rural areas (Hassan, personal communication). The exact number of monolingual speakers among the east Semai people is unknown. However, those who moved and live in semi-rural areas with close proximity to Malay villages (under the 'regroupment' scheme) became bilinguals in Semai and Malay. Factors such as commerce, employment, mass media and education have encouraged the spread of Malay (Nik Safiah, 1981). Little is known, however, of the factors that favour Semai language maintenance or shift in this community. Although preliminary data from a sample population shows that the Semai people have strong in-group identity and positive Semai language attitudes (Boucher-Yip, 2002), more evidence is needed to link these factors to Semai maintenance.

In light of the increasing bilingualism among the west Semai community as a result of the national language policy, some of the Semai community leaders have expressed concern over the gradual loss of their culture and language. Like other minority indigenous groups in Malaysia (see Smith, 2003), the Semai leaders see their ethnic language declining in use among the younger generation as they are schooled in the national language (Hassan, personal communication). This observation is usually an indication of language shift in progress. As discussed in the previous chapter, such a process can potentially lead to language loss and even language death.

In using a case study approach this study is an attempt to investigate the language situation of one west Semai community by examining the pattern of language use among the members and the factors that may favour maintenance or shift. Much of this study focuses on questions of language maintenance and shift as outlined earlier. In the next chapter, the methodology used in the collection of data for this study is described. The research strategy is discussed in detail and the strengths and limitations of the instruments used will be highlighted.

Chapter 4

Research methods and data collection

In this chapter I present a discussion of the research methodology used in this study. I first discuss the case study approach and highlight some of the advantages of using this approach in research. Although there are criticisms against the case study I will show why this approach is most appropriate for this study and how the triangulation of methods is used to minimise the limitations. This chapter also presents a description of the evolution of the research design through a pilot study and the testing of the research instruments. The ethical considerations are discussed after an explanation of the data collection methods used. This chapter ends with an explanation of the methods of data analysis.

4.1 The case study as a research approach

The case study in recent years has become increasingly popular as a research strategy especially in investigating small speech communities (Fishman, 2001; Bradley, 2002). In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’

or ‘why’ questions are posed. This approach is usually taken when the researcher has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 1994).

4.1.1 Potential strengths

In describing the case study, Nisbet and Watt (1984) stress that it is not simply an example or an anecdote but involves a systematic collection of evidence. Similarly, Johnson (1994) adds that a case study approach is an enquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence. It investigates contemporary phenomena within real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In a similar vein, McDonough and McDonough (2000) point out that a case study is not a research method nor the equivalent of one. Instead, it employs methods and techniques in the investigation of an object of interest or problem.

Yin (1994) defines the ‘case’ or ‘unit of analysis’ in case study research, which might be a single individual,

An individual person is the case being studied, and the individual is the primary unit of analysis. Information about each relevant individual would be collected and several such individuals or ‘case’ might be included in a multiple case study.

(Yin, 1994: p.137)

Alternatively a case might be an institution, such as school or event or even a community. Yin (1994) emphasises that those within the unit of analysis must be distinguished from those outside it. According to Cohen and Manion (1994) when case study researchers observe the characteristics of an individual unit, whether an individual or a community, the purpose is to probe deeply and to analyse

intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit. This is to establish generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs.

Thus the case study is a useful research approach. The literature stresses that the case study is not synonymous with any particular research technique. Several research tools like observation, interviewing, use of records, are often used in case study research. As the specificity of the case study in its main strength and that every case study is embedded in historical, social, political, personal and other contexts, this research approach has a number of advantages that make it attractive especially in language maintenance and shift studies. Some advantages of using the case study approach include the following:

1. A case study data is 'strong in reality'. This strength in reality is because case studies are down-to-earth and attention holding; in harmony with the reader's own experience (Cohen and Manion, 1994). A reader responding to a case study report is consequently able to employ the ordinary processes of judgement by which people tacitly understand life and social actions around them (McDonough and McDonough, 2000).
2. Case study results relate more closely to daily experience than those of experimental and survey methods. They tend to have, as Shaw (1982) puts it, a more human face. In other words, the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 1994).
3. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations. Adelman et al. (1984) suggest that case studies

considered as products may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation.

4.1.2 Limitations

While a potential weakness of case studies is their generally microscopic nature, case study accounts are also sometimes criticised as subjective, biased, impressionistic and lacking in precision (Kemmis, 1982). These are serious issues in any research design. The following discussion addresses the issue of subjectivity, reliability and validity of case study research.

Subjectivity

Classical research designs strive for the elimination from the results of an experiment of any biases from the researcher. The knowledge gained is seen as objective and independent of any particular human agent. One of the reasons quantitative research investigators regard the case study approach with indifference and view it as a less desirable form of inquiry is the concern of the role of human subjectivity (Burns, 2000). In particular, when selecting evidence to support or refute or when choosing a particular explanation for the evidence found. It is easy for the investigator to allow equivocal evidence or personal views to influence the direction of the finding and the conclusion.

However, one can also argue that this bias can also enter into the conduct of experiments and in the designing of questionnaires to an unknown degree. Objectivity is a laudable goal, but so is contextual specificity. McDonough and McDonough (2000) stress that the problem is to satisfy both concurrently, not to sacrifice the one for the other. Although there are no 'rules' for the design of a case study, there are 'stages' in case study research that could serve as a safeguard to the issue of subjective bias. Bassey (1999) sets out seven stages which include

testing analytical statements, explaining the analytical statements and deciding the outcome. However, it is plain that case studies rely heavily on the skill and industry of the individual researcher.

Reliability

In any kind of measurement, reliability concerns the confidence the user can have that the measurement will provide the same answer given the same thing to measure (Burns, 2000). Perhaps at the heart of the problem of the case study approach is inevitably always the partial accounts involving selection at every stage, from choosing cases for study, to sampling events and instances and to editing and presenting material. One that often dominates discussion of case study research is the problem of replicability. Sociolinguistic research is rarely replicable and would be difficult to test. However in theory, it would seem that where procedures are clear and explicit then reliability in this sense would be higher than it would given a free hand to the researcher to design and conduct the case study. According to Cohen and Manion (1994) in order to improve reliability and enable others to replicate a case study, the steps and procedures must be clearly explicit and well documented.

Validity

The argument against the issue of validity is that the checks and balances of random sampling and standardised and reliable instruments are missing in the case study approach (Kemmis, 1982). The able case study researcher indicates the validity of the report by giving a detailed account of how they carried out the study. However, Shaw (1982) stresses that what case studies must aim on as the basis of their claim to validity is 'articulated representative experience' (p.24), which need not shrink from an element of moral valuation. Shaw argues that

validation is from the response of the readership. A major validation may be that the case contributes to the reader's vicarious experience, each reader relating it to their own context and method and inferring the quality of contribution it can make for their particular context. Many case study investigators fail to develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and as a result, subjective judgement is used to collect data. Burns (2000) suggests two ways to improve validity. Firstly, the use of multiple sources of evidence to demonstrate convergence of data from all sources. Secondly, the need to establish a chain of evidence that links parts together. Cohen and Manion (1994) refer to a number of techniques such as quota sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling that researchers can use as a way of checking the validity of their data.

In the light of these issues that stand against the case study, it is still a useful research strategy to consider in this study. Nisbet and Watt (1984) remind us that the purpose of research by case study is not to portray a specific situation but to illuminate more general principles. The whole picture, which a good case study provides, is not sufficient in itself. Some conceptual analysis must be made of the elements which make up the picture. Johnson (1994) echoes a similar view and adds that the analysis can then either be used to create a grounded theory or be related to some existing body or bodies of knowledge. The creation of grounded theory is the line taken by many case study researchers who use their specialised data to illuminate a more general principle. Johnson (1994) posits that 'grounded' theory is theory based on emerging data, rather than on an advanced hypothesis.

4.1.3 Summary

The term 'case study' refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of the subjects themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research,

the case study looks intensely at the individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Although case study research can be criticised as subjective, biased, impressionistic and lacking in reliability and validity, the above discussion tried to establish that case study has a place in the research framework. There is no simple formula that guarantees good research and there is no necessity for research to use only one method or approach. The choice of which research method is used should be based on an informed understanding of the suitability of that method for that particular research. The research problem should determine the method. It is impossible to judge one method using the concepts derived from another approach. In the literature on research methods, concepts and issues of validity, reliability and generalisability surface frequently. However, each individual feature has its own significance depending on the type of research project undertaken. Nisbet and Watt (1984) suggest that the survey and case study approaches can be used to complement each other. A survey can be followed up by case studies to test out conclusions by examining specific instances. Alternatively, where a new problem is researched 'the case study may precede a survey, to identify key issues' (Nisbet and Watt 1984: p.77). Thus, case study approach is appropriate for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale.

Bearing in mind the strengths and limitations of the case study, the basic strategy used in the design of this investigation is that of a case study with multi-methods approach to data collection. As discussed in Chapter 1 the principal aim of this study is to understand language use among one Semai community. This fits with one of the characteristics of a descriptive case study (see Stake, 1995) where the purpose of this methodology is to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events and to understand the specific case under study, as well as to 'describe' how things were at a particular time and place.

4.2 Methodological triangulation

In planning the research design of this study, triangulation techniques were particularly appropriate to reduce the problems that may potentially arise from a case study approach as noted in the above discussion. Lin (1976) stresses that the researcher needs to be confident that the data generated are not simply artefacts of one specific method of collection. This confidence can be achieved when different methods of data collection yield substantially the same results. The chances that any consistent findings are attributable to similarities of method are reduced when the methods used contrast with each other (Lin, 1976). Thus the use of triangular techniques in this study will help overcome the problem of any bias that may distort the results arising from a single case study research. The adoption of a multi-method approach will also generate a fuller and more realistic view of the complex phenomenon under study.

Often the nature of the problem under investigation demands a multi-method approach because the various methods give different kinds of information that can supplement each other (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmais, 1996). Furthermore, the use of multiple methods contrasts with the ubiquitous but generally more vulnerable single method approach (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Thus, exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's results. Triangulation is often characterised by a multi-method approach to a problem in contrast to a single-method approach. It is part of data collection that cuts across two or more techniques or sources. Essentially, it is qualitative cross-validation that can be conducted among different data sources or different data collection methods. As Denzin (1978) points out, '[t]riangulation can take many forms, but its basic feature will be the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical unit' (p.308).

To a large extent, triangulation reduces the problem of subjectivity of single case studies and at the same time triangulation assesses the sufficiency of the data. However, Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) state that if the data are inconsistent or do not converge they are insufficient. The researcher is then faced with a dilemma regarding what to believe. In other words, the researcher may be left with the difficult task of having to reconcile discrepancies and contradictions produced by the use of different methods. Thus the issue of validity of the data obtained is a key concern in this study.

A problem confronting researchers using triangulation is that of validity. This is particularly relevant where researchers use only qualitative techniques to collect data on a particular or single event. McCormick and James (1983) highlight this point,

There is no absolute guarantee that a number of data sources that purport to provide evidence concerning the same construction in fact do so. . . In view of the apparently subjective nature of much qualitative interpretation, validation is achieved when others, particularly the subjects of the research, recognise its authenticity. One way of doing this is for the researcher to write out his/her analysis for the subjects of the research in terms that they will understand, and then record their reactions to it. This is known as respondent validation.

(in Cohen and Manion, 1994: p.241)

The use of multiple data-collection procedures along with triangulation tends to enhance internal validity. In selecting the methods of data collection, and to ensure validity of the results in this study, different triangulation methods were deemed necessary. Methodological triangulation was carried out in this study by using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Instruments such as

questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were used in the research design to collect data. In the next section, I will describe the data collection procedures which were conducted in three phases.

4.3 Data collection procedure

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in three phases over the course of eight months. Several trips to the study site were made in order to establish contact with the community and to collect data.

4.3.1 Phase 1: Preliminary investigation

The first phase of this study was primarily concerned with identifying the relevant language issues that relate to the language situation among the bilingual Semai population. Due to the lack of information on the current language use among the Semai community and other related literature, it was deemed necessary to conduct preliminary informal interviews with leaders in the community. Through personal contacts my first fieldwork trip was arranged and made primarily to interview two key Semai informants who are leaders in the target community. The aim was to get a deeper understanding of the current Semai language situation.

The preliminary interviews covered questions such as what languages they used in their daily communication, what factors determine their language use, what Semai language means to them and what language-related issues were of concern to them. Matters such as the demography, identifying the accessible populations, gaining permission and administration matters were also discussed. Visits to several Semai settlements were also made to determine the accessibility of these places and the facilities in the settlements, bearing in mind Marshall and Roseman's (1995) advice that, 'site and sample selection should be planned around practical

issues, such as researcher's comfort, ability to fit into some form of role during the participant observation and access to a range of subgroup activities' (p.54).

The study site was chosen in a purposive manner (see Patten, 1998) during this exploratory phase prior to the study proper. One of the potential problems of fieldwork identified by Erikson (1986) is the limitation of the researcher's access to data due to inadequate negotiation for entry into the field setting. Hence, this exploratory phase of my study served several functions. First, I informed the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA) in Kuala Lumpur regarding my research interests. Since the research topic was not 'sensitive' in nature, there were no objections from the officials and subsequently the required description of the study was submitted to the Department. I then gained permission and access to the study site through negotiations with the community leaders. I also identified a population I wanted to study. Second, I collected initial data that would shape the research strategy, formulate the research questions and the questionnaire, and interview schedule. Third, I started to build a trusting, collaborative relationship necessary for this study with members of the community.

4.3.2 Phase 2: Pilot study

The main justification for conducting pilot studies is so that researchers refine their methods and research instruments (Patten, 1998). Research questions were formulated and a written questionnaire was designed based on the information from the preliminary interviews. Relevant issues were identified and translated into statements and questions. The pilot questionnaire sought to find out the language repertoire of the target community, their self-reported proficiency of each language, the domains of use for each language(s), factors affecting their language choice and the literacy level of the community.

In translating the research instruments I enlisted the help of English-Malay bilingual friends who translated the English version of the questionnaire and interview questions. The Malay version of the instruments was then piloted on Semai-Malay bilingual friends. It was important that respondents be able to understand the semantics of survey items in order to provide honest and thoughtful answers. From the preliminary feedback, the questionnaire was then redesigned. I removed ambiguous and irrelevant questions, reworded and refined several items and used a simpler reader-friendly format for the pilot run.

Fifty pilot questionnaires were then distributed and administered among the target community. A small number of individuals who were representatives of the sample population were first identified. Only Semai speakers who were bilingual were recruited for the pilot test. It was also necessary for the pilot study that participants had at least a primary education as some reading was required in the instrument. These people were then used as informants to identify others who would qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others. Hence the snowball sampling technique was used in the pilot study. The questionnaire was designed to test the clarity of the questions, the simplicity of the design and to identify ambiguities in questionnaire items for the main study. After minor revisions, and in order to maintain clarity and accuracy of the meaning of the questions, the questionnaire was tested again with ten respondents.

Open-ended interview questions were also tested for the same purposes. The interview questions were orally tested with four members of the Semai community who volunteered their participation in the pilot study. Based on the interview guide used in the pilot run, an interview schedule with four open-ended questions was designed for the main study.

4.3.3 Phase 3: Data collection

At the third phase of the research, the main study was conducted. Three further trips were made to the study site to distribute and administer the questionnaires, to conduct interviews and to make observations in the target community. In order to collect quantitative data a survey approach was used.

Questionnaire survey

A questionnaire survey was used in this study as the main instrument for data collection, primarily for its strengths as described by Johnson (1994) and Wilson (1984). Although the strengths of the survey lay in its breadth of coverage, generalisability and descriptive power, this method of data collection has its limitations. One of the criticisms against this method is that standardised surveys do not give researchers the opportunity to explore a topic in depth. The questions in the survey must have a clear meaning and responses must be fitted into a limited range. In addition, the replies may be simplified and subtler differences between respondents may be obscured (Johnson, 1994). Respondents may need encouragement and a sense of rapport with the researcher and the research, if they are to provide factual information and opinion on sensitive issues. Johnson points out that surveys do not have the flexibility to provide this kind of supportive atmosphere.

Another weakness of the survey is that if the sample is flawed in some way so that it is not representative of the population, generalising from the findings may be misleading. Even with a representative sample, bias may arise from a low response rate (Wilson, 1984). Hoinville and Jowell (1984) observe that respondents tend to be more favourably disposed towards the survey's aims than non-respondents. Low response rates may, therefore, skew findings. These limitations were taken into consideration during the administration of the survey.

According to Davidson (1970) an ideal questionnaire possesses the same properties as a good law in that it should be 'clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable. Its design must minimise potential errors from respondents... and coders' (p. 92). With these qualities in mind, the language use data for the main study was collected by the means of a three-page questionnaire that was piloted and re-tested for clarity of wording and simplicity of design. Leading questions and open-ended questions were avoided as they could potentially lead to ambiguities. Generally the questionnaire guidelines by Oppenheim (1992) were followed in the design of the instrument. The questionnaire included three sections: background characteristics (demographic information), language use (domains) and views of Semai language use (vitality, attitude and identity). As there is a higher literacy rate in Malay than in Semai among the respondents, the questionnaire was written in Malay. In this way, the respondents can interpret the questions on their own and provide their responses according to their understanding of the questions.

The first part of the questionnaire sought information such as age, gender, level of education and occupation. Demographic data are needed to explore the findings and such data provides information about the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire was generally based on Fishman's et al. (1971) study of language use as highlighted in Chapter 2. The study is significant in two ways. Firstly, it provides a way to assess the degree of Semai versus Malay language use of the respondents by asking them which language they most frequently used in which domain. Secondly, as Fishman's model points to the importance of the home as the most important domain for intergenerational transmission, further questions were asked about language use in the home. The domains of language use identified for this study are that of family, neighbourhood/village, school, work, government, market and church/mosque.

The third part of the questionnaire was concerned with factors that may influence language choice. Language 'vitality' in this study is defined in terms of maintenance and viability. Some of the vitality items were modeled after Evans (1996) and Allard and Landry (1994). For use in the Semai context, the items, however, required rewording so that they were meaningful and relevant to the Semai respondents. It was important that the questions in this part of the questionnaire were simple but able to elicit the required information. As semantics is a potential limitation in translating words such as 'progress' and 'identity' to Malay, these words were carefully explained to the respondents.

As results of the pilot study showed that younger members were far less involved than the elder generations in the issues related to group identity (Boucher-Yip, 2002) it was important for the purposes of this study that the items were modified to include questions on identity and attitudes to Semai language use (see questionnaire sample in Appendix A). Thus twenty Likert-type items were written in simple declarative forms and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements.

A limitation of using such Likert-type items is that it may lead some respondents to respond to all items in the series in a global fashion. From the pilot study it was found that some respondents with a very positive attitude simply marked them all 'Strongly Agree' without carefully considering each item. Responding in this way (based on a general impression or attitude) is known as the 'halo effect' (Patten, 1998). Patten stresses that those who write attitude scales should also be concerned with 'response sets'. Some individuals may have an acquiescence response set in that they tend to agree with everything. Others may tend to be negative regardless of the topic. Still others may respond to everything with a neutral position to avoid taking a stand (Patten, 1998). Thus, writing some items so that they are favourable (positive) and others unfavourable (negative) was necessary in order to break down these response sets and the 'halo effect'.

Sample population

Drawing a sample from the target population was a problem anticipated in this study. The whole Semai population is dispersed around two large states (see Figure 3.1) and it was too large to deal with in its entirety. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, (1996) suggest that when the accessible population is very large, researchers often draw just a sample to study. Although a properly drawn sample of the population will permit sound generalisations to the accessible population, gathering a simple random sample posed administrative problems. In addition, no complete population list was available to allow for a random sampling or cluster method to be used. As the intent of this investigation is not to generalise but to study the language use of one community, convenience sampling was adopted instead. It was decided at the exploratory phase that the more 'accessible population' would be the west Semai people as they are mostly settled in semi-rural areas. A settlement that consisted of several 'groups' which were of similar socio-economic background and that were fairly representative of the general Semai population were then identified with the help of key informants. The convenience sampling strategy was used to form the sample population.

At this stage of the data collection, two Semai research assistants were engaged to distribute and administer the questionnaires. Role-playing techniques were used (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996) to train the research assistants to answer all potential queries about the questionnaire items. The research assistants were also trained to administer the questionnaire orally to respondents who had difficulties reading the questionnaire and to respondents who are illiterate. Although the quality of the questionnaire administration was difficult to monitor, this strategy of questionnaire distribution was necessary at this stage of the data collection for methodological and practical reasons.

Firstly, the questionnaire required respondents to complete the instrument themselves. If respondents had difficulties understanding the questionnaire in Malay, they were able to ask for help in Semai. This support would motivate them to respond to the questionnaire. This would also increase the response rate and the external validity of the instrument. Secondly, for the collection of complete, reliable and valid data from the identified group, it was necessary for a systematic distribution of the questionnaire among the sample population. This required time and resources. The use of assistants meant a shorter time in administering the questionnaire. Thirdly, it provides a type of anonymity as the researcher had no connections with the respondents. This was an important factor as the respondents were more likely to give the 'right' answer or what they would perceive as the correct official answer (e.g. the use of Malay daily) if an outsider was administering the questionnaire. Cultural sensitivity was also taken into consideration in the use of this strategy. While the accuracy of self-reported data collected through the questionnaire is difficult to ascertain, I was completely satisfied with the representativeness of the sample population. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed in the target community of approximately 600 people. Being aware of the limitations of the questionnaire as a research tool, and of the fact that the data gathered would be based solely on the participants' self-evaluation and interpretation of their language behaviour, oral interviews were conducted to further validate the findings and probe issues pertaining to the community's language use and the reasons for their language choice.

Interview

With the noted limitations of the questionnaire as a research tool and of the fact that the data gathered would be based solely on respondents' self-evaluation and interpretation of their language behaviour, interviews were conducted to improve

the reliability and quality of the data. The interview differs from a questionnaire in that it involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals. Many studies require large amounts of comparable data that do not arise naturally but only in response to some form of interview elicitation. Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that the interview may serve three purposes.

Firstly, it may be used as a principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. Secondly, it may be used to test hypotheses or suggest new ones, or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. Thirdly, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking. The purpose of using interviews in this study was to provide a cross-check on the questionnaire's validity and to supply a more qualitative meaning to the quantified summaries of the questionnaire responses. In addition, the exploratory strengths of the interview are impossible to obtain in the questionnaire.

It has been pointed out that the direct interaction of the interview is the source of both its advantages and disadvantages as a research technique. One advantage is that it allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. This research technique allows the researcher opportunities to probe and ask follow up questions. Probing motivates the respondent to elaborate on or clarify an answer or explain the reason behind the answer, and help focus the conversation on the specific topic of the interview (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). However, a disadvantage in using interviews is that it is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer. This often occurs with non-structured or non-directive interviews. In such interviews the researcher does not employ a schedule to ask a pre-specified set of questions nor are the questions asked in a specific order. The very flexibility that is the chief advantage of interviews leaves room for the interviewer's personal influence and bias. The lack of standardisation in the data collection process makes interviewing vulnerable to interviewer bias.

To minimise the potential subjectivity and interviewer bias of an unstructured interview, a semi-structured interview was adopted in this study. This involved predefining a range of questions to be addressed in the interview but at the same time being flexible enough to allow the respondents to expand on the relevant issues. This form of interview also allows the interviewer to make a 'truer' assessment of what the respondents really believe. The interview consisted of four open-ended questions, which were tested, in the pilot study. The final interview schedule is found in Appendix B. Open-ended questions were used because they are flexible and they allow the interviewer to probe so that they may go into more depth if they choose or to clear up any misunderstandings. According to Fink and Kosecoff (1998) open-ended questions can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers, which may suggest unthought-of relationships or hypotheses. The semi-structured form of interviews also enables the researcher to test the limits of the respondent's knowledge, encourage cooperation and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondents really believe (Payne, 2000).

Taking the suggestions made by Cohen and Manion (1994), the interview questions were designed in a 'funnel' like format, that is from broad questions and ended with more specific ones. The questions generally explored the attitudes and feelings of the respondents about Semai language use. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1998) stress the importance of pre-testing the interview situation which includes becoming familiar with the place where the interview is to be done, becoming familiar with the use of the tape recorder in the specific setting, practising taking probe notes and using the interview guide in the particular setting and role-playing some practice introductions by which the situation is structured for the respondent. This process was accomplished at the pilot stage of the study.

Conducting the interview

I was keenly aware from the onset that there were practical and ethical issues to consider before the actual interview sessions. Firstly, I was concerned that the informants should be comfortable with the interview procedure and that they are not inconvenienced in participating in the interviews. As Semai people are generally shy and suspicious of outsiders, setting up and conducting the interviews at the informants' home was considered ideal as the informants will be most comfortable in their natural surroundings. However, informants were also given the option of meeting at a pre-arranged place. Despite all efforts to obtain privacy and quiet some interviews were conducted in several stretches especially with informants who had little children in their care.

My second concern was the issue of consent and confidentiality. In eliciting consent for the interview the respondents were made aware that the prime purpose was to obtain data for research purposes only. This was especially important as I intended to tape-record the interviews. The nature of the study was explained and the questions were made explicit. The respondents were also assured that the information given will remain confidential and their identities will not be revealed. To further safeguard their anonymity, no names and addresses were taken. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) state that a participant is considered anonymous when the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant from the information provided. De Vaus (1986) also points out that a respondent may be considered anonymous when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent. In cases where informants are identifiable especially in small-scale enquiries, Johnson (1994) suggests that job titles rather than names or roles-holders should be referred to in the report.

The convenience sampling method was again used to recruit ten informants between the ages 14 - 72 years who were then interviewed in their own homes.

For some who found it more convenient were interviewed at a pre-arranged place, mostly in the home of my host. The time and place were arranged prior to the interviews. During the interview sessions, which ranged from 30 to 45 minutes, questions were asked chronologically according to the interview schedule. In order to make the most of each interview the tape recorder was used. According to Gorden, (1980) using a tape recorder, 'frees the interviewer from the burden of trying to record all of the relevant details and allows him to devote more attention to the respondent' (p.495). In order to adhere to ethical procedures, the respondents' approval was sought and permission was granted before the tape recorder was used. As a token of appreciation, all participants were given a gift at the end of the session. All interviews were transcribed in Malay and translated to English after the interview. Due to space constraints transcription of one interview is provided in Appendix C. The others are available on request.

Participant observation

The last technique employed in order to triangulate quantitative data from the questionnaire survey and qualitative data from interviews, was participant observation. The main advantage of observation is its directness (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). It enables researchers to study behaviour as it occurs in its natural setting. A researcher trying to observe and record natural language faces a dilemma that Labov (in Chambers, 1995) refers to as the 'observer's paradox'. He describes the difficulty '[t]he aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation' (p.19). Particularly difficult to observe is vernacular speech, or the style used by speakers when they are not being systematically observed. Numerous ways to minimise the effect of the observer's paradox have been proposed.

Labov is one of many researchers who stressed the importance of studying the informant's language 'in his own natural social context - interacting with his family or peer group and in contexts in which vernacular styles are likely to be used' (in Chambers, 1995: p.4). Gumperz and Hymes (1972) used self-recruited groups to minimise the effects of the observer's paradox. This strategy is effective because it brings in-group members with close ties to each other together in a setting in which a researcher is present and can collect data. Community linguistic norm-enforcing mechanisms influence the speech of participants in such groups and thus results in less social monitoring of speech and more use of the vernacular.

Milroy's (1984) use of the role of 'a friend of a friend' provides a means for a researcher who is an outsider to the community to gain access to the family or peer group setting. In a community like the Semai that may be closed to and suspicious of outsiders (Dentan, 1997), a culturally recognised role, that of a friend of a friend, is assumed by the researcher. As a result of my participation in this role, I gained opportunities to participate in and observe community interactions. As in Gumperz and Hymes's study, the influence of the researcher's presence is minimised because the presence of other community members serves to enforce community norms governing language usage. The data being sought through participant observation is the linguistic behaviour of the community, in particular the manifest content of their speech and the various attributes of their verbal communication. This method also enables the researcher to determine if their actual behaviour (studied by direct observation) is identical to their reported behaviour (questionnaire survey and interviews).

In order to capture some actual linguistic behaviour through participant observation during my fieldwork, observations were made which ranged from general observations of the setting in totality to focused observations which concentrated on specific behaviours. Spradley (1980) describes a passive participant observer as 'one who is present at the scene but not involved' (p.59-60). This was the case

on most days when I was not interviewing informants at the study site. General observations such as observing the daily life of the villagers and watching children at play provided the opportunity to observe the general use of language among the villagers.

As for more focused observations, I concentrated on the language use in one household, that is the language use in the home of my host. I specifically observed if choice of language differed between generations (age groups). In other words, I engaged in selected observations paying particular attention to intergenerational switching in the home. This strategy was also employed in the community/village domain when I attended two meetings in the village. The language use in the proceedings were observed and noted. Fieldnotes were made which were then analysed to check findings obtained through the questionnaires and interviews.

4.3.4 Ethical considerations

In planning this research project ethical issues were carefully considered at every stage of the research process. The ethical researcher, Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) stress, is 'educated about ethical guidelines, carefully examines moral alternatives, exercises judgment about each situation and accepts responsibility for his choice' (p.81). In this study, potential participants were informed verbally in Semai about the nature of the study, what kinds of issues will be explored and how participants were selected. A major tenet in any research project is that participation must be voluntary (Cohen and Manion, 1994). It was impressed upon the participants in this study that participation in the questionnaire survey and interviews were completely voluntary. Although there was the challenge of securing a high completion rate in order to ensure a reasonably representative sample, no pressure was placed on the participants to cooperate in this study. Instead it was a pleasant surprise that the participants were cooperative

and were willing to provide the information sought. Thus in keeping with ethical principles in research, participation in this study was based on informed consent and, voluntary participation was practiced.

One of the most stringent requirements when conducting survey research is to maintain the confidentiality of survey respondents. In applying the principle of confidentiality, the participants were made aware verbally that the information they provided will be confidential and used for academic purposes only. In addition, they were informed that they would remain anonymous. One way of guaranteeing this was that both the written questionnaires and interviews did not require the names and addresses of the participants. Although demographic information can potentially identify respondents, Johnson (1994) stresses that the researcher is obligated not to produce reports that can lead to the identification of individuals.

4.4 Methods of data analysis

The data collected were analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative data, specifically field notes from participant-observation and interviews, were examined through content analysis technique following Spradley's (1980) protocol for the identification of 'emerging patterns' and the coding of the data into analytical categories (p.35). Both observational and interview data were reported mainly in a narrative form through the use of quotations from interviews and descriptions from observational notes. The purpose is to cull the transcripts and observations selectively for major themes that recur. At the same time, language data collected through questionnaires were analysed using statistical analysis and reported by using simple descriptive statistics (e.g., percentages, means). In order to conduct statistical tests, the data from the questionnaires were coded and entered into Excel spreadsheets. The data was then exported to the statistical program SAS version 8 (SAS Institute, 1999).

Frequency distributions of demographic and other summary data were produced using the PROC FREQ function in SAS. The Pearson chi-squared test of independence was used to assess whether certain independent variables of interest (i.e., age and sex) were associated with a given outcome variable (e.g., Semai language acquisition source, see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5). The significance level was set at $\alpha=0.05$.

This chapter provided a description of the research strategy undertaken in this study and the justification for the choice of methods used. It also described the planning of the actual investigation which included the identification of the population and samples, the selection and construction of instruments for collecting data and the methods of data analysis. In the next two chapters, the description, analysis and interpretation of the data will be presented. Due to the nature and organisation of the data, the results of the quantitative data will be presented in Chapter 5 and the analysis of the qualitative data gathered from interviews and observation will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

Quantitative analysis: survey results

In this and the next chapter the analyses of the results will be presented. This chapter describes the results of the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire survey. The analyses provide a macroscopic view of the pattern of language use at the community level. A description of the sample is first presented followed by an analysis of the language use and attitudes data which are presented in tables and charts for easy reference.

5.1 Background of the sample

The demographic data gathered is summarised in Table 5.1. A total of 165 people participated in the questionnaire survey with 58.8% of the total sample being female. The data indicate that there is religious uniformity in the sample with 97% reporting that they are Christian. That such a large proportion of the respondents are Christians is significant, particularly in a ‘Malay’ milieu, and this will be discussed later. Of the total sample 54.5% reported their marital status as married

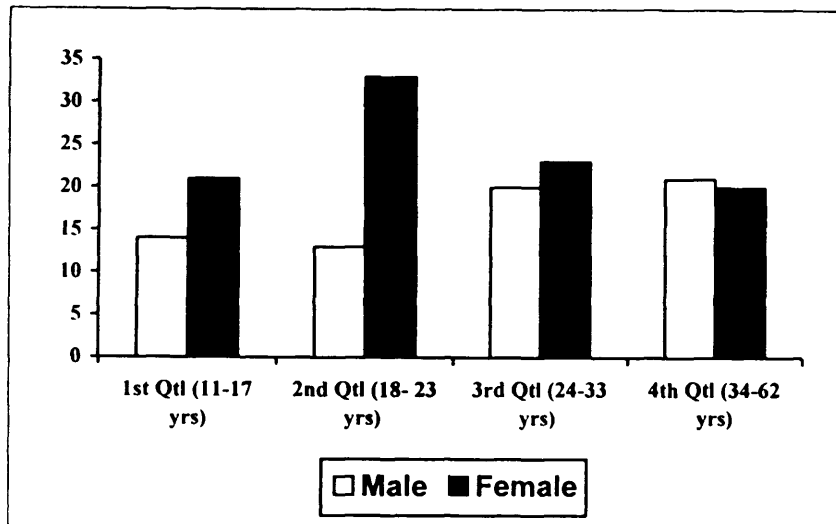
and 44.9% single. For those with children, the average number of children is 2.2 and the average number of people living in one household is 7.3 members.

Table 5.1: Summary of demographic data (N=165)

		N(%)
Sex	Male	68 (41.2%)
	Female	97 (58.8%)
Religion	Christian	160 (97.0%)
	None	5 (3.0%)
Marital status	Married	90 (54.5%)
	Single	74 (44.9%)
	Widowed	1 (0.6%)
		Mean (SD)
Children		2.2 (2.8)
Household members		7.3 (2.7)

Figure 5.1 below summarises the respondents' age and sex distribution. The first quartile comprises 35 respondents aged between 11 - 17 years with 14 male and 21 female. In the second quartile, there are 46 respondents aged between 18 - 23 years, with 13 male and 33 female. The third quartile comprises 20 male and 23 female aged between 24 - 33 years. In the last and fourth quartile, there are 41 respondents between the ages 34 - 62 years, with 21 male and 20 female. The mean age of this sample population is 26.8 years with standard deviation of 11.5, ranging between 11 and 62 years.

Figure 5.1: Respondents' age and sex distribution



5.2 Semai language acquisition

In the questionnaire survey, respondents were asked how they first learned Semai and Malay. The data in Table 5.2 show that respondents learned Semai in the home and from their family members. Respondents were more likely to acquire Semai from their mother (99.4%), father (92.7%), siblings (73.2%), grandparents (67.7%) and other relatives (31.1%) compared to Malay in Table 5.3. No respondent reported the role of the print media such as newspapers, in Semai acquisition. This, of course, is not surprising considering that there are currently no newspapers available in Semai.

5.3 Malay language acquisition

Generally, respondents in the survey reported that Malay was acquired in a formal environment such as school. In all Malaysian government schools Malay is the medium of instruction. Community leaders confirmed that Malay is the main

Table 5.2: Semai language acquisition

I first learned Semai from...	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (n)	Age χ^2_{3df} p-value	Sex χ^2_{3df} p-value
Mother	163 (99.4%)	1 (0.6%)	164	0.29	0.40
Father	152 (92.7%)	12 (7.3%)	164	0.91	0.55
Siblings	120 (73.2%)	44 (26.8%)	164	0.37	0.79
Grandparents	111 (67.7%)	53 (32.3%)	164	0.17	0.50
School	5 (3.0%)	159 (97.0%)	164	0.08	0.08
Church	24 (14.6%)	140 (85.4%)	164	0.72	0.98
Relatives	51 (31.1%)	113 (68.9%)	164	0.49	0.46
Newspapers	0 (0%)	164 (100%)	164	—	—
TV/Radio	6 (3.7%)	158 (96.3%)	164	0.33	0.67

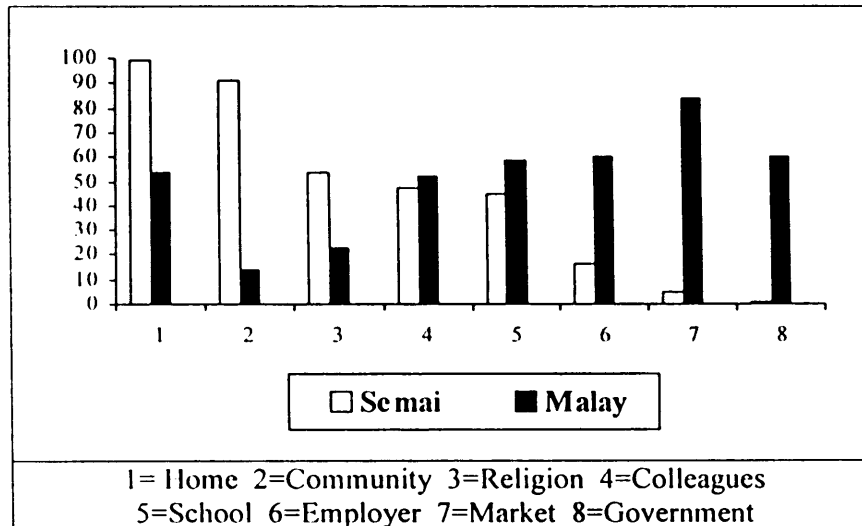
medium of instruction in the schools for most respondents in this study . In Table 5.3, 81.7% reported that they learned Malay at school and from the media (newspaper 50.6% and TV/radio 35.4%). A smaller percentage reported learning Malay from mother (34.8%), father (40.8%) and siblings (34.2%).

Table 5.3: Malay language acquisition

I first learned Malay from...	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (n)	Age χ^2_{3df} p-value	Sex χ^2_{3df} p-value
Mother	57 (34.8%)	107 (65.2%)	164	0.44	0.83
Father	67 (40.8%)	97 (59.2%)	164	0.35	0.47
Siblings	56 (34.2%)	108 (65.8 %)	164	0.71	0.79
Grandparents	46 (28.0 %)	118 (72.0%)	164	0.76	0.98
School	134 (81.7 %)	30 (18.3 %)	164	0.67	0.32
Church	18 (11.0%)	146 (89.0 %)	164	0.85	0.79
Relatives	21 (12.8 %)	143 (87.2%)	164	0.07	0.12
Newspapers	83 (50.6%)	81 (49.4 %)	164	0.09	0.08
TV/Radio	58 (35.4 %)	106 (64.6 %)	164	0.005	0.10

The Pearson chi-squared tests presented in Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 above indicated that age and sex are not significantly associated at the $p=0.05$ level with language acquisition from any source, except for TV and radio. However, it is noteworthy in Table 5.3 that the oldest quartile is less likely than others to have

Figure 5.2: Language choice according to domain



learned Malay through broadcast media such as the television and radio compared to the younger respondents in the first quartile. A plausible explanation is that this medium is not popular among the older generation for language learning. Supplementary data from interviews would reveal that older members prefer instead to read the local newspapers for information and leisure.

5.4 Language use according to domain

In order to determine which language was more likely used in various domains, respondents were asked to indicate in which domains Semai was frequently used and domains in which Malay was more likely used. Figure 5.2 shows the results of respondents' language choice in the various domains.

The presentation of data in the above format enables one to see at a glance respondents' choice of language from a gradual continuum of more intimate domains to less intimate domains (left to right). From Figure 5.2 it can be seen that respondents are more likely to use Semai in intimate domains such as home

(99.4%) and community (90.9%). This suggests that Semai is the dominant language within the home and village settings whereas in the religious context both languages are used but with more Semai (53.7%) than Malay (22.6%). Malay is more likely the language choice in less intimate domains such as school (58.5%) work (employer 60%), market (83.5%), government (60.4%) than Semai. This finding is not surprising because in such outgroup domains respondents were more likely to communicate with interlocutors from different ethnic groups. Malay, being the language of wider communication in such multilingual settings, would then be the likely choice of language.

As for the language use in both secondary and primary schools, particularly with friends in school, 44.5% reported the use of Semai whereas 58.5% reported the use of Malay. It is not evident from this data if respondents were more likely to speak Semai with friends from the same ethnic group or switch to Malay in a formal environment such as the school. Further analysis of language use in this domain later in this chapter will illuminate respondents' language choice in the school with friends from the same ethnic background. As for the language choice in their religious life, 53.7% reported that they were more likely to use Semai in church than Malay (22.6%). The fact that only slightly more than half of the sample population reported the use of Semai in this domain is indicative of the role Malay plays in this setting. Qualitative analysis in the next chapter will explain the functions of each language in this domain.

Given that a large proportion of respondents reported the use of Semai with family members (99.4%), it is interesting to note that a little more than half (53.7%) also reported the use of Malay in the home. This suggests that code-switching between Semai and Malay may occur in the home. Supplementary data from interviews will later show that Malay words are used by the younger members when they are not able to recall Semai words. Table 5.4 provides a closer examination of language use in the home domain.

Table 5.4: Languages used at home by respondents with various interlocutors

	Semai	Malay	Semai and some Malay (more Semai)	Malay and some Semai (more Malay)	Semai and Malay
Mother (n=164)	115 (70.1%)	0 (0.0%)	42 (25.6%)	1 (0.6%)	6 (3.7%)
Father (n=161)	118 (73.3%)	0 (0.0%)	37 (23.0%)	1 (0.6%)	5 (3.1%)
Husband (n=88)	60 (68.2%)	0 (0.0%)	23 (26.1%)	2 (2.3%)	3 (3.4%)
Wife (n=82)	54 (65.9%)	0 (0.0%)	24 (29.3%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.7%)
Son (n=93)	65 (69.9%)	0 (0.0%)	24 (25.8%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.2%)
Daughter (n=95)	68 (71.6%)	0 (0.0%)	23 (24.2%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.2%)
Siblings (n=154)	110 (71.0%)	0 (0.0%)	35 (22.7%)	4 (2.6%)	5 (3.3%)
Grandfather (n=153)	121 (71.9%)	0 (0.0%)	26 (17.0%)	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Grandmother (n=155)	124 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (16.1%)	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.2%)
Other relatives (n=164)	107 (65.2%)	0 (0.0%)	49 (29.9%)	3 (1.8%)	5 (3.1%)

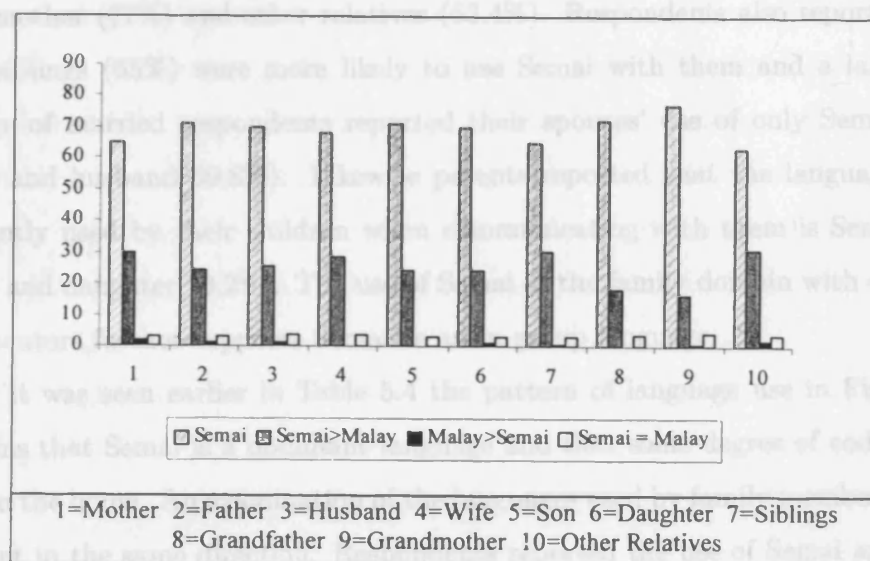
5.5 Languages used at home

In order to further examine language use in the home domain, respondents were asked to indicate their language choice with different interlocutors across generations (parents, children, siblings, grandparents, other relatives) in their family. Respondents were also asked to indicate the language spoken by family members when communicating with them. This are to determine if there are differences in inter-generational language patterns. Table 5.4 presents the data of languages spoken at home by the respondents and Figure 5.3 summarises the reported languages spoken by the respective family members to the respondents. The options ‘Semai and some Malay’ and ‘Malay and some Semai’ is to allow respondents to report the use of either language be it in the form of a word or phrase in their conversations with family members. The last column ‘Semai and Malay’ (Semai=Malay) is an option for respondents who use both languages equally with the various interlocutors.

Results in Table 5.4 suggest Semai is the dominant language spoken at home with family members. Respondents indicated that they were more likely to speak Semai than Malay with their parents, (mother 70.1% and father 73.3%), grandparents (grandmother 80% and grandfather 71.9%) and other relatives (65.2%). A majority of the respondents who are married reported that they speak Semai with their spouses (husband 68.2% and wife 65.9%) while parents reported that they speak mostly Semai with their children (son 69.9% and daughter 71.6%). A large majority of respondents also reported that they use Semai with their siblings (71%).

The analysis in Table 5.4 shows no respondents reporting the exclusive use of Malay with any of their family members. However, respondents reported that they are likely to use Semai and some Malay in communicating with their mother (25.6%), father (23%), siblings (22.7%), grandmother (16.1%) and grandfather

Figure 5.3: Languages used by various interlocutors with the respondents



(17%) and other relatives (29.9%). Likewise, some degree of codemixing was reported in the language used with their spouses (husband 26.1%, wife 29.3%) and parents reported the use of Semai and some Malay with their children (son 25.8% and daughter 24.2%). A very small percentage of respondents reported the use of Semai and Malay with family members and this is reflected in the last column on the right in Table 5.4. As highlighted in Chapter 2 any 'leakage' in the home domain particularly among the younger members can be a sign of incipient shift. In a longer thesis and with more linguistic data how much of Malay is used in Semai discourse and its functions can be further researched.

While the majority of respondents reported the primary language used in their family is Semai, a similar pattern is found in the language choice of respondents' family members. In order to cross check the languages used by family members with the respondent, information about the languages spoken by respondents' family members were obtained and presented in Figure 5.3. The majority of

respondents reported that family members were more likely to use Semai when communicating with them: mother (65.2%), father (71.4%), grandfather (78.2%), grandmother (77%) and other relatives (63.4%). Respondents also reported that their siblings (65%) were more likely to use Semai with them and a large percentage of married respondents reported their spouses' use of only Semai (wife 67.9% and husband 69.8%). Likewise parents reported that the language most frequently used by their children when communicating with them is Semai (son 71.3% and daughter 70.2%). The use of Semai in the family domain with different interlocutors further supports Semai as an in-group language.

As it was seen earlier in Table 5.4 the pattern of language use in Figure 5.3 confirms that Semai is a dominant language and that some degree of codemixing exists in the home. An examination of the languages used by family members seems to point in the same direction. Respondents reported the use of Semai and some Malay with their family members. In Figure 5.3, a small percentage reported that their parents and grandparents were likely to use Semai and some Malay (Semai > Malay); mother 29.9%, father 24.2%, grandmother 16.4%, grandfather 18%. As for their siblings, 30.7% of the respondents reported they use Semai and some Malay. Parents also reported the use of some Malay from their children (son 24.5% and daughter 24.5%). Finally, some married respondents reported that their spouses were likely to use Semai and some Malay, husband 25.6% and wife 28.4%. This shows that although Semai is the primary choice of language between family members, there is some degree of language mixing or code-switching occurring between family members. As code-switching is potentially an indicator of language shift, the significance of this finding will be later discussed in the Chapter 7.

In summary, the patterns of language use suggest that there is no significant difference in the choice of language between the language spoken by the respondents to a range of family interlocutors and language spoken to the respondents by their family members. For a large majority of respondents Semai is the primary

language of communication within the family and across generations. No respondents reported the exclusive use of Malay within their family network. However, a small percentage of respondents indicated that some Malay is used in their communications. It must be pointed out that as it was not a primary aim in this study to assess the degree to which respondents mixed Semai and Malay in their communication, quantitative data or any linguistic data on code-switching was not collected. This lack of linguistic data makes it difficult to ascertain the extend of Semai - Malay usage in different domains among different interlocutors and thus limits this study. However, data based on interviews and observation allows some inferences to be made and this will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.

5.6 Language spoken outside the home

In order to determine language use outside the home domain, respondents were asked to indicate the language they were more likely to use in various domains with different interlocutors. Respondents' choice of language outside the home is reflected in Table 5.5.

In Table 5.5 the pattern of language use in the village (neighbourhood) suggests that Semai is indeed the primary language of communication. However, respondents also report some language mixing. For example, when communicating with their Semai neighbours, 63.8% of the respondents reported that they use Semai, 2.5% reported the use of Malay, 29.4% reported the use of Semai and some Malay and a smaller percentage (3.1%) reported the use of Malay and some Semai. It is interesting to note that the language most likely used when communicating with Semai friends outside the village is still predominantly Semai: 63.8% reported the use of only Semai with Semai friends outside the village area, 29.4% reported the use of Semai and some Malay.

Table 5.5: Languages used outside the home with various interlocutors

	Semai	Malay	Semai and some Malay (more Semai)	Malay and some Semai (more Malay)	Semai and Malay
Neighbours (n=160)	102 (63.8%)	4 (2.5%)	47 (29.4%)	5 (3.1%)	2 (1.3%)
School: Semai friends (n=147)	89 (60.5%)	5 (3.4%)	40 (27.2%)	11 (7.5%)	2 (1.4%)
School: Non-Semai friends (n=138)	21 (15.2%)	67 (48.6%)	16 (11.6%)	33 (23.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Semai colleagues (n=135)	87 (64.4%)	6 (4.4%)	32 (23.7%)	8 (5.9%)	2 (1.5%)
Non-Semai colleagues (n=134)	28 (20.9%)	52 (38.8%)	23 (17.2%)	31 (23.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Semai friends outside village (n=160)	102 (63.8%)	4 (2.5%)	47 (29.4%)	5 (3.1%)	2 (1.2%)

When reporting their language use in school, 60.5% of the respondents reported the use of Semai with their Semai friends. As for the choice of language with non-Semai friends, 48.6% reported the use of Malay while the rest of the respondents reported some level of code-switching between Semai and Malay. According to informants in this study some non-Semai people particularly members of other Orang Asli groups have some knowledge of Semai language. Supplementary data

based on an interview with one student suggests that Semai is used in school with friends from the same ethnic group and Malay is used when communicating with friends from other groups. The dominant language in the classroom, however, is Malay. It is not surprising then that respondents also reported the use of Semai and some Malay with their Semai friends in school.

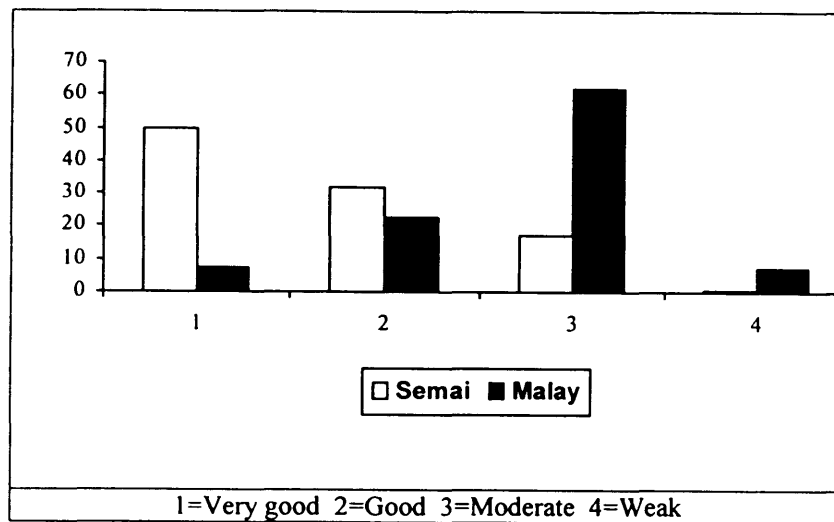
The pattern of language use is similar at work. Table 5.5 shows that 64.4% of the respondents reported the use of only Semai with their Semai colleagues and 23.7% reported the use of Semai and some Malay. When communicating with their non-Semai colleagues, 38.8% reported the exclusive use of Malay, 23.1% reported the use of Malay and some Semai, and 20.9 % reported the use of only Semai. It is interesting to observe that a small percentage of respondents use both Semai and Malay with their non-Semai friends in school and at work. Code-switching is a common phenomenon among bilinguals, and this is reflected in the reported language use even with non-Semai speakers. In the Discussion chapter I discuss the functions of code-switching and the implications for the maintenance of Semai.

In summary the pattern of language use outside the home suggests that the primary in-group language is Semai. It is clear that it is the language most commonly used with Semai speakers such as neighbours and Semai friends. As expected, Malay, is used as the out-group language and this is reflected in their language use with non-Semai speakers. This confirms the notion that Malay is primarily used in less intimate domains where interlocutors are almost certain from other ethnic groups.

5.7 Self-reported language proficiency

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate their oral proficiency in Semai and Malay. The respondents were given a choice of four categories; very good, good, moderate and weak. The results of the self-reported language proficiency

Figure 5.4: Self-reported oral language proficiency



data are presented in Figure 5.4. In rating their own proficiency, respondents rated their Semai proficiency higher than Malay. A large percentage of respondents reported their Semai oral proficiency as 'very good' or 'good' (50% and 32.1% respectively). Only 17.3% reported their Semai oral proficiency as 'moderate'. On the other hand, 62.1% reported their Malay oral proficiency as 'moderate', 23% 'good' and only 7.5% reported their Malay oral proficiency as 'very good'. Statistical analysis of the data indicates that age and sex are not significantly associated with the reported oral proficiency of the two languages.

Respondents were asked to rate Semai proficiency of the younger and older generations. When asked to rate the Semai oral proficiency of the younger, 33.5% of the respondents reported it as 'very good' and 48.4% reported it as 'good' (Table 5.6). A majority rated the older generation's Semai oral proficiency as 'very good' (49.7%) and 'good' (32.9%). When asked to rate their ability to speak to the younger generation in Semai, respondents rated it as 'very good' (47.5%) and 38.3% rated 'good'. Respondents reported that they are able to communicate well with the older generation; 50.3% reported 'very good' and 38.3% reported

Table 5.6: Self-reported Semai language proficiency

	Very good	Good	Moderate	Weak	Age χ^2 p-value	Sex χ^2 p-value
Oral proficiency: young generation (n=161)	33.5%	48.4%	16.2%	1.9%	0.09	0.73
Oral proficiency: old generation (n=161)	49.7%	32.9%	15.5%	1.9%	0.58	0.74
Ability to speak to young generation: self (n=160)	47.5%	38.8%	12.5%	1.2%	0.56	0.10
Ability to speak to old generation: self (n=161)	50.3%	38.5%	10.6%	0.6%	0.24	0.77

'good'. This shows that Semai respondents believe that they and other members have a good command of Semai and able to communicate across generations.

5.8 Parents' attitude to language learning

Semai parents were asked to indicate on a 5 point Likert scale if they agree or disagree with items pertaining to their children's language learning. They were first asked if they themselves 'would like to learn more Semai'. In Table 5.7 we find that a large majority of parents indicated that they want to learn more Semai (60.6% 'strongly agree' and 21.8% 'agree'). This strong indication suggests a positive attitude to mother tongue learning and maintenance. This is also reflected in what they want for their children in terms of language learning. 76.2% of parents

Table 5.7: Parents' attitude to language learning

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Want self to learn more Semai	100 (60.6%)	36 (21.8%)	25 (15.2%)	4 (2.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Want children to learn more Semai	71 (43.3%)	54 (32.9%)	31 (18.9%)	7 (4.3%)	1 (0.6%)
Want children to learn only one language	13 (7.9%)	18 (10.9%)	55 (33.3%)	59 (35.8%)	20 (12.1%)
Want children to learn many languages	74 (44.9%)	44 (26.7%)	39 (23.6%)	6 (3.6%)	2 (1.2%)
Want children to speak Semai well	99 (60.0%)	29 (17.6%)	31 (18.8%)	1 (0.6%)	5 (3.0%)

want their children to learn more Semai particularly to be more literate in their mother tongue and a large majority (77.6%) also indicated that parents want their children to speak Semai well. 47.8% do not want their children to learn only one language: asked whether they want their children to learn many languages, 44.9% strongly agree and 26.7% agree. These parents' positive attitudes probably explains the pattern of language use at home where Semai figures prominently as the main language of communication in the family.

5.9 Views of Semai language use

In section G of the questionnaire (see Appendix A), there were twenty items designed to examine respondents' opinions on various issues such as vitality of the Semai language, their attitude to Semai and if the Semai language plays a role

in Semai identity. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements. The results for 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' were tabulated and combined for easy reference under the heading 'Agree' and similarly, results for 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' were tabulated and combined under the heading 'Disagree' as shown in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9.

The general trend found in the results in Tables 5.8 and 5.9 suggests that majority of respondents agree with the 'positive' statements and disagree with the 'negative' statements. For example in G2 when asked about language use and the younger generation 'it is important for young people to know Semai' 94.6% indicated that they agree and 2.4% disagreed. However, for the statement in G3 'it is not important for young people to know Semai' 66.5% disagreed and 24.4% agreed. A similar pattern is found in the statement in G4 'it is beneficial for young Semai to know Semai' where 87.9% agreed and 5.4% disagreed. Although 76.1% disagreed with the statement in G5 'other people look down on people who speak Semai' 87.1% agreed with the statement in G6 that 'young people do not like to speak Semai'. Data from interviews will later show that code-switching among young people gives the older generation the perception that young people do not like to use the mother tongue. Interviews with the younger members, however, reveal that such a perception is not true of their attitude towards the mother tongue.

A majority of the respondents believe that parents play a crucial role in the use of the mother tongue. When asked if 'parents should teach children Semai' 95.8% agreed and 95.1% agreed that 'parents should speak to their children in Semai'. This indicates that the community feels it is important that parents transmit the Semai language to the younger generation. It is not surprising then that later findings (from interviews) show that parents themselves believe that it is their responsibility to retain the use of Semai at home. This is important in language maintenance efforts and this strategy will be explored further in the next chapter.

Table 5.8: Views of Semai language use

		Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)
G1	Parents should teach children Semai	158 (95.8%)	7 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)
G2	Important for young people to know Semai	156 (94.6%)	5 (3.0%)	4 (2.4%)
G3	Not important for young people to know Semai	40 (24.4%)	15 (9.2%)	109 (66.5%)
G4	Beneficial for young people to know Semai	145 (87.9%)	11 (6.7%)	9 (5.4%)
G5	Other people look down on Semai speakers	14 (8.6%)	25 (16.3%)	124 (76.1%)
G6	Young people do not like to speak Semai	142 (87.1%)	19 (11.7%)	2 (1.2%)
G7	Parents should speak to children in Semai	154 (95.1%)	8 (4.9%)	0 (0.0%)
G8	Use of Semai hinders progress of community	5 (3.0%)	26 (15.8%)	134 (81.2%)
G9	Non-Semai should learn Semai	113 (68.5%)	45 (27.3%)	7 (4.2%)
G10	Semai is a mark of identity for community	156 (94.6%)	8 (4.8%)	1 (0.6%)

Table 5.9: Views of Semai language use

		Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)
G11	Use of Semai can maintain Semai identity	154 (93.3%)	11 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)
G12	Semai person who cannot speak Semai is not really Semai	57 (34.6%)	65 (39.4%)	43 (26.1%)
G13	Semai community must maintain Semai language	158 (95.8%)	5 (3.0%)	2 (1.2%)
G14	Future of Semai language dependent on community	134 (81.2%)	29 (17.6%)	2 (1.2%)
G15	Semai can be maintained with government help	107 (66.0%)	29 (17.9%)	26 (16.1%)
G16	Semai easy to use in religious practices	146 (88.0%)	18 (11.0%)	0 (0.0%)
G17	Use of Semai in sermons easy to understand	129 (78.0%)	27 (16.5%)	8 (4.8%)
G18	Semai not suitable for all occasions	33 (20.1%)	46 (28.1%)	85 (51.8%)
G19	Semai should be taught in school	110 (67.5%)	40 (24.5%)	13 (8.0%)
G20	Semai will not be used in future	22 (13.4%)	14 (8.5%)	128 (78.1%)

With regards to Semai use in the future, 78.1% disagreed with the statement 'Semai will not be used in the future'. This suggests that a majority believe that Semai will be maintained in the long term. While 95.8% agreed that 'Semai community must maintain Semai' and 81.2% agree that the future of the language is in the hands of the community, 66% believe that Semai can be maintained with the help of the government.

It is interesting to find that given the low status of Semai in the Malaysian education system, respondents (81.2%) do not think that the use of Semai hinders the progress of the community. This shows that the community believes that the language is viable and relevant and is not 'low' in status. It is not unexpected then to find that more than half of the surveyed respondents (51.8%) disagreed with the statement 'Semai is no longer suitable for all occasions' while (20.1%) agreed. As for Semai use in the religious context, 88% agreed that Semai is relevant in their religious life and that the use of Semai in religious instruction is helpful.

As in-group identity is a significant factor in this study, it was explained to the respondents that how they perceived themselves as a community was important. The notion that language is important in Semai identity is revealed when 94.6% agreed with the statement 'Semai language is a mark of Semai identity', and 93.3% agreed that the 'use of Semai can maintain Semai identity'. However, while a large majority agreed on the significance of language in the Semai identity, respondents were ambivalent towards the statement 'a Semai person who cannot speak the Semai language is not really Semai'; 34.6% agreed, 39.4% undecided and 26.1% disagreed.

5.10 Summary

This chapter provides a macro view of language use in the Semai community. The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires were subjected to statistical

analyses which revealed patterns of language use in the community. The results indicate that Semai is used in the in-group domains and with Semai-speaking interlocutors. Semai is also the primary language used inter- and intra-generationally. The reported pattern of language use also suggests that Malay is the natural language choice for most respondents when communicating in out-group and public domains such as work, school and market. However, the results show that there is some degree of code-switching in all domains. To what extent respondents mix codes is uncertain at this point. In the next chapter, reported language use at the individual level will be the primary focus.

Chapter 6

Qualitative analysis: reported and actual language use

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The focus of this chapter will be the reported pattern of language use at the individual level and factors that motivate their language choice. The chapter concludes with a description of actual language use observed in two settings; the home and community domain.

6.1 Brief description of informants

In order to further investigate issues related to language use in the community, ten informants were interviewed from the sample population. As described in Chapter 4, the purpose of the interviews was to gather evidence of language use patterns and investigate language maintenance issues which were not explored in detail in the questionnaire survey. I was particularly interested in exploring issues centred on questions of language use, attitudes and identities. Ten bilingual informants were selected with the help of the community leaders and the interviews were

conducted in Malay as this was the only common language in which both the interviewee and interviewer were proficient. The semi-structured interview was based on an interview schedule (Appendix B) that was piloted and revised. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated to English. As I was acutely aware that there might be translation problems during the interview, the interview transcription was back translated for accuracy. Transcriptions of the interviews are available but due to space constraints transcriptions of one interview is provided (Appendix C).

Based on demographic information such as age, marital status, number of siblings, occupation and other information, a brief summary of the ten informants is presented in Table 6.1. For the purpose of anonymity the informants are assigned pseudonyms.* All informants reported that they learned Semai as their mother tongue in their homes when they were children and learned Malay in school or from their families.

6.2 Language use

To establish 'Who speaks what language to whom and when' (after Fishman, 1991) I first asked my informants what language or languages they frequently used at home, within the community and in public settings such as outside the village area. Virtually all participants in the interview reported that they speak Semai 'most of the time' especially at home, in the village and even with their Semai friends when they meet outside the village. I further probed my informants and asked if they had any difficulties when communicating with other members of the community, specifically with regards to language use, such as with the older or younger members of the community. Most of the informants reported that they could not recall any instances of language problems when interacting with members

*Traditional Semai names carry the prefix 'Bah' for men and 'Wah' for women.

Table 6.1: Summary of informants

Informant	Age	Sex	Profile
Bah Serpi	14	M	Secondary school student. Two older siblings.
Wah Merdi	16	F	Secondary school student. Two older and one younger sibling.
Bah Hindau	24	M	Single. Factory worker. Four siblings.
Wah Rosma	30	F	Married. Four children.
Wah Ngaling	34	F	Single. Works in resort. Returns to village occasionally to visit aged parents.
Wah Saili	40	F	Married. Housewife. Part-time nursery teacher. Three children: two working in nearby towns.
Bah Ngah	52	M	Married. Community leader. Works for private sector. Has three children
Bah Uda	55	M	Married. Self-employed. Four children and two grandchildren.
Wah Idah	70	F	Widow. Lives with two adult daughters in village. Three children living in nearby towns. Five grandchildren.
Bah Busu	72	M	Retired village head and community leader. Lives with wife and adult children in village. One son living in the city.

within the community. For example, Wah Merdi who lives with her parents and three siblings communicates easily in Semai with her immediate family and other relatives without problems,

We speak Semai usually. . . I speak Semai with my parent, brothers and sister. Even with my cousins here, we always speak in Semai. When we visit our grandparents or when they come here, we just use our language to talk, tell stories or jokes.

(Tapescript#2: p.1)

However, three informants who had grandchildren living in urban centres such as Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur, reported that they spoke very little Semai with their grandchildren. For instance, when relating her experience communicating with her grandchildren Wah Idah, a 70 year old informant, reported that she has to sometimes use Malay,

Only with my grandchildren I find it a problem to talk to them. . . They live in KL so it difficult to talk to them in Semai. If I really want to talk to them [children] I have to use Malay. Why? That's the only language they know especially the younger ones. As for my older grandchildren, they know just a bit of Semai.

(Tapescript#9: p.1)

Likewise for Bah Uda who reported that his grandchildren visit him occasionally in the village. While he would have liked to communicate to them in Semai, he uses Malay with his grandchildren but finds it uncomfortable,

It's not good for them [grandchildren]... they don't speak Semai. I feel strange that I have to use another language [Malay] when talking to my son's children. That's a problem... but what can we do, they now live there [Ipoh].

(Tapescript#8: p.1)

Bah Uda's comments suggest that the younger generation living in urban centres is not maintaining Semai. Bah Busu, a former village head, encounters a similar problem as Bah Uda. He reported that while he thinks his grandchildren have a passive knowledge of Semai, they are reluctant to use it,

I try to speak [to my grandchildren] Semai in the beginning but they don't seem to understand me. Their mother had to interpret for them in Malay. Sometimes when they come to the village to visit me... they use a bit of Semai. I think they feel embarrassed to speak Semai.

(Tapescript#10: p.1)

These older informants resort to Malay only when communicating with their grandchildren living outside the village, such as in urban areas, although they would have preferred using Semai. These informants also revealed that they do not seem to feel that they have close ties with their grandchildren. However, they have no difficulties using Semai with their own adult children who have moved to the urban centres. This observation suggests that there may be a shift in process among the third generation Semai who now live in urban areas. This is not surprising as a similar trend was also reported by Martin and Yen (1994) among the urban Kelabits.

In reporting their language use, younger informants such as Bah Serpi and Wah Merdi revealed that they tend to use 'some' Malay words when talking to their

friends and family members especially to their siblings. For instance, Wah Merdi who attends a secondary school just outside the village reported that she tries to use Semai most of the time when talking to her friends in the village. However, there is a tendency to use Malay words instead of Semai whenever she cannot find the right Semai word,

Most of the time I use Semai with my friends here in the village... but sometimes when I forget the Semai word, I use Malay. They [Malay words] come easily in my mind. With my other friends in school, such as the Malays, I speak Malay with them. Also with some Chinese friends, I speak Malay with them.

(Tapescript#2: p.1)

Bah Serpi, another teenager, also reported that he uses Semai most of the time with his parents and relatives at home. However, he reported that Malay is sometimes used with his siblings when they have problems translating Malay words to Semai,

When I ask my brother and sister what the word is, they also have difficulty telling me, so we end up using Malay. But when my parents are around they are able to give me the Semai word.

(Tapescript#1: p.1)

This 14 year old informant also revealed that sometimes he finds it difficult communicating with the older generations such as his grandparents. He finds that their Semai is different from the Semai he knows;

I don't think there is any problem talking to my parents...or to my brother and sister. It is more difficult talking to my grandparents...I think their Semai is purer...a bit different I think. I can understand them but I don't use the same words. It is easier talking to my friends in Semai because we know the same type of Semai and if we don't know how to say it in Semai we can use Malay.

(Tapescript#1: p.2)

Although Semai is mostly used in the family and with other community members, some Malay words are used in replacement of Semai. Informants stress that Malay words are used only when they cannot remember the correct Semai word. This strategy of borrowing from the second language is often used in bi- or multilingual settings where code-switching is observed as a natural tendency. However, it would also potentially signal a shift of language use. This pattern of 'language mixing' among the younger members is also noted by one parent, Wah Rosma who has four school going children,

Sometimes I hear them [children] using Malay words. I try to teach them the Semai words but not always, because it is tiring. They learn this [language] in school so I can't stop them or correct them all the time... But like I say, I try my best to make sure they know the Semai word.

(Tapescript#4: p.2)

It is interesting from this quote to find that the parent here takes an active role in correcting her children's use of language at home. Wah Rosma's experience described above is telling of the pressure felt by Semai parents who want their

children to succeed in school. Other informants who are parents did not explicitly express this tension but spoke of the struggle to keep their children from using Malay in the home.

It is important to note that Semai children do not formally learn Malay until they go to school at the age of seven years. However, Wah Sali in describing her community-based work, reports that she teaches Malay at pre-school level in the village. She teaches Malay vocabulary and songs and believes that knowing some Malay will prepare Semai children for primary school and make the first school years a little easier for the children. However, she reported that while the Semai community wants the pre-school children to have a head start in knowing Malay, parents complain that they are already learning too much of the language when they find their young children using Malay at home!

Thus like Wah Sali who believes that parents then have the responsibility of teaching Semai in the home, Bah Ngah and Bah Uda spoke of their efforts in reminding their children to use Semai especially at home. This strategy of maintaining Semai is supported by most informants interviewed. While some informants encourage the use of Semai at home by speaking it themselves, others correct their children or teach them the Semai language. The analysis in the previous chapter suggests that the majority of the respondents believed that parents have a major role in teaching and maintaining Semai in the home. The implications for Semai maintenance is significant and this will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Informants who have jobs outside the village and a larger network of friends and colleagues who are non-Semai reported the use of Malay only when communicating with people of other ethnic backgrounds or other Orang Asli groups, as reported by Bah Hindau who works in a factory near the village,

How can I use Semai with my friends at work... they won't understand me. So I speak Malay with the Chinese and Malays... sometimes when I meet other Asli [friends], we speak Malay or Semai... depends if they understand Semai or not... When I am buying things in town I have to speak Malay. At work, there are no Semai friends there, so I use Malay most of the time.

(Tapescript#3: p.2)

The answers to my first interview question suggest that although Semai is reported as the primary language of communication within the community and intergenerationally, some degree of code-switching exists especially among the younger informants. Malay is the dominant language of inter-ethnic communication and is used in formal domains such as school and work. This supports the pattern of language use analysed in the previous chapter.

6.3 Language attitude

In order to establish if attitudes towards Semai and Malay is a significant factor in their language choice, I asked my informants if they felt it was important to know both languages and if so, why they thought it was important to be bilingual. This was to gauge their general attitude towards the use of Semai and Malay. Reasons given for why Semai people should know both languages are summarised in Table 6.2 and Table 6.3.

Information from the interviews suggests that informants generally expressed the need to be proficient in both languages. They strongly feel that knowing Semai and Malay is important and advantageous. No informant reported that they did not like speaking in Malay or Semai. This is surprising considering that

Table 6.2: Reasons why Malay is important

<i>Malay is important. . .</i>

- To pass exams
- To read the Bible
- To speak with people who visit our village
- To read the newspapers and understand TV programs
- To speak to the Malays and other people like the Chinese and Indians
- So that we can get jobs
- So that I can do well in school
- If we don't know Malay, won't know what's happening outside village

the perception of most survey respondents is that young people do not like to speak Semai. The younger informants in the interviews, however, did not express such sentiments.

Among the reasons why Malay is important to them, a few informants said that they want to be able to use Malay to communicate with outsiders i.e., non-Semai people, but many informants also felt that Malay is necessary for securing jobs and educational success. There are also some who reported that Malay enables them to read the newspapers. This is an important point to highlight in that Semai people value Malay because it meets their literacy needs.

As for the importance of Semai, informants were more reflective. Most informants revealed that Semai is important to them because it is their 'own' language. Other reasons included were for communication purposes within the village, participation in church activities such as singing hymns and for keeping their culture alive. Some pointed out that by speaking Semai, the younger generation will know their language. One informant commented that he would have liked to be able *read* more in Semai. This is an indication that Semai people want to develop literacy

Table 6.3: Reasons why Semai is important

<i>Semai is important. . .</i>

- It is our language
- It is part of our culture and way of life
- So that we can sing Semai [songs] in church
- So that the young ones will know Semai
- Everybody speaks it here in this village
- Although it is difficult to read Semai, we should try
- We should speak our own language since we have one

in the Semai language in order to fulfil the literacy functions and forms that only Malay literacy has so far fulfilled.

These informants' views suggest that Semai is valuable because it is the mother tongue, the language of tradition, culture and identity while Malay is needed for securing jobs, to get an education and participating in local communities and beyond. The different function each language has seems to motivate the Semai informants to maintain both Semai and Malay. The views expressed by the informants also suggest a general positive attitude towards bilingualism although their reasons for knowing Semai and Malay vary from pragmatic to sentimental reasons.

Contrary to the common misconception among the Malays as observed by Dentan (1997) that the Orang Asli in general are totally against any education, it is interesting to find Semai informants expressing the desire to be educated and to develop themselves as a community. Informants regard reading especially the local newspapers as one way of knowing what is happening in the country and the outside world. This is evident in Wah Idah's comments when describing her

aspirations for her five grandchildren,

I feel it is important to learn as many languages as possible... I am happy if all my grandchildren can go to Chinese or Malay schools... it is better for them to speak many languages... and get a good education. Later on they can find good jobs.

(Tapescript#9: p.4)

6.4 Language and identity

As a follow-up to the issues discussed in the second question I asked the third question, 'If people stop using Semai, do you think the identity of the Semai community can be maintained?'. This question was asked because I wanted to find out their views if language plays an important role in Semai identity and culture. Without exception all the respondents said that language and culture were closely related. Some informants felt that culture cannot be preserved without language. Informants also expressed that identity and culture are important aspects of their community and 'adat' (traditions). As to whether Semai identity is linked to language, answers varied among the informants.

Some informants believed strongly that Semai identity and their language are intrinsically linked. For example, Bah Ngah recalled a time when his Malay neighbour reproached him for using Semai with his children. He was at that time living in an urban area. This informant reported that he was advised instead to speak Malay to his children. The reason being that Malay was the school language and that he would be helping them by speaking Malay. This informant was adamant that he should continue using Semai in his home,

I told him that I am Semai so I want to speak Semai to my children... sometimes it is difficult [to communicate] because my children

know more Malay from school. I think it is important for me... and for my wife [that] we should at least try to speak Semai at home. If my children use a Malay word, I will tell them the Semai word instead.

(Tapescript#7: p.3)

Again, we find evidence of parents deliberately teaching their children and transmitting the language to their children. This is perhaps due to the integral part language plays in the Semai culture. Some informants reported that language is part of their culture and it should be passed on to the younger generations. These informants expressed their disapproval of urban Semai parents who do not teach their children the Semai language. They illustrated their point by citing examples of Semai people such as their children and relatives, who have moved away from the village. In their view, they had 'lost their culture' because they no longer speak Semai at home or to their children. This is evident in Wah Idah's comment,

I keep telling my daughters, if you stop speaking your own language, then you forget your own culture and you cannot pass it on to your children. Look at them (grandchildren) now... they are more like the Malays since they don't use our language anymore. Even their children don't know a lot of Semai, they only use Malay... even [speaking] to me.

(Tapescript#9: p.3)

There were informants who commented readily of the effects of exogamy especially marrying a Malay. One informant, Wah Ngaling, related a story about a relative who had inter-married and had moved out of the village. What was interesting in her story was her attitude toward her relative and children,

I still consider her a Semai because she speaks Semai to me...but sometimes she uses Malay words...but as for her children, I don't consider them Semai anymore. They follow their [Malay] father.

(Tapescript#5: p.3)

This informant does not accept her relative's children as Semai because they do not speak the language and her remark 'follow their father' or *masuk Melayu* (become Malay) suggests a change in identity. It is important to note that in Malaysia, it is required by law that any marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, regardless of sex, requires conversion authorised by the religious affairs department. Thus, an important factor leading to the loss of Semai identity is out-marriage especially to Malay spouses. The children of these marriages are raised as Malays and tend not to learn the Semai language. As pointed out by Bah Uda,

...once they marry others, especially the Malays...everything is forgotten. Our language, our traditions.

(Tapescripts#8: p.3)

Many informants in the interviews expressed their belief that part of being Semai is speaking their own language. Older informants asserted that since they have a language of their own, their identity should be expressed in that language. It is not surprising then that some informants insisted that to 'be Semai' was to retain the use of their language.

Among the younger informants, however, opinions varied about the role of language in their identity as a Semai. According to Bah Hindau, keeping Semai traditions are important elements in Semai identity,

I think that as long as they [those who live in urban centres] come back here once in a while and celebrate our festivals, they are still Semai. Knowing Malay is important especially if we want to find jobs. That does not mean we are being Malays...we are still Semai. Whether we like it or not, we have to know some Malay...or else we can't understand other people or read the newspaper. But for those who live outside [the village] and speak Malay all the time...I think it's a pity [they don't speak Semai] but they are still Semai to me.

(Tapescript#3: p.4)

It appears that younger members of the community do not consider language as an important marker of identity as do the older members. While the younger informants recognise the value of Malay especially for employment, they do not believe that using the Malay language means losing their identity. Bah Hindau, who also believes that cultural practices are important in retaining the Semai identity, expresses a similar view,

Semai is important to us...that is our language...just like the Chinese have their own language...but we also know Malay. What is wrong if we use Malay? That does not make us like them [Malays]...Only if a Semai marries a Malay, then I think they cannot celebrate our festivals anymore or eat the food that we eat...many restrictions for them. So I think, that our traditions are important...and that's what makes us Asli [Semai].

(Tapescript#3: p.3)

That these informants thought it was important to remark on exogamous marriages suggest that cultural attributes, especially religion, continue to weigh importantly in the negotiation of Semai identity and ethnic solidarity among the

Semai. In their view, by marrying a Malay and converting to Islam, one would assume a Malay identity. To the Semai, the Malays are conceived as people who adhere to a different culture and way of life that contrast with their own in particular. The informants appear to be acutely aware of themselves as an ethnic community and some of their comments suggest that they are clearly anxious to maintain their identity and language.

6.5 Future of Semai language

In order to probe my informants' opinions concerning the maintenance of the Semai language, I asked the last question, 'What do you think about the future of the Semai language?'. This question was asked in order to understand the Semai perception about the survivability of the Semai language. One senses great optimism among the Semai informants with regards to the longevity of their language. They seem to perceive that the Semai language is safe and in no danger of dying out. A majority of the informants expressed optimism regarding the survival of the Semai language, such as Wah Merdi who said,

As long as we speak it [Semai] I think the language will not die. Who knows what will happen in the future? It depends if we all still speak Semai, but I think it will remain for a long time.

(Tapescript#2: p.4)

Wah Rosma, who felt that learning the language is an important factor in maintaining Semai, demonstrates a similar sentiment,

I'm not sure if we can stop our people from using Malay... and I'm not sure if we can get our people, especially those who have left [the

village], to speak Semai. . . But I think if we learn the language [Semai], it will not die. . . especially if we teach our children to speak it.

(Tapescript#4: p.4)

Although the informants noted there is a possibility that more Malay will be spoken in the future, they cannot imagine their language disappearing for good. Only one informant expressed doubt if the Semai language would survive in the long-term,

It is difficult to say if our language can survive. . . it can be lost too. Not now, but maybe in the future. . . many more years. . . perhaps our language will be lost. My grandchildren's generation. . . maybe. You look at the Chinese and the Indians, their language will not die. . . it is taught in schools. Maybe if Semai is taught in the school, then it is difficult for the language to die.

(Tapescript#10: p.4)

The oldest informant, Bah Busu, who also felt that Semai could be 'lost' and no longer spoken by the future generations, expressed this fear that unless the language is taught in schools to Semai children, it would be difficult to maintain the language. He believed that this could be one way of keeping the language alive for the future generations. Informants, especially the older ones, took the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction that Semai is not taught in schools. While other minority languages, such as Chinese and Tamil are taught in some schools, they felt that Semai should be introduced in schools especially where there are Semai pupils.

There were a few informants who expressed concern over the gradual loss of their language. They see their language declining in use among the younger generation especially when Malay is the primary language in school. They are, however, not against education and progress. According to these informants, although their children are supposedly bilingual, they do not demonstrate fluent control of either Semai or Malay, but instead 'mix' the languages. This is evident in Wah Idah's comments,

I feel that the younger generations, like my grandchildren, don't speak Semai very well... sometimes I hear them speaking Semai, sometimes Malay. It is good if they can speak Malay well... that means they can do well in school... but what I see is that their Malay is not good too... or else they will pass all their exams. When they speak Malay, I hear Semai words too.

(Tapescript#9: p.4)

This phenomenon of 'mixed' language use that the older informants claimed the young people are demonstrating was the focus of my observation during my fieldwork in one Semai village. In the following section, I describe the results of my observations of language use in two settings. The observations primarily focused on when the two languages, Semai and Malay, were used by whom and for what purposes.

6.6 Observations of language use

The analysis in this section is based on the participant observation technique employed during the course of my fieldwork in the village. The data is organised according to my general observations in the village and observations of actual language use in one household and in two village meetings.

6.6.1 General observations

When I was not conducting interviews, I took the opportunity to walk around the Semai village to observe the villagers' daily activities and social interactions. Having met the community on previous visits, I was already a familiar face. Hence, there were occasions when I was invited into homes for informal interactions. This gave me valuable opportunities to know the people and their culture better. During these times I noted that almost all forms of literature, from the village signage to books kept in their modest homes, were in Malay. When I pointed out my observation to my hosts, they brought out copies of Christian hymnals and liturgy booklets and showed them to me. Upon close inspection I noticed that these materials were in both in Semai and Malay. I was told that these Christian materials were mainly used for their worship services in the village. According to one Semai Christian leader, the Methodist Mission which is run by the Semai, produces and uses Christian materials in the Semai language.

While I had informal discussions with the villagers, I also showed them a trilingual word-list booklet (Malay-Semai-Temiar) published by the JHEOA in 2001. Most of the villagers were interested in this book. While they read out the Malay word list with ease they had difficulties reading the Semai words. It was not surprising that most of them had difficulties pronouncing the Semai words on the list. According to one Christian leader, the orthography and translations used in the Semai Christian literature are based on the Malay language, which some linguists would point out, does not provide for the nasalised and other sounds not found in the Semai language. Most Christian Semai are acquainted with the Semai Christian literature more from memory than reading them. This seems to confirm some of the community leaders' comments that there is generally low Semai literacy in the community.

6.6.2 Focused observation

There were two domains in which I was noting actual language use during my fieldwork; the home and the village domain. As there was time constraints, I was only able to observe language use in one household, that is, of my host family, and secondly, in the community meetings held in the village. For both domains, I looked for intergenerational use of language and any evidence of 'code mixing'. Since code-switching between Semai and Malay is an easily-observed phenomenon for those who know either language, I was able to note any instance of code-switching especially intergenerational switching and between siblings.

At the time of my stay there were three generations living in the home of my host. As a guest and already a familiar visitor, I was able to observe intimate speech interactions between generations during meal times and family activities. This gave me the opportunity to observe language use between family members and between different generations. I noted that Semai was the primary language used in all interactions between generations such as parent-child and grandparent-grandchild. However, there was code mixing in the language use between the siblings who were aged between 14 and 22 years. It was noted that code-switching occurred in sibling interactions such as the example below taken from my field notes (Malay is underscored while Semai is italicized):

Brother: *Mong edn.* (It's me)

Sister: *Mong he'.* (There you are)

Brother: Ada bicaraa. (There's a meeting)

Sister: *Edn gaap teh.* Hek bawak biskut. (I'll boil the tea. You take the biscuits)

Some code-switching was also noted in one occasion where the family that I was observing was engaged in a serious discussion. The discussion centred on the

road accident that involved one of the family members. While the injured young man was recuperating, he was asked by older family members to recount how the accident occurred. It was interesting to note that he used both Semai and Malay to describe his ordeal. Malay words such as 'kenderaan' (vehicle), 'langgar' (crash) and 'kanan' (right), were used by the young man. The lengthy discussion about the youngster's treatment that followed was conducted in Semai interspersed with Malay words such as 'sakit' (painful), 'bedah' (surgery), 'darah' and 'dokter' (doctor) . It was only after a while that the whole incident was translated in Malay for my benefit. This observation of code-switching was also noted in two community meetings which I was invited to attend.

As a large percentage of Semai are Christians it was not unusual that religious meetings are often held in the village. Based on the nature of these meetings, I will regard this context as a community/church since 'church' is a social domain in which language use can be observed due to the organised nature of the proceedings. It was observed that in such settings, both Malay and Semai were used. I noted a consistent pattern of language use on both occasions. While all informal interactions such as jokes and gossip between members were generally in Semai, a greeting in Malay by the leader marked the start of the 'formal' meeting. The meeting continued with the reading of the Bible and prayer in Malay. The sermon, which was largely based on the Bible, was preached in Semai. The meeting ended with singing of Christian hymns in Malay and Semai.

The book of hymns that was used in the meetings contained bilingual Christian songs and prayers. When I asked members of the community if they usually sang in both languages, they reported that the inclusion of hymns in Malay is to encourage the younger people to attend their meetings. They explained that as more of the younger members are fluent in Malay the leaders hoped that by singing some choruses in Malay during meetings, younger members' attendance would increase. Christian Semai leaders say that there has been some success with this strategy

but they are looking into other ways to reach out to the younger members.

Data from observations made during my fieldwork suggests that in the realm of spoken language Semai use is dominant in the community and does not appear to be threatened by Malay. It would also appear that Semai is the unchallenged language of the home. If Malay was spoken at all, it is only a little as noted in my observations. However, it is not clear if Malay use is dominant in other informal contexts.

The data analysed in this chapter seems to support the pattern of language use described in the previous chapter. Informants report that Semai remains a dominant language in their daily interaction. While Semai is valued as a mother tongue, Malay is important to them not only for employment but as a tool in communicating with others outside the group and to fulfil their literacy needs. The findings suggest that Semai remains relatively strong but at the same time the people are motivated to maintain both languages. The implication of the results described in this chapter will be discussed next.

Chapter 7

Interpretation and discussion

In this chapter I synthesise the results of the quantitative and qualitative data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and discuss the findings in relation to the questions raised earlier. I first briefly review the purpose of the study and the methodology employed. I then highlight significant patterns of reported language use that have emerged from the data. I also consider the factors that seem to motivate mother tongue use in the community. In particular, I explore if perceived vitality, positive attitudes and a strong group identity play an important role in the Semai community and favour language maintenance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings against indicators from the literature that suggest Semai maintenance or shift. The discussion in this chapter is organised according to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1.

7.1 Review of research objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the reported language use patterns in one bilingual Semai community and factors that motivate mother tongue maintenance or shift. For this purpose, patterns of reported language use were investigated

according to domains. The choice of language within the home warranted closer examination as intergenerational transmission of the language is crucial in maintaining the mother tongue especially in minority contexts (Fishman, 1980, 2001; Brenzinger, 1992). As language maintenance and shift studies have also demonstrated that socio-psychological variables such as perceived vitality, attitudes and identities have an affect on minority language maintenance (Giles et al., 1977; Allard and Landry, 1986), this study sought to investigate the function of these variables in light of the Semai context.

Four research questions were formulated in order to investigate the current pattern of language use among members of one Semai community. Information on the individual self-reported language use in different settings and with different interlocutors, perceptions regarding Semai vitality, the extent of respondents' attitudes toward mother tongue usage and identification with the Semai language were principally collected through a written questionnaire constructed for this purpose. Semi-structured interviews of ten bilingual Semai speakers and observations of actual language use in the community were employed to augment the quantitative data as well as to check its validity. I now discuss the implications of the findings and organise the discussion according to the research questions presented in the first chapter.

7.2 Research question one

What is the pattern of language use in the Semai community? Is there intergenerational transmission of the language?

The first question is based on the assumption that trends toward either language maintenance or language shift are reflected in the choices the Semai people make regarding language use. The second question assumes that there is evidence for either maintenance or shift based on how the language is transmitted in

the community. Based on empirical evidence, the pattern of reported language use is described and indicators that suggest mother tongue transmission in the community are highlighted in the discussion below.

7.2.1 The pattern of language use at the community level

The domain analysis data reveal a clear distinction in the respondents' choice of language use. The use of Semai dominates in the intimate and ingroup domains whereas Malay is used in formal and outgroup domains. Respondents surveyed reported that they use Semai in private or intimate domains such as home and neighbourhood. On the other hand, Malay is used at school, work, market and with government officials. This finding is not unexpected given that Malay is the language for wider communication in multiethnic Malaysia. This also confirms Nik Safiah's (1981) observation of language use among the Orang Asli highlighted in Chapter 3. In some ways the segregation of the languages is there from the start of the acquisition experience for most Semai members. The language use data suggest that children in the community acquire Semai at home before Malay is later introduced in the school. This clearly indicates that Semai is transmitted to the younger generation.

Based on these findings, the results suggest that certain domains may well appear to be encouraging Semai maintenance such as the family-neighbour-community domains. Malay, on the other hand, is assigned quite specific and restricted domains. As might be expected, Malay is more likely to be used in 'public' and formal settings and with interlocutors who are regarded as outsiders. Based on the empirical data, it was found that, except for religion, there appears to be a division of language use between those domains that are Semai domains and those which are Malay domains. Although some code-switching exists in most domains, Malay does not appear to threaten the role of Semai in the home domain.

In the religious context, however, although respondents indicated that they are more likely to use Semai than Malay, supplementary data suggest that Malay plays a significant function. It was observed that Malay is valuable in this domain in that it fulfils literacy functions such as reading. For most Christian Semai reading the Bible and other religious literature is an integral part of their religious life. Malay is also used to mark formal proceedings in their worship services. Considering that most religious activities are held in the village, and that weekly religious services are an important social feature in the community, there are reasons to regard 'church' as an intimate, community-based domain. However, since Semai people are likely to use both languages in this domain, it is in this sense that this domain is classified as 'mixed'. The implications of this finding will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Languages in decline characteristically have a predominance of middle-aged or elderly native speakers, and in some instances, women were found to shift to the majority language faster than the men as reported in Gal's study (1979). However, the data in this study suggest that age and sex do not figure significantly in the pattern of language use. There was no significant evidence to suggest that there is greater use of Semai among the older respondents and less use of the mother tongue among the younger generation. This suggests that there is homogenous use of Semai within the community. This also shows that Semai use is relatively 'strong' among community members.

7.2.2 The pattern of language use at the individual level

Although the picture drawn at the individual level is suggestive rather than definitive, as it is based on interviews and observations, the qualitative data supports a similar pattern of language use at the micro level. All ten of the bilingual informants reported that they used Semai 'most of the time' in their daily interactions.

The informants also confirmed that Semai is learned at home as the first language and Malay is acquired through schooling and partly from their parents. In the family-neighbour-community domains Semai is the dominant language of the informants. Although Malay is a valued language among the Semai, it was not surprising that informants reported that Malay is usually reserved for inter-ethnic communication and for 'public' domains.

Although there is a clear distinction of language use between ingroup and out-group domains, younger informants revealed that a 'little Malay' is also used when communicating with their siblings. This linguistic behaviour is confirmed by observations of actual language use intra-generationally. It was observed that Malay loan words were used when teenagers communicated with each other. It is not clear at this point if Malay borrowings are merely to fill a lexical need or if this observation signals a general communicative strategy used by younger Semai bilinguals. Older informants appear to resort to using Malay within the family only when communicating with 'urban' members of the family, especially their grandchildren who live outside the village. As Semai is not transmitted to these children, communicating intergenerationally in such families, where Semai is the dominant language, would be potentially problematic. While the phenomena of code-switching and borrowing are usually observed in bilingual speakers it can potentially lead to shift in language use. Further discussion of Semai-Malay code switching will be made in relation to maintenance and shift later in this chapter.

7.2.3 The pattern of Semai transmission

Transmission across the intergenerational link is, according to Fishman (1990), the 'acid test' in assuring language maintenance or in reversing language shift in minority communities. In Fishman's (1991) discussion of the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), which is the cornerstone of his theory of Reversing

Language Shift (RLS), he asserted that intergenerational mother tongue transmission and language maintenance are not one and the same, related though they are to the total RLS enterprise. However, without intergenerational mother tongue transmission no language maintenance is possible, as Fishman puts it, 'that which is not transmitted cannot be maintained' (p.29).

There is evidence in the sample population to suggest that there is intergenerational transmission of the Semai language. A close examination of language use between family members confirms that Semai is the dominant language of the home. Like most minority contexts, Semai is learned in private and informal settings such as the home. Parents in this sample seem to play an important role in Semai language learning. The data reveal that Semai parents want their children to learn more Semai. While they want their children to speak the traditional language well, they do not want their children to be monolinguals. Instead they want their children to be bi- or multilinguals. This is a realistic outlook that most parents have adopted. Since Malay is the school language, most parents realise that their children will be increasingly fluent in the national language. Thus, there are deliberate efforts by parents to teach their children Semai in the home context.

It has been argued in the literature that if the language is not transmitted in the home, it is not likely to survive another generation. There is some evidence in this study to suggest that Semai children in urban centres either know very little Semai or have no knowledge of the mother tongue at all primarily because the language is no longer used at home. The same is true in mixed marriages where the shift to Malay, and to some extent to English, is also common, especially among some minority groups in Malaysia as reported by Lasimbang et al. (1992), Martin and Yen (1994) and David (2003) in the Introduction of her edited volume. This is supported by Romaine (2000) who observed that offspring in linguistically mixed marriages will eventually shift to the majority language. Given that Malay dominates in all the major institutional domains such as school, TV, radio, newspapers,

government administration, courts, work, it may well appear that maintaining the mother tongue in such settings is difficult for urban Semai members. It has been argued that once the choice to use the majority language as the home language is made, the break in intergenerational transmission will occur. Although the data gathered does not provide enough evidence for such conclusions to be made about Semai families in urban centres, one outcome for non-active transmission of the mother tongue is the inevitable shift to Malay.

7.2.4 Summary

In summary, the language use data suggest that the general pattern of reported language use is found to be generally homogenous in the community. Age does not figure prominently as a significant factor in the reported pattern of language use. While the difference between older speakers reporting the use of one language and younger speakers reporting more use of another language is interpreted as signaling a shift in progress, the absence of this indicator can mean that the language is being maintained. The results also show that Semai is the primary language of the community and it is the language of daily communication.

The pattern of reported language use in the home confirms that the mother tongue is being actively transmitted to the younger members of the family. While Semai dominates in ingroup contexts, such as home and community domains, Malay is mostly used in out-group and formal settings, especially in inter-ethnic communication. In this way, Malay takes on the functions typical of a High variety, while Semai takes on the Low functions. The allocation of functions for Semai and Malay in the community would appear to be balanced and in complementary distribution. The implication of these findings has a bearing in the type of societal bilingualism that exists in the community and this will be considered next.

7.3 Research question two

What type of societal bilingualism exists in the community? Is the community experiencing stable diglossia?

In the context of language shift, societal bilingualism, as argued by Fishman (1972b) and Fasold (1984), must exist at some point for language shift to occur. Fasold in stressing this point, maintains that ‘a virtual prerequisite for shift is bilingualism’ (1984: p.240). Indeed, studies have shown that bilingualism can ultimately lead to language shift. However, bilingualism alone is not a sufficient condition for shift. Romaine (2000) posits that other factors such as social conditions, attitudes and values in the minority group must be considered. Maintenance, on the other hand, is often a characteristic of bilinguals or multilingual communities. According to Fasold (1984) maintenance of the minority language can only happen when the community is diglossic. This means that language-maintaining communities reserve each language for certain domains with little encroachment of one language on the domains of the other.

7.3.1 Bilingualism with diglossia

It would seem that the major prerequisite for shift, from Semai to Malay is present in the bilingual community examined. However, the pattern of language use among the Semai people in this study suggests that there is functional division between Semai and Malay. It would appear that there is a ‘division of labour’ between the two languages in terms of language use in this community. If we apply Ferguson’s (1959) concept of diglossia, Semai appears to be the code choice of family, neighbourhood and community whereas Malay is the code used for education, government, work and other formal contexts. Additionally, Malay, is the language of literacy and is usually spoken when dealing with outsiders. In this schema according to Ferguson, the ‘Low’ variety (reserved for intimate domains) is usually only

spoken and is the language of home and community. Such is the case found in the Semai context.

Recalling Fishman's (1972b) argument stated in Chapter 2, it was pointed out that bilingualism is more likely to be stable if the two languages used served different functions and if each language is used in predictable domains, they are likely to be maintained. According to Fishman's (1980) taxonomy of the types of bilingual communities discussed earlier, the type of bilingualism that exists in the Semai community would then be that of 'bilingualism with diglossia' (p.28). This condition is regarded the most stable of all the types of bilingualism theorised by Fishman. He also emphasises that the attainment of diglossia, the use of different languages in different domains, is crucial to the maintenance of minority languages.

As the notion of diglossia has been expanded to include the complementarity in which two unrelated languages coexist, it has come to be regarded as a force of stability. According to Eckert (1980), it is assumed that in diglossia in its broader sense,

...division of labour allows the speakers to keep the two linguistic systems separate, and thus to retain the structural integrity of each language. Diglossia is frequently seen therefore as a structured means of reserving the vernacular for ingroup use while speakers use the standard language for entrance into the wider society.

(1980: p.1054)

There are two defining characteristics of diglossia, first identified by Ferguson (1959) and retained by Fishman (1967) in his redefinition of the term, which are stability and compartmentalisation of functions. While there is evidence from the language use data in this study to suggest that there are differential functions

for Semai and Malay, the question now is whether this diglossic-like relationship between the two languages is really stable.

7.3.2 Diglossia and stability

Romaine (2000) rightly pointed out that stability is a subjective notion. The literature does not define what 'long term' exactly means nor does it suggest causal factors that may destabilise a stable situation. Romaine argues that there are many bilingual situations, which do not last for more than three generations. In some cases, other 'intrusive' languages can swamp the indigenous language. There are also studies that found bilingualism in some communities stable over a long period of time, while in other cases it may rapidly or gradually give way to monolingualism in the majority language. Although the language use data show that Semai use is dominant in all age groups and in most ingroup domains, it is not clear if this 'stability' will be maintained in the long term. There are, however, indicators that may result in 'destabilisation' and cause shift away from the mother tongue. The discussion now turns to these indicators that are present in the Semai context.

Language maintenance and shift studies have demonstrated that shift can take place in the minority community if a number of domains are identified in which it is unclear which language is appropriate, or in which the language used is not the one traditionally expected in such a domain. Ferguson (1959) describes this condition as 'leaking' diglossia. Leakage in any of the domains of communication can be taken as a destabilisation of stable diglossic state. He adds that if a leaking diglossia is accompanied by increasing bilingualism it is quite likely to be indicative of shift. This was the experience of many indigenous communities (Bradley, 2002; Nettle and Romaine, 2000; Dorian, 1981) where the majority language eventually encroached into domains that were traditionally dominated by the mother tongue.

Although we do not find any evidence of significant ‘leakage’ in the Semai context in this study, one domain where both languages play a significant role is in the religious context.

Sociologists, such as Fasold (1984), consider religion a ‘High’ domain where the most likely language used is the High variety, in this case, Malay. However, while the highest language is usually reserved for religious activities, the Semai Christians in this study reported the use of Semai and Malay in practising their faith. Both languages are used in their worship services and bilingual literature is used among Christian Semai. However, the data obtained does not clearly show if more of one language is used in this domain. Although a close examination of the results show that the people are more likely to use Semai than Malay in the church domain and that a majority reported that Semai is preferred in religious practices, observations suggest that Malay figures prominently in their religious life. Malay is used when some degree of formality is observed in the worship service such as Bible reading and formal prayers.

It is in this domain of religious life where, potentially, ‘leakage’ or shift can occur. Although Malay encroachment is not evident from the data, the fact that most Semai people rely on Malay to fulfil their literacy needs suggests that Malay is central in the teaching and learning of the Christian faith. As informants pointed out, with literacy skills in Malay, they get to read the Bible. According to one Christian leader, most of the community members prefer to read the Bible in standard Malay even though parts of the Bible have been translated in the Semai language. One possible reason is that there is low Semai literacy in the community. The lack of a standard orthography and standardisation of the language makes reading in the Semai language all the more difficult. As pointed out by some informants that they would like to be literate in their mother tongue and want their children to be able to read Semai, literacy is a crucial aspect of language maintenance for this community.

7.3.3 Salient issues

Although some Semai informants expressed eagerness to acquire Semai literacy, two issues remain problematic. Firstly, the distinctive orthographic systems of Semai and Malay pose a problem for Semai literacy acquisition. Semai, being an Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer) language, differs distinctively from Malay, an Austronesian language (Benjamin, 2001). The spelling system most Semai are familiar with uses the Malay conventions, which do not accommodate certain features of the Semai language, for example, the nasalisation of words (see Benjamin, 1999 for a detailed description of the Semai language). The complexity of the language, thus, requires a re-learning of a new orthography. Although there has been some effort in promoting Semai literacy, mostly in the form of government-sponsored seminars (Kwek, personal communication) for community leaders, little else is being done to promote Semai literacy especially among the younger generation. Although Semai is reportedly being introduced in some schools, it has generally not been successful (Smith, 2003) primarily because of the lack of teachers who are knowledgeable in Semai orthography. However, it is worth pointing out that the Methodist Mission, which is run by the Semai, has gone to great lengths to establish some form of written Semai especially Christian materials. On the initiative of the Mission some basic Semai is also taught in the seminary. Although there are no figures for Semai literacy, according to one Christian Semai leader, few Semai people, mostly with religious training, are likely to have Semai literacy skills.

Secondly, linked to the problem of orthography is the issue of standardisation. A major disagreement among Semai leaders is the adoption of one Semai dialect in the standardisation drive. As Diffloth's (1977) research revealed, there are more than forty quite variable dialects in the Semai language, which makes standardisation a difficult process. However, with the help of the Summer Institute

of Linguistics, discussions among Semai leaders are under way to develop a version of the language that is accepted by the general Semai population (Hassan, personal communication). This is a potentially positive step towards language planning efforts and the teaching of Semai in schools. Indeed, this initiative is particularly important also as a language maintenance strategy especially when it involves developing language skills of young Semai speakers. Although there are positive signs that some of the language-related concerns of the Semai community are being addressed, the process of establishing Semai as a language of literacy, however, is a long one and requires concerted effort by the community and the government.

In discussing what makes a community 'stable' and the notion of 'bilingualism with diglossia', Fishman (1971a) cautions us that any society which produces functionally balanced bilinguals who use both languages equally well in all contexts would soon cease to be bilinguals. This is primarily because no society needs two languages for the same set of functions. He also says that bilinguals are rarely equally fluent in both languages about all possible topics. Although Semai language use appears to be strong in the religious life of Christian Semai, Malay undeniably serves an important function not only in their religious practices but also for their spiritual growth. As literacy in Malay increases and with the growing fluency of the younger generation in Malay, a shift of language use in this domain is potentially one outcome in the future.

7.3.4 Summary

The domain analysis suggests that Semai and Malay serve different functions and that each language is used in predictable domains. This suggests that the type of societal bilingualism that exists in the community examined is that of 'bilingualism with diglossia'. Using the broader notion of diglossia, Semai is considered the L

(low) code of family, neighbourhood and community, while Malay is the H (high) code for education, work and other formal contexts. Based on empirical evidence a tentative conclusion can be made whether the community is experiencing stable diglossia. The current pattern of reported language use indicates that the community is experiencing some degree of stability. As long as the crucial domains of home-neighbourhood-community is dominated by Semai and with little encroachment of one language on the domains of the other, stability can be maintained in the community. The discussion above also highlighted the fact that unless Semai is developed as a language of literacy, Malay will be the primary language that fulfils the people's literacy needs.

7.4 Research question three

What factors influence speakers' language use in the community? Do factors such as perceived vitality, language attitude and group identity contribute to language maintenance or shift in the Semai community?

Before trying to answer this question, it is necessary to understand the Orang Asli people from a cultural perspective. Until recently, they did not think of themselves as an 'ethnic group', only as 'not-Malays' (Dentan et al., 1997: p.35). In describing their own culture, Dentan (1975) notes that the Orang Asli people persistently contrast how they do things with how Malays do them. Nowadays, the Orang Asli regard themselves as a distinct social and cultural grouping. As explained in Chapter 3, their *bumiputera* status is uncertain and they are often under pressure to conform, especially through conversion to Islam and the adoption of a Malay lifestyle.

7.4.1 Preserving Semai cultural identity

Perhaps the major underlying reason Orang Asli resist adopting Islam is that they simply do not want to 'become Malays'. Most Orang Asli prefer to live among their own people, and they derive a sense of security from being part of their community and kinship network. Furthermore, they do not generally like Malays and have no desire to associate more closely with them. Orang Asli who convert to Islam often find themselves cut off from their own people but not fully accepted by their Malay co-religionists (Mohd Tap, 1990). Orang Asli also often mention food restrictions as a reason for rejecting conversion. They cannot eat with other Orang Asli because of Muslim food prohibitions. Traditional Semai members insist that they could not survive if they gave up the foods conversion would require. Fasting all day, another requirement during the Muslim fasting month, would also be very difficult for them. Thus many Orang Asli actively resist Islamisation because converting to Islam is like stepping into the abyss between two societies. Furthermore it does not help when the government promotes the use of Arabic in connection with the policy of Islamisation of the indigenous people.

If the government efforts are successful, as Rachagan (1990) cautions, 'the Orang Asli will cease to exist by a process of assimilation with the Malay community' (p.110). Presumably, when such assimilation is complete they will enjoy the special privileges that are accorded the Malays. However, the Orang Asli, like most indigenous minorities, are strongly opposed to giving up their religion, customs, languages and identities. The expressions of resistance to assimilating into the Malay majority and be identified as Malays, play perhaps a crucial role in their efforts in maintaining their language.

It is not unexpected then that most Semai regard themselves as fundamentally opposite to Malays (Dentan, 1975) and are very aware of the Malay perception of them and of the Orang Asli in general. In their effort to distinguish themselves

from the Malays, Semai sense of identity is intertwined with language and culture. Language functions not only as an ethnic marker but also as a way of uniting as a community. Given the significance language play in their lives, it is possible that the motivation to keep their culture alive may affect their language choice. Although the literature suggests that socio-psychological variables such as vitality, attitudes and identity factors are crucial in understanding linguistic behaviour, in the Semai context these factors should not be seen in isolation as one factor hinges and impacts the other. Nonetheless, the following discussion will highlight the factors that were examined in this study in an attempt to understand the people's strong use of Semai.

7.4.2 Perceived vitality

If we were to apply the concept of 'objective' vitality, based on socio-structural variables of status, demography and institutional support (Giles et al., 1977) in the Semai context, it would appear that the strength of the group's vitality is low. Considering the non-status of the Semai language in the larger Malaysian context, the small size of the Semai population, the lack of institutional support for the Semai language it would be expected that the group's chances of maintaining their language are slim. However, according to sociolinguistic literature, equally important in minority language maintenance is the group members' subjective assessment of their own-group vitality (Bourhis et al., 1981). In other words, the perception the group has of itself can be supportive or can undermine the value associated with their language and ultimately their own use of their language. This is supported by Giles and Johnson (1981) who asserted that 'the higher a subordinate group perceives its vitality to be, the more likely its members will accentuate their ethnolinguistic features in interethnic encounters' (p.220).

However, it must be pointed out that any attempt to measure perceptions is problematic because of the subjective nature of the topic. In this study, it was difficult to examine how Semai speakers perceived the vitality of their language. An attempt was made to gain insights into individuals' perceptions of their language by requiring the respondents to respond to statements about language maintenance. 'Vitality' was measured by calculating respondents' responses to the items in the questionnaire. Although the weight for each item is relative and may not accurately reflect the real value of the respondents' perception of the group's language vitality, the results allow some meaningful inferences.

The data suggest that among the people surveyed there is generally a strong perception of Semai vitality. The mean score for perceived vitality fell within the 'high' range which indicates that for many informants in this study, the common perception is that Semai vitality is high. What accounts for this perception can be explained by examining the responses to the individual items. We find that a large majority of the respondents believe that Semai is important and must be maintained. The results show that informants believe Semai is relevant and applicable in their daily lives. The fact that Semai is sufficient to meet their daily communication needs probably explains why they also regard the language as suitable for all occasions. Clearly the language is valued not just as a mother tongue but also as a means of communication, and the community should all the more maintain it. Although there are many who think that government support and school are important in maintaining Semai, still others believe that the survival of the language is in the hands of the community. This perception that their language, in spite of the increasing importance of Malay, is viable and vital may explain their choice of language use at home and the emphasis they place on the young members knowing the language.

7.4.3 Language attitude

In discussing the course of shift, Paulston (1994) points out that when languages are in the progress of shifting, especially if one language looks as if it will not survive, people associated with the languages in question tend to take passionate attitudes toward them. Therefore, one can expect highly polarised rhetoric and contradictions between rhetoric and actual behaviour in the language communities in question. In the Semai context, while respondents rated 'high' on the range references for attitudes, they also exhibited active use of the language. Validation of this positive attitude toward Semai was made through actual observation of Semai use in the community. The observations show that Semai is indeed used as the primary language in the community. Additionally, most informants interviewed appear to rely on Semai as their principal means of communication and therefore demonstrated positive attitude towards Semai use.

The generally positive attitude found in this community toward Semai is supported by the community's belief that it is the group's responsibility to maintain their language, especially parents. A large percentage reported that parents should speak and teach their offspring the mother tongue. Results of parents' attitudes also support this finding where they see themselves as duty bound to support bi-or multilingualism but at the same time, encourage their children to be more proficient in Semai. How parents view their role as transmitters of the mother tongue is often cited as crucial especially in setting the policy of language use at home (Evans, 1996).

In Sercombe's (2003) study of multilingualism and language attitudes among a small community of Penans in Brunei, he found that the Penans show a flexible outlook towards group members' language behaviour as well as their language's position and future. He posits that 'these kinds of attitudes are not exclusive to language and can also be perceived in their disposition towards cultural beliefs'

(p. 160). Nonetheless, Sercombe concludes that the Penans remain positive about their own language and its future, and this was reflected in its continued transmission from parents to children and its use as their community language. However, in Kershaw's (1994) study of language shift among the Dusun in Brunei, it was found that parents have unwittingly aided in the progressive demise of Dusun by encouraging the children to use Malay. They see Malay as a route to academic and material success in Brunei and as a result, parents have shifted to Malay even in the home (in Sercombe, 2002).

Although most Semai realise the value of the national language in the Malaysian context, their mother tongue still figures prominently in their concept of self and community. The parental and community support in maintenance efforts probably explains why most informants believe that Semai will continue to be spoken in the future. A similar attitude is found among most of the informants interviewed who expressed optimism that the language will survive in the long term. Many are of the opinion that their language is not threatened and is in no danger of disappearing.

The optimism expressed by the respondents about the future of their language cannot necessarily be interpreted as an indicator of language maintenance. Fishman (1991) cautions against such reasoning, he says that, '[t]he road to societal language death is paved with the good intentions called "positive" attitude' (p.9). Although Fishman is warning about language death for languages far more threatened than Semai, the point holds that positive attitudes must be coupled with actions which will lead to continued use of the language, especially by young people in the community.

For most young Semai in this study there is no evidence in the data to suggest that they are using more of the national language than their mother tongue, although their attitude towards Semai is somewhat ambivalent. It is also interesting to find that a majority of the respondents feel that young Semai do not like to

speak Semai. The general complaint, as some informants reported, is that the younger members 'mixed' their codes. This is interpreted by the older generation as not good for Semai maintenance, thus, parents have a key role as 'gatekeepers' of the mother tongue.

For many speakers, structural purity of a language and lexical purity in terms of vocabulary is part and parcel of a language's survival (Burridge, 2002). According to Dorian (1998) this tendency to purism is typically very strong within revival and revitalisation movements. In particular, she argues that there is an unrealistic insistence that the current-day language reflects norms of the past and remains uncontaminated from outside elements. Puristic attitudes, that is the desire to keep a language pure and free from elements from the dominant language, is understandable, especially in a situation of potential language shift to the dominant language. However, in a language survival context, they can have the disastrous effect of discouraging younger speakers, who feel they do not speak an authentic form of the language if they do not speak the forms that older speakers in the community are insisting on. The result can be that they give up altogether and opt for the dominant language, where they do not experience the same pressures. As Dorian (1998) concludes, linguistic straight-jacketing never works, but in the case of language death 'it can be the kiss of death for a language which is under threat' (p.218).

In the case of the Semai community examined, only one informant reported that the language of the older speakers appear to be 'purer' than the younger speakers. The older informants commented on the growing number of lexical borrowings from Malay but they appear to be tolerant of the influence of Malay on the Semai language. Although there are reports that parents constantly remind or teach their children the correct Semai word in instances where a Malay word is used, parents also realise that expressions for new concepts and objects particularly those not associated with the Semai culture must come from Malay. It may well appear that

the absence of purist attitudes in this community may indeed work positively for the maintenance of the language.

7.4.4 Identity

Like many ethnic groups, Semai respondents in this study believe that their language is the best medium for preserving and expressing their culture and identity. Language is seen as a symbol of Semai identity and this is clearly suggested in the survey and interview results. When asked 'if Semai is a mark of identity for the Semai community', an overwhelming majority in the sample responded positively. Similarly, a large majority believes that the use of the language can maintain their ethnic identity. Some informants when interviewed asserted that that part of being Semai is speaking their own language. Older informants stressed that since they have a language of their own, their identity should be expressed in that language. When asked 'if the people stopped using Semai altogether, do you think the culture and identity of the Semai community can be maintained', one informant, Wah Idah said, '... if you stop speaking your own language, then you forget your own culture' (Tapescript#9: p.3). This informant goes on to say that their culture cannot be passed on to the younger generation without passing on the language. Clearly the comment here suggests that Semai culture can only be expressed in Semai language. Although this is an isolated comment, the general sentiment expressed by the people is that Semai traditions, customs and way of life are connected to their language.

Younger informants, however, do not share the strong views expressed by the older generation. Instead, they believe that observing cultural practices are more important in defining the Semai identity. Theirs is a pragmatic outlook where the use of Malay, especially in urban centres, need not necessarily imply a shedding of one's identity. They seem to accept, with some resignation, that urban Semai

members will eventually lose the mother tongue to Malay. However, on the issue of identity, they point out an important factor leading to the loss of Semai identity, which is out-marriage especially to the Malays. As one young adult informant commented, 'only if a Semai marries a Malay... they cannot celebrate our festivals anymore (Tapescript#3:p.3) which refers to aspects of culture loss when the practice of Semai traditions ceases in mix-marriages especially when a Semai converts to Islam upon marrying a Malay. Other informants also pointed out that the children of these marriages are raised as Malays and tend not to learn the Semai language. It would appear then that the main focal point of Semai identity is related to cultural attributes and those who no longer observe 'traditional' practices, including speaking the Semai language, were generally regarded as changed in their ethnic status.

On this complex issue of language use and identity, Fasold (1984) stresses that language shift will occur if, and to the extent that, a community desires to give up its identity as an identifiable sociocultural group in favour of an identity as a part of some other community. However, the Semai vision of their future, that is, integration as a distinct and respected community in Malaysia's ethnically diverse society (Nicholas, 1993), is different from the government's vision, which is assimilation into the Malay population. As the physical differences between Semai and Malays are slight at best, the continued use of their language is in some respects an assertion of their identity as a separate ethnic group.

7.4.5 Summary

In an attempt to understand what motivates a minority community to maintain its mother tongue, the literature has suggested that socio-psychological factors have a significant influence in predicting language behaviour. The findings suggest that there exists a high perception of Semai vitality among the respondents and

a positive attitude towards their language. For many respondents, language is a mark of their identity and language plays a central role in preserving their culture and traditions. The combination of these three factors would probably explain the community's active use of the language and their deliberate efforts in maintaining the Semai language. This strategy has enabled them to maintain their identity and cultural continuity in spite of the government pressure to assimilate.

7.5 Research question four

Is the Semai language being maintained or is the community experiencing language shift?

In answering this final question, I will discuss significant findings against indicators from the literature that suggest Semai maintenance or shift. As language maintenance and shift are the long term collective consequences of consistent patterns of language choice (Fasold, 1984), a community's continued use of the minority language, is undoubtedly a sign of maintenance.

7.5.1 Primary language

There are indicators that have emerged from this study that suggest that Semai is being maintained in the community. One of the important indicators is the actual use of the language in daily interactions. Respondents in this study report that Semai is actively used in the community in all age groups and regardless of gender. It has been argued that in order for minority languages to be maintained, the crucial domains of language use are those which concern communication within the group. There is empirical evidence to suggest that there is extensive use of the language in majority of the ingroup domains investigated such as in the family and community contexts. The language use data in this study shows that Semai is

the primary language used among the nuclear and the extended family members. As for the language use in the village Semai remains the dominant language.

7.5.2 Transmission of Semai language

A crucial strategy in any language maintenance effort is the transmission of the language to the younger generation. The fact that intergenerational transmission is the bastion of mother tongue maintenance has been emphasised by many sociolinguists. It has been pointed out that only when a language is being passed on in the home is there some chance of long-term survival for the mother tongue. It was found that Semai parents deliberately choose to speak Semai with their children although they know the importance of being proficient in the national language. As one mother said, 'if we don't teach them our language, they will not learn it' (Tapescript#4:p.3). Another informant likewise claimed that, 'our own language is an important part of our culture' (Tapescript#7:p.4). This is a theme repeated by older informants who feel that it is their responsibility to maintain their language by using it within the community and transmitting it to their children. Additionally results of language use at home supports the claim that Semai is being transmitted to the younger generation. Thus another indicator of maintenance in the community is that there are conscious efforts to pass on the Semai language to the younger generations.

7.5.3 Implications for language maintenance

Active use of the language and intergenerational transmission are indeed crucial in language maintenance efforts. This is reiterated by many researchers in the field, especially by Fishman (1991) who stressed the significance of these two conditions in his scale to measure the degree of disruption and shift in a community. In his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), Fishman argues that only

when a language is passed on in the home, there are some chances of long-term survival. In GIDS Stage 6 on the bottom-up scale of 8 to 1 has been found to be the important stage of the 'intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood-community, the basis of mother tongue transmission' (p.466). It is this stage that Fishman describes as the threshold level for language maintenance. According to him, 'the lion's share of the world's intergenerationally continuous languages are at this very stage and they continue to survive and, in most cases, even to thrive, without going on to subsequent ('higher') stages' (p.92). Fishman goes on to argue that if this stage is not satisfied in a community, all else can amount to little more than bidding time.

If the Semai community is ranked based on the language use data on Fishman's GIDS, the Semai community would be classified as being at the 'safe' level of Stage 6. Fishman states that 'at this stage the threatened language ... is the normal language for informal interaction between and within all three generations of the family' (p.92). In addition, the threatened language at Stage 6 must be the language of inter-family interactions. Findings in this study suggest that these conditions exist in the sample where there is intergenerational use of the Semai language in families in this community, and the general pattern of Semai use in the home and between all three generations is still relatively intact.

The main criticism against Fishman's GIDS is that his scale is largely based on the Hebrew RLS model, which has been revived as a national language. As such it may not be useful for any indigenous languages in which the language is in gradual decline and may not be a national language. Furthermore the concepts of function and power and their effects as a cause of shift are not addressed in the model. Thus the GIDS 'scale' may not be the optimal measurement of language maintenance as it is primarily focused on the reintroduction of a language where language shift has already occurred. Although some aspects of the GIDS are controversial (Spolsky and Shohamy, 2001) as noted above, the model has been applied to a number of

minority languages around the world, both as an instrument for analysis and as a programme for efforts at reversing language shift. There is widespread agreement that it draws attention to the most important element of language maintenance, that is, the normal intergenerational mother tongue transmission.

7.5.4 Signs of potential shift

While current intergenerational language transmission seems to be relatively intact, the results show that a small percentage report some degree of code-switching. Although the empirical data show that Semai is the dominant language in private settings, the data also suggest that code-switching occurs in most domains in varying degrees. The phenomenon of code-switching is described as ‘a range of language (or dialect) alternation and mixing phenomena whether within the same conversation, the same turn, or the same sentence-utterance’ (Milroy and Matthew, 2003: p.209). Reports of the use of Semai and Malay when communicating with Semai-speaking interlocutors show that some degree of code-switching is present in the community. For example, in the community domain 29.4% reported that they use Semai and some Malay when communicating with their neighbours in the village, 3.1% reported the use of Malay and some Semai and 1.3% reported the use of Semai and Malay.

Although the data does not allow further analysis to determine the extent of code-switching among the population, observations suggest that some members in the community seem to have Semai word-finding problems. According to Appel and Musyken (1987) the loss of lexical skills in the minority language goes hand in hand with another phenomenon, such as the process of relexification where words from the dominant language are replacing words in the minority language. This is evident in the Semai context where some informants reported the use of Malay words in Semai discourse whenever they cannot recall Semai words.

Observations of language use show that the influence of Malay within the linguistic features of Semai especially lexical borrowings is evident especially among the younger generation. It has been noted that as a language loses territory in a given community, speakers will become less proficient in it. In other words, children in linguistic minority groups will often speak the language of the group less well than their parents. What effect code-mixing and borrowings have towards the process of shift for this community is uncertain and needs further research. This phenomenon, however, does not appear a threat to the mother tongue primarily due to the strong indicators of Semai maintenance discussed earlier.

7.5.5 Summary

Based on the reported language use data a shift away from the mother tongue is not progress among the Semai. Although there are indicators found in this study to suggest that the community is currently maintaining their language and does not appear to be experiencing a shift to the majority language, Malay, it is not possible to predict Semai language use and maintenance in the future. The speakers of the language will have to decide for themselves whether or not they continue to use the language and transmit it to future generations. There is, however, no clear evidence from the data that Semai speakers in the sample population are about to give up their language in favour of the national language in the near future. In the final chapter, I discuss factors that seem to contribute to language maintenance in this community. In concluding this thesis I will also summarise the findings, highlight the limitations of this study and suggest areas for further research.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study with a summary of the findings that have emerged. This is followed by a discussion of the factors that seem to play a significant role in Semai maintenance for this community. Next, I explore the implications for the future of the Semai language. There are several limitations in this study which I will highlight and I conclude this final chapter by suggesting directions for future research in language maintenance and shift studies in general and within the Semai context in particular.

8.1 Summary of findings

In this study an attempt was made to examine whether one Semai community is maintaining its mother tongue or shifting to the majority and national language, Malay. In order to determine language maintenance or shift of the mother tongue, the people's pattern of language use and attitudes toward the Semai language were examined. The results show some interesting findings. As an increasing number of indigenous minority communities around the world face the impending loss of their languages, it is encouraging to find that the Semai language is being maintained

in this community. There are three significant indicators that have emerged from this study that suggest shift is not in progress in this community.

8.1.1 Stable diglossia

Firstly, studies on language maintenance and shift have found that stable situations of bilingualism are predicated on domain separation and diglossic patterns of communication. While bilingualism, as it has been argued, is always a necessary condition for language shift, stable diglossia does not always result in shift. Stable diglossic communities demonstrate that when the two languages are not in competition but have their separate domains of use and functions, the mother tongue is able to survive. Empirical data from this study reveal that the crucial aspect of Semai-Malay bilingualism in this community is diglossia. The pattern of language use show that while Semai is used for the L (lower) functions of daily interactions within the group, Malay is reserved for H (high) functions of communication. Semai is the language of daily communication in the home and community domains and is more likely to be used in intimate and informal contexts. Malay, however, is reserved for formal and public domains.

In addition, Fishman (1991) stresses functional differentiation as fundamental in maintaining stable bilingualism in a community. When diglossia is stable, each language has its own set of functions and space without threatening the other. Such is the case in the Semai context. Although it was found that there is some degree of code-switching, the language use data suggest that Semai and Malay have their own quite separate domains of use. Semai is only spoken and is widely used as a means of communication between the young and their relatives at home and in the village. Malay is read and written and is primarily spoken with when dealing with non-Semai speaking outsiders. According to Fishman (1989) this sort of compartmentalisation seems necessary if languages are to survive alongside

one another. As Fishman puts it, 'without compartmentalisation of one kind or another . . . the flow process from language spread to language shift is an inexorable one' (p.29).

From the results of domain analysis, there is evidence to suggest a functional specialisation between the languages. To use Fishman's (1972a) term, a *diglossic* relationship exists between Semai and Malay. Additionally, the pattern of language use in the sample population supports Fishman's description of 'bilingualism with diglossia' discussed in Chapter 2. Thus the findings suggest that the current picture of the language situation in the Semai context appears to be stable. This achievement of stable diglossia is at the heart of many language maintenance efforts especially in small speech communities.

8.1.2 Intergenerational transmission

It has been argued in the literature that intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue is the bastion of language maintenance strategy. Studies have shown that languages are at risk when they are no longer transmitted naturally to children in the home by parents or caretakers. Transmission across the intergenerational link, as it has been argued, is thus fundamental in maintaining the mother tongue. It was found that Semai is transmitted intergenerationally and remains the dominant language of the home. Virtually all respondents reported that they learn Semai in the home context and that it is the primary language of communication in the home. This suggests that there is natural transmission of the language to the children.

One reason that the language is being passed on to the younger generation is evident in the parents' attitude to Semai learning. It was found that Semai parents are keen to have their children learn more Semai and to speak the language well. As there is a lack of institutional support for formal Semai learning, parents appear

to be taking the responsibility of teaching their children the mother tongue and this is supported by the community that believes the future of their language is in their hands. This finding is significant, as many studies have linked home use of the mother tongue and intergenerational transmission of the traditional language. Clearly for a language to be maintained over any period of time, it must be transmitted from one generation to the next.

8.1.3 Motivations for language maintenance

Thirdly, in the social psychological dimension of the study, factors such as vitality perception, attitude and identity were found to be instrumental in favouring Semai maintenance. The results suggest that there is a common perception among the sample population that Semai language is vital and relevant for their daily interactions. This is supported by the positive attitudes and strong identity link towards their language. It has been discussed that the way the community perceives its language is important as to whether they retain their language or not. High-vitality groups are believed to be more likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings.

For most Semai in this study, it was found that ethnicity issues weigh significantly in their desire to establishing their reputation as a distinctive community. The symbolic value members attach to their language may affect their perception of Semai vitality and attitudes to Semai use. As language is an important symbol of their identity, it is highly valued. This perception therefore serves to motivate Semai language use. In some ways it explains why the people show such surprisingly strong resistance against the more powerful dominant language Malay. There may be other reasons underlying the people's motivations for language choice but this study found that the three socio-psychological factors suggested in the literature are useful in understanding language behaviour among the Semai.

8.2 Factors contributing to Semai maintenance

Investigations in language contact situations in the past decades have tried to capture the main factors in explaining the maintenance and shift phenomena. Several variables such as geography, indigenusness, group membership, religion, sex, age, social status, occupation and rural versus urban residence were found to be decisive factors. In this study I believe that there are three factors that are of significance in this community that currently contribute to the maintenance of the Semai language. In this section I discuss how the demography of the speech community, their values and attitude towards the language and the religious homogeneity found in the community can contribute to Semai language maintenance.

8.2.1 Demographic factors

In discussing factors favouring language maintenance, Holmes (2001) points out that demographic factors are relevant in accounting for the speed of language shift or the maintenance of the mother tongue. The urban-rural differences are crucial in determining whether a community is able to retain their language or shift to the dominant language. Studies have shown that resistance to language shift among minority communities tends to last longer in rural than in urban areas. This is partly a reflection of the fact that rural groups tend to be isolated from the centres of political power for longer, and they can meet most of their social needs in the ethnic or minority language (Holmes, 2001). In their study of language shift among Nahuatl-speaking communities in Central Mexico, Hill and Hill (1977) found that the settlement of rural people in cities and industrial suburbs fostered shift toward Spanish and away from their mother tongue. Generally, rural groups demonstrate a tendency to preserve a minority language much longer than urban groups in their natural surroundings.

The geographical distribution of minority group members affects the maintenance and shift of the mother tongue considerably as well. As long as they live concentrated in a certain area, minority groups have better chances of maintaining their language. The importance of this factor can be illustrated with examples from all over the world. For example, in Quebec where many French-speaking Canadians are concentrated, French is a vital language, while in other parts of Canada, where the speakers of French live more dispersed, there is a tendency to shift away from French (Appel and Musyken, 1987). Similarly, Li (1982) in this study on language shift of Chinese Americans, found that third-generation Chinese Americans living and residing in Chinatowns shifted substantially less often towards English than their age-mates living outside Chinatowns.

In the case of the Orang Asli, about forty percent of the community in general today are rural peasants and not deep forest dwellers. Dentan et al. (1997) believe that this percentage will increase as logging, 'development' and forced regroupment advance into the interior. Under the regroupment scheme the government plan is to settle-down the Orang Asli in one place. As explained earlier, the schemes are intended to be relatively self-contained communities with an administrative centre surrounded by family farms and communal plots of forest and pasture land for grazing livestock. Most west Semai villages are located in semi-rural areas where there is easy access to major roads leading to urban centres. This accessibility enables many who have jobs in these towns to commute daily by motorcycles from their villages. Others who have jobs further away return to the village on weekends.

Related to this, then, is the communication patterns and the absence of daily social pressure to use the majority language. In Semai villages, when neighbours are members of the same ethnic and linguistic group, as they always are, there is not much need to use Malay. Where the normal family organisation is the extended family with grandparents and unmarried relatives living in the same house as the nuclear family, there is good reason to continue using the mother tongue at

home. By not severing ties with their village and community, the young adults who work outside the village area are able to maintain close relationships with their families and community. It can be argued that these people are able to maintain their use of the mother tongue because of the location of the villages which seems conducive to the maintenance of a sense of community identity and consequently the maintenance of their language. This accounts for the general perception among the Semai people in this study that Semai is still a viable language for their daily interactions. In other words, Semai is sufficient in meeting most of their communicative needs.

While the location of Semai villages and the geographic concentration of the speech community are significant factors in favouring the maintenance of their language, out-migration is likely a factor for language shift among the Semai in urban centres. According to Nicholas (2001) out-migration among the Semai is usually motivated by economic reasons. The Orang Asli in general have few job options in the settlements. Besides selling forest products, another source of income is wage labour. A study of west Semai economic activities (Dental et al., 1997) showed that a few west Semai members are salaried, mainly in the JHEOA, army and police, but most wage-earners are day labourers on non-Semai vegetable farms, tea plantations and rubber estates. For others, with their limited education and skills, they are generally engaged in the lowest of the menial jobs with little prospect for job improvement or job satisfaction (Mohd Tap, 1990). Therefore, in search for economic, educational and social success an increasing number of young adults have moved away from the village and chose to relocate in urban centres.

For these Semai people the prospect of maintaining the mother tongue in their new environment is not favourable. Although there are no studies on language use among urban based Semai, the language use data in this study suggests that some degree of language shift has occurred among the Semai people who have moved to the cities and towns. The fact that Semai grandparents are not able to

communicate with their urban grandchildren in Semai indicates that a shift has occurred. While Semai grandparents in this study would have preferred to use Semai with their grandchildren who are brought up in urban centres, the lack of proficiency and, for some, no knowledge of the Semai language, forces the older generation to use Malay in their attempt to communicate with these grandchildren. This could mean that there is a disruption in the transmission of the mother tongue to the third generation. This is a clear indication that the shift process has taken place for Semai members in urban settings. While most respondents reported that they are able to speak Semai with their adult relatives who are living in urban areas, it is apparent that the language is no longer a primary language in urban Semai homes and that it is not transmitted to the next generation.

When Bah Ngah shared his brief experience living in an urban setting, the pressure to use Malay instead of Semai is apparent. Not only did he realise the influence of school on his children's language use, he also experienced social pressure to use Malay with his children. Indeed, the Semai people living in urban centres are pressured in various situations to use the majority language daily, which eventually weakens the position of the mother tongue in the home. To a large extent it is more difficult for these Semai members to maintain their mother tongue. When the language of wider communication in ethnically diverse Malaysia is Malay, the trend is to shift especially if economic and social success is the desired goals. This is the pattern generally found in studies of other minority ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia (David, 2002, 2003) and Borneo (Martin, 1995) where members of the ethnic groups are more likely to shift to a shared common lingua franca, such as Malay, and to some extent, English, especially in urban settings.

8.2.2 Attitudes and values

From the government's perspective, the crucial cultural issues concerning the Orang Asli are national integration with assimilation, common identity, the promotion of an acceptable religion and a modern lifestyle. The Orang Asli reactions to these policies have often involved a mixture of hostility and resistance, on the one hand, and dependency and acceptance, on the other. The Orang Asli are, after all, the concern of the JHEOA which exercises substantial control over all facets of their current lives and future (Endicott, 1987). The assimilation of the Orang Asli would appear to mean not only the disappearance of their distinctive identities, cultural traditions, knowledge and ways of life but also movement into the lowest and most disadvantaged place within the larger society (Dentan, 2000). As explained earlier, the Orang Asli do not want to become Malays nor want to be absorbed in to the Malay population. At the same time these people have had little opportunity to develop or assert cultural identities in the modern context.

As a result of these policies and like many indigenous peoples resisting the imposition of political control, economic intrusion and environmental transformation, issues such as ethnicity and identity have become important matters to the Semai people. In their effort to distinguish themselves, some Semai people have come to look upon their customs and way of life in a new manner. Previously implicit cultural patterns and traditions have become objectified or externalised, and this includes language use. Language is important for the Semai because it is a means of cultural identity, a link with their heritage and as a symbol of group identity.

For many minority groups, pride in their ethnic identity and their language can be important factors which contribute to language maintenance, provided there is a strong community to support and encourage these attitudes. A prevalent tendency found among the informants in this study is that they seem to maintain a distinction between 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group). They seem to define

themselves in relation to other ethnic groups in the wider Malaysian context. In their explanations why Semai is important to them, the use of *own* language was a key factor for many of the informants. This suggests that they see themselves as a distinct group. The maintenance of Semai identity and cultural intactness becomes all the more important for the community, and language is one way of expressing their identity. This is supported in the literature where language and identity are more often inextricably linked in traditional societies.

Clearly, the issue of language and identity is closely linked to Semai preservation of their culture and traditions. By keeping their language alive, they are in a way helping to preserve their culture. To some extent, this is a matter of cultural survival. In this respect the assimilationist policy of the government may have a reverse effect for some Semai people and this is manifested in their language choice.

In discussing the course of language shift, Fishman (2001) points out that shift tends to be slower among communities where the minority language is highly valued. When the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer. Additionally, positive attitudes support efforts to use the minority language in a variety of domains, and this helps people resist the pressure from the majority group to switch to their language. Despite efforts at acculturation and assimilation, which are the current values of official government policy toward the Orang Asli, the Semai people are trying to develop strategies to maintain their culture and identity, and this is manifested in their choice of language and in the attitudes and values they hold toward their mother tongue.

Given the powerful symbolic importance of language, it is possible that the continued use of their language may be seen as a symbol of resistance. Unfortunately, this comes at a cost; the Semai youth have relatively poor qualifications and underachievement in schools is an issue the government is trying to address (Dentan, 2000). As a result, the younger generation often finds that it is able

to get low-status jobs with little possibility for advancement. Their allegiance to mother tongue maintenance does not necessarily affect literacy in Malay or the desire to learn the national language. According to Dentan (2000) the issue among the youths is the lack of motivation in achieving academic success.

8.2.3 Religious homogeneity

Another factor which may contribute to language maintenance for this community, is the religious uniformity of the sample population and the role language plays in their religious life. Most sociolinguists agree that when the minority language is also the language of religion this will be an impetus for its maintenance. This means that when language serves important religious functions, it may stand a better chance of survival (Romaine, 2000). This is evident in Burrridge's (2002) study of Pennsylvania German maintenance among the Mennonites in Canada.

According to Burrridge, religion and the way of life are intimately connected for the Mennonites and govern strongly the attitude of the people towards their language. In this speech community language and faith are viewed as one. In their efforts to be a 'separate people' the Mennonites have always emphasised rigid separation from the world and through mutual self-help and through economic, social and spiritual self-reliance, they have been able to achieve this. Thus their language, Pennsylvania German, has provided an important barrier to the outside world, allowing not only for insider identification, but more importantly for outsider separation. Its loss would also mean the loss of this separate status and this would be equivalent to losing their faith. Burrridge concludes that as language has a deeply religious significance in this community, this will guarantee its survival for this group.

Although there is religious diversity among the general Semai population, Christian and Muslim Semai communities tend to live in separate villages. Re-

religious uniformity is one of the characteristics found in most of the villages. As respondents in this study are generally from one religious background the relevance of this factor to language maintenance is applicable only to the Christian community. It can be argued that Semai communities espousing different religions may have differing patterns of language use.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Semai equate losing one's language with giving up aspects of their faith nor are there threats of excommunication for members who stop using the Semai language, religion does play an integral part in their way of life. The observations of Dentan et al. (1997) reveal that religion and way of life are intimately connected for the Semai people and govern strongly the attitude of the people toward their language. For many Semai people, language has a deeply religious significance. This is evident among the Semai people in this study where religious meetings be it for worship, prayer or fellowship are regularly held in the village. There are informal gatherings to pray for the sick, the elderly, the injured and other needs that require divine intervention. Thanksgiving feasts are also held for more celebratory occasions such as weddings, baptisms and newborns. These activities seem to foster closer ties among the villagers, which further enhances group solidarity. In this respect, religious uniformity in this sample population seems a positive force for maintenance of the mother tongue.

It would also appear that another encouraging factor that seems to attract Christian converts is the use of language. Like the work of early Christian missionaries in Asia who had strongly favoured the use of local and vernacular languages instead of national ones to evangelise to the indigenous peoples, a similar strategy was used to convert the Orang Asli. It was their contention that evangelisation would be most successful if it was undertaken by means of the mother tongue of the people. As a result of their evangelical interests these missionaries have written grammars, orthographies, religious books and translated the Bible in Semai (Kwek,

personal communication). These materials produced in non-standard Semai are used to facilitate not only Christian education but also promotes some form of literacy. For example, the *Lamur* or Book of Worship is widely used particularly among the Methodist communities. In this way, the use of Semai continues to be important in their spiritual life. It is not surprising then to find that respondents in this study report that they favour the use of Semai in the church. Besides theological considerations, when the important aspects of their new religion such as the liturgy, sermons and prayers, are conducted in their mother tongue it makes it all the more attractive to convert to Christianity than becoming Muslims. In some ways also the use of their own language in church helps them retain their group identity and solidarity.

In this section, I have argued that the location and geographic concentration of the community is significant in that it enables the community to retain their use of the mother tongue for their daily communication. I also demonstrated that language is integral in the Semai culture and it supports their identity as a separate and distinct group. Finally, I discussed the possibility of religious homogeneity in this community as a contributory factor in Semai maintenance. I argue that efforts by Semai Christians and the church in encouraging the use of Semai in their religious life are positive steps in the direction of language maintenance.

8.3 The future of the Semai language

Although there are indicators found in this study to suggest that one bilingual Semai community is maintaining the use of Semai and does not appear to be experiencing a shift to Malay, it is not possible to predict Semai language use among the Semai population in general and the maintenance of their language in the future. Studies in language maintenance and shift have found that language maintenance and survival are closely linked to institutional support. Without

the help and support of the government, developing, documenting and teaching a minority language would be difficult. It takes a lot of resources to train teachers, produce materials and develop the minority language. Although the Malaysian government over recent years have shown a renewed interest in the preservation and promotion of Semai especially in selected Orang Asli schools, issues connected with standardisation and orthography need to be resolved before any efforts at teaching and developing the language can take place. However, it must be pointed out that with regards to the formal teaching of indigenous languages it may be argued that the role of school is always difficult to determine. Thus it remains to be seen if the introduction of Semai in schools can be a positive force for maintenance in the Semai context.

There is no doubt that the Semai community in general is eager to preserve their heritage. However, the prospect for the continued use of the Semai language appears to depend on the younger generation. Out-migration, to some extent intermarriage and code-switching are potential factors for a shift to Malay. It has been discussed that it is difficult for urban based Semai people to maintain the use of the Semai language primarily because of the social pressure to use the majority language. Nevertheless, intergenerational transmission of the language remains crucial in the maintenance of the mother tongue and in such context, parents' commitment and effort to transmit the language to their children are important. The future of the Semai language very much depends on the Semai speakers who will have to decide for themselves whether or not they continue to use Semai as a home language and transmit it to future generations.

8.4 Limitations of the study

This study is not without its shortcomings, particularly the research methods used and their validity and reliability. There are several limitations that I wish

to highlight. Firstly, the one-time survey adopted in this study only provides a picture of language use at one point in time. As a result, the picture of Semai language use described in this study is tentative. The dangers of jumping to conclusions on the basis of this kind of data have been mentioned by Lieberman (1980) Mackey and Cartwright (1979). They point out that the problem with one-time survey results are connected to age grading and migration and that such findings hold limited generalisability. However, such an approach has its relevance in language maintenance and shift studies. As Fasold (1984) pointed out, 'if census data are inadequate or not available, a one shot survey will have to do. The thing to look for is age-distribution numbers. If older speakers report more use of one language and younger speakers more use of another one, this can be an indication of shift... If there is a genuine shift taking place, it would certainly show up in the larger proportion of older speakers using the declining language than younger speakers' (p.215).

This is also noted by Martin-Jones (1991) who adds, 'in theory, sociolinguistic work can be replicated at different points in time so as to capture different moments of diglossia. However, in practice, it is often not feasible. Most sociolinguistic surveys among bilingual minorities are, in fact, carried at just one point in time' (p.52). It would appear then, that the optimal approach to a sociolinguistic study of language use would be that of a longitudinal and retrospective survey of a large number of respondents. Although a longitudinal study would allow us to explain and predict language behaviour and provide findings of wider generality, it should be noted that longitudinal research designs hold numerous disadvantages as well, such as mortality effects, test-retest effect and the selection of intervals (De Bot and Clyne, 1994).

Secondly, the questionnaire used in this study was limited in its ability to deal with all the determinants of domain as suggested by Fishman (1971). Domain may be determined by the physical setting of the conversation, such as home school or

other environments. It may also be determined by the topic of conversation or by the type of interlocutors such as friends, colleagues or parents. The questionnaire used in this study attempted to include location and type of interlocutor, but did not include topic because of the length considerations. It is the lack of reference to topic which makes the category 'Semai and some Malay' and 'Malay and some Semai' in the language use analyses difficult to interpret. The respondents' answer may mean that the choice of language depends on the topic or that regardless of the topic both languages are used. These categories may also indicate various combinations of the two languages ranging from the use of a word or two from one language in an utterance of the other language to rapid and consistent code switching.

Thirdly, limitations arise when using self-report data on language behaviour (Boyd, 1985; Hughes, 1992). There are many differences in individual judgments or standards that could result in discrepancies between what is reported and what is actually observed. However, Hughes argues (1992), 'These advantages... are not reason enough to dismiss the value of self-evaluations in studies of linguistic competence' (p.115). According to Doucet (1991), research has shown that self-reports provide researchers with a fairly reliable source of information, and other research has shown that there is a high correlation between survey results and observations (Gal, 1979; Dorain, 1981; Bradley, 2002). In language maintenance and shift studies, it is common practice to utilise self-reported data in this area of investigation (e.g. Fase et al., 1992; Bradley, 2002; David, 2003) since they provide economical means of collecting large amounts of data from a wide range of individuals (Holmes, 2001).

It needs to be pointed out also that the reliability of self-assessment is affected by many variables, such as the attitude which the person has towards a particular language and the relative status of the languages in a particular context. If one of the languages has a higher prestige, informants may claim greater knowledge

of it than they actually have. Different cultures may embody different notions of what it means to be a competent member of a particular language community. Speakers who know a non-standard form of a language may not regard it as a real language, particularly when they have been schooled in the standard variety. Since literacy may play an important part in the definitions of proficiency, a person who knows a language but cannot read and write it, may say that he does not know that language very well. With these limitations in mind, I would like to offer some suggestions for further research in the Semai context.

8.5 Suggestions for further research

The findings of this study suggest that further work would do well to investigate three areas that have emerged from the findings. Firstly, results from this study suggest that the maintenance of the Semai language is present in the sample population. As this study only provides a snapshot picture of one community language use, a systematic study of the language situation in other Semai speech communities is crucial. Whether Semai is being maintained or experiencing shift in the wider Semai community will have huge implications for maintenance efforts especially in indigenous language planning in Malaysia. Future researchers interested in this topic should consider investigating Semai language use in the northern state of Perak where there are higher concentrations of Semai groups. Given that Semai is being introduced in some Orang Asli schools in that area, it would be interesting to explore if factors such as formal language learning and education would have any bearing on language use especially among the younger generation.

Since the future of the Semai language is dependent on the younger generation's language choice, another crucial aspect in exploring Semai maintenance and shift is to examine the relationship between language proficiency and attitude of young Semai members. Such an investigation would illuminate the impact of the

national language among young Semai members in the community. As the Semai bilinguals skills may not be the same for both the languages at all linguistic levels, there is a need to measure Semai bilinguals' ability in a variety of areas (listening, reading, speaking, writing) as this can likely influence their aptitude/attitude and motivation for language use and indirectly affect their language choice. Such research would provide a better understanding and explanation of the causal factors that may contribute in the maintenance or shift of the Semai language especially among the younger generation.

Finally, many facets of bilingualism such as the extent of interference, alternation, code-switching and borrowings are not investigated in any detail in this study. With the increasing pressure for the Semai community to become bilingual and as almost all Semai children are educated in the national language, the area of language mixing among the Semai merits further investigation. Results from this study suggest that there is some amount of code-switching among the younger speakers and lexical borrowings from the Malay language is observed in their linguistic behaviour. As bilingualism and extensive code-switching may lead to language shift, more research is needed to determine to what extent this is a general tendency among Semai populations where bilingualism is a predominant behavioural pattern. These are all, I believe, researchable issues that must be addressed before we can begin to assert generally valid conclusions regarding the larger sociolinguistic situation of the Semai people.

Appendix A

Questionnaire survey

A language maintenance and shift study

All information given is CONFIDENTIAL and will be used for research purposes only.
Please take some time to answer all the questions.
Mark the answers that are most applicable to you.
Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A : Personal Details
(Mark X in the box most applicable)

- A1. Age: _____ years
- A2. Sex: Female [] Male []
- A3. Occupation: _____ Student []
- A4. Religion: _____ None []
- A5. Status: Married []
Single []
Other (please specify) _____
- A6. Number of children (if applicable): _____
- A7. Number of household members: _____
- A8. Education: _____

Section B: Language Learning

How did you first learn Bahasa Semai?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. ☐ from mother | 5. ☐ in school | 9. ☐ from newspaper |
| 2. ☐ from father | 6. ☐ in church | 10. ☐ from TV/Radio |
| 3. ☐ from siblings | 7. ☐ in mosque | 11. ☐ others: |
| 4. ☐ from grandparents | 8. ☐ from relatives | _____ |
| | | (please specify) |

How did you first learn Bahasa Malaysia?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 12. ☐ from mother | 16. ☐ in school | 20. ☐ from newspapers |
| 13. ☐ from father | 17. ☐ in church | 21. ☐ from TV/Radio |
| 14. ☐ from siblings | 18. ☐ in mosque | 22. ☐ others |
| 15. ☐ from grandparents | 19. ☐ from relatives | _____ |
| | | (please specify) |

I speak Bahasa Semai only with:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 23. ☐ family members | 28. ☐ government officials |
| 24. ☐ colleagues | 29. ☐ market traders |
| 25. ☐ friends in school | 30. ☐ people in mosque |
| 26. ☐ neighbours | 31. ☐ people in church |
| 27. ☐ employer | 32. ☐ others: _____ |
| | (please specify) |

I speak Bahasa Malaysia only with :

- | | |
|--|---|
| 33. ☐ family members | 38. ☐ government officials |
| 34. ☐ colleagues | 39. ☐ market traders |
| 35. ☐ friends in school | 40. ☐ people in mosque |
| 36. ☐ neighbours | 41. ☐ people in church |
| 37. ☐ employer | 42. ☐ others: _____ |
| | (please specify) |

Section C: Language Use at Home.
You may mark (X) in more than one box

1-Bahasa Semai only
 2-Bahasa Malaysia only

3-Bahasa Semai with Bahasa Malaysia (more B.Semai)
 4-Bahasa Malaysia with Bahasa Semai (more B.M'sia)
 5-Other languages (please specify in the box)
 6-Not applicable

	Language I often use when:	1	2	3	4	5	6
C1	Speaking to my mother						
C2	Speaking to my father						
C3	Speaking to my husband						
C4	Speaking to my wife						
C5	Speaking to my son						
C6	Speaking to my daughter						
C7	Speaking to my siblings						
C8	Speaking to my grandfather						
C9	Speaking to my grandmother						
C10	Speaking to my relatives						

Language use when family members speak to you
You may mark (X) in more than one box

	Language often used when:	1	2	3	4	5	6
C11	My mother speaks to me						
C12	My father speaks to me						
C13	My husband speaks to me						
C14	My wife speaks to me						
C15	My son speaks to me						
C16	My daughter speaks to me						
C17	My siblings speak to me						

1-Bahasa Semai only
2-Bahasa Malaysia only

3-Bahasa Semai with Bahasa Malaysia (more B.Semai)
4-Bahasa Malaysia with Bahasa Semai (more B.M'sia)
5-Other languages (please specify in the box)
6-Not applicable

		1	2	3	4	5	6
C18	My grandfather speaks to me						
C19	My grandmother speaks to me						
C20	My relatives speaks to me						

Section D: Language Use outside the Home

You may mark (X) in more than one box

	Language often use :	1	2	3	4	5	6
D1	When speaking to my neighbours						
D2	When speaking to my Semai friends in school						
D3	When speaking to my non-Semai friends in school						
D4	When speaking to my Semai colleagues at work						
D5	When speaking to my non-Semai colleagues at work						
D6	When speaking to my Semai friends outside the village						

Section E: Language Proficiency

You may mark (X) in more than one box

1 – Very Good

2 – Good

3 – Moderate

4 – Weak

		1	2	3	4
E1	In general, how would you rate your Bahasa Semai oral proficiency?				
E2	In general, how would you rate your Bahasa Malaysia oral proficiency?				
E3	In general, how would you rate the younger generation's Bahasa Semai oral proficiency?				
E4	In general, how would you rate the older generation Bahasa Semai oral proficiency?				
E5	How would you rate your ability to speak to the younger generation in Bahasa Semai ?				
E6	How would you rate your ability to speak to the older generation in Bahasa Semai ?				

Section F: Learning languages

You may mark (X) in more than one box

1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Not sure 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree

		1	2	3	4	5
F1	Do you want to learn more Bahasa Semai?					
F2	Do you want your children to learn more Bahasa Semai?					
F3	Do your children to speak only one language?					
F4	Do you want your children to speak many languages?					
F5	Do you want your children to speak Bahasa Semai well?					

Section G: Agree or Disagree

You may mark (X) in more than one box

1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Not sure 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree

		1	2	3	4	5
G1	Parents should teach their own children Bahasa Semai					
G2	It is important for young Semai to know Bahasa Semai					
G3	It is not important for young Semai to know Bahasa Semai					
G4	It is beneficial for young Semai to speak Bahasa Semai					
G5	Other people will look down on Semai people who speak Bahasa Semai					
G6	Young people do not like to speak Bahasa Semai					
G7	Parents should speak to their children in Bahasa Semai					

1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Not sure 4 – Disagree 5 –Strongly disagree

G8	The use of Bahasa Semai can hinder the progress of the Semai community					
G9	Non-Semai people should learn Bahasa Semai					
G10	Bahasa Semai is a mark of identity for the Semai community					
G11	The use of Bahasa Semai can maintain the identity of the Semai community					
G12	A Semai person who cannot speak Semai is not really a Semai					
G13	The Semai community should make an effort to maintain Bahasa Semai.					
G14	The future of Bahasa Semai depends on the Semai community					
G15	Bahasa Semai can be maintained with the help of the government					
G16	Bahasa Semai is easier to use in religious practices					
G17	The use of Bahasa Semai in the mosque/sermons is easier to understand					
G18	Bahasa Semai is no longer suitable for all situations and occasions					
G19	Bahasa Semai should be taught in school					
G20	Bahasa Semai will not be used in the future					

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix B

Interview schedule

Introduction

I am interested in finding out your language use and your opinion about issues related to language. The information you provide is strictly for research purposes only. There are four main questions but I may ask you more questions to clarify what you mean. If you are ready, let us begin.

Background information

Could you provide some information about yourself?

Age :

Occupation :

Education :

Marital Status :

Gender :

Question 1 (language use patterns)

- What language do you speak at home?
- What language do use often with your siblings /relatives /children?

Question 2 (attitudes)

- In your opinion, is it important to know Semai? Is important to know Malay?
- Do you like speaking Semai? Do you like speaking Malay?

Question 3 (language and identity)

- If people stop using Semai, do you think the identity of the Semai community can be maintained?

Question 4 (perceived vitality)

- What do you think about the future of the Semai language?
- Do you think it will die or people will stop speaking the language?

**We have come to the end of the interview.
Thank you for your time and cooperation.**

Appendix C

Interview tapescript#9

Introduction

I am interested in finding out your language use and your opinion about issues related to language. The information you provide is strictly for research purposes only. There are four main questions but I may ask you more questions to clarify what you mean. If you are ready, let us begin.

Background information

Could you provide some information about yourself?

Age : 70 years

Occupation : Housewife/grandmother

Education : Primary school

Marital Status : Widow

Gender : Female

Question 1 (language use patterns)

- What language do you speak at home?
- What language do use often with your siblings /relatives /children?

When my parents were alive we spoke Semai. I remember speaking to them in Semai, also with my brothers and sisters. Most of the time...when I meet my relatives we also speak Semai. Nowadays... hmmm with my children, the two that live with me, I usually speak the same language. My eldest son in KL... also Semai. The other two also the same. No problems for me... Only with my grandchildren I find it a problem to talk to them... they live in KL. I don't visit them often... so it difficult to talk to them in Semai. If I really want to talk these grandchildren I have to use Malay. Why? That's the only language they know especially the younger ones. As for my older grandchildren, they know just a bit of Semai. I know it is difficult for them...but they live so far and I hardly see them, unless for special occasions.

Question 2 (attitudes)

- In your opinion, is it important to know Semai? Is important to know Malay?
- Do you like speaking Semai? Do you like speaking Malay?

Of course it is important to know Semai, for me. And also it is important to know Malay these days. We can't runaway from it. I feel it is important to learn as many languages as possible...I am happy if all my grandchildren can go to Chinese or Malay schools...it is better for them to speak many languages...and get a good education. Later on they can find good jobs. You see in town, there are many people...Chinese, Malay, Indian...all kinds of languages there are...nowadays English too is important...according to my grandchildren. I feel that the younger generations, like my grandchildren, don't speak Semai very well...sometimes I hear them speaking Semai, sometimes Malay. It is good if they can speak Malay well...that means they can do well in school...but what I see is that their Malay is not good too...or else they will pass all their exams. When they speak Malay, I hear Semai words too. Yes, I like to Semai...to my children, neighbours, friends, relatives. Sometimes I also like speaking in Malay...especially when I go to the market with my daughter. They don't know Semai...so what to do...speak Malay then. Like with you, see I have to speak Malay because you don't know Semai !

Question 3 (language and identity)

- If people stop using Semai, do you think the identity of the Semai community can be maintained?

I keep telling my daughters...if you stop speaking your own language, then you forget your own culture and you cannot pass it on to your children. For example my sons...look at them...my grandchildren now...they are more like the Malays because they don't use our language anymore. Even their children don't know a lot of Semai, they only use Malay...even [speaking] to me. So what to do...it is difficult. All our traditions and practices we know in our language. Yes, we can use Malay...but it is not the same, it is not Asli. I'm not sure...it is a difficult question...maybe the Semai identity will be the same, maybe our culture can be preserved. Depends on the younger generations...I am too old already.

Question 4 (perceived vitality)

- What do you think about the future of the Semai language?
- Do you think it will die or people will stop speaking the language?

Like I said, it depends on the children...like my grandchildren. If they want to speak Semai or they learn in school...or if their parents teach them, then there's no problem. But now they say, Malay is important too...for school, for getting a job...If the children learn Asli language in their school then I think the language

will be used...but you see now, only Chinese and Indians have their languages taught in some school. I hear they are also teaching some Semai, like this school here. The teachers say they know Semai...I'm not sure. There are also other Asli languages...only a few people know them. I don't know if their language died or not...They now speak Temiar...or Semai. Depends where they are...like the Asli here, they all speak Semai. So more and more people speak Semai, then I don't think the language will die.

**We have come to the end of the interview.
Thank you for your time and cooperation.**

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