

Status of Rungus Language as an Indigenous Language Spoken by Rungus Ethnic Group in Eastern Malaysia

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Abstract—Language shift and language maintenance as contact phenomena have received considerable attention in the realm of linguistics. The current study investigated the status of Rungus language, language of Rungus ethnic group in east Malaysia, to find out the status of this language within the Rungus local community. Synchronous unstructured interviews were conducted with twenty five Rungus educated speakers (15 males, 10 females) to elicit their attitudes about their Rungus mother tongue. Thematic analysis showed that the low status of the heritage language vis-à-vis Malay and English is evidently shown in the participants' responses. This low status is due to various reasons such as parents' lack of literacy, language policy, and absence of the language in the Malaysian educational system. Results of this research could argue that Rungus language is endangered and it is recommended that Rungus minority should try to maintain their language by any means otherwise it will be subject to death.

Index Terms—Kudat, language shift, language maintenance, Malaysia, Rungus

I. INTRODUCTION

Sapir (1920, p. 7) defines language in his book: language, as "An Introduction to the Study of Speech" as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols". Language is mainly used for social communications, and societies as well as cultures could not be envisaged without language, which is the heart of human progress. Language is the core of the individuals' identity and their markers of belonging to special social groups (Foy, 2002; Sapir, 1929). In addition, language is considered as versatile code used to deliver desires, thoughts and experiences to others. Several relationships were detected between language and society, that is, social structure might influence or control the linguistic structure or behaviours of specific ethnic group; younger generations might have a specific repertoire which differs from older generations determined by various certain social and political requirements (Yule & Macdonald, 1990). Crystal (2003) explains that the language disappears when no one speaks it anymore, or when the last person who speaks that language dies. It is estimated that there are about 6,900 languages spoken today around the globe. Most of these languages could be classified as minority languages (Gordon & Hendrick, 2005). Over the past 200 years, it is estimated that half of the languages disappeared (Romaine, 2008). Furthermore, Crystal (2000) argued that half of the today languages will disappear by the end of next century. Hence, minorities are required to maintain their own languages.

Kingdom of Malaysia is an independent country in south East Asia. It is a multi-ethnic country; the 28 million populations consist of three main ethnic groups: Malay, the majority, Chinese and Indian in addition to other small groups especially in eastern Malaysia such as Rungus (Lasimbang & Kinajil, 2004). The current research paper is devoted to shed some light on the Rungus language which is the language of one of the indigenous ethnic groups living in Kudat, town in Sabah state located in eastern Malaysia. The investigation tries to understand the status of that language whether it is safe or endangered from a sociolinguistic perspectives highlighting the social and political factors that might affect the status of this language.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Any language loss, undoubtedly, will lead to the loss of all the cultural heritage of the people who speak that language, resulting in scarce and limited information about the nature and traditions of some speech communities. As Campbell (1994) explains, the language is depicted as a guardian of its speakers; and the conservation of these endangered languages enable us to understand more about cultures, oral literature, human values and more. The Rungus is a sub-group of Kadazan-Dusun ethnic group who primarily resides in Kudat province northern Sabah state, Malaysia. This ethnic group has a distinctive language, dress, architecture, customs, and oral literature. They comprise approximately 60,000 people. The Rungus language is considered as minor language that does not gain any support from the Malaysian government, since the Malaysian language policy, as it is known, strives to improve the Malay language and develop it and gives less support or ignores the other indigenous languages all over the country. Rungus may be found in three districts; Kudat, Pitas and Kota Marudu (Lasimbang & Kinajil, 2004).

Limited research has been conducted in the field of investigating the status of minority languages in Malaysia. For example, David (2017) investigated the reasons of language shift of some speech communities in peninsular Malaysia to other languages such as Malay or English. Findings showed that language policy is the main reason for this shift; Malaysian government supports Malay language as means for community integration and unity. Fishman (1991) argues that there are two main reasons for language shift; internal and external. The internal includes the lack of literacy among the members of specific speech community which, as a result, forbid transferring the language heritage from one generation to another. The external reason is the language policy; when the government supports one main language and ignores the other languages. It is of paramount significance for minorities to maintain their heritage languages, leading to preserve their heritage and cultural traits. Hence, to the best of researcher's knowledge there is scarcity of the research about Rungus language. Therefore, this study may give clearer picture about Rungus language, the mother tongue of Rungus ethnic group resides in Sabah, the east of Malaysia. The present study hopes to provide some useful information about how the Rungus people think toward their mother tongue and their general attitudes about it especially the younger generation.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To find out to what extent Rungus people care about their mother tongue and try to maintain and develop it
- 2- To find out the attitudes of Rungus young generation about their mother tongue

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Reasons of Language Death*

Various reasons might lead to language death such as the social reasons. However, there are other natural reasons that might play role in the extinction of a specific language, including but not limited to hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and others. When small community is decimated by one of these natural factors, the language of that community will die and never come back. Moreover, the language of one specific speech community may die when the speakers of that language all die because of diseases or genocide, as happened with some Native American tribes upon their contact with European colonizers (Crystal, 2003; David, 2004; Lieberman, 1965).

The other significant issue that affects language is the cultural assimilation, which is considered by Crystal as a bigger threat for the minor languages than the natural factors. Cultural assimilation means when one community incorporated and assimilated with another strong community either culturally or linguistically, and as a result, the strong languages substituted the minor or weak languages in a specific speech community. For example, Spanish and Portuguese languages dominated the indigenous languages of the inhabitants of South America, and Arabic language suppressed a number of indigenous languages in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Beside, native language could be lost when the minorities seek to fit with the culture of majority and neglect the heritage language (Sands et al., 2007). This argument is also firmly supported by Crawford (1998) who argues that the assimilation is major factor for death of languages or shifting some societies to other languages.

B. *The Importance of Diversity and Languages Maintenance*

It is agreed upon by most of the linguists that the death of the languages contributes to the death of the whole cultures that these languages present. To mention few, Romaine (2008) clarified that death of a specific language means the loss of centuries of human knowledge. Further, Avtans (2008) added that language expresses identity for those who speak it, and when some speech communities stop speaking their mother tongue, and assimilated with other strong communities, they are considered as loser for their identity, since the language is the main pillar that represents special identity for a specific speech community, and distinguish it from others.

Also the issue of diversity will disappear if the languages start to die respectively with the passing of time. Hale (1992) argues that linguistic diversity has a wide variety of languages and language types is very important to human intellectual life, because such diversity, provides a plenty of data for the linguists, and it also relate to the human activities that belong to the realm of art and culture. In addition, languages are considered as repositories of the histories, because they contribute to the sum of human knowledge. To maintain the groups' languages, family transmission is of great importance; and if this transmission fails, the heritage language will die within two generations (Sasse, 1992). Thus, the death of a language is a fast process not slow one (Denham & Lobeck, 2006). Consequently, Crystal (2003) commented that there are some steps could be taken by the speakers of the endangered language to protect them from extinction. These steps include but not limited to, increasing the prestige of the minority language in the dominant community, using the language in public services signs and advertising, using it to name places and road signs. In addition, and above all, the presence of the endangered language in the education system is very important factor that help the endangered language to thrive.

C. *The Demographic Map of Malaysia*

Malaysia is considered as a multi-lingual and multi ethnic country, since there are three main ethnic groups and more than 140 spoken languages in this country. These groups are; Malay, the majority followed by Chinese and Indians as well as other minorities especially in Sabah and Sarawak states, east of the country. Ethnic groups are illustrated in table 1 below (David, 2017).

TABLE 1
ETHNIC GROUPS OF MALAYSIA

1	Malay (or Muslim Malay)	50.1%
2	Chinese Malaysians	22.6%
3	Non-Malay Bumiputera and Other Indigenous Groups	11.8%
4	Indian Malaysians	6.7%
	Other Groups	8.8%

D. Language Policies in Malaysia

Language policies in Malaysia have been set after Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. It was clear the great focus was on the Malay as an official language, and leaving the other indigenous languages strive for survival by themselves. In an interview conducted by Gill (2003) with the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohmd, when asked whether the government should support the teaching of minority languages in the country or not, he explained that supporting many languages will divide the country.

After Malaysia obtained its independence in 1957, Malay was established as the national language with the purpose of achieving national unity. Tunku Abdul Rahman (the first Prime Minister of Malaysia) adopted this view and strongly worked hard to support the Malay language since he considered it as a soul of the country and the main way to unite the nation (Hassan, 2004). This can clearly explain the language policy attitudes of decision makers in Malaysia, aiming for marginalizing the minority languages in favour of Malay language. The reasons behind this were to keep the national unity for the country, and prevent it from division. The policy is clear, in which the diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia can practice their languages and religions, but should not expect support from the government, they have to support themselves, and use their own resources to maintain their languages and cultures.

E. International Studies on Language Endangerment

There are some studies devoted to explore the status of the endangered languages worldwide, for example, Sallabank (2010) investigated the status of Guernsey language in Guernsey which is a small island in the English Channel. Results found an attitude shift which has affected all generations; even those who taught their children English for economic reasons now regret not having preserved bilingual competence and a link to their heritage for their children. Furthermore, Coluzzi (2010) conducted a survey to explore the attitudes of the Iban and Murut (Lun Bawang) people living in the Temburong district of Brunei Darussalam toward their mother tongue. Results were achieved from younger and older age groups to find out the degree of language shift from mother tongue toward Malay language. Results showed that there is a great shift toward Malay due to various reasons such as language policy and lack of using these ethnic languages in the community circles. The researcher suggested that for maintaining these languages, they should be presented in the national curriculums side by side with Malay and English.

In Malaysian context also, David (1991) studied the Sindhis minority in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Specifically, it zoomed in language used in the home domain of Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur. Questionnaires and observations were used to elicit the needed data. Findings confirmed that there is a great shift from mother tongue toward English in most of the social activities, and Sindhis is used with elders only. David added that if there is something to be done, it should come from the community itself. As an example done by the local minor community to sustain their language and culture, the Punjabi minority established Punjabi Education Trust Malaysia (PETM). (Punjabi community by taking serious steps, showing their interest and caring about their mother tongue, convinced the government by their mission which aims at developing their language, and save it from extinction.

Finally the government, and after serious efforts taken by Punjabi community, agreed to allocate 2 million Malaysian ringgit for supporting the sustenance and maintenance of Punjabi language teaching (Gill, 2003). Moreover, Kadazan ethnic group which is one of the ethnic groups in Malaysia strove to improve their mother tongue, and develop it to be sustained and save from extinction. After many attempts, Kadazan language introduced in Sabah schools in 1997 and has been taught in some mission-run primary schools and Native Voluntary Schools (NVS) in Sabah in the mid-1950s until the late 1960s (Lasimbang, 2004). Also, Perlas et al. (2013) examined the language choice for 30 Filipino Malaysian families and found that the language choice varies according to the settings. However, it is found also that English has become the most dominant language besides code-switching with Malay and Filipino.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have proposed a measurement called Language Vitality and Endangerment framework to measure the endangerment of the languages. This frame establishes six degrees of vitality/endangerment based on nine factors. Of these factors, the most salient is that of intergenerational transmission: whether or not a language is used in the family. This factor is generally accepted as the ‘gold standard’ of language vitality (Fishman, 1991).

TABLE 2
UNESCO’S LANGUAGE VITALITY AND ENDANGERMENT FRAMEWORK

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational Language Transmission
Safe	language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
Vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
definitely endangered	children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
severely endangered	language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
Critically endangered	the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
Extinct	there are no speakers left

(UNESCO document)

Having reviewed the literature review of the indigenous languages in Malaysia, and to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, there are limited attempts devoted to examine the minority languages. Hence, this study aims to examine the status of Rungus language and the attitudes of the Rungus younger generation towards it.

V. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the present study is to investigate the status of Rungus language, which is the language of Rungus ethnic group residing in Sabah east of Malaysia, and see to what extent the Rungus younger generation is interested in their mother tongue and their attitudes about it. The participants were purposively chosen as they have the following criteria: educated, young and multilingual.

A. Participants

Twenty five purposely chosen undergraduate students participated in this research; 10 females and 15 males. All of them are from Rungus ethnic group in Kudat district the place of the indigenous Rungus ethnic group. The participants are all considered educated people since all of them were pursuing their studies during data collection period in different universities such as the University of Malaysia Sabah, and University of Malaysia Sarawak, except one participant who finished her study and currently working in United Kingdom. The goal behind targeting those individuals was because all of them represent the younger generation of the Rungus ethnic group, and the future of the Rungus language depends on them, whether they like to keep using it or not in the future. Hence, the elicited responses from those participants might give the researchers the possibility of foreseeing the status of Rungus language in future. Table 4 below shows the participants’ demographics.

TABLE 3
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS PARTICIPANTS

Characteristics	No =25
Gender	Males 15 Females 10
Age (18- 24)	Males mean=22 Females mean=21
Education	University level
Geographical place	Kudat *
Occupational status	Students
Ethnicity	Rungus

Kudat is a small town northern Sabah state east of peninsular Malaysia

B. Instrument

Unstructured interview

Adopting this type of interview helps the researcher to collect answers about the question why in addition to its flexibility since it is conducted in comfortable atmosphere and give the respondents the space to add more information (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Kasper & Dahil, 1991). According to Creswell (2013), to understand the phenomena five to twenty five interviewees is sufficient number and could achieve adequate explanation about a particular phenomenon. The data were qualitatively gathered from the twenty five participants via social websites in the internet, and phone interviews. The participants were questioned through launching questions on their profiles in Tagged, Facebook and Blogs sites except for one participant who was interviewed through phone. All the participants have been told that the researcher is carrying out a study about Rungus language, and need their honest answers either positive or negative, to

understand their attitudes and thinking about their mother tongue and other related issues. Main interview questions in Appendix 1.

Data were collected from participants using online interviews; synchronous chat rooms in which the participants responded directly. This type of interview is valuable since it could gather people from different zones and enables them to answer at their convenient time. Synchronous interview has advantage of spontaneous answering by the participants. In qualitative research, interviewing is widely utilized for data collection (Creswell, 2007). In order to overcome the financial, geographical and physical mobility of the researchers, online interviewing has witnessed a rapid growth and helped in reducing the face-to face interviewing constrains (Hooley et al., 2012). Thus, two types of online interviews have emerged; synchronous interview such as chats and mobile calls, and asynchronous such as emails. This study has adopted synchronous interviews method since it closely resembles the face-to-face interviews and the researcher could get the responses instantly.

VI. PROCEDURES

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a very useful approach in research since it investigates the participants' views, opinions and thoughts. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is very vital and fundamental approach in qualitative analysis and it provides main skills to conduct many forms of qualitative analysis. It is a method for organize, analyze, describe and create themes from the available data set.

The participants were coded from A1 to 25. They all explained that they were not used to using Rungus except in very limited domains i.e. home.

- 20 participants put the blame on the parents
- 17 of them did not care too much about using it
- All of them said they are not fluent in it
- All of them speak Malay at home
- 15 of them said that they care about it and they might lose their identity of the language
- All of them think that language policy play major role in the deterioration of their language
- 19 think that the older generations are responsible for this status

VII. RESULTS

As previously mentioned, thematic analysis was used in data analysis. First, codes are spotted based on the analysis of the participants' responses. Second, based on these codes the main themes are found as illustrated in the following table 4 below.

TABLE 4
CODES AND THEMES

Codes.	Themes
Ex1: In our daily conversation we using Malay language. Ex2: nope...we speak Malay at home...n im not really good in Rungus language.	Rungus is not spoken at homes
Ex4: yes i do know about young runggus people right now they dont speak much runggus language i feel sad about that	Younger generations are not fluent in their mother tongue
Ex5: i think it up to they parents if you speak to your children in runggus when they baby then it be ok but young parents this days they intend to speak Malay to them. then again when ur children going to school the children have to speak Malay ...	Older generations did not put effort to maintain their mother tongue
Ex6: In schools we don't study Rungus. Ex7: our teenager now a days so week to spoke Rungus. some,feel shy to admit tht they r Rungus	Language policy
A20 yes ofcourse i care runggus is where i come from and my family so it well be very sad to lose runggus language and ya we will lose our identity for sure. Ex8: ya off course i care bout my language...its our symbol...i love my language!n im proud with it... Ex9: ..i hink our race must stand for survive our comunity	Losing identity
Ex9: n im not really good in Rungus language... so i prefer Malay than Rungus...but i still can speak Rungus a bit..	Lack of literacy

To attain the objectives, the data were gathered from the participants' responses to the unstructured synchronous interviews. Their responses have been analysed and came up with new findings. Table 4 above illustrates the codes and the themes found after analysing the participants' responses; these themes are explained below; verbatim excerpts are included as well.

A. Rungus Language Is not Spoken at Home

All participants explained that they used Malay language in their daily conversation with their family members, and friends as well, because they are not fluent or efficient enough in Rungus language. The reason of not being fluent in their mother tongue comes from their parents, because they did not care too much to deliver their mother tongue to their children. Therefore, this gives an impression that if the elder generation does not try to maintain their mother tongue and deliver it to their young generation, the status of the language will be worse in the future and it will be subject to death.

Ex1: In our daily conversation we using Malay language.

Ex2: nope...we speak Malay at home....n im not really good in Rungus language.

B. Younger Generations Are not Fluent in Their Mother Tongue

Participants explained that Rungus people whose age is under 30 years do not care about learning the language, while the elder people whose age up 30 years are better in Rungus language. This indicates the negative attitudes of the younger Rungus generation about their mother tongue. Moreover, this shows the great level of assimilation of Rungus community to the stronger community which is the Malay ethnic. Most of the participants confirmed this since their parents did not speak Rungus with them. See the following excerpts:

Ex3: im not really good in Rungus language... so i prefer Malay than Rungus...but i still can speak Rungus a bit.

Ex4: yes i do know about young runggus people right now they dont speak much runggus language i feel sad about that

C. Older Generation did not Put Effort to Maintain Their Ethnic Rungus Language.

Great blame has been put on the parents, because they stopped using their mother tongue and did not care to pass it to their children; consequently this will expose the language to the extinction in the near future. The parents try to adopt the language of the majority, which is Malay language and did not try to maintain their language. According to Hoffman (1991), when a specific community gradually adopts the majority language over their heritage language, we talk about language shift.

Home and school domains, both do not support Rungus language to thrive. Parents at home speak Malay with their children, this undoubtedly will make it easy for the children to be quickly assimilated with the Malay community and culture, and start losing their Rungus identity. See excerpts:

Ex5: i think it up to they parents if you speak to your children in runggus when they baby then it be ok but young parents this days they intend to speak Malay to them. Then again when ur children going to school the children have to speak Malay ...

D. Language Policy

The Malaysian educational system does not offer any curriculum with Rungus language, but all is in Malay and English languages. Most of the participants clearly commented that they only study Malay and English in the public schools. This again can be attributed to the language policies in Malaysia that primarily focus on Malay language and marginalize the other minor indigenous languages.

Ex6: In schools we don't study Rungus.

Ex7: our teenager now a days so week to spoke Rungus. some, feel shy to admit tht they r Rungus.

E. Losing Identity

Participants explained that the teenagers of this speech community feel shy to say that they are Rungus. This can be considered as a hint to show the future of this language is in steady decline with the coming of the next generations. As Lanza and Svendsen (2007, p. 293) suggest, 'language might become important for identity when a group feels it is losing its identity due to political or social reasons.' Language planners and activists may promote symbolic ethnicity and 'localness' as means to encourage language revitalization.

A20 yes ofcourse i care runggus is where i come from and my family so it well be very sad to lose runggus language and ya we will lose our identity for sure.

Ex8: ya off course i care bout my language...its our symbol...i love my language!n im proud with it...

Ex9: .. i hink our race must stand for survive our comunity.

Few participants showed compassion with their Rungus language and confirmed that it is a part of their heritage and if it is lost they will lose their identity as Rungus ethnic group.

F. Lack of Literacy

The lack of literacy of the one language is considered as an internal factor effects the indigenous language, and shifted it to another major language (David, 2003). Lack of literacy among younger Rungus community members is one of the significant factors that might lead to shift or death of the Rungus language. Some participants commented that they speak Malay and Rungus at home and with friends, with more fluency in Malay language. They added that English language is more important than Rungus or even Malay nowadays, relating it to the high status of English language as an international language.

Ex9: n im not really good in Rungus language... so i prefer Malay than Rungus...but i still can speak Rungus a bit.

Most of the answers gathered by the researcher showed that Rungus new generation do not care too much about their mother tongue. Some of them explained that they prefer to speak Malay language, not their mother tongue. Some participants admitted that they are not fluent in their mother tongue as their fluency in Malay. This can be attributed to the language policies applied in Malaysia, in which all students at school must study Malay language in Malay national schools as a compulsory course, whether they are Malay or not. When a people's native language is not regularly used, the speaker of that language and culture stands to lose the most; they would lose access to the treasured heritage in form of literature including religious texts and others. They also lose their sense of identity since their identity is closely defined with their language and culture. It seems that they have low esteem with their language in which they did not pass to their children, and only older generations use it. If they want to keep their language they have to start developing it and using it in oral and written communication and in teaching and learning. Language maintenance or loss belongs to the behaviour of specific speech community members themselves (Fishman, 1991). Fishman (1996, p. 192) added "Vernaculars are acquired in infancy, in the family, which means in intimacy. They are handed on that way, in intimacy and in infancy".

VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper discussed an important linguistic issue which is language shift, and explained the multiple reasons that might lead to this shift. The most significant and important reasons that lead to language shift are the social and political factors; when some specific speech community stops using their native tongue in favour of another powerful and more prestigious languages, also when the parents do not pass over their mother tongue to their children in order to support their assimilation process with the dominant speech community. Rungus mother tongue was highlighted in this study, by investigating and analysing the Rungus younger generation's attitudes about their mother tongue. There is an obvious tendency by Rungus ethnic group to shift away from their mother tongue to adopt other languages such as Malay and English. The younger generations of Rungus ethnic community in Kudat tend to gravitate toward English and Malay languages. Further, English has become the dominant language for most of younger generations. Rungus is only used in very few domains such as homes and by some of the elder generations. The status of Rungus language nowadays is in increased inclination, due to multiple reasons; the most important one is the Rungus people themselves, in which they do not support their language, and it is rarely spoken among them especially the younger generations. The others include language policies, the attitudes of the young generation toward it. Some of them, upon the information gathered in this field, feel shy to speak in Rungus, because they consider it as a low status language, and unable to serve their goals to have jobs or be active members in the Malaysian society. These factors may work together to finally lead the disappearance of this heritage language.

Research of minority languages (Fishman, 2006; Haugen, 1972) has demonstrated that there is a decline of the ethnic language retention from one generation to the next. Furthermore, David argued that there are two main reasons for language shift; internal and external. As for the internal factors, they include lack of literacy in the minority language is one of the reasons to hasten the loss of these minorities perspective languages. Concerning the external factors it includes the language policy. In the case of Rungus minority, it is obvious that both internal and external factors have played a role in losing this language. It can be concluded that Rungus younger generation does not care too much about their mother tongue. Although they do value and cherish their ancestral language and consider it as a symbol for their identity, but they still cannot preserve it as required and do not exert any effort to develop it, or even practice it except in limited domains. Some of them even feel shy to admit that they are Rungus or speak Rungus language. Generally, they are not fluent in their mother tongue, due to different reasons; such as the parents' lack of literacy, and their carelessness toward the language, as parents did not try to transfer it to their children. The other thing is the status of the Rungus language itself, Rungus generation look to it as a language of low status, in comparison with Malay or English that gain a high considerable status in Malaysian society.

Moreover, Rungus language is not taught in schools, since it is not supported by the Malaysian educational policies and Rungus students have to study by adopting Malay language as a medium of instruction. There were no serious attempts by the Rungus speech community to support and develop their mother tongue, compared other minor communities in Malaysia like Punjabi and Karajan ethnic group who, strove for improving and sustaining their languages. Rungus are found to have contradicting language attitudes. They recognize the importance of Rungus language as their mother tongue, yet consider English language and Malay language as more important. Besides, they also do not resist education in other languages. This contradiction on language attitude indicates that changes in cultural identity might have taken place.

We can to some extent argue that the reason of Rungus endangerment is due to cultural/political/economic dominance of other cultures. As noted earlier the causes of language endangerment and attitudes are keys to whether languages are maintained or abandoned. Negative attitudes are often adopted by speakers, and use of a minority language comes to be denounced, so that speakers feel ashamed of it. Speakers are then less likely to transfer the language to their children, leading to a self-perpetuating downward spiral. When the children object to speaking a language, gradually forget it or pretend to have forgotten it because they are ashamed of it, its future is much less assured (Calvet, 1998). Thus, if the minor ethnics want to sustain their mother tongues, and save them from extinction, they have to be the initiators, they have to prove to the authorities that they care for their languages and they want them

to be surviving. Because reform stems from inside, so if the inside of the Rungus ethnic do not do anything for their language, it will be extinct in the near future.

APPENDIX. THE MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS APPENDIX

1. What language do your parents use with you?
2. Do you use your mother tongue with friends or in school?
3. Can you understand Rungus?
4. Which language do you use with your grandparents?

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