
Bahasa Malaysia Usage Among Form Four Pupils in The High School, Bukit Mertajam - A Sociolinguistic Survey

R.D. Naidu
High School, Bukit Mertajam

Kajian ini bertujuan mendapatkan maklumat mengenai penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia oleh pelajar-pelajar tingkatan empat, Sekolah Menengah Tinggi, Bukit Mertajam, serta meneliti keberkesanan pengajaran bahasa itu dan cadangan-cadangan mengatasinya.

Hasilnya telah menunjukkan iaitu pelajar-pelajar tersebut menyedari perlu dan mustahaknya Bahasa Malaysia sebagai bahasa pembelajaran dan pengetahuan, juga sebagai bahasa perantaraan untuk semua kaum di negara ini.

Walaupun bagaimanapun adalah didapati penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia yang 'standard' hanya di dalam pembelajaran di kelas-kelas sahaja. Bahasa Malaysia dialek utara digunakan sepenuhnya sama ada di rumah atau pun di dalam perbualan harian.

Introduction

The growth and the development of Bahasa Malaysia in this country has been a process of the natural evolution of the language. From its initial growth as the trade language (Takdir Alisjahbana, 1962) of the Malay Archipelago in the first century, as the language of the Srivijayan Empire (700-1200 A.D.) and as the lingua franca of the Melaka Empire (1400-1511), through the period of rising nationalism and to Independence in 1957, Bahasa Malaysia has been used widely in interpersonal communication by all peoples, including the non-Malay ethnic communities in this country.

The efflorescence of Bahasa Malaysia as the national and official language of the country before and, especially after Independence, owes a great deal to the efforts of Malay scholars, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the Malay press, graduates of the Sultan Idris Training College, Gabungan Pelajar-Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung, the mass media, local universities and the teaching profession. The strenuous exertions of all these persons and bodies have given Bahasa Malaysia its present status, the position where it is accepted and used in all official and literary circles. Linguists describe this status as the first stage of the emergence of a national language.

The growth and development of the national language of a country is followed by a second stage, that is, its use as the literary language of both oral and written communication in all spheres by all the peoples of the country. Guzman (Guzman, M., 1964) describes the second stage as follows:

"The gradual penetration of the literary language into all spheres of communication, including.... the formation of unified norms, a striving to liquidate the gap between the written literary and colloquial folk varieties of the language...."

The progress of the second phase of the language can be measured by its acceptance and usage throughout the different districts and sectors of society in both oral and written communication, as pointed out by Guzman.

Purpose of The Study

The principal aim of this paper is to examine the extent to which the literary language of Bahasa Malaysia is used in the formal and personal communication of a group of form four pupils in this school. A study of this type might, while fulfilling the main aim, provide insights into how effective the teaching programmes in the school are, revealing the areas of weaknesses in the usage of Bahasa Malaysia and, consequently, suggesting steps that can be taken to redress the situation.

The Population Under Study

All the 265 form four pupils in the school constituted the population under study. The population included 105 Malays, 85 Chinese and 75 Indians.

Form four pupils have been chosen for the study because there is time, one more year, to rectify their weaknesses and improve their skills and proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia before they sit for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Examination in 1984. Another reason for the inclusion of form four pupils is that the time taken to conduct the research will not take up too much of their time as they do not sit for any public examination this year.

Methodology

A questionnaire eliciting information about formal language variables (expressed attitude towards Bahasa Malaysia, reported use of the language, demonstrated skill in the language) and social variables (place of residence, languages spoken in the home with parents, siblings, and in social intercourse) was administered to the whole population. A written examination to test their linguistic proficiency and level of attainment was administered. The results of all these variables were then taken for analysis. Responses to the following three survey questions summarize the language situation in the school, the home and the larger environment. The questions asked were: For whom is Bahasa Malaysia important? When do you use Bahasa Malaysia? Did you speak in Bahasa Malaysia during the two weeks of the first term holidays?

Data Analysis

(a) For Whom Is Bahasa Malaysia Important?

An overwhelming majority of the pupils (93.5%) reported that Bahasa Malaysia is important for them as pupils and as citizens of this country. This response indicates that the pupils perceive the importance of Bahasa Malaysia in its correct perspective and that they show total identification with the language.

Ten pupils (3.7%) said that Bahasa is important for teachers. Two pupils (0.7%) said that it is important for tourists while another 2 said it is important for higher education. One pupil (0%) said that it is important for world trade and another said that it is important as an ASEAN language.

b) When Do You Use Bahasa Malaysia?

A breakdown of the responses by race seems pertinent in the analysis of the responses to this question.

(i) The Malays

All the 105 Malay respondents use Bahasa Malaysia in their communication with

their parents, for learning in the school, in their daily movements and for purchases in the town. Ninety two (88%) use Bahasa Malaysia for conversing with their friends while 13 pupils (12%) who play games, use the language on the playing field.

(ii) **The Chinese**

All the 85 Chinese respondents use Bahasa Malaysia in the school in the formal learning situation. Sixty five pupils (76.5%) use the language to converse with their friends while 27 pupils (32%) use Bahasa Malaysia in making their purchases in the town. Ninety two (88%) use Bahasa Malaysia for conversing with their friends while 13 pupils (12%) who play games, use the language on the playing field.

iii) **The Indians**

All the 75 Indian pupils use Bahasa Malaysia in the school in the formal learning situation. Sixty three pupils (84.0%) use the language to talk to their friends. 32 pupils (42.7%) use Bahasa Malaysia for making their purchases or while in government offices. Five pupils (6.7%) who play games, use the language on the playing field. Only 5 pupils (6.7%) use Bahasa Malaysia in the home to converse with their sisters and brothers.

Table I

The Use Of Bahasa Malaysia

	In the home	Conversing with friends in and out of school	Purchases, journeys govt. offices	On the playing field
1. Malays	: 100%	87.6%	100%	12.3%
2. Chinese	: 2.4%	76.5%	31.8%	4.7%
3. Indians	: 6.7%	84.0%	42.7%	6.7%

Several important facts emerge from the statistics given above.

They are:

1. All the Malay, Chinese and Indian pupils use Bahasa Malaysia in the formal learning situation in the school.
2. All the Malay pupils use Bahasa Malaysia in full both in the home and in the larger environment.
3. On the playing field, nearly a quarter of the pupils of all races use Bahasa Malaysia. These are the pupils who are involved in games, and constitute 23.7% of the population under study.
4. Bahasa Malaysia is very little used in Chinese (2%) and Indian homes (6.7%).
5. Nearly a quarter of the Chinese pupils (23%) do not use Bahasa Malaysia with their friends in and out of school.
6. A larger number (68%) of the Chinese pupils do not use Bahasa Malaysia in the larger environment of the town or in their daily social intercourse.

7. More than half the Indian pupils (57%) do not use Bahasa Malaysia in their daily dealings in the larger environment.

Table II

	At home	Outside the home	No usage of Bahasa Malaysia at all
1. Malays	100%	100%	Nil
2. Chinese	Nil	74%	26%
3. Indians	7%	76.0%	24.0%

Table II shows the use of Bahasa Malaysia by all the pupils during the first term school holidays, that is, during a period of two weeks of absence from the formal learning situation of the classroom.

The pupils' responses indicate the following:

1. The Malay pupils used Bahasa Malaysia in the home and outside the home in full.
2. All the Chinese pupils did not use Bahasa Malaysia at all in the home, but used the language extensively outside the home (74%). However, more than a quarter of them (25.9%) did not use Bahasa Malaysia at all for the whole duration of the two weeks of the holidays both in or out of their homes.
3. Very few Indian pupils (6.6%) used Bahasa Malaysia in the home during the two weeks of the holidays, but used it extensively outside the home (76.0%). Nearly a quarter of the pupils (24.0%), however, did not use Bahasa Malaysia at all for the whole duration of the two weeks of the holidays both in or out of their homes.

The limited and the total non-usage of Bahasa Malaysia during the holidays by a quarter of the Chinese and Indian pupils reflects their temporary alienation from the language and indicates trends which have important educational implications for the teacher.

Evaluation Of The Pupils' Bahasa Malaysia Ability

A written examination was conducted to evaluate the pupils' proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and the results were graded on a four-point scale. The four levels of ability are:

1. Level I, which indicates fluent command and understanding of Bahasa Malaysia.
2. Level II, which indicates good command and understanding of Bahasa Malaysia.
3. Level III, which indicates some comprehension but weak command of Bahasa Malaysia.
4. Level IV, which indicates poor comprehension and poor command of Bahasa Malaysia.

Table III summarizes the pupils' levels of ability with respect to Bahasa Malaysia.

Table III

**Levels of Attainment of the Pupils
In Bahasa Malaysia**

	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Total
1. Level I (Above 70%)	10(9.5%)	3(3.5%)	2(2.7%)	15(5.7%)
2. Level II (55.69%)	21(20.2%)	19(22.3%)	10(13.3%)	50(18.9%)
3. Level III (40.54%)	36(34.3%)	23(27.1%)	23(30.7%)	82(30.9%)
4. Level IV (Below 40%)	38(36.2%)	40(47.1%)	40(53.3%)	118(44.5%)
Total	105	85	75	N = 265

Implicit in the statistics above are the following:

1. A very small percentage (5.7%) of the whole group of pupils is competent in Bahasa Malaysia (Level I).
2. About a fifth of the Malay and Chinese pupils (20.0-22.3%) have reached a reasonably competent standard in Bahasa Malaysia while only 13.3% of the Indian pupils have reached this standard (Level II).
3. About a third of the pupils are at the mediocre level which could mean only a pass standard in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Examination next year (Level III).
4. Taken as a whole, nearly half (44.5%) of the population under study falls in Level IV. For each ethnic group under study, the highest number of pupils (36.2% for Malays, 47.1% for Chinese and 53.3% for Indians) fall in Level IV which shows poor comprehension and a poor command of the language.

Correlation of Bahasa Malaysia Ability with Social Variables

As the statistics in Table III indicate, nearly half (44.5%) the population under study is not fluent and competent in Bahasa Malaysia. It is important to discover what social variables are related to this inability in the language. In this part of the paper, the level of performance of the pupils is correlated with their place of residence, language spoken in the home and the language used in communication with friends.

1. Place of Residence

The breakdown of the pupils under study by urban and rural residence is as follows:

Table IV

Place of Residence of Pupils

	Urban	Rural
1. Malays	40(38.1%)	65(61.9%)
2. Chinese	64(75.3%)	21(24.7%)
3. Indians	44(58.7%)	31(41.3%)
	55.8%	44.2%

It was hypothesized that pupils living in urban areas where the majority of the population is Chinese, might not have opportunities to use Bahasa Malaysia fully and that this lack of use might affect their level of attainment in the language.

To test the validity of this hypothesis, a chi square test comparing the performance of the pupils against their places of residence was computed. The result showed that the level of significance did not fall within the 0.05 or the 0.01 level. This means that the hypothesis that urban residence affects language ability has to be rejected.

In other words, the result of the chi square test means that the attainment level of a pupil in Bahasa Malaysia is not necessarily affected by his urban residence. The question that may be asked is whether a rural residence with more opportunities for the use of Bahasa Malaysia could affect the pupils' performance. To answer this question a chi square test was computed for rural pupils and the result revealed that their performance is also not significantly affected by their rural residence.

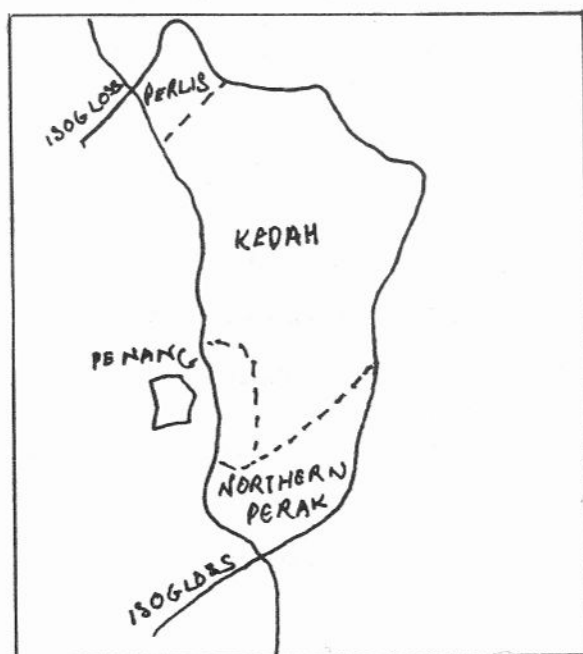
A pupil's residence, whether urban or rural, does not seem to significantly affect his level of attainment in Bahasa Malaysia.

2. The Use of "Dialek Utara"

Investigations made in this study show that there is a regional or dialectical variety of Bahasa Malaysia in use. This dialectical variety of Bahasa Malaysia is referred to as "Dialek Utama". Certain words in everyday use, speech patterns and the pronunciation of some words in this dialect differ from Standard Bahasa Malaysia.

The criterion for delimiting the boundaries where this "Dialek Utara" is used is geographical. The isogloss for "Dialek Utara" appears to coincide with the north-western lowland plains of Peninsular Malaysia in the states of Perlis, Kedah and Penang and northern Perak, where there are no mountainous obstacles. The lowland feature of the plains appears to have led to the widespread diffusion of "Dialek Utara" in this region.

Map I
The Isogloss For "Dialek Utara"



"Dialek Utara" is used in everyday conversation by the people who live in this part of the country. The pupils from this region have an understanding of Standard Bahasa Malaysia through national programmes over radio and Television Malaysia, and the use of it in formal learning situations in the school. However, the exposure to Standard Bahasa Malaysia seems unidirectional, because outside the situations mentioned above, the pupils use "Dialek Utara" at home, with friends and acquaintances and in casual contacts in the larger environment. The reasons for the preponderance of "Dialek Utara" are psychological, such as feelings of solidarity within the region, pride in their traditions, and, most important, the relaxed mode of expression in informal social contacts.

The following statistics show the extent to which "Dialek Utara" and Standard Bahasa are used by the pupils in the home, with their parents and with their siblings.

Table V

The Use of "Dialek Utara" and Standard Bahasa Malaysia

	Dialect Utara	Standard Bahasa Malaysia
1. Malays	- 97(92.4%)	8(7.6%)
2. Chinese	- 85(100.0%)	-
3. Indians	- 75(100.0%)	-

Except for 8 Malay pupils (7.6%) who use Standard Bahasa Malaysia in their homes, the entire population under study uses "Dialek Utara" on all occasions except in the formal learning situation in the school.

A chi square test of the frequency of the use of "Dialek Utara" against the levels of attainment of the pupils in Bahasa Malaysia was done and this put the significance at the 0.05 level.

In other words, this statistical finding means that the daily and preponderant use of "Dialek Utara" by the pupils affects their proficiency and level of attainment in Standard Bahasa Malaysia in a negative manner.

3. The Use of Bahasa Malaysia With Friends

In the formal learning situation in the school, the pupils use Standard Bahasa Malaysia. Outside this situation, an overwhelming majority of the pupils use "Dialek Utara" in their daily conversations and in their dealings with friends.

The Use of Standard Bahasa Malaysia and "Dialek Utara" with Friends

	Standard Bahasa Malaysia	Dialect Utara
1. Malays	6(5.3%)	99(94.3%)
2. Chinese	-	85(100%)
3. Indians	-	75(100%)

Only 6 Malay pupils (5.3%) claimed that they use Standard Bahasa Malaysia in their daily conversations and dealings with their friends. The rest of the pupils stated that they use "Dialek Utara" in their daily social intercourse with their friends.

A statistical correlation of the usage of "Dialek Utara" with the level of attainment of the pupils put the chi square value significant at the 0.05 level.

In other words, the result of the chi square test shows that the widespread use of "Dialek Utara" affects the pupils' proficiency and their level of attainment in Standard Bahasa Malaysia in a negative manner.

Summary And Conclusions

1. This study clearly indicates that the pupils in form four in this school perceive the importance of Bahasa Malaysia as the language of learning and as the major inter-ethnic language in the country. They accept and identify themselves with Bahasa Malaysia.

However, they use Standard Bahasa Malaysia only in the formal learning situation in the classroom.

2. There is very little use of Standard Bahasa Malaysia outside the formal learning situation. "Dialek Utara" seems to assume a larger role in the daily conversation of the pupils both in the home and in the larger environment. The established and widespread language pattern of "Dialek Utara" makes it difficult for the pupils to switch to Standard Bahasa Malaysia in their daily social intercourse. Where kin and neighbour use the dialectical version of the language, conformity to this language pattern seems easy and natural in informal contacts. It appears that the social environment of the population is not supportive enough for the use of Standard Bahasa Malaysia. So clearly marked and widespread is the use of "Dialek Utara" that its effect on attainment levels in Standard Bahasa Malaysia is measurable.
3. The protracted and extensive use of "Dialek Utara" has deleterious effects on the pupils' proficiency in Standard Bahasa Malaysia. They are as follows:
 - (a) the extensive and widespread use of "Dialek Utara" does not assist in reinforcing the language patterns of Standard Bahasa Malaysia taught in the school, for the pupils readily relapse into "Dialek Utara" once they are outside the classroom and sometimes even in the classroom.
 - (b) the use of "Dialek Utara" introduces pronunciation which is not in conformity with accepted phonetics, and sentence patterns which are strictly not grammatical.
 - (c) dialectical words which are not accepted as correct by Bahasa Malaysia Examiners in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Examination are used in essays by the pupils. They stand to lose marks because of the usage of these words. (Please see Appendix I attached).
4. The school holidays, two weeks in the first and second terms, and six to seven weeks in the third term, result in a temporary alienation of the pupils from Standard Bahasa Malaysia. This lay-off period of the inactive use of Standard Bahasa Malaysia can affect the pupils' proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia in a negative manner.
5. There is little use of Bahasa Malaysia in Chinese and Indian homes. Though the pupils use Bahasa Malaysia in the larger environment, they use it only in its dialectical version. The Malay pupils themselves fall into the category of dialect speakers of Bahasa Malaysia,
6. Urban residence in Chinese-dominated areas does not seem to affect the pupils' proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia probably because of the exposure of the urban pupils to bookshops, newspapers, magazines, television programmes, public functions and ceremonies and tuition classes, all of which invite the listening to and the use of Standard Bahasa Malaysia.

7. Nearly half the population under study (45%) is weak in Bahasa Malaysia. Their comprehension of the language and their written Bahasa Malaysia is poor. This state of affairs has serious educational implications for these pupils in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Examination in 1984, where a pass in Bahasa Malaysia is mandatory for a pass in the examination and where a credit is compulsory for entry into the sixth form. The onus of bringing these pupils up to the required standard is therefore heavy on the Bahasa Malaysia teachers in the school.

8. Following Guzman's lines of analysis, it may be stated that Bahasa Malaysia has successfully gone through the first stage of acceptance and use in all official and literary circles. However, in its second phase, the literary language appears to be beset with problems in trying to establish the country-wide use of unified norms and in the liquidation of dialectical or folk varieties of the language, largely because of the widespread use of the dialectical version of Bahasa Malaysia. The approach to the solving of these problems requires tact and a diplomatic handling of regional loyalties not only by the teachers but also by the government at national level.

In sum, the findings of this study clearly indicate the lines of approach that have to be taken by the teachers of Bahasa Malaysia in this school. The conclusions may have valid applications for other schools in the region. It is hoped that this paper has indicated some positive lines of thought for teachers of Bahasa Malaysia.

APPENDIX - 1
CONTOH DAFTAR ISTILAH DIALEK UTARA

DIALEK UTARA		BAHASA MALAYSIA STANDARD
	a	
adoi	-	aduh
awat	-	kenapa
ayag	-	air
	b	
bangkit	-	bangun
bantai	-	tidak bersungguh-sungguh
batas	-	jalan
blemoih	-	comot/kotor
berambuih	-	pergi
biag	-	biar
bodek	-	mengampu
boh	-	masukkan
	c	
cedok	-	kaut/kutip
cekop	-	tangkap
cemeghkap	-	gopoh
cemuih	-	jemu
cincai	-	tidak memuaskan
co'me	-	comel
cucog	-	kuih
	d	
dah dah	-	segera

dan	-	sempat
dangau	-	pondok
dok	-	duduk/tinggal
dengarg	-	dengar
depa	-	mereka
det	-	sen

g

gabuih	-	sapu
gagau	-	raba
gerek	-	basikal
gheban	-	rebah
ghenyah	-	rumit
gughurh	-	mancis

h

habag	-	beritahu
hampa	-	kamu/awak
hampag	-	hampar
hangat	-	panas
heghot	-	tidak lurus
hentam	-	pukul

i

ikan ghuan	-	ikan haruan
------------	---	-------------

j

jamban	-	tandas
jegil	-	beliak
jengoi	-	muncul
jenoh	-	banyak
jom	-	mari

k

kaghi	-	kacau
kain gebag	-	kain selimut
kalu	-	kalau
kalut	-	sibuk
kampuoi	-	gulung
kat	-	kepada
katok	-	ketuk
keghedhot	-	kedut
kelebog	-	lumpur
keriau	-	menangis
ketegag	-	degil
kejol	-	mati
kot	-	melalui
kut	-	mungkin

l

la	-	sekarang
lau	-	reban
lorat	-	tenat/teruk

	m	
mai	-	datang
melewag	-	berkeliaran
melilau	-	meronda
meluat	-	benci
menghapu	-	merepek
mengkala	-	bila
merodong	-	merendah
moktan	-	rambutan
muhong	-	bohong
	n	
ndak	-	hendak
	p	
pancog	-	paip air
pasai	-	sebab
pelek	-	ganjil
perabih	-	habiskan
pi	-	pergi
pikiag	-	fikir
	q	
ghalik	-	leka
	r	
rabong	-	rancak
rebah	-	runtuk
ret	-	sen
	s	
sat	-	sekejab
seghupa	-	sama
soghang	-	seorang
	t	
tabuh	-	tampar/pukul
tak dak	-	tiada
tak dan	-	tidak sempat
tak pa	-	tidak mengapa
tang ni	-	dekat sini
tang tu	-	dekat situ
tekoh	-	kadang-kadang
terpenyek	-	terhimpit
teriak	-	menangis
terising	-	tersengih
tibai	-	pukul
tikag	-	tikar
tokok	-	tambah
tak sah	-	jangan
tok yu	-	kicap
tonyoh	-	gosok

References

- Banks, Olive. "*The Sociology of Education*", Batsford Ltd., London, 1972.
- Garrett, H.E. "*Statistics In Psychology And Education*", Longmans, 1965.
- Guzman, M. "*Linguistic And Social Interaction In Two Communities*", *American Anthropologist*, 66, 6, Part II (1964), pp. 137-154.
- Rafferty, Y.E. "*National Language Ability: A Sociolinguistic Survey In East Java, Indonesia*", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume XIV, No. 1. March 1983, pp. 134-148
- Scott, J.C. "*Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia*", *The American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972), pp. 91-113.
- Takdir Alisjahbana. "*Indonesian Language and Literature: Two Essays*", *Cultural Report Series*, No. 11, New Haven, 1962, pp. 1-5.