

Tongues in Use: The Case of Two Southeast Asian Boundary Communities

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1. Introduction

This paper considers patterns of communication between two Iban communities, one situated in the Lower Baram district of Sarawak in east Malaysia, the other in the southern part of Negara Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei). They are connected by a two-mile path, which traverses the border between Malaysia and Brunei. Central issues in these patterns are the relative social, economic and cultural situations of each community. These 'social' factors serve to illustrate the extent to which the environment inhabited by each group has affected the language repertoires and affiliations of these particular communities.

The Iban comprise the most numerous of the indigenous groups in Borneo and the second most numerous in Malaysia after the Malays. While the Iban constitute an indigenous majority in Sarawak (in East Malaysia on the island of Borneo), they are a minority in Brunei as well as being considered non-indigenous to the state. Given that many of the minority groups in Brunei appear to be undergoing a process of ethnolinguistic assimilation under the hegemony of the numerically and politically dominant Malays, one might reasonably assume some degree of cultural and linguistic assimilation for the Iban (despite their relatively strong ethnolinguistic vitality rating by Martin (1995:32)).

Cultural and linguistic shift in Southeast Asia have received increasing attention in recent years, major contributions including (among others): Thurston (1987), Mullhausler (1989), Florey (1991), Kulick (1992) and Dutton (ed., 1992), the latter editing an issue of *Pacific Linguistics* devoted to cultural and linguistic change as evidenced through a series of individual case studies.

In Brunei there has been the work of Kershaw on the position of Dusun (1994a) and the ongoing work of Martin with respect to the ethnolinguistic vitality of indigenous languages in Brunei under

the domination of Malay (1995); Sercombe (in press) has briefly considered the ethnolinguistic situation among the tiny group (of officially non-indigenous) Penan, former hunter-gatherers, for whom the transition to a settled existence has itself been a dramatic change.

To date the Iban in Brunei (and their language) have received little close attention other than in the demographic studies of Austin (1976, 1977a, 1977b) and in Nothofer's survey of Brunei languages (1991). The Iban in Sarawak however, in comparison to other Borneo groups, have received considerable attention from scholars especially over the last three decades, including among others: Kedit's work on modernization among the Iban (1980a, 1980b), Asmah's description of Iban grammar (1981), Freeman's detailed ethnographic study, whose main focus is Iban agriculture (1992), Sutlive's study of the effects of urbanization on the Iban (1972, 1988, 1992) and Jawan's attention to the Iban in the arena of Sarawak politics as well as economic development among the Iban in Sarawak (1992, 1994).

This paper aims to address the issue of language repertoires and language attitudes among the residents of two Iban villages situated approximately two miles apart, but otherwise located in the separate nation states of Brunei and Malaysia. They inhabit markedly different circumstances, especially in relation to their economic conditions, and these I believe, are presently what most affect their patterns of language use. The picture given here is a general one and is without a detailed consideration of the potential significance of age and gender differences, thus lacking a precision, which might otherwise have revealed finer distinctions in language use between various subgroupings within each community.

2. Background to the Study

2.1 History of the Iban people

The history of the Iban in Sarawak commenced with their migration from the Kapuas River region in western Kalimantan by way of the low-lying watershed between the Kapuas and the Batang Lupar river (around three centuries ago). They came in

search of new lands for cultivation and to expand their territories (Sandin 1967:1, 1994:79).

The Iban have been particularly noted for their considerable mobility (Austin 1976:64), and this accounts for their spread into and throughout Sarawak since they first arrived in Borneo, compared to the less widespread movement of other groups; Ibans however, remain predominant in western Sarawak. Groups of Iban began to migrate east across Sarawak to the Baram River area in significant numbers between 1900 and 1941 where they settled largely in the Lower Baram and its larger tributaries, the Bakong and Tinjar. This was as a result both of their own desire to acquire new lands and encouragement from the ruler of Sarawak Charles Brooke during the early part of this time, who saw the Iban as a security buffer against the Brunei sultanate, besides them being a useful means of keeping the inhabitants of the Baram district in check. During this period the indigenes of Sarawak's Baram division still remained an unknown quantity to senior administrators in Kuching (Pringle 1970:269-272).

2.2 Economy of the Iban people

The Iban have been characterized traditionally as a lowland people, practising dry rice shifting cultivation. The swidden method of agriculture meant there was an ongoing search for new lands, which the Ibans were able to continue colonizing until fairly recently. Theirs is basically a rice cult, aimed at ensuring ample supplies of this staple food. However, in recent decades, cocoa, pepper and rubber, among others, have been planted as cash crops. Nowadays though, increasing numbers of Ibans are seeking work in urban, coastal areas (cf. Sutlive 1992), as among other ethnic groups throughout Borneo, to satisfy changing values and needs: symbols of status are rapidly becoming: "consumeristic, mass cultural and alien to local ethnic traditions" (Mulder 1996:175). Both village communities considered here, rather than buying large ceramic jars, the traditional wealth totems of old, now buy video players and televisions for the home, a trend that is certainly not exclusive to today's Ibans (even though large ceramic jars continue to be admired, but more as antiques, or relics of a past era rather than as symbols of status).

2.3 Social Organisation

Ibans (like the majority of other indigenous groups in Borneo) have traditionally occupied longhouses, being generally located next to and facing rivers. They have comprised mainly autonomous communities, that are unstratified, unlike many other settled groups in Borneo who are generally more institutionally hierarchical in their social organisation (cf. Revel-Macdonald 1988:80) Even so they are not necessarily egalitarian (cf. Rousseau 1980:52-63), often having affluent and domineering lineages. Every longhouse village however does have a headman (*tuai rumah*) or - rarely - a headwoman, but since the arrival of European colonizers, the way an Iban headman is viewed and remains in that position has come to be even more influenced by factors outside Iban society, particularly central government. As recognised by Steward, in his description of notions and means to account for cultural change among primitive societies around the world, “In states, nations and empires the nature of the local group is determined by these larger institutions no less than by its local adaptations” (1955:32).

2.4 Distinctive cultural features

Despite massive social, political and economic changes throughout Borneo, especially since 1963 when Sarawak joined Malaysia (cf. Cleary and Eaton 1992:3; Ave and King 1986: 65), the Iban nevertheless tend to remain strong adherents to certain traditions and are famous throughout Borneo for their *gawai* (festivals), particularly the harvest festival, held annually at the end of May. Significant here is that even when Ibans embrace a major religion such as Islam or Christianity, many continue to observe their festivals with vigour.¹

2.5 The Iban language

Iban is an isolect of the Austronesian language family, which is characteristically agglutinative. It is part of the Malayic subgroup of languages and shares a number of cognates with Malay, although the two languages are mutually unintelligible (Hose 1912:249; Asmah 1981:5). Hose, in his late nineteenth century study of the different tribes of Borneo, writes “Iban . . .

seems to be the language from which Malay has been formed under Arab influence and culture" (1912:250). Cense and Uhlenbeck, in their critical survey of Borneo languages, actually treat Iban as a dialect of Malay (1958:10), a view which recently sparked considerable controversy in the local media (cf. Ejau 1987; Masing 1987), but the notion that Iban is a Malay dialect is not generally accepted, being that they are not mutually comprehensible.

Interestingly, Iban is largely homogeneous with few significant differences occurring between the areas in Borneo (western Kalimantan, Sarawak and Brunei) where it is spoken (cf. LeBar 1972:180), yet it diverges widely from other Bornean languages (a point previously noted by Hose (1912: 254)).²

It is primarily a spoken language, although since an orthography was established (Howell and Bailey 1900) and later standardized (Scott 1956), there has been a steady output of literature published in the language, dictionaries being a well represented genre: Howell and Bailey's *A Sea Dayak Dictionary* (1900); Scott's *A Dictionary of Sea Dayak* (1956); Richards' *Iban-English Dictionary* (1981); Bruggeman's *English-Iban Vocabulary* (1985); and the Sutlives' *Dictionary of Iban and English* (1994), among others. Both the latter two publications also contain comprehensive bibliographies of the language and literature of Iban.

While social, economic and cultural change throughout Borneo are bringing about a rapid decline in the rich oral literature of ritual, myth and epic stories in Iban (cf. Richards 1981:vi) there has recently been some resurgence in the publication of folk literature and epics (in Sarawak) in Iban, including works by Jimmy Donald (1989a, 1989b, 1992, 1993), Thomas Bangit (1991, 1993) and Jimbun Tawai (1989, 1991). An encyclopedia of Iban culture (described as having a mythology more extensive and richer than that of the ancient Greeks) and a comprehensive up-to-date dictionary of the language are also planned (Sutlive in prep.).

The Iban people and their tongue are widespread throughout Sarawak and Brunei, and while no figures exist to show how many people speak Iban as a second or additional language, it has

been described as being of 'regional importance' within the Malay archipelago (Clark 1990:173), and it rather than Malay (the national languages of Malaysia and Brunei), is often the lingua franca in areas where Ibans are numerically predominant (cf. Wurm 1994:95), a significant factor when considering the situation of the Iban language in Brunei.³ Institutionally, Iban also receives some support through the daily broadcasts in Iban by Radio Televisyen Malaysia in Sarawak, and these can also be heard throughout Brunei.

3. Ridan Longhouse in Sarawak in East Malaysia

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with an area of forty-seven thousand square miles and a population of over one and a quarter million, and Iban exist throughout every district of the state. In 1988 the Iban comprised around sixty-four per cent of the population of the Marudi (where Ridan is situated) political constituency in Sarawak, whose total population was just approximately fifteen thousand (Jawan 1992:97), thus being the largest ethnolinguistic group in this district of Sarawak.

3.1 Ridan Longhouse

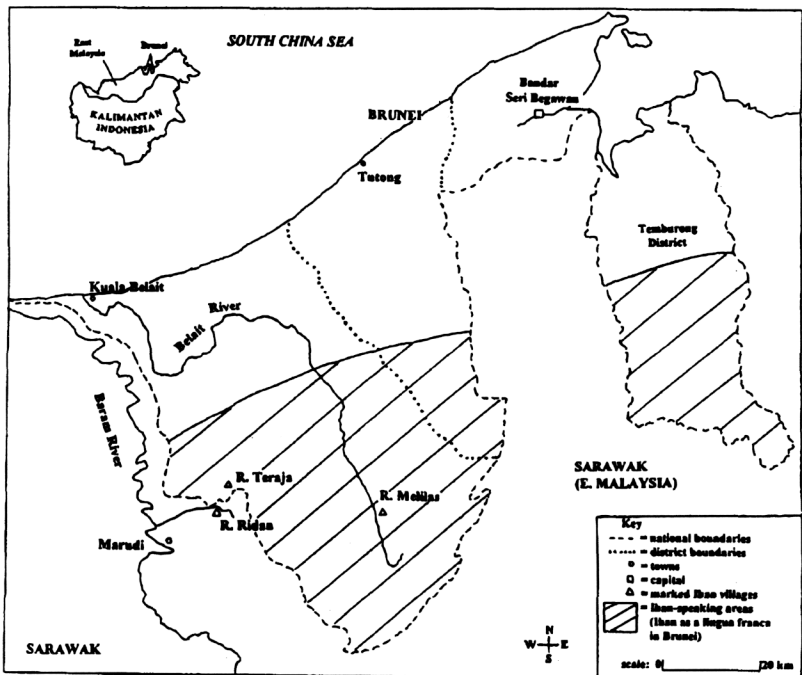
Ridan longhouse has 44 doors (or separate family compartments), a population of just over 300 and is situated in a rural area of mixed lowland dipterocarp, peat swamp and kerangas-type forest, about eight miles east of Marudi town, itself only accessible from the coast by river or air. [See Map 1] The village is linked by a sandy path, (which follows the course of the Ridan River, a minor tributary of the Baram), to a road that continues to Marudi.

The longhouse has occupied its present position since 1989 although it was first established in 1942 by Ibans originating from the Kapit, Sibuh and Lubok Antu areas in central and western Sarawak.

The inhabitants of Ridan own the land they occupy, having bought it for a nominal price from the state government, at the time they originally settled here.

Of crucial importance here is the manner in which the people of Ridan earn their living for it affects their use of language, their

language repertoires and their language attitudes (which will be discussed on later pages): for the most part they are subsistence farmers cultivating dry or hill rice⁴ and a variety of vegetables and fruits, all for domestic consumption. Food is not generally shared with other families in the longhouse (unlike in many other Iban longhouses) or with relatives across the border in Brunei. Wildlife is sought with guns, blowpipes, dogs and traps, the latter method being increasingly common; this results farm people occupying much of their free time with some means of earning money through planting and maintaining cash crops such as rubber and pepper, besides preparing sawn timber.⁵ Furniture to sell, is also made by a number of household males, from rattan either gathered, or bought, in nearby Marudi.



Map 1

Brunei, with particular reference to Rumah Teraja
and Rumah Ridan in Sarawak

Out of the total populations of the longhouse, there are currently five males working as labourers for Chinese businessmen in Maurdi and nine working in Brunei. For the majority of adults then, work time is spent around other residents of the village and presently they have little continuous contact time with other groups, Iban or otherwise.

There is presently no one from the longhouse working in government service and this is felt to reflect badly on the village in terms of its academic and professional achievement. While there is a high level of attendance at primary school, there are few children at secondary school, currently it seems, because of the demands of earning a living from farming. As a general phenomenon, this has been noted by Jawan in his book *Iban politics and economic development* (covering the period 1963 to 1990), in which he remarks: "the dominance of the agricultural economy chains the *ulu*⁶ Ibans to numerous labour-intensive activities in the pursuit of their everyday needs" (1994:72; and cf. Steward 1955:77).

Throughout the longhouse, consumer items are relatively few in number (compared to those in Teraja in Brunei: in total, there are approximately twenty ou

Ridan folk remain active in terms of ritual practices.⁷ There is no longhouse shaman (*dukun*), but there is a bard (*lemambang*); rice cultivation rituals are practised and most inhabitants continue to believe notionally, at least, in bird augury.⁸ *Bejalai* (males travelling afar as a means of seeing the world and gaining wealth and status) seems not to have the significance of earlier times: people still go away to work, as mentioned, but more for money and not particularly to accrue social prestige.

There is no official border crossing between Brunei and Malaysia at Marudi,⁹ so any visit by the connecting path to Brunei (taking around an hour and a half on foot) is illegal. A longer journey via the coast can be undertaken, for which a passport is required, but most male adults from Ridan cross into Brunei on foot, around once in two months on average: a few seek or return to waged employment, but mainly they go to buy petrol or monosodium glutamate¹⁰ which are cheaper in Brunei (despite the

current rate of exchange which makes the Malaysian ringgit worth almost half the Brunei dollar).

The families of Ridan have many consanguine and affinal relatives across the border in Brunei, particularly in Teraja longhouse, but the social contact between the villages is less frequent than one might expect, especially in terms of the Iban of Teraja visiting Ridan.

Despite their somewhat harsher circumstances (compared to the Ibans in Teraja) no residents enquired of in Ridan, felt they would want to move, unless they had no choice, such is the bond with their present home.

3.2 Language use and attitudes among Ridan inhabitants

Besides Iban, all residents in Ridan of school-age and above know vernacular Malay, which they insist has been acquired through informal contact with members of other groups and exposure to the local media. Certainly for some business and the majority of contact with bureaucracy, mostly in urban settings, Malay would be the normal code for oral communication, when interacting with those who are not cogniscant of Iban. [See Table 1] However there is little doubt that education has been instrumental, to some extent, in their acquisition of Malay, despite few residents in Ridan having schooled beyond primary level. Of the twenty odd residents addressed on the topic of Brunei Malay, all said they are unable to speak it but can understand it when they hear it (thus being bilingual, but not bidialectal). [See Table 2]

There are exceptional individuals in the longhouse including one Kayan woman (married into the community) who can speak English (which she learned by completing her secondary education when English was still the medium of education in Sarawak),¹¹ and one Iban male who has learned a little basic English working in a hotel in Brunei. Both these individuals are very keen to use their English with non-Iban/Malay speakers.

Residents of Ridan perceived few differences between the Iban used in Brunei, compared to that spoken in Ridan (apart from the occasional choice of lexis, such as the use of *badoh* 'enough' in Ridan, versus *umbas* in Brunei, the former carrying a greater sense of finality).

Table 1
Language use by domains in the longhouses
of Ridan and Teraja

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Ridan</u>	<u>Teraja</u>
household	I	I
village	I	I
interethnic	I / CM	I / BrM / CM
government	CM	BrM / E
education	StM	E / BrM / StM
letters	I / CM	I
religion	I	I
shops: local	I	I / BrM / CM
non-local	I / CM	BrM / E / CM

BrM = Brunei Malay

CM = Colloquial Malay

StM = Standard Malay

E = English

I = Iban

Table 2
Language repertoires of inhabitants
of Ridan and Teraja by age*

<u>Language</u>	<u>Ridan > 35</u>	<u>Teraja > 35</u>	<u>Ridan < 35</u>	<u>Teraja < 35</u>
English		/		(/)
BrM		/		/
CM	/	/	/	/
StM	(/)	/	(/)	/

/ = receptive and active knowledge

(/) = receptive knowledge

**(This is an overall picture and takes no account of sex differences, although it is based mostly on male responses. Preschool children are not included in the >35 age group).*

Although most people in the longhouse have basic literacy, they have had and continue to have little exposure to the culture of formalized institutions, and no one reads newspapers or books when in the longhouse, as these are considered too expensive to buy, especially in the light of other material needs. Residents, especially those in their teens or younger, often crowd round the available televisions in the evening, if the owners permit, and watch a variety of programmes in Malay and English, the favourites being American action shows. Radio programmes broadcast in Iban are also listened to during the day if people are at home.

Of the adults addressed, all stated they would like to see Iban taught throughout primary and secondary school, for at the present time, Iban is an optional subject and then only in Sarawak's primary schools.¹² A few children from the village are in Chinese medium primary education in Marudi, but most are unhappy attending Chinese schools, where they have few Iban friends, besides the challenges of instruction in Chinese medium.

The majority of the longhouse members addressed by the author voiced a preference for English-medium education, arguing that a knowledge of English would be an additional resource and give access to otherwise unattainable jobs in both the private and government sectors. This tends to uphold a view put forward by Pennycook, that in Malaysia "for many non-Malays, language policies are perceived as Malay rather than Malaysian" (1994:199).¹³ Thus language is an issue of some concern among residents of Ridan. Being mostly unable to converse with 'foreigners', or watch programmes in English with a proper understanding of what is taking place, many adults perceive a lack of material and social achievement (in comparison to residents of Teraja in Brunei) attributing this, in part at least, by their limited knowledge of languages other than Iban and Malay.

4. Teraja Longhouse in Brunei

Brunei is considerably smaller in size than Malaysia or Sarawak, encompassing less than six thousand square kilometres, with a population of around two hundred and eighty thousand (Government of Brunei 1993). The economy is virtually

dependent on oil, and the petroleum industry accounts for 99% of all exports. This has created a wealth of continuing job opportunities. As Austin has said “the oilfields have for much of the twentieth century represented the ideal goal for Iban *bejalai*” (1977:162).¹⁴ The Ibans then, came to Brunei largely as a result of two mutually dependent motives: firstly *bejalai* (mentioned earlier as being to travel afar in order to seek wealth, see the world and accrue the social prestige acquired by a much-travelled man);¹⁵ and secondly to seek waged employment. This in the light of the Sarawak government’s emphasis on settled agriculture, the reduced opportunity for taking over new lands, the expansion of a monetary economy and its consequent demand for wage-earning jobs (Austin 1976: 64). *Bejalai* for many became *pindah* (to migrate permanently as a family group or longhouse community) when workers did not return home (Kedit 1980b:124). Instead of returning to Sarawak many of the Ibans settled down to farm, their longhouses being found mainly on the Belait, Temburong and Tutong rivers of Brunei. Earlier migrants tended to settle upriver, while later arrivals generally settled downriver.

At this stage it is necessary to specify that the situation for the approximately fifteen thousand Iban now settled in Brunei is, in certain respects, very different from that of the Iban in Sarawak.¹⁶ Firstly, there remains in Brunei’s interior, access to an abundance of primary and long-standing secondary growth rainforest, with a low population density and much undisturbed flora and fauna. Secondly, with the availability of relatively well-paid employment on the coast, the Iban of Brunei have the best of two worlds. (Concomitant nonetheless, has been a gradual but inexorable change of attitudes towards the rainforest environment, particularly among younger people, a point to be discussed later with particular reference to the younger generation of Teraja).

Thirdly, the Iban in Brunei, like other Bruneians, have access to a large component of English-medium education under Brunei’s bilingual education system. However, they are less likely to have access to institutional or overt expressions of Iban culture and Iban students in schools seem equally as likely to identify with Malay peers as Ibans in the school environment, where there is a tendency to use Malay exclusively in oral interaction.

Fourthly, the only national newspaper is nearly all in English and only recent has a publication in Malay appeared. Besides the broadcasts of Radio Televisyen Brunei (in both English and Malay), there is also access to an international television network with nine channels, offering sport, drama, news and popular music, all in English.

Finally, Brunei has a relatively large English-speaking, expatriate population working in both the private and public sectors, especially in education. Most primary schools have at least one non-Bruneian teacher (often more), but certainly every secondary school has a large number of native English speakers, many contracted to teach English. Besides then, the substantial, formal contact with foreign teachers (and foreigners in general), there is also more likely to be more coincidental, observation of and informal contact with people of other cultures and nationalities.

The above factors give some indication of the extent of differences between the social conditions of the Iban in Brunei compared to their ethnic counterparts in Sarawak.

4.1 Teraja Longhouse

Teraja longhouse was first established in 1948, although the present building was constructed in 1986. It has six doors or separate family compartments and is situated in largely undisturbed lowland dipterocarp forest, with a population of just fifty-seven. Some half of these reside on the coast during the week (in the towns of Seria or Kuala Belait) where adults maintain waged jobs, meaning effectively that every family has access to at least two homes. The community has its own generator, road access to the coast and has recently had a telephone receiver aerial installed. Residents own the land they occupy (each door possessing approximately ten acres), but they are not permitted to sell it.

Families farm wet or hill rice, in locations up to twelve miles from the village and a range of vegetables are intercropped with the hill rice, all produce being for domestic consumption with the surplus being shared.¹⁷ No one under thirty-five however, plants rice on a full-time basis, leaving only the older generation to work

on the farms. Pigs and chickens are also reared and hunting is practised with dogs and spears, as well as by trapping.¹⁸ No specific cash crops are cultivated, neither are crafts produced for sale. Five older members of the community previously had paid work (either in the police force or for a municipal council) but chose to resume a farming lifestyle, after saving sufficient cash for their needs or by simply taking early retirement to return to the longhouse that had been established on coming to Brunei.

Every family has an adult member who has some form of waged work on the coast and every family has a television, radio and car of its own. "The younger generation have been attracted to cash incomes that require less physical effort, besides the facilities that tend to be available in urban areas" (Uja 1994:2), which along with education, which is as much in English as in Malay, contribute to their language knowledge and attitudes. Formal education, attractive job opportunities and increasing communication networks in Brunei, now offer greater freedom for social and geographical mobility and have tended to magnify the distance between home and work (cf. Minder 1996:174 and his description of a similar phenomenon in Java). Material and social advancement in Teraja are further illustrated by one longhouse member having trained to become a qualified teacher in a local government school.

There is a longhouse shaman (*dukun*) and the community occasionally makes use of both bards (*lemambang*) and traditional healers (*manang*). Rice cultivation rituals are still carried out although these are mostly performed by the older generation. Young Terajans said they are often coaxed to perform certain rituals, which they did not resent, but they have grown up, and in many cases attended school on the coast, becoming socialized in an atmosphere of both national and foreign cultures, as much as that of the Iban village.

For the younger population, the longhouse and its surroundings are not the pragmatic home (although that is what they call them) but a connection with the older generation, a weekend destination where Iban culture and life can be practised on a part-time basis. Depopulation of the interior and the loss of forest knowledge and the influence of the Malay-dominated

populace view of the forest as a recreational resource, is a growing phenomenon in Brunei and the Ibans are no exception (cf. Ellen & Bernstein 1994:16).¹⁹ In fact adults who work on the coast admit the likelihood of Teraja longhouse being abandoned in the future, although they are loathe to deliberate on this prospect.

As a diaspora to some extent, residents of Teraja continue to maintain extended social networks throughout Brunei and Sarawak²⁰ and claim to visit places of family origin (in Sarawak) at least once in three years. They continue to value the names of ancestors by employing them in the naming of offspring, an illustration of links with the cultural and genealogical past (cf. Azmi in press).

Austin stated in 1976 that "The Ibans of Brunei have not been separated for a period of time long enough to have permitted any noticeable amount of divergent culture change" (from their ethnic counterparts in Sarawak) (1976:66). This author would suggest that younger Ibans in Brunei are in fact beginning to show signs of divergence, firstly (and similarly to modern generation Ibans elsewhere) by their reduced involvement in traditional longhouse activities, but also by their continuing experience of Brunei (features of which were outlined earlier). In short Ibans are no longer just Ibanic: they have in many cases become, as they themselves say, Bruneian.

4.2 Language use and attitudes among residents of Teraja

The intraethnic code in Teraja is Iban, there appearing no critical incursions through codeswitching or the use of other languages in the village domain (cf. Martin and Sercombe 1994[?]: 171; Sercombe in press). Only one person wanted to talk English to the author, the others spoke Iban or Malay (given the author's poor active knowledge of Iban). Of greater interest perhaps, is that Iban is used as a lingua franca throughout much of the interior of Brunei, although this is not too remarkable, given the numerical dominance of Ibans in Brunei's otherwise sparsely populated inland areas. [See Map 1]

The bilingual education system in Brunei (in English and Malay), instituted in 1985, has allowed many Iban (among of

course other Bruneians) to become proficient in English and Standard Malay, besides the prestigious national code Brunei Malay (making some of them not only bilingual but also bidialectal). Residents of Teraja responded very positively to the idea of bilingual education, saying English gave them access to a wider range of jobs; while Malay allowed for cultural integration in a society dominated by Brunei Malays (cf. Martin 1995:33).

There are currently four Ibans from Teraja in form five at high school studying for 'O' levels. Of those questioned (as well as other male adults who had since left school), the predominant feeling was that Iban has a low prestige value in Brunei (cf. Uja 1993:3), and that they (as Ibans) felt obliged to use Malay in the school environment, where "To present themselves in a positive light, speakers of minority languages speak the majority language" (Kulick 1992:262), although they continue to write informally in Iban. Ibans in Brunei are in a situation where the implicit edict of the school to the children is that there's no need for them to utilize their mother tongue (Kulick 1992:222). Even so respondents in Teraja felt Iban to be an important language in Brunei, because of the relatively high number of Iban and because their language is known and used in each of the four districts of the country.

In their free time, people admitted to ample viewing of satellite television stations (in English), with a preference for the popular music channel, otherwise preferring to listen to Malay music stations on the radio.

Nothofer, in his survey of Brunei languages, identified a number of features which he claimed differentiate the Iban spoken in Brunei from other varieties: the most significant was the diphthongization of all vowels except *a* in open final syllables, e.g. *ati* (liver) appears as *atey* and *ngasu* (to hunt) as *ngasow* in his wordlist (1991:157). This is a form of vowel breaking, whereby a glide precedes the final vowel, creating an on-glide resulting in a diphthong (Crowley 1992:49). Despite considerable interaction with Ibans from different parts of Brunei and having made a number of recordings of free discourse in Teraja (although none in the area where Nothofer collected his data), I perceive no significant phonological distinctions between the variety of Iban spoken in Brunei and that of Ridan in Sarawak. The suggestion

also that the use of the supposedly Brunei Malay lexical item *gadong* (green) indicates a borrowing, can be countered by judging *gadong* as an areal word, as much Iban as *ijau* (cf. Richards 1981:92). The lexical choice of *umbas* against *badoh*, used interchangeably (mentioned earlier) represents from my viewpoint, a stylistic choice, while remembering Milroy's observation: "linguistic variables may be markers of certain fine-grained functions within the community, which can be broadly considered to be identity functions, and which may appear as age, sex or areal differences for example" (1992:92).

Infrequent code-switching however was noted in the village setting, but occurrences have so far only been at sentence boundaries (or intersententially) and in the form of single word utterances: *nda'* (no) versus the more common *nadai*, the use of *bah*, for concurrence (cf. Ozog and Martin 1990), and the curious (because it was isolated and seemingly anomalous) substitution of the Iban *kemari'* (yesterday) for the Malay pronunciation *kelmarin*.²¹

Other marked occurrences of language use included several examples of English for phatic communion between younger men on meeting after a period of absence, but (while exemplifying an extended language repertoire) these might have been to impress the author and others.

It is relevant to remark here briefly that Ibans of Kampong Siol Kandis, a suburb of Kuching, liberally mix Malay and Iban intrasententially, although I have not so far taperecorded data for this. The Ibans and Malays who reside there interact socially to a considerable degree, and I would suggest this reflects a degree of boundary-breaking, while in Brunei the Iban interact to a lesser degree with Malays on an informal basis, and that the view here of the homogeneity of Iban in Brunei reflects both internal cohesion and significant social boundary maintenance.

5. Concluding Notes: Patterns of Language Use among the Members of Ridan and Teraja

Both Ridan and Teraja are examples of small subcultures that have not yet undergone urbanization in the physical sense. Teraja's 'residents' are undoubtedly undergoing a gradual but

progressive transformation by their integration into Brunei national culture, mirroring, as Edwards remarks, "That some elements of ethnicity decline and others linger is obviously a reflection of social adjustment. That is, it indicates a desire to move away from segregation without undergoing complete submersion" (1984:281). There is, nonetheless, less evidence of assimilation into national culture in Ridan, where residents appear less affected by aspects of state or national culture, despite a longer and more established residence in Sarawak than their Brunei neighbours (cf. Steward 1955:47).

Patterns of language use seem more uniform throughout the generations and sexes in Ridan in contrast to the inhabitants of Teraja, who vary according to age, work, educational level and probably sex (although this latter is an avenue I have hitherto neglected). This is not surprising given the more diverse conditions and circumstances of the Iban of Teraja in Brunei. Their longer and more continuous exposure to members of society beyond the Iban ethnic category has increased both vertical and horizontal modes by which cultural and linguistic transmission can occur (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 1981: 53-62), as compared to the more restricted situation of those in Ridan. Still, in both communities, the conversational partner is the most important consideration in villagers' language choice and they have a solid sense of linguistic compromise (Kulick 1992:75).

Access to a bilingual education in Teraja has obviously been instrumental in bringing about not only bilingualism in Iban and Malay, but also English (for the younger generation at least), besides bidialecticism in Standard Malay and Brunei Malay. Iban functions probably a little more esoterically for Terajans, given that in most urban areas in Brunei (unlike Sarawak), Iban is unknown beyond the Iban communities besides its having little status.

The Iban are, to some extent, in a unique position in Brunei as the largest non-Muslim Borneo group. Unlike other indigenous groups such as the Belait, Dusun and Tutong, all of whom appear to be in the stages of shifting towards Brunei Malay, the Iban continue to maintain their language even when they have embraced a major religion. The relatively large number of Ibans in

surrounding Sarawak no doubt help to reinforce both social ties and the language (cf. Martin 1995: 35), and so far, it seems, only intermarriage appears a potent factor in the cause of language shift within the family (cf. Uja 1994:3).

There has no doubt been a reduction in the domains of use for Iban in Brunei; since the migration of Ibans to Brunei, pragmatics has reigned over ideology. "The relationship between language and economics is . . . a strong one, and practical considerations underlie most linguistic patterns and alterations" (Edwards 1985:164; cf. Coulmas 1992:59). [See Table 1] At the same time a new language and identification with its speakers can be an *additional resource to fulfill specific functions, while the apparent intactness of Iban demonstrates that language is a powerful obstacle to penetration* (cf. Monbiot 1995). This leads me to posit that it is because the Ibans are not indigenous to Brunei that they remain unabsorbed and are able to maintain both a metaphorical and a literal/linguistic distance from the ruling Malays while at the same time feeling Bruneian. To my mind there has so far been no (conscious) shedding of culture among Iban migrants but rather the incorporation of another. "The notion that ethnic identities are not necessarily fixed but malleable, in at least some circumstances, has rightly become common wisdom" (Verdery 1994:36). And, as Edwards states, "Change need not imply loss" (1985:160). In contrast to the indigenous languages of Brunei, I would suggest that the foreseeable future for Iban in Brunei looks fairly good.

The situation that I have described here attempts to illustrate the crucial importance of environment in shaping language repertoires, attitudes, affiliations and identities. Ridan in its position of *relative physical and social isolation, where members are subject to the demands of an agricultural economy, have yet to enter society's mainstream and acquire a sense of national identity, while the immersion of Ibans from Teraja into Brunei society has helped foster not only a larger linguistic but also a larger cultural repertoire.*

Notes

1. Half of the one hundred inhabitants of the Iban longhouse of Melilas in the interior of the Belait District of Brunei embraced Islam in 1992, yet continue to practise traditional rituals and celebrate their annual harvest festival in a unified manner.
2. Wurm declares about Borneo languages that, "All the languages (except those in the northeast extension of Borneo) belong to a comparatively simple type of Western Austronesian with a moderately developed range of prefixes and suffixes and simple indication of possessives" (1994:122).
3. Ariffin and Teoh (1994) are of the opinion that "Iban . . . could become obsolescent . . . within a couple of generations", due to a lack of institutional support. This is despite stating that around 60% of the population of Sarawak speak Iban. I tend to feel that such is its role as an interethnic vernacular tongue that it is in no danger of becoming obsolete in the near future, despite little institutional support.
4. They do not, however, plant wet rice, which is more productive than hill rice. Considerable effort is required to establish wet rice fields, and this the residents of Ridan currently claim is beyond their resources. There was generally a poor harvest in 1996, due to heavy flooding that affected those families with rice fields located near the Ridan river.
5. They receive four hundred Malaysian dollars per ton for this sawn wood, although strictly speaking they are only supposed to make use of wood for domestic purposes, not for sale.
6. *Ulu* means interior, or interior place, in contrast often to urbanised (and mostly) coastal areas and people.
7. Although some five families in the longhouse have become Catholic and no longer take part in rice planting ceremonies and the annual harvest festival.
8. Certain birds are seen as the incarnation of supernatural beings, and the signs they give are important to heed, especially in undertaking something important (cf. Freeman 1992:117–20).

9. Interestingly, in the *Malaysian Information Yearbook 1994*, a map of Sarawak shows a road connecting Marudi with Brunei (1994:635), perhaps reflecting Malaysia's aspirations for further ease of movement between the two countries.
10. A flavour enhancer, very popular in the cooking of savoury foods.
11. The last year of English-medium education in Sarawak in secondary schools was in 1988.
12. Cf. Ariffin and Teoh (1994) for a discussion of what they describe as '*The marginalization of Iban in Sarawak*'.
13. There are both historical and political dimensions associated with some Ibans' concerns over the medium of education in Sarawak, which are of significance, but beyond the scope of this paper. Cf. Sutlive (1992:244–46) for further detail of these concerns. The opinions reported in the text contrast with findings of Harris in a study conducted among Murut communities in Sabah, who responded positively towards the idea of Malay-medium education (1996:17).
14. It is interesting to note that under the entry for *bejalai* in Richards' dictionary a town in Brunei is used to help illustrate the word's meaning: *Maioh kami sa-rumah nyau bejalai ka Seria*. 'Many [men] of our house have gone to Seria.' (1981:34).
15. Freeman states that only a travelled man is entitled to be tattooed and is also more likely to win the wife of his choice (1992:225). Tattooing however seems nowadays to be little practised (although still to be widely observed among the older generations).
16. Cf. Sercombe's discussion of the circumstances of the Penan of Brunei in comparison to their relatives in Sarawak; these circumstances are comparable to those of the Iban groups under discussion here [forthcoming].
17. Some families farm both hill rice and wet rice, allowing them a healthy surplus.
18. The possession of firearms in Brunei is illegal.

19. Unlike Ridan there is an absence of longhouse totems at the edges of the longhouse compound to ward against evil spirits.
20. This was evident when I attended briefly a period of mourning at the the nearby home of a deceased Iban youth and saw just how many sympathizers were there and how far some had come, both from Brunei and Sarawak.
21. Whereby the central schwa has been replaced by the front mid vowel /e/ and the liquid /l/ has been inserted as a form of excrescence (cf. Crowley 1992:44) and the final glottal substituted with the nasal alveolar /n/ (with the stress remaining on the penultimate syllable).

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