LINGUISTIC MINORITIES
THEIR EXISTENCE & IDENTITY WITHIN LARGER COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the vitality of Punan Ba, Tatau and Lugat, three languages located in Bintulu. It is found that there has been a drastic decline in this aspect for all the three of them. The one that has suffered most is Lugat with less that 50 speakers left, followed by Tatau and Punan Ba. Three factors have contributed to this endangered state of the languages, and these are illness, intermarriage, and education. The first has gradually passed off with the re-location of the people in their current places of domicile from where they once were in the upstream regions where food was not easily available, not to mention medical supplies. Intermarriages with people from more dominant communities such as the Iban and the Chinese have contributed to the shrinking size of each of these three communities, in that being in the minority they tend to get absorbed into the former communities. Children from such marriages are brought up using the language of the parent of the more dominant community, and there seems to be
A JAKUN SENSE OF IDENTITY

Kamila Ghazali, Sakina Suffian and Khatijah Shamsudin

Abstract

The Jakun is one of nineteen aboriginal groups of Malaysia. There are about 21,000 of them living in the states of Pahang and Johor. They comprise two groups: one residing by the sea or Orang Laut (People of the Sea) and the other residing in the jungle. Of particular interest to this study is the group residing in the jungle in Kampung Peta, Endau-Rompin, within the confines of the Johor National Park. The Jakun language is without a writing system. Thus, data was collected using the upstream method where the informants were interviewed and the data recorded. A wide range of data was collected and among them were those pertaining to oral traditions. As oral tradition reveals a variety of beliefs, customs and rituals, the scope of this paper is on the folk tales and practices of this Jakun community. Folk tales and practices may seem trivial and old-fashioned but studies have indicated that they connect people to their past and are a central part of their present. This study hopes to uncover the Jakun sense of identity in terms of how they see themselves within their surroundings and how they identify ‘others’ in their folklores.
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The world may have a thousand languages, or even more. But some are fast disappearing or on the road to extinction. This process has been going on through the ages and is not a new phenomenon. In the past, it was mainly due to the depletion of speakers caused by ill health and physical environment. Today, this danger lies in social processes which have created linguistic minorities in the face of dominant and powerful languages.

This volume tells the story of linguistic minorities - their existence and identity within larger communities. As a story, and is written with the general readers in mind and not just for linguists, it should appeal to those who are interested in the preservation of the languages and cultures of these minorities as part of the heritage of mankind. Different approaches employed by researcher-writers in methodology and analysis, as reflected in the various chapters, should prove to be interesting to linguists in the field.

Asmah Haji Omar is a world-renowned linguist. She was formerly Professor of Malay Linguistics, and the Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics of the University of Malaya. After retiring, she occupied the Za'ba Chair of Malay Civilization, and established the Institute of Malay Civilization (2001-2005), University of Education Sultan Idris, Perak. She is also a member of the Language Council of Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia (MABBIM), and is the author of various books among them, The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Languages and Literature (2004), and Languages in the Malaysian Education System: Monolingual strands in multilingual settings (2016).

Norazuna Norahim obtained her doctoral degree from University Malaya in 2010. Her doctoral thesis was entitled, Language Choice Patterns of the Bidayuh Graduates in Kuching-Samarahan Division. She was formerly the Dean of the Centre of Language Studies, and the Dean of the Faculty of Language Studies and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (2011-2016). She is currently working on language resource development of the Miriek language. Her forthcoming books are on The Miriek Language, and Language Endangerment Scenario in the Baram valley. The latter book focuses on smaller communities i.e. Narom, Kiput, Berawan and Penan.