

## The Vitality & Revitalisation of a Minority Language: The Case of Dusun in Brunei Darussalam

Hjh. Dyg. Fatimah binti Hj. Awg. Chuchu (Dr.) & Najib Noorashid  
Universiti Brunei Darussalam; Brunei Darussalam  
fatimah.chuchu@ubd.edu.bn; najibnoorashidwritings@outlook.com.

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**Abstract.** Language extinction or language death is a sociolinguistic phenomenon which concerns and is often discussed among linguists or members of speaker in general (Aitchison, 2001; Crystal, 2000; Dalby, 2003; Mufwene, 2004; Nelson, 2007; Fishman, 2002; 2007). Due to rapid globalisation, the effect of linguistic "superstratum-substratum" is inevitable (Crystal, 2003), in particular to those languages of ethnic minorities; those in Brunei Darussalam are not the exclusion (Martin, 1995; Noor Azam, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009; Clynes, 2012; Coluzzi, 2012). These minority languages are inclined to endangerment due to urbanisation, education system, migrations and others, which lead to language shift and consequently, extinction. Brunei Darussalam is a multilingual country that has a diverse population and cultures which generate variations of language and dialect (Nothofer, 1991; Fatimah & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Jaludin Chuchu, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). Recognised as one of the seven indigenous in Brunei under the Citizenship Status laws 1961 of the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*, Dusun ethnic is alleged to have and practice its own code of dialect. All dialects and languages spoken by indigenous ethnics are regarded as minority languages, except for the dialect of Brunei Malay. By focusing on Dusun dialect, this paper discusses the current situation of its language use and perceptions among the native speakers. The current study is an extrapolation from recent fieldworks research on the Dusun code-practice by Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c). This paper also reviews the efforts of revitalising the Dusun dialect – facing the globalisation. Result found Dusun dialect is still being practiced as an identity marker among the older generations but declined in use amongst younger generations. Nevertheless, these native speakers are still aware of the importance of their mother-tongue. Efforts to revitalise Dusun are constantly executed, and interest towards it has also increased over time.

### 1. Introduction

Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei) is known as a multilingual state with diversity of populations and cultures which generate variations on languages and dialects (Nothofer, 1991; Fatimah & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Jaludin Chuchu, 2005; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). These include those from the Malay indigenous ethnics, permanent residents as well as the immigrants (Sercombe, 1996).

Based on the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*, of The Citizenship Status Law Act 1961 Section 4 (1) (a), the recognition of indigenous ethnic groups in Brunei is among those seven ethnics of Malay descent, namely: Bruneian Malay, Kedayan, Murut, Dusun, Bisaya, Belait and Tutong (Brunei Citizenship Status, 1961). Aini Karim (2007) and Fatimah Chuchu (2009) claim every ethnicity owns their specific codes, and practice the language and dialect of theirs. Nevertheless, it is clearly known that Brunei Malay dialect is not only used as a code for everyday

communication in intercultural communications, but also dominantly practice in formal situations. Previous studies have proven Brunei Malay dialect continues to maintain its prestige as the lingua franca among the public in Brunei (Gunn, 1997), other than the standard Malay language that acts as the official language and English language which has instrumental value (David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009).

Prevalently acclaimed, sociolinguistic phenomena in Brunei is closely related to triglossia, where: coveted English has the highest prestige based on its needs for employment, international relations, and education; Standard Malay with its medium prestige as the official language; and Brunei Malay dialect which considered having the low prestige (Fatimah & Poedjosoedarmo, 1995; David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi, 2009). The diglossia and prestige of languages are closely intertwined with the prevalence of its use and practices as well as the attitude of its speakers of the language (Fishman, 1991a; Derhemi, 2002; Mufwene, 2002; Meyerhoff, 2006), consequently to the vitality and maintenance of those languages and dialects (Derhemi, 2002). Vitality of a language/dialect refers to as the maintenance of a language whether it is likely to be used continuously as a representation of various social functions in everyday communication or vice versa; which involves influences such as institutional factors, social and the demographic of its speakers (Meyerhoff, 2006). Meanwhile, revitalisation refers to the efforts of certain parties to raise the importance of a language and its use, thus evading the language from total transition and extinction (Crystal, 2002; Tsunoda, 2005; Nelson, 2007; Laoire, 2008). Hence, it is also closely related to the maintenance of dialect or language in multilingual settings.

The phenomenon of language vitality is often present in multilingual communities that closely related to its diglossia (Dorian, 2009). Therefore, the concern of language extinction, in particular those of ethnic minorities, has always been the focus of discussion among language experts or the members of the language itself (Trudgill, 2000; Crystal, 1997, 2000; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). Previous studies show much interest on the vitality of language and dialect and the efforts to revitalise them, especially when dealing with globalisation (Crystal, 1997, 2000; Fishman, 1991b; Mufwene, 2002). This paper is not the exception. By focusing on a minority dialect of indigenous ethnic Dusun in Brunei, this paper shows its current vitality based on local practices among the native speakers, simultaneously exploring the efforts of revitalising the dialect. As an extrapolation of research studies conducted earlier, this paper focuses on the findings and results of Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c)<sup>i</sup>, with further complemented investigation.

## **2. Statement of the Problem & the Objectives of Current Study**

Language extinction is allegedly emerge in multilingual settings as linguists believe about 6,000 languages spoken around the world today will face its 'death' (Crystal, 1997; Wolfram, 2004; Nelson, 2007). An endangered language expert, Michael Krauss, predicts 90 percent of spoken languages at present will face endangered by the end of this century (Krauss, 1992; Hale *et al.* 1992). David Crystal (2000, 2003) states a language entity in this world are expected to be extinct by the scale of every two weeks. In addition, an international foundation dedicated to endangered languages, The Foundation for Endangered Languages also claims half of the languages spoken around the world are dealing with the issue of extinction as most of it has not been transmitted to younger generations (Nelson, 2007). This statement is consistent with the study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which reports among 6,800 languages spoken in 190 countries and territories in the world's six billion population, only 3,000 languages can be written and the rest only practice by spoken, though lessen (Finaz Daniel, August 30, 2010). Various aspects influence the extinction of languages in multilingual societies, and they are often justified from various levels involving its native speakers to the new generation which were expected to maintain their mother-tongue. As every language has a role in communication, cultures and identity, its function will diminish when it is no longer being practiced (*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, 2000a; Derhemi, 2002; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011).

Nevertheless, the study in relation to the vitality and revitalisation of Dusun based on its

practices has less attention in the past. Therefore, this paper has taken the opportunity to review the current situation of Dusun language in practice, by focusing on the target population of its native speakers. This paper attempts to examine current objectives of: a) To review descriptive evidence of a language used among the native speakers of Dusun in Brunei; b) To identify the motivations or reasons for the occurrence of language transition from Dusun dialect in current situation, and; c) To review and analyse the current revitalisation efforts to maintain the Dusun dialect as one of the local dialects that should be retained.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The Model of Ethnolinguistics Vitality by Giles *et al.* (1977) provides a guideline to explain the vitality of a language, and evaluate its current situation as well as its practices, through three major crucial factors to the vitality and efforts of language revitalisation. The three major elements are: (i) the status of the language (of a variety or of the speakers of that variety in different contexts), (ii) the demographics of the group identified that impact the language; and (iii) the approach and efforts of institutional measures to support and provide strong resistance to the linguistic entity (Meyerhoff, 2006). Refer to Figure 3.1 for Model of Ethnolinguistics Vitality (1977). Based on the theoretical framework, current study will not discuss each component in the vitality model in specific but is implemented with a focus on reviewing the aspects of language status and trends, based on the code selections among the demographic focus of Dusun natives. Current study also explores the efforts of various parties involved to revitalise the usage of Dusun dialect among these indigenous ethnics.

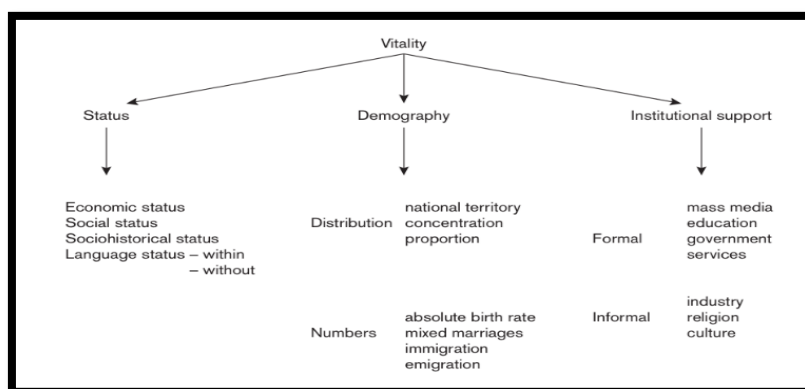


Figure 3.1: The Model of Ethnolinguistics Vitality by Giles *et al.* (1977) in Meyerhoff (2006: 108)

### 4. Literature Review

Even though, there were several studies on Dusun community undertaken over the last decade, comparable to others, studies that focus on the language and culture of Dusun ethnic in Brunei are still considered less focused (Martin, 1994). Among the earliest studies involving Dusun was a lexicography research by Nothofer (1991), in regards to the collection of cognate words of native languages and dialects of indigenous ethnics in Brunei, and their lexical relations with Brunei Malay dialect and between one another. The earliest study considered significant focuses on Dusun dialect was by Kershaw (1994), which deals with the use of the dialect in the delivery of traditional oral literature among the older generations of Dusun native speaker. Kershaw research also found the practice of Dusun is more focused among older generations and less in the younger generations. Later, Kershaw (2000) also found the role of non-Muslim Dusun towards the modern Islamic monarchy of Brunei had impacted to the transition and convergence from their mother-tongue to the use of more "mutually understood" Brunei Malay. Asiyah (2011) confirms the findings by Kershaw's.

Based on preliminary observation, the study of language contact and socialisation among Dusun community is indeed less conducted in Brunei; hence study involving communication code in relations to sociolinguistic aspects is also less stressed. For instance, those studies of minority

and the dialect of Dusun in Brunei are typically reviewed for its language structures and system (Yabit Alas, 1995; Aini Karim, 2008; Chong Ah Fok, 2008; Dayangku Rosenani Pengiran Halus, 2009), or comparative to the Malay language (Aini Karim, 2007), as well as a study of historical linguistics (Yabit, 2009). However, the studies on the selection of communication codes involving the minority Dusun in a multilingual setting were conducted recently by Fatimah Chucu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c). Comparable to earlier Kershaw's (1994), these studies found that the use of the Dusun is just focused on the elderly and less among the youngsters, as today's generations pertain to employ the Malay language or English. However, these populations prefer Dusun as the representation of their identity as the ethnic of Brunei. Based on the findings and results of the earlier studies of Fatimah Chucu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c), this paper explores the selections of communication code in the Dusun community that manifest the current situation and the vitality of their native dialect, based on sociolinguistic perspectives.

## 6. Dusun Speakers in Brunei Darussalam

There is no specific statistic of Dusun population in Brunei to date. However, based on the entire population in 1998, from the estimated 323.600 people, a total of 19,400 people (or 6.0%) is made up of those minority ethnic groups of indigenous Brunei – Dusun is a part of it (Aini Karim, 2007). This population is expected to increase overtime as The Minority Rights Group International Report (2008) states the rate of Dusun population which makes of 6.3% of the total population<sup>ii</sup>, practiced animism and now begin to embrace Islam. Hypothetically, we acknowledge these populations are regarded as the native speaker of Dusun.

Based on the distribution of native Dusun, the majority of these natives reside in the Tutong District (Nothofer, 1991; Asiyah, 2011). Aini Karim (2007) confirms that several numbers of Dusun natives can be found in the peripheral areas of Belait and Tutong District; in areas such as Mukim Bukit Sawat, Kampong Sungai Mau, Merangking, Kampong Bukit Sawat, Kampong Sungai Liang, Kampong Ukong, Mukim Kiudang, Lamunin, Rambai and Telisai. A smaller number of them are also found in the interior part of Brunei Muara District, namely around Kampong Batang Mitus and Kampong Bebuloh. Refer to Figure 6.1 for a map of the distribution of Dusun speakers in Brunei Darussalam by Aini Karim (2007: 19).

As previously mentioned, the dialect of Dusun is one of the spoken mediums of the minority indigenous of Dusun in Brunei. However, Dusun is also a tool for the people of Kedazan in Sabah, Malaysia; and Bisaya in Limbang, Sarawak (Aini Karim, 2007:10). In spite of this, Yabit Alas (1994) claims the language spoken by the Dusun in Brunei is different to those spoken by the Kedazan and Bisaya, either in terms of pronunciation or lexical. The focus of the study in this paper is to review those of Dusun natives in Brunei.

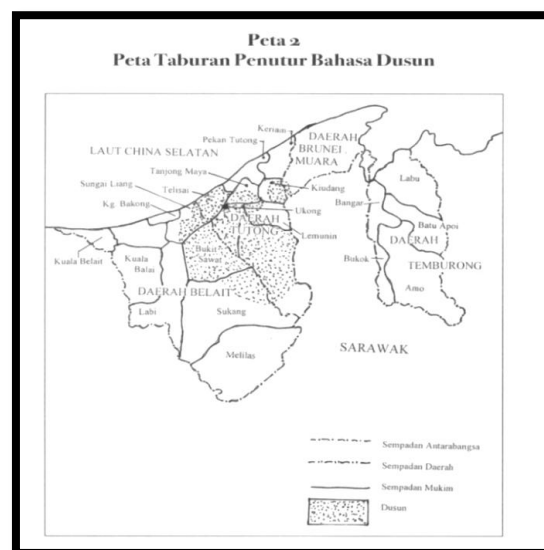


Figure 6.1 taken from Aini Karim (2007: 19)

## 7. The Current Situation and Vitality of Dusun in Brunei Darussalam

As previously mentioned, the vitality of Dusun dialect has never been specifically discussed. Nevertheless, a few studies have indirectly approached to the current situation of Dusun which reveal a brief description of the dialect.

The vitality of indigenous ethnic languages in Brunei was briefly reviewed by Martin (1995). Based on the collective data and the language used among native speakers, with the rate of language vitality scale on 0-6 (6 being the highest retention), Martin classifies Dusun dialect on a scale of 2 which has the tendency to go extinct. Although Aini Karim (2007) does not include the vitality scale, she points that the Dusun dialect in Brunei is indeed declining and facing its extinction. The use of Dusun dialect is limited to the older generations, while the youngsters prefer to code-mix Dusun with Malay language. Dusun dialect will only be employed when communicating with the older generations. Coluzzi (2012) on linguistic ecology of Brunei, points that there is no usage of minority languages, in particular the ethnic dialects, on public signboards, thus, concludes these languages do not present any value and prestige to compare with standard Malay and English or the local vernacular of Brunei Malay. This also reflects the less practicality of ethnic languages to the public. The same findings were found by Noor Azam (2005), which shows the status of ethnic languages in Brunei is low and declining in practice. The Dusun language is no exception.

The recent studies by Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b) also implicate the vitality of Dusun dialect. Preliminary focused on the code-choice within intercultural communications involving a number of respondents from Dusun native speakers, these studies show the language used, current situation, shifting and motivations of the Dusun among its natives. Based on 35 Dusun natives interviewed, a total of 21 respondents (60%) choose the code of Dusun when conversing to older audiences, such as parents, grandparents, etc. It is also found that these respondents are among native population of aged 40 year and above. However, none of them speak Dusun to younger audiences, such as their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren or younger relatives – which they use Brunei Malay or code-mixing. Most young natives pertain to use Brunei Malay or mixed code during conversations. The summary of code-practice to the younger generations can be seen through Chart 7.1 in the following:

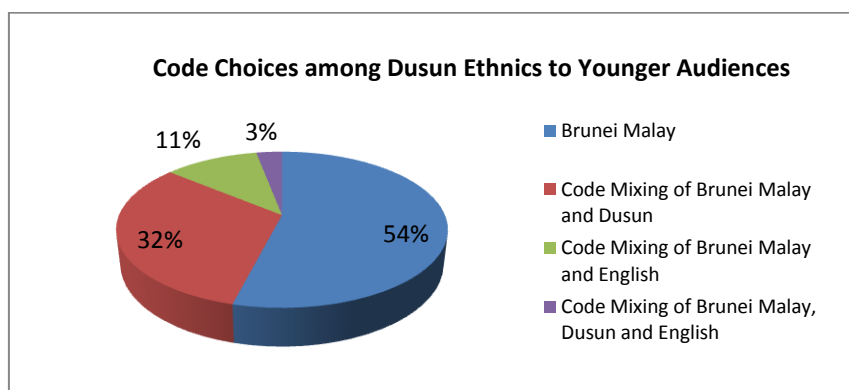


Chart 7.1: Code Choices among Dusun Ethnics to Their Younger Audiences

Among reasons of these natives adopting Brunei Malay over Dusun can be seen from the following responses:

(1) *"Anak-anak baru mesti kami cakap Melayu. Durang faham tapi durang membunyikan percakapan atu inda lurus, inda ngam, macam karau bunyinya, percakapan inda tepat, iatah pakai Melayu saja"*  
<Awg. Tawar; 60 year old; UKO13-MN-8; 9:03>

[English Translation (ET): I must speak Malay with the younger generations. They do understand the Dusun language, but there will be problems here and there if they started to speak one. Their accents and pronunciations are not correct and precise. So, it is much easier to use Malay].

(2) *"...Dusun aku inda berapa, inda pandai membalas. Faham tapi inda pandai membalas. Pakai*

*Melayu saja*” <Dyg. Nurul; 19 year old; UKO13-MN-9; 2:05>

[ET: I cannot speak Dusun that well. I do not know how to respond to them. I understand them but I could not reply in Dusun. Thus, adopting the Malay language would be the most convenient way].

(3) “*Anak-anak masa ani cakap Melayu saja tapi durang merati pulang tapi aku bercakap ani cakap Dusun pulang tapi durang merati jua tapi balasnya cakap Melayu, awu, awu cakap Dusun atu ia tau bah*” <Awg. Mokti; 83 year old; UKO13-MN-8; 1:54>

[ET: Nowadays, our young people can speak Malay only. However, they understand the Dusun. I personally speak Dusun with them, but then, they will reply in Malay. Yes, they do understand the Dusun].

Extracted from Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b).

Based on these findings, Brunei Malay is dominantly preferred by the Dusun native speakers, in particular those of the younger generations. These approved the findings of Martin (1995), Noor Azam (2005) and Aini Karim (2007). Respondent statements in (1) and (3) above also suggest the intergenerational transmission of Dusun also significantly reduced – or perhaps is not present. These native speakers believe the accommodation to Brunei Malay will ease the communications between them without realising the adverse effect of the Dusun dialect endangeredment. If this continues amid the individual level or in family institutions, we can conclude Dusun dialect is deemed to be endangered. Moreover, Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b) studies also found that academic level also plays a prominent role of language shift from their mother-tongue to the “more prestigious speak”. Refer Chart 7.2 which shows the daily code choice based on academic levels.

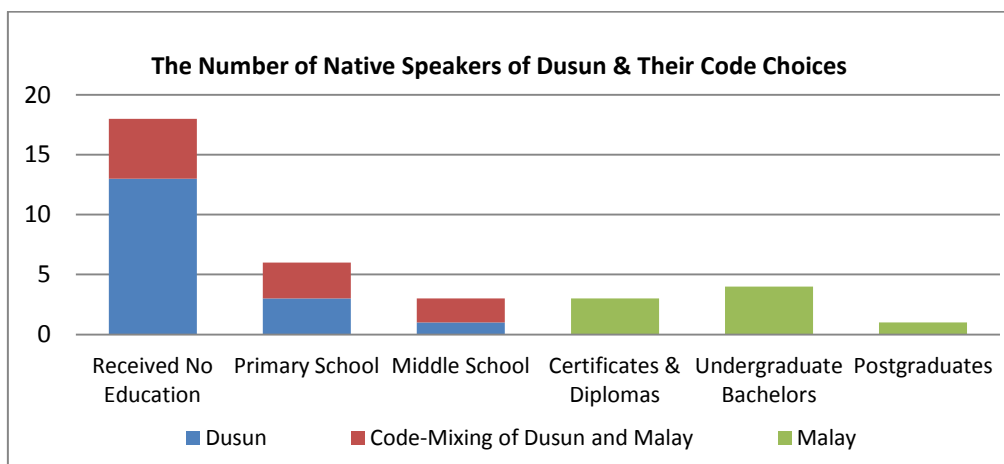


Chart 7.2: Code Choice in Daily Communications Based on Academic Statuses

Based on the code choice shown, Dusun is evidently more practiced among the less educated. These natives are also those older generations that previously stated that they prefer to speak their mother-tongue. This finding also shows an inclination among younger native speakers who are exposed to mainstream education, to use the Brunei Malay, standard Malay as well as English, notably those who are highly-educated. It is generally known that Malay and English language have more instrumental value than the native languages or dialects (Fatimah & Poedjosoedarmo; 1995; Gunn, 1997; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; David, Cavallaro & Colluzzi, 2009; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). Here, the status of Dusun dialect is considered relatively low and under-served to those who have high academic level.

These findings also suggested on how the lower prestige of Dusun is affected by the superstratum effect of the assimilation to Brunei Malay that constantly acts as the local vernacular in Brunei. In this case, the extinction of minority languages is more likely to occur due to the profound influence of dominant languages, which later might result into language shift (Fasold, 1984; Noor Azam, 2005; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). This is comparable to the previous studies in the

Westerns where the languages of ethnic minorities often suffer the consequences of language shift from the effects of globalisation and the superstrate English language (Trudgill, 2000; Crystal, 1997, 2000). This also claims by previous studies which dictate the shifting from mother-tongues to Brunei Malay is due to its prestige as the lingua franca of various ethnic groups in Brunei (Hassan Salikin, 13 November 1991; Martin, 1996a; Gunn, 1997, Muhammad Awang Jambol, 2001; Azmi Abdullah, 2001; Noor Azam, 2005; Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid, 2103a, 2013b, 2013c). The following statements are among responses of native speakers interviewed:

(4) “Aa, kebiasaan sudah juakan cakap Melayu jadinya gunakan saja cakap Melayulah, lebih mudah untuk berkomunikasi jua bah, orang pun paham” <Dyg. Nie; 34 year old; UKO13-MN-14; 0:27>

[ET: It has become habitual for me to speak in Malay, so, I will speak in Malay. Thus, the communication will flow smoothly, and other people can comprehend easily].

(5) “Kalau for me, I prefer to speak in Malay saja, I mean, I’ve been exposed to Malay since I was a kid, walau ada kadang-kadangnya my mum speaks Dusun with me but I’d rather speak Malay. My Dusun sounds very weird” <Dyg. Katie; 28 year old; UKO13-MN-15; 1:21>

[ET: "For me, I prefer to speak in Malay only. I mean, I have been exposed to Malay since I was a kid, even though my mother speaks Dusun sometimes, I'd rather speak in Malay. My Dusun sounds very weird].

Extracted from Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b).

Both statements (4) and (5) clearly show that it has become a "norm" for these natives to employ Brunei Malay over Dusun. This might cause the vitality of Dusun dialect to weaken over time. Furthermore, the diminishing intergenerational transmission of Dusun in family institutions and the tendency of older generations to instil Brunei Malay to their youngsters have lessened the practicality and the importance of their native-tongue. These findings are comparable to Martin's (1996b), when endangered Lemeting language (a dialect of indigenous Belait ethnic) had experienced major language shift to the dominant Brunei Malay due to less practice and not being transmitted inter-generations. Even though, the Dusun dialect is more concentrated among the elders, this would not assist to maintain the Dusun as it is not transmitted to its future generations, as stated by Fishman (1991b) and Reyhner (2007) "...efforts to save languages must ultimately deal with the intergenerational transmission of mother-tongues". In this case, the role of family and social institution is very crucial to prevent total language shift.

The study of Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b) also elicited language attitudes and perceptions among those 35 Dusun natives. All interviewed respondents believe that the use of Dusun dialect among them would decrease in the future as the next generations would prefer Malay or English. Nevertheless, 97% represents 34 natives claim the dialect is important as their identity marker of being Dusun. This also found in Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013c) when all indigenous ethnics involved (including those of the Dusun), also express their dialects are important as a form of identification. This also confirms by Noor Azam (2005) where the majority of the indigenous ethnics believe their languages and dialects are essential for their identification as Bruneian ethnics, even though they do not practice them. Still, this would not help in maintaining the Dusun in present multilingual settings. The entity of a language should be practiced and used for the purpose of communication, to maintain their statuses in the community and not just shown in the form of affective. These shows the vitality of Dusun is increasingly threatened.

The current situation of Dusun dialect also shares a number of features as claim by Campbell & Muntzel (1989) as "the gradual extinction of the language". This refers to language extinction that often occurs in a multilingual setting as it involves the transition of minority languages to the more dominant language gradually (Sasse, 1992; Wolfram, 2004). In this case, Dorian (1977) states there will be a continuum of significant differences in language used between the speakers' generations. The new generations are referred to as "semi speakers" as they often have poor language competence to compare to the older generation. This is evidently found in the

language used among Dusun natives discussed earlier.

## 8. Language Revitalisation of Dusun in Brunei Darussalam

The extinction of a language (particularly involving those of minorities) is a universal phenomenon (Wolfram, 2004; Nelson, 2007; Dorian, 2009; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). Nevertheless, this is feasibly avoided by language maintenance and revitalisation through various strategies to prevent them from total extinction (Fatimah Chuchu, 2011).

David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi (2009) states even though the importance of maintaining the languages of ethnic minority is often emphasised by Brunei authorities and non-governmental sectors, the effort to prevent the transition of these minority languages and dialects to the dominants (referring to both Malay and English) has never been applied at large. These ethnic languages and dialects are also found to have less to none statuses, when compared to the Malay language (referring to the use of standard Malay as the medium of teaching and learning in schools and officials) as well as English being the focus on bilingual education policy in Brunei. Even so, David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi study has listed some of the revitalisation efforts implicitly. For instance, the official Institute of Language & Literature of Brunei (*Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*) has published several articles, reading materials and references in ethnic dialects of Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Tutong and Belait. Dusun dialect, on the other hand, is applied as a medium for a limited number of folk tales.

An expert language and sociolinguistics of Brunei, Noor Azam<sup>iii</sup> (2013) through an interview argues the statement by David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi (2009), as the effort to revitalise the use of ethnic languages, in particular Dusun, has broadened. According to him, even though these ethnic languages still do not have status as Malay (the official language preserves through the *Constitution of Negari Brunei 1959*), the implementation to creating awareness of the importance to support these languages has been diversified. For instance, a higher education institution, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, through its Central Division of Language (Language Centre) has established a Dusun language course as part of electives, which is conducted by a Dusun expert who is also a native speaker. This course is offered not limited to the generation of Dusun but to any interested students, and since has gained interest from them. Although, the implementation is still limited to "elective"; it is perhaps considered effective way to prevent the extinction of a language. These are comparable to the studies of: Malone (2004, 2007); Laoire, (2008); David, Cavallaro & Coluzzi (2009); Jaap de Ruiter, Saidi & Spotti (2009).

Noor Azam (2013) added in recent years, mass media also increases their interests exposing the languages and dialects of ethnic groups to the public. For instance, the government official broadcaster, Radio Television Brunei also caters local radio programmes such as "*Bahasa Mengenal Bangsa*" (ET: "To know your language is to know your ethnic") that reveals Dusun dialect in terms of its lexical and general use. Furthermore, the official Institute of Language & Literature of Brunei also continues to promote and publish writings about Dusun dialect, thus increases its interest and status.

As the imminent extinction of Dusun dialect and its culture, the alliance of Sang Jati Dusun Association (PSJD) is established by the conglomeration of Dusun communities in Brunei. Various activities and planning held annually to unite these ethnic natives, merely, to remind the importance of their origins as the indigenous ethnic Dusun, while preserving its cultures and language in every generation (Yaw Siew May, May 23, 2007). In addition, several seminars to introduce the Dusun's way of life, including exposures to the dialect, cultures, diets, medicines, crafts and dance were organised by the Majlis Perwakilan Kampung (ET: the assembly of village representatives) (Sharlene Othman, June 25, 2011). These efforts to increase awareness are believed to upgrade the status of a revitalised language by providing more confidence and economic value to the language, as well as to the native speakers (Pandharipande, 2002).

The awareness of language used is not only limited to institutions, but local individual and



the native speakers themselves. This can be seen from the use of technology, such as several personal blogs written by Dusun natives, which aim to educate the dialect to Brunei society. For instance, a blog<sup>iv</sup> by "Sang Jati" (ET: The native of Dusun) displays Dusun dialect in daily use of the native community in Mukim Bukit Sawat, Belait. It exposes various aspects of the Dusun language entities, whether in terms of lexis, semantics, and modern used or rare-classical Dusun expressions. Even though this effort is considered informal in nature, it is a good approach to continue broadening the knowledge and use of Dusun, as there is less documentation in the past. In this case, it is observed that the effort of revitalising the Dusun dialect is gradually gaining attentions from various parties in Brunei. Nevertheless, it is often questioned: how long will these efforts be undertaken? Are existed efforts sufficient enough to maintain the Dusun competence? In what level will these efforts succeed? Moreover, language revitalisation takes time. Therefore, this paper also suggests a number of actions that consider feasible in maintaining the native language of ethnic minorities, based on the contextualisation of Dusun dialect in Brunei.

Based on previous studies of maintaining the status and economic value of indigenous ethnic languages and dialects that have been conducted internationally (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, Burnaby, 2007; Crawford; 2007), the status and the use of the Dusun dialect can be maintained among the natives by the implementation of language policy that also concerned the role of minority languages in Brunei. This is not suggesting these minority languages should be elevated into the official language as Malay, but the formulation of such language policy will definitely promote ethnic languages, so they can be practiced pro-actively among ethnics, particularly within family institutions (Fishman, 1989). The involvement of more parties in language planning will undoubtedly bring about awareness and confidence among speakers to employ their native speaks without insecurities (*Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, 2000b). However, the implementation of the language policy should be planned carefully in regards to the preservation of minority cultures and habitats (Romaine, 2002).

The revitalisation on extinct languages is deemed effective through language documentation (Crystal, 2002; Brunaby, 2007; Fishman, 2007; Fatimah Chuchu, 2011). In this case, the Dusun language documentation should be disseminated and executed immediately as it can be recorded, discussed and revealed to the public, on its use as a medium, general reading or for research purposes, as well as further learning in the future, effectively. These can assist native speakers or others to get references or spelling system which helps improve the literacy rates of this dialect (Zaharlick, 1982; Crystal, 2002). The involvement of multiple parties is crucial to sustain, enhance the value and importance of Dusun dialect. Continuous activities such as forums, road-shows, language programmes for native speakers which engage the community, institutions and publics can be accomplished by an effective action plan. In this regards, the efforts should not be limited to governments and non-governmental organisations but also individual consciousness of native speakers to maintain their languages and cultures, as nowadays our lives are vulnerable to globalisations. This is reinforced by Austin & Sallabank (2011) which points, linguists, members of endangered language communities, government and non-governmental organisations, as well as international organisations such as UNESCO and the European Union are actively working to continue preserve and stabilise endangered languages through multiple actions and efforts that have been planned thoroughly. These will preserve cultures, thoughts, identity and originality of the way of life of a community<sup>v</sup>.

## 9. Conclusion

Based on the comparatively small demographic population of indigenous Dusun to the overall population in Brunei, the composition of its native speakers also relatively less, thus, classifying them as one of the minorities. These minority languages are often vulnerable to extinction as their less competency and practicality alongside dominant languages which have more instrumental values or importance. Dusun language used among the natives is found to be significantly lessened

which only concentrated among the older generations. This is limited among the younger generations that perceived as "semi speakers" who cannot speak or lack of knowledge about the use of their mother-tongue. These inevitably put the dialect of Dusun in the category of endangerment and vulnerable to extinction.

There are several grounds which weakens the vitality of Dusun dialect. Among the main reasons is the dominant effect of the Malay language and English which cause the tendency for native speakers to shift to dominant languages, without any effort to channel their mother-tongue as the medium among individual and families, or to their younger generations. The status of the Dusun dialect is also relatively low when compared to the official language, the vernacular and English language is also causing adverse effects, especially among those who are exposed to education and globalisation thus predispose to immense accommodation and assimilation. The future of Dusun dialect is not guaranteed, especially dealing with the forces of globalisation. There are other factors such as migration and religion that also affect the vitality of the Dusun. Nevertheless, further discussion and research are needed to prove these.

In conclusion, the survey on the vitality of Dusun dialect as a minority language of ethnic Dusun in Brunei is proven to be facing its gradual extinction. Therefore, various responsible parties, either at personal level or institutional should constantly take effective measures to prevent this language issue – not limited to the Dusun but other indigenous ethnic languages as well. However, extensive studies involving more respondents, reviewing various aspects and discussion as well as involving wider geographical distributions should be conducted in the near future, to provide more exact situation that involves the issues of language extinction, holistically.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c) are sociolinguistics-field studies undertaken to identify code choices within intercultural communications and inter-ethnics as of 2013. By involving a number of native speakers of certain ethnic minorities in Brunei, both studies of (2013a) and (2013b) are undertaken around the villages in Mukim Ukong, whilst the study of (2013c) is carried out within the neighbourhood of Kampong Kiudang and Kampong Mungkom in the Tutong district. Empirical studies are done by implementing methodologies of ethnographic observation, questionnaires and interviews. Most of the study populations are composed of native speakers of Dusun which involve young people, youth and elders. Refer to Fatimah Chuchu & Najib Noorashid (2013a; 2013b; 2013c) works for further examination.

<sup>ii</sup> However, Bernstein (1997) states the rate population of ethnic Dusun in Brunei cannot be expressed in specific figures as it is quite dynamic periodically.

<sup>iii</sup> Noor Azam OKMB Hj. Othman is one of language experts in Brunei who actively involves in sociolinguistic studies. Among his research involve issues of minority languages, language shift, bilingualism and multilingualism in Brunei. He was the former Director of the Language Centre at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and currently serves as a senior lecturer and the Dean of Faculty of Art and Social Sciences in the same university. He is also one of the board members of SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (RELC) and holds the position of Senior Editor for the Journal of South – East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal (UBD).

<sup>iv</sup> The blog “Khazanah Bahasa Sang Jati Dusun” (ET: The Treasure of Dusun Language) is accessible through the website of <http://khazanahbahasasangjatidusun.blogspot.com>. Established in 2012, the author of the blog claims he is a native speaker of Dusun. Born and raised in Mukim Bukit Sawat, Belait District, he has served as invited speaker at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Teachers Training College (BTTC), College of Nursing and Sinaut Agriculture Training Centre.

<sup>v</sup> Further reading on the suggestions of revitalising local minority dialects in Brunei through language planning can be referred from the work of Coluzzi (2013).