



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**LANGUAGE CHOICE AND USE IN TRAINING SESSIONS OF  
SELECTED MALAYSIAN PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS**

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**FBMK 2007 11**

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SELECTED MALAYSIAN PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS**

**By**

**KAMISAH BINTI ARIFFIN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**November 2007**



This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Abdul Shukor Dato' Samat, my daughters, Allysha Nashwa and Allyyah Najwa, my parents, Haji Ariffin Ismail and Hajjah Maimunah Yatim, Dato' Haji Samat Hasan and Datin Hajjah Kamsiah Shaari, who have believed in me and given me all the encouragement and support needed during these challenging years.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
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This study examined the language choice and use of the speakers in the formal workplace domain of public organisations in Malaysia. It was the assumption of this study that, other languages understood by the speakers in the context of interaction were also used in public organisations despite the country's policy on the use of the national language, Bahasa Malaysia (BM) for official purposes. The discourse of the organisational training sessions was analysed in terms of the speakers' language choice and use, and the factors governing the choice.

The data for the study mainly consist of the transcribed discourse of the training sessions of the selected public organisations. The data were complemented by the data from the survey questionnaire and interview. The factors governing the speakers' choice of language in their interactional context were examined under



their societal institutional and socio-psychological levels. The findings could provide insights into a range of perspectives underlying the choice.

The data were analysed in two parts: domain analysis and linguistic analysis. The domain analysis described speakers' language use from the socio-psychological and societal levels. In this analysis, observable themes or patterns that emerged from the speakers' speech were discussed to explain the language use within the context of interaction. The linguistic analysis, on the other hand, focused on speakers' choice based on the linguistic and stylistic features inherent in the speakers' speech. These include the language features of colloquial BM and Malaysian English (ME), and the occurrence of code-switching in terms of levels and types, and the discourse functions of code-switching.

Evidence from the discourse revealed that the use of BM in formal context as stipulated in the National Language Policy was not really adhered to in the studied organisations. The analysis showed that BM and English were used in varying proportions in the interactional context. The findings also suggested that the language use depended largely on the societal-institutional and socio-psychological levels of the speakers and their communicative intent.

The data displayed extensive use of the colloquial BM and the local variety (ME). Another pertinent feature found was the code-switching phenomenon. The data demonstrated that code-switching, both at intra- and inter-sentential



levels, emerged as speakers' choice to fulfill various communicative functions in their speech.

The study concluded that the stipulated language use in the domain of public organisations had oversimplified the complexities of the actual language use in a multilingual context. Speakers would use any language in their repertoire to suit their communicative needs. The language use could also be influenced by an array of factors from the societal institutional and socio-psychological levels of the speakers. The study also offered a model that could illustrate the pattern of language use in the studied organisations based on the ethnographic and linguistic evidence derived from the data.

Finally, the study discussed the theoretical, methodological and sociolinguistic implications of the evidence that may be of interest to those concerned with sociolinguistic research and the country's language planning and its implementation. Some recommendations for further research were also put forward.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PEMILIHAN DAN PENGGUNAAN BAHASA DALAM SESI LATIHAN  
DI ORGANISASI AWAM MALAYSIA YANG TERPILIH**

Oleh

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Kajian ini menganalisis pemilihan dan penggunaan bahasa para pekerja di dalam domain formal tempat kerja di organisasi awam di Malaysia. Kajian ini beranggapan bahawa bahasa lain yang difahami oleh penutur akan digunakan juga oleh organisasi awam dalam konteks interaksi mereka walaupun Dasar Bahasa Kebangsaan telah mewajibkan penggunaan Bahasa Melayu (BM) dalam urusan rasmi. Wacana sesi latihan dianalisa dari segi pemilihan dan penggunaan bahasa dan juga faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemilihan bahasa tersebut.

Data kajian terdiri daripada transkripsi wacana sesi latihan dari tiga organisasi awam yang terpilih. Data ini juga disokong oleh data yang diperolehi daripada soal-selidik dan temuduga. Dua peringkat penutur, iaitu institusi-masyarakat (*societal-institutional*) dan sosio-psikologi (*socio-psychological*) dikaji untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemilihan bahasa penutur



dalam konteks interaksi mereka. Ini dapat memberikan pemahaman yang mendalam akan faktor-faktor di sebalik pemilihan bahasa tersebut.

Analisa data dibahagikan kepada dua bahagian, iaitu analisa domain dan analisa linguistik. Analisa domain merangkumi keterangan mengenai penggunaan bahasa dari dua aspek penutur; institusi-masyarakat (*societal-institutional*) dan sosio-psikologi (*socio-psychological*). Dalam analisa ini, corak atau tema penggunaan bahasa yang jelas diperolehi daripada ucapan penutur dibincang bagi menerangkan penggunaan bahasa yang terlibat. Manakala analisa linguistik pula memfokus kepada pilihan bahasa dari bentuk linguistik dan stail bahasa yang digunakan oleh penutur. Ini termasuk bentuk Bahasa Malaysia kollokial dan Bahasa Inggeris variasi tempatan, iaitu Malaysian English (ME), dan perlakuan penukaran kod dari segi tahap, jenis dan juga fungsinya dalam wacana.

Dapatan kajian membuktikan bahawa penggunaan BM dalam urusan rasmi, seperti yang telah diperuntukkan dalam Dasar Bahasa Kebangsaan, tidak begitu dipatuhi di organisasi-organisasi yang dikaji. Analisa menunjukkan bahawa BM dan Bahasa Inggeris digunakan dalam kadar pembahagian yang berbeza dalam konteks interaksi di organisasi-organisasi tersebut. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan bahasa banyak bergantung kepada tahap institusi-masyarakat (*societal-institutional*) dan *socio-psychological* (sosio-psikologi) penutur dan tujuan komunikasi itu sendiri.



Analisa linguistik menunjukkan kepada kecenderungan penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia kollokial dan Bahasa Inggeris variasi tempatan. Selain dari itu, fenomena penukaran kod juga didapati signifikan dalam wacana tersebut. Penutur memilih untuk menukar kod pada tahap *intra-* dan *inter-sentential* bagi memenuhi fungsi komunikasi dalam pengucapan mereka.

Sebagai kesimpulan, kajian ini mendapati bahawa peruntukkan penggunaan bahasa di dalam domain organisasi awam telah mengambil mudah akan penggunaan sebenar bahasa yang kompleks dalam konteks kepelbagaian bahasa. Penutur akan menggunakan bahasa yang ada di dalam *repertoire* mereka untuk disesuaikan dengan keperluan komunikasi. Penggunaan bahasa juga dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor dari aspek institusi-masyarakat (*societal-institution*) dan sosio-psikologi (*socio-psychology*). Kajian ini juga mencadangkan satu model yang menggambarkan corak penggunaan bahasa di dalam organisasi berdasarkan kepada bukti etnografi dan linguistik yang diperolehi daripada data.

Akhir sekali, kajian ini membincangkan implikasi dari segi teori, metodologi dan sosiolinguistik yang mungkin dapat dimanfaatkan oleh pihak yang terlibat dengan kajian bahasa dan juga program perancangan bahasa dan pelaksanaannya. Beberapa cadangan untuk kajian di masa akan datang juga dikemukakan.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am most grateful to Allah S.W.T. for His gracefulness and countless bounties bestowed upon me, without which this academic journey would not have been possible.

I owe a multitude of gratitude to the following people who have encouraged, supported and believed in me during what it seems a long, challenging five years of my life:

I would like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to my supervisors, Associate Professor Dr. Shameem Rafik-Khan@Rafik-Galea, Associate Professor Dr. Hj Rosli Hj Talif and Associate Professor Dr. Ezhar Hj Tamam, for their constant help, support and encouragement and their painstaking effort and patience while reading the drafts of this thesis. Dr Shameem deserves a huge credit for her extreme patience and constructive comments towards the improvement of this paper. The meticulous guidance and commitment have been invaluable towards the completion of this study. I deeply appreciate her enthusiastic interest and generosity and willingness in sharing the materials and resources with me. I also wish to express my gratitude to Dr Rosli and Dr Ezhar for their useful advice, comments and invaluable input to this research. Each has given me the opportunity to refine my work. My deepest appreciation goes to my beloved husband, Abdul Shukor Dato' Samat, for his never ending support, tolerance, patience, and understanding, and for being there for me at all times. My endless love also goes to my little angels, Allysha Nashwa and Allyyah Najwa for putting up with my temperamental behaviour when pressures struck



the most. My deep gratitude also goes to my father, Haji Ariffin Ismail, my mother, Hajjah Maimunah Yatim, my siblings, Sainon, Azhar, Hamera, Suhaimi and Suhaila, as well as my beloved in-laws, Dato' Maharaja Inda Haji Samat Hasan and Datin Hajjah Kamsiah Shaari, for their unconditional love, prayers, endless support and encouragement. My sincere thanks are also due to my dearest friends and colleagues, Ahmad Daud, Azlini, Hadina, Harlina, Badli, Maizatulliza, Misyana Susanti, and Roselina, for sharing their materials, ideas and thoughts with me, and obviously, without whom, I would never have come this far. To all my other colleagues in the department, and to Sheema, Maziana, Nur Fakhzan, Norshariza, Asmidar, Nazirah, Norol Hamiza, Norazlan, Gerry, Fendi and Sheela, thank you for the moral support extended when I needed it the most. To Maiza, Prema and Dr Muhammad Haque Salam, thank you for the long distance support, help and fruitful discussions. To my friends on the net, I wish them thanks for their support and generosity in providing the information needed to complete this project. To the many individuals who have not been specifically mentioned, I would like to express my profound thanks for the ideas and support towards the completion of this thesis. I would also be remiss if I did not convey my thanks and gratitude to Professor Dr. Shanta Nair-Venugopal for her willingness to share some insights and experience on the topic. Special thanks are also due to all the directors, human resource personnel, trainers and trainees of the organisations for taking part in the research. Last but not least, my eternal gratitude to Yayasan Pahang for the financial support, and Universiti Teknologi MARA for granting the permission, support, encouragement and help in this study.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	Bahasa Melayu
ME	Malaysian English
CS	Code-switching / Code-mixing / Code-alternation / Code-oscillation
IT	Information Technology
OA	Organisation A
OB	Organisation B
OC	Organisation B
OA1	Training Session 1 of Organisation A
OA2	Training Session 2 of Organisation A
OB1	Training Session 1 of Organisation B
OB2	Training Session 2 of Organisation B
OC1	Training Session 1 of Organisation C
OC2	Training Session 2 of Organisation C
T	Trainer
Tr	Trainee



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Geographical boundaries have now become arbitrary with the expansion of contacts especially resulting from trade and commerce. Most countries have become more multicultural than they have been before. This created a highly culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. Thus, it is inevitable that, in a plural society, there are diversity and variation in the code selection and stylistic in speech as far as communication among people from different background is concerned. Malaysia is no exception. Much has been said and studied about the language use or choice and preference of speakers when communicating within the multilingual and multicultural milieu in Malaysia.

The language situation in Malaysia is described as multilingual, diglossic and even polyglossic (Platt & Weber, 1980; Asmah, 1982). Besides the official language, Bahasa Malaysia, there are a variety of language codes available in the speakers' repertoire to choose from when communicating. These language codes may include different languages, different regional and social dialects of these languages and perhaps even different registers of the same language. Thus, with linguistically diverse workforce in the organisations, there is no doubt that more than one language will be used in their day to day operations.

The literature on the subject of language use and choice within the Malaysian multilingual settings is quite replete (Asmah, 1982; 1988; 1995; Morais, 1994;

Anie, 1998; David, 1998; Kuang, 1999; Nair-Venugopal, 2000; Ain Nadzimah, 2005; Rafik-Galea & Fernandez, 2005). However, almost all of these studies have concentrated on language use and choice either in the personal domain or in the private workplace domain. Almost no work has been reported on language use and choice in the public workplace domain except of Asmah's (1988), Nik Safiah and Hamdan's (1992) work which examined the extent to which Bahasa Malaysia (BM henceforth) was used in the public organisations in Sarawak and Sabah respectively. The term Bahasa Malaysia here encompasses the other terms used in the literature for the national language or official language of the country – Bahasa Melayu, Malay and Malay Language.

The National Language Policy of Malaysia stipulates BM must be used for all official purposes by the public organisations. The official purposes include departmental meetings and briefings, communication between public organisations, communication with the masses and as the medium of instruction in the classroom. However, there is very little documented information on language use within organisations which can provide evidence of this policy. Little is known about the extent to which BM, or other languages, is used in the organisations. Perhaps, the policy imposed on the public workplace domain with regard to language has led to the assumption that the organisations would comply with the policy. In turn, this assumption may have led researchers to neglect this domain. Instead, researchers seem to have concentrated more on either the personal or the private workplace domain.



As an employee in a public organisation herself, the researcher has observed that BM is not the only language used in the workplace even during official purposes. This is largely due to the increasing multilingual workforce and the demand of modernisation and globalisation. Other languages emerge in most context of interaction as speakers have a variety of codes and styles to choose from their linguistic repertoire. Thus, as the researcher has observed, while BM could be the main language in official functions such as meetings, briefings or ceremonies, it may also not be the sole language used throughout – other available languages understood by the speech community may be used - although it is quite unlikely the languages are produced at a full range within one particular speech event. However, as mentioned earlier, there is very few available documentation on this issue. This study, therefore, seeks to augment the little available information on language use in the public workplace domain.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The National Language Act of 1967 made BM an official language. As the national language and official language, it is constituted that BM must be used for official purposes, that is, in official ceremonies, government administration, communication between the government and the people, and as the medium of instruction in schools and university. This imperative includes the federal and state governments, and as defined by the Constitutional Amendment of 1971 under Article 152, by all the authorities and statutory bodies. However, since the declaration of the National Language Act 1967, no assessment has been done on this imperative in the public sector (except for Asmah's (1988) and Nik Safiah and Hamdan's (1992) studies mentioned earlier). As stated earlier, the majority of