English in Malaysia: Current Use and Status offers an account of the English language used in present-day West and East Malaysia and its status anchored in different linguistic, social and educational domains. After an Introduction giving a bird’s eye view of the status of English in Malaysia, the eight main chapters offer case studies revolving around four themes:
1. linguistic features, with special focus on pronunciation and language contact;
2. language attitudes;
3. English in on-line discourse; and
4. English and language policies.

The chapters cover original data and topics, seeking to draw an accurate portrait of Malaysian English, a non-native variety of postcolonial English that is currently developing its pronunciation, grammar, lexis and distinct identity.

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English in Malaysia

Current Use and Status

Edited by

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CHAPTER 6

English for the Indigenous People of Sarawak: Focus on the Bidayuhs

Patricia Nora Riget and Xiaomei Wang

Introduction

Sarawak covers a vast land area of 124,450 km² and is the largest state in Malaysia. Despite its size, its population of 2.4 million people constitutes less than one tenth of the country's population of 30 million people (as of 2006). In terms of its ethnic composition, besides the Malays and Chinese, there are at least 10 main indigenous groups living within the state's border, namely the Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, Bisaya, Kelabit, Lun Bawang, Penan, Kayan, Kenyah and Kajang, the last three being collectively known as the Orang Ulu (lit. 'upriver people'), a term that also includes other smaller groups (Han, 2006). The Bidayuh (formerly known as the Land Dayaks) population is 598,477 (State Planning Unit, 2010), which constitutes roughly 8% of the total population of Sarawak. The Bidayuhs form the fourth largest ethnic group after the Ibans, the Chinese and the Malays. In terms of their distribution and density, the Bidayuhs are mostly found living in the Lundu, Bau and Kuching districts (Kuching Division) and in the Serian district (Samarahan Division), situated at the western end of Sarawak (Rensch et al., 2006). However, due to the lack of employment opportunities in their native districts, many Bidayuhs, especially youths, have migrated to other parts of the state, such as Miri in the east, in search of job opportunities and many have moved to parts of Peninsula Malaysia, especially Kuala Lumpur, to seek greener pastures.

Traditionally, the Bidayuhs lived in longhouses along the hills and were involved primarily in hill paddy planting. Traditionally, the Bidayuh community held matters concerning land close to their hearts as the land is looked upon as a direct source of sustenance. In the same way, paddy planting became a natural activity (regarded as part of Bidayuh life) and thus needed to be treated with great care and respect. Today, the majority of the Bidayuhs, particularly those living in rural villages, continue their agricultural activities, but they are less involved in paddy planting. They have gradually switched to planting cash crops such as rubber, cocoa, oil palm and pepper, in addition to investing their time and energy in orchards that produce fruits such as durian, rambutan and bananas and many vegetables (Minos, 2000, pp. 45–47).

Bidayuh People a...