Language Policies – Impact on Language Maintenance and Teaching:
Focus on Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines

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2 Most of the paper is the work of Maya Khemlani David; Francesco Cavallaro contributed the sections on Singapore and language policies and language shift, and to the overall discussion; Paolo Coluzzi’s contribution is restricted mainly to the sections on Brunei.

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**Abstract**

This paper will describe the language policies, planning and implementation in selected ASEAN countries and discuss the impact of such policies on the maintenance of a number of languages. The paper will specifically examine the policies towards minority languages in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines. The findings indicate that some countries have language policies that benefit some of the minority languages; while others do not seem to be doing enough to stop the shift to the majority languages. The revitalization efforts of these countries are also discussed. Language programmes in these countries show how the learning of minority endangered languages can take place in institutional or community settings. The use of ‘multiliteracies’ in such settings to revive threatened languages in new learning venues is also discussed.

**Keywords**, language policies, language revitalization, minority languages, multiliteracies, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines.
How do languages die?

Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) estimates that there are about 6,900 languages spoken around the world today. It is also estimated that only 4% of the globe's 6 billion people speak 96% of the world’s languages (Crystal 2000). This means that most nations are multilingual (Ricento 2006) and that the greater part of the languages spoken in the world can be classified as ‘minority’ languages. Nettle and Romaine (2000) estimate that about half the known languages in the world have disappeared over the past 500 years and Crystal (2000) suggests that an average of one language may vanish every two weeks over the next 100 years. This would lead to around half of the languages currently spoken around the world to disappear by the turn of the next century.

There are several reasons why languages die. One of the most common is through language shift and its ramifications. That is, in situations where different languages come into contact and through social or political processes one or more language(s) become dominant at the expense of the others (Cavallaro 2005). In multilingual societies, the languages spoken by minority groups are constantly under pressure. Their main competitors are the language of the majority group and, increasingly, internationally popular/dominant languages. This is certainly the case in South East Asia, where we see a large number of minority and indigenous languages being displaced by larger and/or more international languages.

Language policies and language shift

One crucial factor that can either help language maintenance or lead to language shift and eventually language death are the language policies of individual nations. In recent times there has been a significant amount of research directed at how language policies affect the ethnolinguistic minority groups’ efforts in maintaining their languages and cultures. The solution to these issues has been actively pursued by advocates of minority language rights (see May 2001, 2003, 2006) and of linguistic human rights (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994). The discussion in support of minority language rights is best put forward by May (2006) who posits four reasons why minority languages should be maintained. First is the responsibility of all involved parties to arrest the “… consequent exponential decline and loss of many of the languages spoken in the world today” (p. 257). If 4% of people in the world speak 96% of the languages, then it follows that the languages of the other 96% of the people are the ones that stand a better chance of surviving. The second is to do with the fact that most minority languages have not become “minoritized” through natural means, but “… the
majority-minority language hierarchy [...] is historically, socially, and politically constructed process.” (p. 259). That is, it is through the active intervention of government policies that an unequal power relation exists between the majority and minority languages within a community. The third point is the flawed belief that social mobility for minority language speakers can only come “… at the expense of one’s first language.” (p. 263 author’s emphasis). That is, by replacing their language with that of the majority. As Ricento (2006) explains it, this rhetoric categorizes the speakers of a majority language as forward looking and upwardly mobile and those members of a community who maintain their minority language as living in the past and not willing to modernize. It is, therefore, not surprising that speakers of minority languages see the adoption of the majority language as the only real alternative. Lastly, May concedes that no matter what steps are taken, majority languages will always dominate in any given community. However, speakers of minority languages “… should be accorded at least some of the protections and institutional support that majority languages already enjoy” (p. 265).

In this paper the language policies, planning and implementation in four selected ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Philippines) will be described with a view on how such policies have impacted on the maintenance of a number of languages. The second part of this paper will discuss how multiliteracies in various domains and settings are being used to maintain or revive some of the endangered languages in these countries.

Language policies, planning and implementation -- Case Studies

Malaysia
Malaysia’s 26 million people speak around 140 languages, and Grimes (2000) describes Malaysia as a truly multilingual and multicultural society. Malaysia is made up of Peninsular Malaya and the states of Sarawak and Sabah. While Peninsular Malaya is known as West Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah are referred to as East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaya or West Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 and the states of Sarawak and Sabah joined them to form Malaysia much later. Out of the total population of Malaysia, Bumiputera (Malays and other indigenous group) make up the majority (65.1%), while the Chinese make up 26.0% and the Indians 7.7% of the population (Census 2000). While the Malay who form the majority of the population are for the large part indigenous, the non-Malay (i.e. the Chinese and the Indian) are considered immigrant communities since many of their ancestors were encouraged to come into the country by the British colonial regime.
While Malays, Chinese and Indians form the majority communities in Peninsular Malaya, there are many more communities and languages in Sarawak and Sabah. In Sarawak the Iban form the largest group followed by the Chinese, Malay and Bidayuh. There are smaller groups like the Kayan, Kenyah, Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Penan (collectively known as the Orang Ulu) and the Melanau (120,000) and there are even smaller groups like the Berawan, Bisayah, Kedayan, Kajang, Baketan, Sian, Ukit and Punan. Sabahans comprise of Kadazandusuns who form the largest group, followed by the Chinese, Bajau, Malay, Murut, Ilanun, Lotud, Rungus, Tambunuo, Dumpas, Margang, Paitan, Idahan, Minokok, Ramanau, Sulu, Orang Sungai, Brunei, Kedayan, Bisaya, Tidong etc.

Soon after Malaya became independent in 1957, Malay was established as the national language with the purpose of fostering national unity. Tunku Abdul Rahman (the first Prime Minister of Malaysia) explained in one of his speeches at the University of Singapore on 9th December 1964:

> It is only right that as a developing nation, we want to have a language of our own. If the National Language is not introduced, our country will be devoid of a unified character and personality - as I would put it, a nation without a soul and without a life. (Abdullah Hassan 2004)

Malay was to be the medium of instruction and the changeover to Malay was implemented in an orderly fashion to avoid disruption and a drop in standards. The Government did not rush the change and it took 26 years (1957-1983) to implement the National Language and National Educational Policies for the primary and secondary level of education (Asmah 1992). English schools were converted to the Malay-medium in West Malaysia by 1983 (Asmah 1997), while English schools in Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) were converted by 1985 (Solomon 1988: 46). The conversion of the English medium schools to Malay medium began in 1968 at a gradual pace (Solomon 1988: 47). Initially, those subjects that could adopt the Malay language as a medium of instruction without difficulty were the first affected by the conversion process (Asmah 1981: 15). From January 1968, all English medium primary schools were required to teach physical education, art and craft, local studies and music in Malay in Standards 1, 2 and 3. More of the Arts subjects were taught in Malay before the shift to Malay occurred for the Science subjects. In fact, for a short period of time during this transitional phase some schools ran the same course in science subjects in two streams, namely Malay and English. In 1976 all English medium primary schools were completely converted into schools where Malay was used as the medium of instruction and by 1982 all the former English medium secondary schools were converted to National...
Schools in Peninsular Malaysia (Solomon 1988: 46). The Education Act was extended to Sarawak in 1977 and the change of the medium of instruction to Malay throughout the entire school system was completed in Sabah and Sarawak three years later, i.e. by 1985.

The idea of using a standard curriculum and mandating the study of the national language after independence was recognized as occupying an important role in establishing fundamental attitudes and images of national identity among the younger generation. The role and status of English were radically reduced, from being the medium of instruction in the education system during colonial times English was relegated to being taught in schools as a second language. In fact, in rural areas where there was almost no environmental exposure to the language, English was virtually a foreign language (see David 2004). Malaysian policy makers, however, always deemed English as the second most important language and English has been taught from year one in the national primary schools. However, whilst it is compulsory to obtain a credit in Malay for the school leaving examination (SPM) this did not apply to English. In 2000, after a gap of about 20 years, English was reintroduced as a subject in pre-university classes and pre-university students who wish to enter local universities have to sit for a compulsory Malaysian Universities English Test (MUET). More recently (2003) a new policy made it mandatory for mathematics and science to be taught in English (Spolsky 2004; Yaakub 2004). The rationale for this as explained by the government of the day was to ensure that Malaysia would not be left behind in a world that was rapidly becoming globalized. Due to much controversy over its use, after five years of implementation that policy is currently under review and the government has been soliciting views from various stakeholders over the last six months but has yet to make a conclusive decision whether the policy is to be maintained or if the nationalists’ demand for Malay to replace English will be accepted.

It should also be pointed out that that even though Bahasa Malaysia is the official language in the education system and required for entry into public (government) tertiary institutions, English is the medium of instruction in private universities.

There are also Chinese and 526 Tamil primary schools where Malaysian children can be taught in their mother tongues i.e. Mandarin and Tamil for the first six years of school. In vernacular schools (today 95% of Chinese children attend such schools as do 55% of Indian children) both Malay and English are taught as compulsory subjects. Some 60 Chinese secondary schools where Mandarin is the
medium of instruction also exist but they are not recognized as part of the official government school system. The overwhelming majority of students in state primary schools or national schools today are Malays. At one time soon after independence Malaysia's national or government schools were mostly racially integrated, now they are largely segregated (Kissel 2008).

There has also always been a provision for the teaching of numerous other minority languages. ‘Pupil’s Own Language’ (POL) could be taught in schools if there were at least 15 students to make up a class (Jermudd 1999; Kaplan and Baldauf 2003; Kuo 1998; Smith 2003). This has been somewhat riddled with problems of obtaining 15 students in one school who want to learn a specific language.

In the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, other languages are also taught. The Iban language catering to the largest group in Sarawak is also a POL in both primary and secondary schools. However, the reality is rather different as there is a lack of trained teachers Consequently, few if any secondary schools offer Iban as a subject (Sercombe, personal communication). In the state of Sabah, also in East Malaysia, Kadazandusun has been taught as a POL in government schools since 1997 (Smith 2003), and the use of Murut has just started according to Kimmo Kosonen (2005). In West Malaysia an Orang Asli (the indigenous people of West Malaysia) language called Semai, is being used as a POL at lower primary school level in some schools where the community dominates.

The use of these minority languages does not mean that minority languages are alive and many languages survive only if they are maintained in the home domain. Unfortunately, the emphasis on Malay, the National language, and also English, the most widespread international language, are seen as more important than time spent on learning the mother tongue and a number of speech communities who do not see any economic value in their respective heritage languages are shifting away from the habitual use of their ethnic languages (see David 1996 on the Sindhis; Sankar 2004 on the Iyers; Nambiar 2007 on the Malayalees; David, Naji and Sheena Kaur, 2003 on the Punjabis; Saidah 2009 on the Bugis; Mohamad Subakir 1998 on the Javanese; David and Faridah 1999 and Ramachandran 2000 on the Portuguese; Martin and Yen 1992 on the Kelabits and the Orang Miriek (Jati Miriek) (see Tunku Zainah 1978: 24 cited in Bibi Aminah and Abang Ahmad Ridzuan 1992)).

Whilst most of these studies on language shift have focused on the Indians who have shifted mainly to English, many Muslim and other communities have taken on a Malay identity and have also shifted away from their heritage languages as noted in Subakir’s 1998 study of the Javanese community, Saidah’s 2009 study of the Bugis, Nambiar’s 2007 study of the Malayalee Muslims and David’s 2003
study of the Pakistanis who married local Kelantanese. In Sarawak, in order to be identified as Malays, the *Orang Miriek* who also are Muslims have shifted to Bahasa Melayu Sarawak. The issue of being teased by members of the dominant group and the backwardness associated with the minority group not only makes the younger generation of Orang Miriek take on a Malay identity but this is also the case with other ethnic groups who have converted to Islam. As the constitutional definition of a Malay is one who practices the Islamic religion, has a Malay way of life and uses the Malay language, non-Malay *Bumiputeras* who are Muslims often adopt Malay culture and identity. When this happens, their children will shift language use to Malay because they have taken Malay names and joined Islamic activities where their peers are mostly Malay. The Bidayuh for instance, who are generally described as “a Christian race” (Minos 2000), have a number who have converted to Islam or “masuk Melayu” (become Malay). According to Chang (2002) there are about 300 families out of 10,750 Bidayuh families in the Kuching Division who have converted to Islam and hence this figure shows that about 3% of the Bidayuh population has embraced the Islamic faith in the Kuching Division already. Therefore, Bidayuhs who have converted to Islam, mostly through intermarriage with Muslims, adopt Malay culture and identity markers such as wearing ‘baju kurung’, speaking Malay and eating Malay food (see David and Dealwis 2008).

Younger members of the Chinese community in Peninsular Malaysia appear to be shifting to Mandarin as evidenced by the fact that 95% of the Chinese children who enter schools opt to attend Chinese schools where Mandarin is the medium of instruction. As in Singapore, the dialects appear to be losing out to Mandarin but perhaps not as drastically as there is no local decree not to use the dialects. Ting (2009) talking about the Chinese in Sarawak states that they are shifting to English and Mandarin. Smaller Chinese communities who have been living in Malaysia for a long time and whose ancestors married the local people are known as the Peranakan (Straits) Chinese. Teo (2004) believes that the Peranakan Chinese feel a sense of separateness from other Malaysian Chinese due to their illiteracy and inadequacy in their own ancestral language. Local communities, language foundations and non-governmental organizations have been working together in language development to have minority languages in the school system (Kuo 1998; Lasimbang and Kinajil 2000; Smith 2001, 2003). These will be discussed in the second part of this paper.
Singapore

Neighbouring Singapore is also ethnically quite diverse. Table 1 shows the composition of the Singaporean residents. We can see that the majority are ethnically Chinese and the Indians and Malay are comparatively small communities.

Table 1 - Ethnic composition of Singapore residents (2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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Source: 2005 General Household Survey, Singapore Department of Statistics

Following these ethnic lines, Singapore has four official languages: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English. A bilingual education policy was instituted as far back as 1956 emphasizing equality for all the official languages. At that time the decision makers were aware of the need not to favour any particular ethnic group; hence the choice of English as the language for all Singaporeans and of Mandarin as the language for all Singaporean Chinese. The policy stated that the four official languages were also designated as the media of instruction. However, because of the fear of the spread of communism, in 1987 the government closed all Chinese-medium schools (Kirkpatrick 2007). Around the same time, due to falling numbers, the Malay-medium schools were also closed. This reduced the Mandarin Chinese and Malay to being taught as second languages in primary and secondary schools, and English has since dominated the country’s education system (Pakir 2004).

In the Singaporean bilingual policy, Singaporeans are also expected to be competent in their mother tongues in addition to English (Wee and Bokhorst-Heng 2005). The general policy is centred on English being the sole medium of instruction at all levels of education, and the other official languages, which are now promoted as ‘mother tongues’, are taught as second languages (Grimes 2000; Jernudd 1999; Kaplan and Baldauf 2003; Pakir 2004). Singaporeans need to learn their ‘mother tongue’ in schools according to their ethnic background (Mandarin for Chinese, Bahasa Melayu for Malays and Tamil for Indians). The use of the term ‘mother tongue’ in the Singaporean context requires some qualification as, for most Singaporeans, the official languages were not and are not their ‘mother tongues’. This is particularly true for the ethnically diverse Chinese and Indian community where most speak languages other than Mandarin Chinese or Tamil at home. The 1957 census recognized 33 mother tongues spoken in Singapore. The census shows that Mandarin speakers only made up 0.1% of the
population, compared to 30% of the population being Hokkien speakers. In the same year only 60% of the Indians in Singapore were Tamil speakers (Kuo 1980). These figures had not changed much when the term ‘mother tongues’ was coined in the 1970s. As for the Indian community, a significant number speak Telegu or Malayalam at home. In short, for these members, the ‘mother tongue’ is not the language they are made to study at school. However, this linguistically controversial label is still in use today.

Various writers (e.g. Gopinathan 1980) have observed that since independence Singapore has practiced bilingualism (English and a mother tongue) because it is considered important for Singaporeans to present Singapore’s ethnic and linguistic diversity to the world. The objective of the bilingual policy is to improve the standard of English and to promote the use of mother tongues so as to ensure identification with and maintenance of traditional cultures and their values (Pakir 2004). Or as Wee and Bokhorst-Heng (2005:165) state, “… English is associated with accessing scientific and technological knowledge as well as Western values, and the official mother tongues are associated with traditional ‘Asian’ values.

Gopinathan (1988, 1998) explains that the need for social and political stability in a diverse multi-racial society which also facilitates rapid economic growth is the main factor influencing the Singaporean government’s thinking and language policies. Indeed, the bilingual policy was implemented to reduce inter-ethnic divisions that were very tense in the late 50s and early 60s, and to promote a Singaporean identity, whilst encouraging economic growth (Gopinathan, Ho and Vanithamani 2004). English is today the de facto national language in Singapore and is seen as a major source of economically valuable knowledge and technology as English gives the nation access to world markets. Indeed the government has continuously reminded Singaporeans, as Lee Hsien Loong, then Deputy Prime Minister said in his speech in Parliament, that

> English is and will remain our common working language. It is the language of global business, commerce and technology. But the mother tongue gives us a crucial part of our values, roots and identity. It gives us direct access to our cultural heritage, and a world-view that complements the perspective of the English-speaking world. (1999)

Rapid economic growth since the 1980s seems to have helped convince the majority that knowledge of English provides better opportunities for Singaporeans as individuals, as well as for the country as a whole. Therefore, despite the emphasis placed on the teaching of ‘mother tongues’ many
Singaporeans are moving towards English as a home language. The 2005 Census indicates that Mandarin is spoken as the home language of only 47.2% of the Singaporean Chinese. Tamil is the home language of only 39% of Singaporean Indians and the ‘healthier’ looking minority language is Malay, spoken by 86.8% of Singaporean Malays (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 Language use at home in Singapore (2000-2005) (Source: 2005 General Household Survey, Singapore Department of Statistics)](image)

In the context of this paper, we need to look into Singapore’s language policies regarding its minority languages. There is no doubt that through a process of favouring recognized ‘international’ languages a clear perception now exists both among government officials and the public alike that success can be more easily achieved through the mastery of English and, thanks to the economic power of China, Mandarin. This means that in Singapore the two majority languages are English and Mandarin. This status is currently being reinforced for the former because of its widespread use by all ethnic and social groups in this island nation, and the latter through the sheer majority of numbers of the Chinese compared to the other ethnic groups, the Malay and the Indians. As described by May (2006) this has led to all other languages spoken in Singapore to being “minoritized” or “dialectalized” (p. 261). Among the Chinese this has also led to a rapidly diminishing number of speakers of other Chinese varieties. So much so, that they are in danger of dying out in Singapore.

There is, therefore, some concern regarding the overall shift to English of the Chinese community as well as the imminent demise of the so-called ‘dialects’ among Singapore Chinese families. The Chinese community in Singapore is made up of a number of language groups. These include Hokkien...
(43.1%), Teochew (22.1%), Cantonese (16.4%), Hakka (7.4%), Hainanese (7.1%) and smaller communities of Foochow, Henghua, Shanghainese and Hokchia. Each of these sub-communities has its own language variety wrongly referred to as ‘dialect’ by Singaporean authorities. At present, as a result of the bilingual educational policy and the influence of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, young Chinese are bilingual in English and Mandarin Chinese. With Mandarin replacing the other Chinese varieties for intra-ethnic communication in almost all domains. Hokkien in particular has been severely displaced in the community. The 1957 census reported that 97% of the Chinese community spoke Hokkien. Recently it is not possible to obtain a breakdown of each ethnic group within the Chinese community, but the 2005 census figures show (See Figure 1) that only 23.9% of the Chinese in Singapore reported a Chinese variety other than Mandarin as their home language. Hokkien is known and still used, but mostly by older Chinese and the less educated. Mandarin is still by and large a High (H) language, while Hokkien and the other Chinese varieties remain dominant in hawker centers, on buses, etc. (Kuo and Jernudd 2003). It is not just the Hokkien speakers that have shifted to English and/or Mandarin. Li, Saravanan and Ng (1997) found that the Teochews have also moved away from their dialect to the use of Mandarin and English in the family domain. According to statistics from the Singapore Ministry of Education, 9.3% of the pupils of first year primary schools of Chinese origin used English at home in 1980. This increased to 45% in 2003.

In summary, the government policies have directly impacted on the well being of all Chinese vernaculars to the benefit of Mandarin and all such vernaculars are on the verge of disappearing. There is little scope for optimism that these languages will survive beyond one or at most two more generations. At the same time, even though Mandarin Chinese is currently promoted through Singapore’s bilingual education policy and through the public rhetoric of the Singapore government, the fact that Mandarin is taught almost solely as a second language and is not the medium of instruction at any level at school means there are real concerns as to whether it is being effectively maintained.

Singapore’s Indian population comprises 8.7% of the total population. Of that number Tamils comprise 63.9%, Malayalees 8.6%, Punjabis 6.7% and there are other smaller Indian linguistic communities, for example, the Bengali, Urdu, Sindhi, and Gujarati speech communities. However, in 2005 only 36.8% of Singaporean Indians used Tamil (Singapore Department of Statistics 2000) as compared to 1985 when 54% of the Tamils reported that they used Tamil as the principal family language (Kuo 1980). As for the other Indian speech communities, only 11.4% use Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam and Punjabi. The Indian community’s shift to English has been well documented (Gupta...
1995; Schiffman 1998, 2002). Saravanan (1995, 1999) reported that Tamil parents and their children tend to use English during family activities, although they use Tamil in prayers and in communicating with relatives. The low use of Tamil with friends, siblings, school and reading of primary students was reported by Ramiah (1991). Data from the 2005 Census confirms that the Tamils have shifted to English the most amongst all the main ethnic groups in Singapore. This shift is most prominent among young Indians (in the age range of 5-14 years), those of high socioeconomic status and those with high educational qualifications. It is clear that the Singaporean Indians are experiencing language shift. The reasons for this shift seem to be clustered around two issues. The first is that Indians in Singapore are highly mobile and highly educated. This seems to indicate that this group wizened up to the fact that economic success in Singapore and good education have been, and still are, intrinsically tied to a good command of English, and that Tamil does not have the same economic value. The other reason is that for a very long time the Tamil taught at school was not the variety spoken at home (Schiffman 1998). Tamil speakers use a more colloquial variety at home but for a very long time were made to learn a more formal, and significantly different, variety at school. So that there was no possible association with what students were learning at school and the language spoken at home. The way Tamil was taught in schools was revised when in 1996, the Singapore Indian Association (SINDA) requested the Ministry of Education (MOE) to establish a committee that would review the teaching and learning of Tamil.

Schiffmann (2002) also proposed an interesting analysis of the covert and overt impact of the language policy on the Tamil community. From an educational point of view, mandatory adoption of any language is surely a sign of support. However, Schiffmann pointed out that other policies, such as the distribution of housing which ensures that the Tamil speaking community is distributed evenly throughout Singapore, work against the existence of a community with critical population mass, a crucial feature of language maintenance. Though the covert impact may not be intentional, indeed the overt policy of the government is both egalitarian and pro-Tamil, the fact remains that it is extremely difficult for a minority language to be maintained if the fundamental reason for its existence is to pass school exams.

Not all research asserts that language shift is certain. More recently, Vaish (2007) reported that while there is widespread use of English among the Tamils in Singapore, there are also signs that Tamil is being maintained in certain domains. She found a complex situation where young Tamils use mostly English in almost everything they do. However, they also value their bilingualism and biculturalism by stating that they are more comfortable with friends who speak both English and Tamil. The same young
people love watching Tamil movies and to listening to Tamil songs. Interestingly, one domain that Vaish found was strongly associated with the Tamil language was religion. In her study her participants reported using Tamil almost exclusively for praying.

However, while the language shift occurring among the Chinese and Indian community is very clear, the situation is different in another minority community in Singapore i.e. the Malay community. The statistics do show that Malay is the healthiest of the three non-English official languages. The 2005 census (see Figure 1) shows that almost 87% of the Malays in Singapore still use predominantly Malay at home; although this is a decrease of 5% from the previous census in 2000.

The language policy on Malay has seen its status change considerably over the last four decades. In 1959 Singapore adopted Malay as its National language. This was done to reassure Malaysia that Singapore’s merging with the Malaysian Federation would not pose a threat to its interethnic stability (Lowenberg 1988). Even when Singapore seceded from the Federation, Malay was kept as the national language. This again was decided upon to keep in good relations with the Malay-speaking neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia. However, subsequent policies have not been formulated with particular interests of the Malays in Singapore. So much so that now the remnants of Malay’s national language status can only be seen in Singapore’s national anthem, its coat of arms, military commands in parades and protocol in official government functions (Lowenberg 1988; Llamzon 1978).

The census figures show that Malay is still being maintained well and there is a relatively high ethnolinguistic vitality among the Singaporean Malay speech community. However, the census figures do not show to what extent English has intruded into the lives of young Singaporean Malays. Roksana (2000) and Kassim (2008) reported on the extensive amount of code switching between Malay and English occurring in the home domain. Cavallaro and Serwe (2009) found that there is no domain in Singapore where Malay is used exclusively. In fact, their findings show that young (18-25 year old) Malays in Singapore interact with other young Malays almost totally in English and use Malay solely with older relatives. One other aspect of the Singaporean Malay community that is not immediately apparent is that the community is not uniformly ‘Malay’. In fact many Malays are descendents of various ethnic groups such as Boyanese, Bugis or Javanese. These sub-groups have their own languages, which have been allowed to slowly die out due to them being neglected in the formulation of any language policies.
Brunei Darussalam

Like the rest of Borneo, Brunei is a very diverse country as far as its linguistic heritage is concerned. In addition to standard Malay, the official language, and English, another eleven languages are spoken: Brunei Malay, Kedayan (which may be also considered as dialects of Malay on account to their proximity to it), Tutong, Belait, Dusun, Bisaya (even though Dusun and Bisaya could also be considered two dialects of the same language), Murut (Lun Bawang), Iban, Penan, Mukah, which are all Austronesian languages, plus various Chinese varieties (which have been counted below as one language: Mandarin, Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainanese, Teochew, Foochow). This number is remarkable considering the small size of the country (5,765 sq km).

All these languages occupy a low position in a diglossic relationship to Standard Malay and English (with the exception perhaps of Mandarin Chinese) and, with the exception of Brunei Malay, which is the language that almost everybody can speak now, can be considered endangered to a greater or smaller extent. Some of them are on the verge of extinction, for example Belait, while most are not doing very well with fewer and fewer younger people being able to speak them, e.g. Tutong, Dusun or Penan. Of these perhaps only three appear to be in a healthy state, i.e. Iban, Murut and Chinese (Martin 1995:49; Dunseath 1996). According to Martin’s (1995) and Niew’s (1991) estimates, there might have been as many as 137,000 people who spoke at least one of these languages (excluding Brunei Malay)³ out of a population of 292,266 inhabitants in 1995 (http://www.theodora.com/wbf/Brunei_people.html)⁴, i.e. about 46.9% of the population⁵. If we consider that until the middle of last century, i.e. no more than sixty years ago almost all of the population of Brunei must have been fluent in at least one of the languages listed above (Noor Azam 2005), we can appreciate the swiftness in which language shift is taking place in Brunei.

Even though seven of the ethnic groups speaking these languages are officially recognized as indigenous groups of the Malay race (1961 Nationality Act of Brunei)⁶, such recognition has almost no

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³ Kedayan, Tutong, Belait, Dusun, Bisaya, Murut, Iban, Penan, Mukah are spoken by 77,000 people, whereas various Chinese dialects and/or Mandarin are spoken by about 60,000 people.
⁴ In November 2007 the estimate for the total population of Brunei was about 391,450 individuals (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brunei).
⁵ According to the 2004 census (Jones 2008), as few as 14.6% of Bruneians are either Chinese or belong to non Malay indigenous groups. The remarkable difference between these data and the ones based on Martin’s and Niew’s estimates is due to the fact that indigenous language minorities are considered by the Government as belonging to the Malay group and the figure of 3.4% of ‘other indigenous groups’ may refer to ethnic groups such as Iban, Penan or Mukah which are not considered indigenous.
⁶ These are: Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong.
bearing on the status of their languages, and even less as far as their protection is concerned. Even though the importance of maintaining these languages has been occasionally affirmed both in official and non official settings, almost nothing has been done so far to try to slow down or reverse language shift towards Malay or English. It is interesting to notice that two of the three least endangered languages mentioned above, i.e. Iban and Chinese are not recognized as languages of Brunei as they are regarded as non-indigenous. However, in spite of their apparent ‘health’, Dunseath’s research (1996) shows that a shift is taking place from the various Chinese dialects to Mandarin and possibly even from the latter to English. On the other hand, even though the sociolinguistic survey carried out by Coluzzi (forthcoming) among the Ibans and the Muruts in the district of Temburong in 2008 shows an extremely high level of language maintenance (all Ibans can speak Iban and nearly all Muruts can speak Murut), the language they speak appears to be increasingly influenced, particularly at the lexical level, by Malay, which is the language spoken in most ‘high’ domains (see also Martin 1996).

At present minority languages do not have any space in public education in Brunei, while Mandarin Chinese is taught as a subject only in two private schools, all other subjects being taught in Malay and English like in all government schools in Brunei. The total absence of minority languages in education in Brunei obviously also applies to Iban and Murut. In neighbouring Sarawak both Iban and Murut have been the object of language planning, though only to a limited extent. For instance a few publications are available in both languages, particularly in Iban, but they have hardly managed to find their way to Brunei, whereas a few radio programmes from Sarawak can be listened to in Brunei. As far as compulsory education is concerned, as shown above, Iban has been used as a subject of instruction in a few Malaysian schools since the 1980s as ‘Pupils’ Own Language’ (Asmah Haji Omar, 2004:32-33), which means that some of the Iban textbooks that have been produced for that purpose could in theory be used in Brunei as well, in the unlikely event that Iban were to be introduced into primary or secondary education.

The survey referred to above carried out by Coluzzi in 2008 on the language use and attitudes of the Ibans and Muruts in the Temburong district (Coluzzi forthcoming) shows that as many as 92.2% of the Iban would like to see their language introduced in the schools of Temburong, 46.4% as a compulsory subject and 45.8% as an elective subject. As for the Murut, 92.6% are in favour of their language being taught in school, 27.9% as a compulsory subject and 64.7% as an elective subject.
The Philippines

The Philippines is a multi-ethnic country consisting of about 180 languages. The Bilingual Education Policy of the Philippines (1974, revised in 1987) states that English and Filipino (based on Tagalog) are the languages of education and the official languages of literacy for the nation. The goal of this policy is to make the population bilingual. In fact, only about a quarter of the population is estimated to receive education in their first language (Grimes 2000; Jernudd 1999; Kaplan and Baldauf 2003; Nical, Smolicz and Secombe 2004; Young 2002).

To some extent the language policy has influenced the abandonment of some Philippine languages. When bilingual education was implemented in 1970, Filipino became the medium of instruction at the elementary level. However, in non-Tagalog areas, the vernacular language was used as the medium of instruction from grade one to grade four and Filipino in grade five. In addition to Filipino, English was offered as a double period subject in grades five and six. In the intermediate level and High school both English and Filipino were used as media of instruction (Fonacier 1987: 145).

In 1973 an attempt to change the system was made where the use of vernacular language was implemented as the medium of instruction in grade one and grade two with English and Filipino as subjects. In grade three English was the medium of instruction with Filipino as a subject. However, this policy was not accepted immediately by the public and it resulted in a revision of the policy in the same year where English and Filipino were used as media of instruction at all levels (Fonacier 1987; Llamazon 1977). The policy was implemented in 1974 by the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS) as stated in the Department Order No. 25, s. 1974 (Espiritu 2007). Because of the revised policy, the vernacular language became an auxiliary language or second language in the school domain. The main objective of the government for implementing such a policy was to make Filipinos bilingual in English and Filipino. This is seen in the Department of Education and Culture Order No. 25 - "the vernacular shall be resorted to only when necessary to facilitate understanding of the concepts being taught through the prescribed medium of instruction: English or Pilipino" (Sibayan 1985).
A general overview of Philippine language policy changes over time is shown below.

**Language policy changes in the Philippines**

**1970: Policy of Bilingual Education**

Medium of instruction at elementary level

A. Tagalog area
   - Grade 1–5: Filipino.

B. Non Tagalog areas
   - Grade 1–5: Vernacular languages as media of instruction.
   - Grade 5: Filipino as a subject.
   - Grade 5–6: Filipino and English as media of instruction.

Medium of instruction at intermediate level and high school: English and Filipino.

**1973 Policy revamp**

Medium of instruction at elementary level

A. Grade 1–2: Vernacular languages with Filipino and English as subjects.

B. Grade 3: English with Filipino as a subject.

**1974 Revised Policy**

A. Bilingual Education: English and Filipino as media of instruction for all levels as stated in the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) Order No. 25.

B. Vernacular languages: auxiliary languages.

To sum up English and Filipino are the official languages in the Philippines, with Filipino as the national language. Local languages have been used in government schools as ‘transitional languages’ for initial instruction and early literacy up to primary Grade 3, but these are employed on a small scale. In the current revised policy, local languages have been elevated to the role of ‘auxiliary languages’. These local languages are used mostly to explain the curriculum to students and are not used seriously as media of instruction. In some cases, however, local language or multilingual learning materials are also used.
with good results, for example, the Lubuagan language (Dumatog and Dekker 2003). Situations vary depending on teachers and the availability of learning materials in local languages.

With the overall emphasis on two languages, Filipino and English as media of instruction at all levels, the importance and role of other vernacular languages appear to have diminished. Many minority language speakers have developed a more positive attitude towards English or Filipino for political, social and economic reasons.

There are a few languages in the Philippines that are slowly being abandoned by the new generation of speakers and one example is the Butuanon language, a member of the Visayan dialect family. It should however be mentioned that some well-established majority languages like Cebuano, Ilokano and Ilongo have not been affected as much as other minority languages.

It should also be pointed out that as the writing systems for most languages are fairly similar in the Philippines, many people literate in Filipino can often quite easily transfer their literacy skills into their mother tongue (Jernudd 1999; Young 2002).
Summary
A general overview of the language policy (acquisition planning) in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Language policy (acquisition planning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Brunei</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay national language and medium of instruction in government (national schools) and Chinese and Tamil medium of instruction in national type primary schools with English taught as subject.</td>
<td>Bilingual policy – English medium of instruction and students learn mother tongue as a subject.</td>
<td>Bilingual policy – both standard Malay and English media of instruction.</td>
<td>English and Filipino media of instruction at different school levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL (Pupil’s Own Language) - minimum 15 students.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above discussion it is clear that language policies and speakers’ attitudes regarding the pragmatic importance of learning some languages given their political and economic importance rather than language policy and medium of instruction in schools per se, have contributed to the language shift of minority languages in these countries.

Maintenance and revitalization of minority languages
Having provided the background of language policies let us move on to discuss how some of the endangered languages have been revitalized in new settings by making use of a range of literacies.

Approaches to language revitalization
According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006), existing educational programmes which focus on language revitalization can be categorized along a continuum according to the extent to which a local language is used. These programmes range from total immersion, where the local language is used for all instruction, to partial immersion, where the local language is used together with a majority language, to programmes
with very little local language content. In fact, Leanner, Hinton and Hale (2001) discuss five such programmes. These include programmes which are: (1) school based; (2) non-school based i.e. after school; (3) focused on adult language education; (4) which emphasise documentation and materials development; and (5) home-based.

What follows is a selection of examples of existing programmes.

(1) School based programmes

   Endangered language as a subject

   Semai in Peninsular Malaysia is one of the 18 aboriginal languages protected by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (JHEOA) formed in 1954. The Ministry of Education (MOE) started to introduce Semai as a subject in the national curriculum from year 1996 and it was fully implemented in some schools by 2000.

   In Sarawak a playschool uses Bidayuh as the medium of instruction and this is funded by UNESCO in the Bidayuh Belt (a term coined by Dundon 1989). This belt refers to areas where the Bidayuh villages are located, namely Padawan, Bau, Serian and Lundu districts.

   In the Philippines the Save Our Languages through Federalism (SOLFED) Butuan chapter solicited assistance from two NGOs to fund the teaching of Butuanon in public schools. The two NGOs signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Caraga Department of Education to teach Butuanon in public schools in 2006 (Sunday Times, August 11, 2007).

(2) Children’s programmes outside the school

   In Malaysia, Sikh children are learning Punjabi in classrooms in gurdwaras i.e. the Sikh temple. And Hindi classes are run every Sunday in the Lakshmi Narayan Temple in Kuala Lumpur. Many ethnic based associations, for example the Sindhi Association of Malaysia (SAM) also hold weekly language classes. Many of such ethnic based classes are however short-lived as attendance is erratic.
(3) Adult language programmes

Two adult classes for teaching Bidayuh in Kampong Quop in the Kuching District and Kampong Kakei in the Serian District (2003) started (Jey Lingam Burkhardt 2007). They are held once a week.

(4) Documentation and material development

Publication, field notes and recordings made by the speakers and researchers can be used by new generations to learn what they can about their languages, and are a rich source of material that can be invaluable to language revitalization programmes. Such documentation and materials have been used to help revitalize some minority languages. For instance, a proposed practical orthography based on linguistic analysis and preliminary phonological description conducted in November 1998 is being used to help the Iranun in Sabah, Malaysia, to revitalize their language. Professor Howard McKaughan and Dr. Jacqueline Kitingan together with Jim and Karla Smith of the Institut Linguistik SIL, Sabah, helped in the Iranun Language Project. Recording and transcription of Iranun traditional stories and history were also carried out. The results from these endeavours were:

- 175 different booklets, including children’s books, and calendars.
- An Iranun picture dictionary.
- A volume of traditional Iranun stories (printed by the Sabah Museum).

The Semai language was revitalized through the documentation and development of Semai language materials. A lexicon is being compiled and has helped to produce a dictionary and by September 2000 more than 2000 Semai words were listed.

In the Philippines the Butuanon dialect can only be spoken by fewer than 500 youngsters in Butuan itself (Manila Times, August 11, 2007). In June 2005 SOLFED Butuan Chapter started creating a Butuanon syllabus and grammar book, designed to be used by any classroom teacher with a working knowledge of English. Since Butuanon did not have any existing piece of literature in 2005, SOLFED used an existing grammar book (made by the Maryknoll Institute of Language and Culture in Davao), designed to teach Cebuano Visayan, as a guide. Cebuano Visayan is a close linguistic relative of Butuanon. SOLFED-Butuan members who were native
Butuanon speakers collaborated in designing a syllabus and numerous copies were made for distribution. The recordings can be played in classrooms.

*The Development of Scripts*

The development of Iranun language orthography i.e. a writing script for Iranun encouraged further development of the Iranun language. Iranun documentation and materials development have helped revitalize the Iranun language and create an awareness of the need to learn the Iranun language.

Due to the variations in their 29 isolects, one of the aims of the Bidayuh Language Development project set up in 2001 was to devise a common Bidayuh language. A unified orthography system was achieved for the four main Bidayuh dialects after a series of workshops held from March 2002 to August 2003 and this has resulted in a unified symbolization for Bidayuh words.

*Computer technology*

According to Hinton and Hale (2001), as computer technology is part of modern culture, it might be the ultimate solution for language revitalization. They discussed several uses of computer technology, which include:

1. Development of materials and self published books
2. Online dictionaries, grammars and other important language references
3. Multimedia curriculum for language pedagogy
4. Networking (which includes emails, online newsgroups, blogs)
5. Documentation of these materials

With the explosive growth of today’s technology, the internet has become a valuable resource for people globally in language learning. There are websites and blogs that promote the learning of minority languages. Some examples in Malaysia are:

2) Penang Hokkien language: [www.penanghokkien.com](http://www.penanghokkien.com) (website) and [www.chineselanguage.org](http://www.chineselanguage.org) (website)


These websites and blogs even show users how to pronounce words. Users are able to listen to the accurate pronunciation by clicking on the related icons. These websites also post songs, e.g. Telegu and Hokkien songs. Users can even have a discussion on their respective minority languages.

**Mass media**

Other than the above stated alternatives and strategies in revitalizing minority languages, mass media is also one of the important sources for revitalizing minority languages. A Chinese radio station in Malaysia – 988 started with a five minute Hokkien programme where two to three Hokkien words are taught daily through simple conversation. The DJs repeat the new vocabulary several times so that the listeners learn how to pronounce the words correctly. Malaysia Radio and Television (RTM)’s Chinese station also has five minutes news announcement in four different Chinese dialects (Hakka, Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew) in the evening. Radio Malaysia Sabah (RMS) airs several ethnic languages, namely Bajau, Kadazan, Dusun and Murut. Based on the feedback and response of the ethnic broadcasters of both the Kadazan and Dusun slots the interviews display the roles of this medium in maintaining the Kadazandusun language. RTM Sarawak Bidayuh service broadcasts news items in Biatah, Bau-jagoi and Bukar-sadong dialects. The Catholic News in Kuching occasionally has news reports written in Bidayuh dialects and Utusan Sarawak, a local Malay daily, allocates one section for news in the Iban language. In short, radio stations and newspapers in Malaysia have become the source of minority language revitalization. In Brunei all that can be found on the radio is a one-hour weekly programme called ‘Bahasa mengenali bangsa’ where different minority languages are used together with Malay, but only those of the recognized indigenous groups, whereas five hours of programmes in Mandarin are broadcast every day.

As for television there are several Chinese dialects programmes in Malaysia. Cantonese drama series are shown on TV2, Astro channels, NTV7 and Channel 8 every evening (6.00pm – 8.00pm).
Lately, Channel 8 has started a Hokkien drama series from Monday to Fridays from 6.00pm to 7.00pm. Vaanavil, one of the Astro television channels, also shows half an hour each of drama in Telegu and Malayalam. One example of a Malayalam drama is ‘Gangotri’. Watching drama programmes in ethnic languages is an effective way to revitalize minority languages.

Songs in different Chinese dialects are produced in cassettes, CDs and DVDs. Michael Ong, a famous Malaysian Chinese singer and writer, sings Cantonese songs. Chinese New Year songs are produced in Hokkien yearly.

(7) In the Phillipines the Subanen language in Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao, has been maintained through songs and folk epics (Esteban 2003).

In Sarawak Bidayuh singers play a very important role in promoting and preserving the Bidayuh language. The Bidayuh lyrics are influential in teaching reading and spelling in Bidayuh, as well as transmitting Bidayuh words to the younger generation (Rensch et al. 2006: 18). As for the Philippines, Surigaonon, another minority language in the Northeastern part of Mindanao, is used in local songs, local newspapers and blogs.

**Community Initiatives**

It is also important for us to investigate how local communities have maintained their dialects in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Philippines. In Malaysia, there are ethnic subgroups that have their own associations which focus on retaining their culture. Most of the associations have been focusing their activities on promoting their culture e.g. food, wedding ceremonies etc. For example, the Malaysian Hakka Association holds a Miss Hakka contest as one of their annual activities (http://www.hakkamalaysia.com/index.html). They do not however appear to be emphasizing the use of the dialect. The same applies to the language minority groups in Brunei who still go on celebrating their own traditional festivals, even though for some, like the Iban, the language still plays a central role. However, as stated above, basically no language planning is being carried out in Brunei for the local minority languages, if we exclude Mandarin Chinese, which is taught in two private schools, as an elective subject at the University of Brunei and can be listened to on the radio for five hours daily.
The Bidayuh communities in Sarawak have attempted to promote the use of the Bidayuh dialects. The Bidayuh Language Development Project (BLDP) is a language revitalization project initiated by the leaders of the Bidayuh community in Sarawak. The project goals are to:

- Revitalize the language, i.e. to recover forgotten and neglected terms
- Develop a unified orthography for all Bidayuh dialects
- Expand the body of literature in Bidayuh
- Facilitate having Bidayuh taught in schools

In Singapore the government is not playing any role in minority languages revitalization. In fact it has consciously and purposely presided over the eradication of the Chinese vernaculars and through their policy of favouring English above all other languages it is promoting a brand of English dominant bilingualism. In actual fact researchers have argued that Singapore English-Mandarin bilingualism is valued much more than the other types (English-Malay, English-Tamil), as these are harder to justify and place a pragmatic value to (Bokhorst-Heng 1998, cited in Wee and Bokhorst-Heng 2005).

The best that can be said is that after being urged by the respective speech communities to do so, today the government has accepted the teaching in community-run classrooms of some of the other Indian languages spoken in Singapore, for example, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati and Urdu. All other efforts at encouraging the learning of other languages in Singapore by the government have been to allow (only) the best students (that is, those in the top 10%) to enroll in a third language apart from their mother tongue. In a positive note, recently this rule has been relaxed and Malay has been introduced as a third language in secondary schools to any student who would like to learn it (Kassim 2008).

The fact that English has become a global force and there are strong instrumental reasons for its adoption in many countries other than Singapore (Sonntag 2003; see also Phillipson 2006 and Schmidt 2006 for a summary) is an incontrovertible fact. In other places around the world, without any overt language policy favouring English, we see the same advancement of English (U.S.) cultural standards and English proficiency in many sectors. However, it is undeniable that official sanctions, together with natural forces, have created a sweeping momentum in the case of Singapore. Indeed, there have been many economic rewards accrued because of the language policies adopted in Singapore. Singapore is
widely considered to be a successful nation state largely because of a slew of far-sighted policies and good management. However, as in any language debate, there is a social cost to all gains.

Table 3 will give us a general overview of how minority communities in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Philippines are revitalizing their minority languages, while Table 4 clearly shows the range of media used to maintain minority languages in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines.

**Table 3 Approaches to minority languages revitalization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages revitalization strategies</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Brunei</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-based programmes</td>
<td>Semai and Kadayandusun - POL</td>
<td>Mandarin, Malay and Tamil - taught as subjects in schools</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese taught in two private schools</td>
<td>Butuanon - taught as a subject in government schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s programmes outside the school</td>
<td>A play school in Sarawak is using Bidayuh as the medium of instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult language programmes</td>
<td>Bidayuh adult classes</td>
<td>Hokkien and Teochew classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document and material development</td>
<td>Iranun traditional stories documented</td>
<td>Orthography and grammar developed</td>
<td>A few basic grammars and dictionaries have been published for Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Tutong and Belait. Some traditional stories have also been published for Dusun</td>
<td>Butuanon grammar book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>175 booklets published</td>
<td>Picture dictionaries published</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semai dictionaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiliteracies</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>Telegu, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka</td>
<td>Butuanon</td>
<td>All official languages and other Indian languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Telegu, Hokkien</td>
<td>Surigaonon</td>
<td>All official languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Hakka</td>
<td>Surigaonon</td>
<td>All official languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV programmes</td>
<td>Hokkien, Cantonese, Telegu, Malayalam</td>
<td>Some Chinese drama series and films are broadcast on Radio Television Brunei in Mandarin. Brunei Malay is used together with standard Malay in locally produced drama series</td>
<td>All official languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio programmes</td>
<td>Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew, Bidayuh</td>
<td>Surigaonon</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs and folk epic</td>
<td>Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka (songs)</td>
<td>Surigaonon, Subanen</td>
<td>All official languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>Utusan Sarawak</td>
<td>Periodico Surigaonon</td>
<td>All official languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary and conclusion

Arguments for the maintenance of minority languages have been made by many linguists around the world (see Cavallaro 2005 for a summary). Crystal (2000) provides a number of reasons why it is important to maintain mother tongues and these include:

- Linguistic diversity enriches human ecology
- Languages are expressions of identity
- Languages are repositories of history
- Languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge: each language provides a new slant on how the human mind works, perceives and records human observation and experience.

The arguments for language maintenance speak for themselves and there is little need for more research into why languages should be maintained. The research should now concentrate on the mechanisms that best reverse language shift and on ways of promoting the maintenance of all languages spoken within a community (Cavallaro 2005). To this end we note that in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Philippines language policies have affected minority languages in some way. However, only the governments of Malaysia and the Philippines have attempted to preserve some minority languages to some extent by introducing the teaching of some of these languages as subjects in the school curriculum. Communities, too, have invited experts to conduct research and campaigns to promote these languages. Unfortunately, most of the minority languages speakers, especially the young ones, have shifted away from using and appreciating their respective mother tongues. Due to their learning environment and their perception of the importance of the majority languages, language shift of minority languages has occurred. Some community leaders across the four countries discussed in this paper have expressed concern at this shift and have attempted to help preserve and maintain their respective languages.

In conclusion we would like to state that whatever the opportunities given by education systems, community leaders and externally funded organizations; whatever the many modes of documenting minority languages and encouraging people to use them through blogs, songs and other media, the desire to maintain and use ethnic languages depends on how ethnic minorities perceive the importance of their languages and also on their desire to use these languages. If a minority language has a use for the modern world and an economic value every effort will be made to ensure its retention. For minority languages to
live, opportunities must exist for their spontaneous use, and a value must be given to the language. The main purpose of language planning is precisely to give minority languages the prestige and usefulness, both in economic and cultural terms, which will help to slow down or stop the language shift currently under way (Coluzzi 2007: 139-144). What has been done so far is clearly insufficient, and if more effective and wide-ranging measures of language planning are not implemented, most of the minority languages discussed in this article are doomed, in the short or in the long term according to their present vitality.

References


