

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sabah is the second largest state in Malaysia. It covers an area of about 73,622 square kilometres, located on the northern part of Borneo Island, and shares borders with Indonesia's Kalimantan on the south and with the Sarawak state of Malaysia on the south-west. The state of Sabah consists of five administrative divisions consisting of Tawau, Sandakan, Kudat, the West Coast, and the Interior Division. These divisions are sub-divided into 24 districts. The population in Sabah is 3,120,040 with average annual growth rate of 2.34% (*Malaysian Yearbook of Statistics, 2010*).

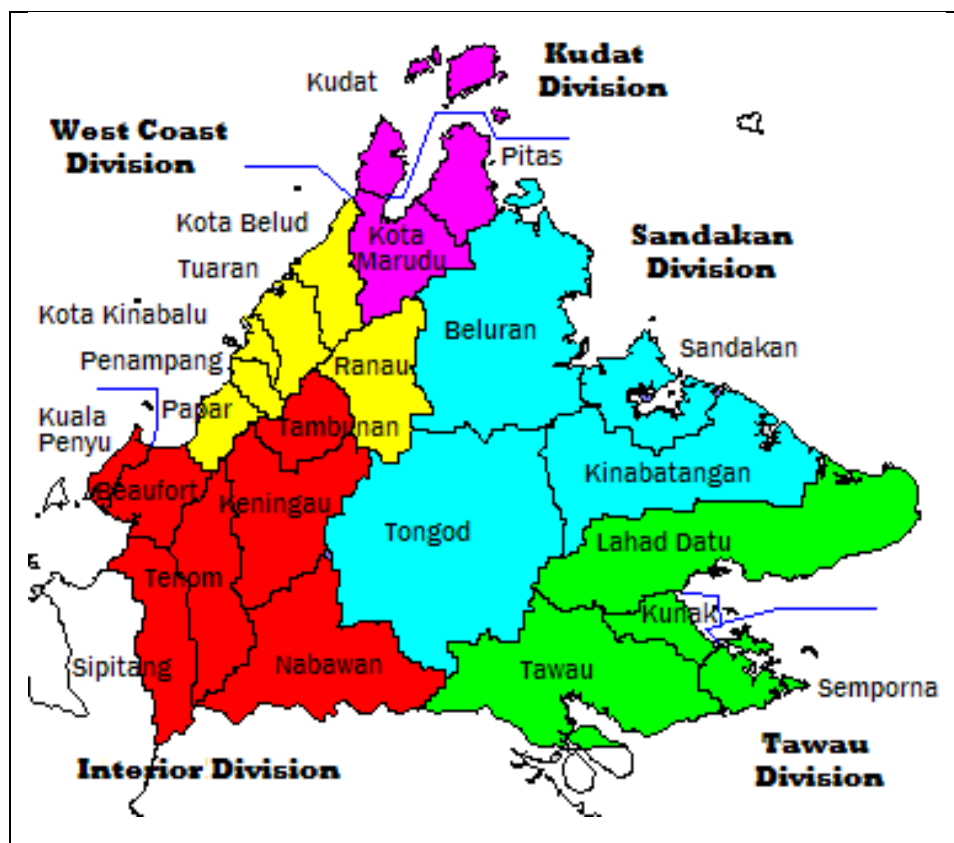


Figure 1.1 Administrative Divisions of Sabah

Sabah, together with Sarawak, was once part of the Kingdom of Brunei in the 14th century. The Malay language was already used as a language of interethnic group communication. It was the language of trade and administration under the Sultanate of Brunei. After the independence of Sabah through the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the people of Sabah accepted the Malay language as the national and official language of Malaysia. Since then, “Malay has spread throughout the heterogeneous native communities in Sabah and Sarawak as the language of governance and the main medium of education” (Asmah, 2008:16).

Although the languages of a majority of the indigenous peoples of Sabah are not Malay but closely related to Malay as they are members of the Austronesian language family (Asmah Haji Omar, 2008:15), Malay has continued to be the language of interaction among the 52 indigenous ethnic and sub-ethnic groups of Sabah such as the Dusun, Kadazan, Bajau, Rungus, Murut and numerous immigrant groups such as Bugis, Javanese, Suluk, and Chinese.

Through time, the Malay language spoken in Sabah has extended its social function from being a lingua franca to one with a wider usage in different settings. Malay is not only a language of inter-ethnic communication, but also serves as a language of interaction in intra-ethnic setting. Most indigenous ethnic groups have adopted Malay as a home language and in bringing up their children. Besides being a home language¹, it is also a first language² to many Sabahans.

¹According to the definition used in Wong, K.L.J (2000), home language is the language that a person speaks to his/her spouse and children at home. It may or may not be his/her L1, mother tongue or native language.

² First language or L1 is the first language to be acquired by a speaker. Usually it is also the person's mother tongue or native language. However, in the case of Sabahans, L1 may or may not be a person's mother tongue or native language.

Gradually the Malay language spoken by the large speech community in Sabah evolved as a variety of the language in its own right. The diversity of speech communities of indigenous languages, each with its own linguistic characteristics, has been a significant factor in the birth of the Sabah variety of Malay. The convergence of these speakers who interact with one another, mainly in the urban areas, also contributes to the making of this variety. To quote Britain and Trudgill (2005:184),

...in certain sorts of sociolinguistic situations involving contact between mutually intelligible dialect-colonial situations, new towns, rapid urbanisation - new dialect may develop.

Asmah (2008:13) proposes three parameters of the typology of an area of language spread: culture area, time-depth and density of first-language speakers. A core area is one which is characterised by all these parameters. By this definition, Sabah is a non-core area, but is still within traditional area of Malay language spread. Sabah, being contiguous to Brunei, has had a long history of interaction of its people with those in the Brunei Sultanate which is a core area of spread of Malay, and the function of Malay as a lingua franca in Sabah can, among other factors, be attributed to this factor. With its membership in the Federation of Malaysia, Sabah now has an increasing number of first- and second-language speakers of Malay, inclusive of the new variety that is the subject of this study. It is then not unexpected that this variety of Malay is heavily influenced by Brunei Malay.

This new variety of Malay is spoken widely by almost everyone in Sabah, and this includes the Malay speech community represented by the Brunei Malays and the Kedayan. These two Malay groups have their own native varieties or dialects which are Brunei Malay and Kedayan Malay respectively. The new Sabah variety is spoken

alongside the native variety even in intergroup communication. But like any other ethnic group in Sabah, these Malay communities will use the new variety Malay when they interact with the non-Malay groups.

Very often speakers do not have a name for the new variety of Malay they speak, for them it is simply 'Malay'. The problem with not having a specific name is that others or the speakers themselves would think the variety that they are speaking is of the Standard Malay. They seem to be unaware that this variety is not Standard Malay. This variety of Malay, as well as many of the other world's major languages may develop to possess a range of language varieties owing to their broad sociolinguistic profiles and complex linguistic landscapes. (Gil, 2009).

This has long been noted by Asmah Haji Omar (1988) who states that, unlike the Malay dialect spoken in the neighbouring state of Sarawak which is clearly known as Sarawak dialect, references have not been made to 'Sabah dialect' or 'Sabah Malay'. A name has to be given to this new variety of Malay spoken in Sabah. To date, very few studies have been carried out on the Malay variety spoken in Sabah, by referring it '*Cakap Sabah*' (meaning the speech of Sabah) '*Bahasa Sabah*' (meaning the language of Sabah), or simply '*Melayu di Sabah*' (Malay in Sabah).

As this variety of Malay with its distinctive linguistic characteristics is specific to Sabah, it can be termed as Sabah Malay Dialect (SMD) in this study. SMD is clearly a dialect of the Malay language. It is also a living language according to Asmah's (2008:1) definition:

A living language does not have to be in the form of a standard language that functions as a frame of reference all speakers who speak different varieties of the language concerned. It may just exist in a single geographical variety or dialect that is equivalent to other dialects of the same language in relation to the standard variety.

As a dialect of Malay, SMD has not received as much attention as it properly deserves (Martin, 2000). There are several reasons why the Malay varieties spoken in Sabah are hardly regarded or categorised as dialects of Malay (Wong, 2000). First, SMD has not been regarded as a distinctive variety. According to a report in Human Relation Area File (1956), “the Malay spoken in Borneo is the same language as that spoken in Malaya (now known as West Malaysia)” and that there is no significant distinctiveness about it. However, this is not quite the case, as any Sabahan, whether a government minister or a layman appearing on national television is quickly recognised as ‘*Orang Sabah*’ the moment he or she speaks Malay. This shows that there is a significant distinctiveness in the features of the Malay variety they speak.

Other reasons in not arriving at a definitive label for the Malay variety spoken in Sabah are underlined by the assumptions that (i) only the Malay ethnic groups speak the Malay language (Asmah Haji Omar 1976), and that (ii) any Malay variety spoken by non-Malays, including the non-Malay indigenous people, non-Muslims and the immigrants of Sabah is considered as ‘*bahasa Melayu Pasar*’ or ‘Bazaar Malay’, i.e. the colloquial varieties spoken particularly in informal places particularly in the markets (Za’ba, 1965).

Even at the present time, the Summer Institute of Linguistics in its *Ethnologue* (2005-2009) classifies SMD as follows:

Table 1.1: Classification of the Sabah Malay Dialect by Ethnologue

	Malay, Sabah A language of Malaysia (Sabah) ISO 639-3: [msi]
<i>Population</i>	No estimate available
<i>Alternate names</i>	Bazaar Malay, Pasar Malay
<i>Classification</i>	Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Malayo-Sumbawan, North and East, Malayic, Malay A member of macrolanguage Malay [msa] (Malaysia)
<i>Language use</i>	Trade language of Sabah. A few L1 speakers in urban areas, especially children of parents who have other L1s. Used mainly as contact language, so not yet fully developed. Speakers shift to other languages to fill in expressions in domains where Sabah Malay is lacking. If the only form of Malay a person knows is Sabah Malay, there will be difficulty understanding Standard Malay [zsm] in other domains.
<i>Language Development</i>	Dictionary
<i>Comments</i>	May be a dialect of Brunei [kxd]. ‘Bazaar Malay’ refers to many regional nonstandard Malay varieties. SVO. Agriculturalists: wet and dry rice, rubber, fruits, vegetables; fishermen; shopkeepers; small traders.

Source: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=msi

However, the above assumption can be debated. Besides its initial function as a lingua franca or a language of the market places, SMD has become a home language. According to Wong (2000), most of the children in Sabah grow up speaking Malay along with their mother tongue(s) as multilingualism is a norm in Sabah. Some children speak SMD as the first language, and most of the time, it is the only language before they reach school age. It is also a language of closeness and intimacy for the Sabahans. This applies not only to the Malay communities, but also to the non-Malay ethnic groups, non-Muslims and immigrant groups in Sabah.

Due to the diverse speech communities with different socio-linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-economic background, SMD displays variation, especially in its phonological and structural characteristics. There is no single uniform and homogeneous variety of SMD.

The varying characteristics of SMD have also brought about the assumption that it is not a 'proper' language but a 'corrupt' or 'broken' variety (Wong, 2000). It is also often considered a deviation or divergence from the standard variety, influenced or interfered by mother tongues, as well as other neighbouring languages. It may be due to this factor that SMD has not been considered a dialect of Malay on the same level as the dialects in Sarawak, Kedah, and Johor.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is obvious that there is a new variety of Malay spoken particularly in Sabah which has emerged as a result of diverse socio-linguistic, socio-cultural, and socio-economic background, with extended functions and distinctive linguistic features. A question arises: Is there a speech system that can be called Sabah Malay Dialect?

SMD, a Malay variety which retains most of its features from Brunei Malay, is further influenced by its speakers' mother tongues which include the non-Malay indigenous languages of Sabah and languages of various immigrant groups. As Sabah is a state with heterogeneous ethnic groups occupying different geographical areas and districts, the SMD they speak displays variations. Variations further increase with the coming of numerous new immigrant groups such as the Indonesians and the Filipinos.

Almost all administrative divisions have their own variants of SMD with different degrees of influences from different indigenous languages and different languages of immigrants. For example, the variety of SMD in the Interior Division has more influence from indigenous languages, such as Dusun and Murut, whereas in areas closer to the West Coast Division of Sabah, the variety retains more Brunei Malay features than others. In the Tawau Division, indigenous languages such as Suluk and

Cocos Malay, as well as Bahasa Indonesia, play some role in the expansion of the lexicon of SMD. Although there are variations, generally all variations of SMD share some common features that are uniquely Sabahan. All these variations in SMD are mutually intelligible; people of one division or district can easily understand a variety of SMD from another division or district.

Language variation can be diverse in aspects of pronunciation, phonology, morphology, lexis, grammar, and meaning. Differentiation is more often seen in the aspects of pronunciation and phonology (Nik Safiah, 1985; and, Quirk and Greenbaum, 1980). Similarly, the most prominent differences that can be seen in SMD is the pronunciation produced by different speakers. These differences are referenced as phonological differentiation.

By using traditional dialectology, Wong (2000) uses the term SMD in quest for phonological similarity rather than phonological differentiation. Due to the diversity of the speech communities, traditional dialectology would have difficulty in prescribing a standard phonological feature of SMD. Feedbacks and responses to the researcher's previous study (Wong, 2000) obtained the following reactions: "*Tidaklah saya cakap macam tu* (I don't speak that way)", "*Bukan semua orang cakap macam ni* (Not everyone speaks this way)" or "*Kadangkala saja kami cakap begini* (Only sometimes we speak this way)". What triggered these comments? Obviously, there are variations within this variety of Malay which is referred as SMD.

Hence, it is crucial to describe the characteristics of SMD as a variety of Malay through its phonological differentiation which could be caused by social context (see Chapter 2.4). This being the case, urban dialectology (see Chapter 2.2.2) is applied in

this study as it allows consideration on social and speech factors which have brought about phonological variations.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify the phoneme inventory of SMD through phonological differentiation.
- ii. To demonstrate the relationship between phonological differentiation and social variation in SMD.
- iii. To demonstrate the relationship between phonological differentiation and stylistic variation in SMD.
- iv. To determine the social function of the linguistic variables in the speech community of SMD.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are as follows:

- i. To what extent are the phonological characteristics of SMD distinct from Standard Malay?
- ii. To what extent is the phonological differentiation of SMD determined by social variation?
- iii. To what extent is the phonological differentiation of SMD determined by stylistic variation?
- iv. To what extent is the speech community of SMD marked by linguistic variables?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Based on the limited and inadequate previous researches and publications on SMD, a more intensive and exhaustive study of SMD is most needed. As there are many different versions of phoneme inventories have been described due to the phonological differentiation, a standard phoneme inventory of SMD is essential.

This study of SMD also helps in understanding Malay dialectology, as also part of Malay heritage. It is hoped that this study will open windows and give new insights into the linguistics of the Malay-speaking region.

Besides contributing to Malay dialectology, this study will provide a picture of various sociolinguistic processes such as language interference and borrowing, as the SMD is often considered as interference of mother tongues.

1.6 RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most of the previous descriptive works or traditional dialect studies done on the Malay varieties are spoken by the various speech communities of Sabah. These have only captured part of SMD (see 2.4). It is hoped that by adopting urban dialectology, this study is able to capture the distinctiveness of SMD spoken by taking into consideration the speakers' social context and speech differentiation (further discussed in chapters 4).

1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

It is not possible to cover the whole of Sabah for this study. So the research area chosen was Kota Kinabalu, the capital of the state. The city is considered a viable place for this type of research in which urban dialectology can be applied, where

various social factors (see Chapter 3.4.1), as well as speech differentiation (see Chapter 3.4.2), can be observed, and analysed.

Four social variables, which are gender, age, ethnicity and social stratification, and four speech styles, namely Word-list, Reading-passage, Formal and Casual styles have been applied in this methodology. The linguistic variations in this study are confined to those of phonology focusing on the variables (α), (\leftrightarrow), (ε), (o), (η), (κ), (ρ), ($\tau\Sigma$) and (?) (see chapter 3.4.3), as these nine variables display the most visible phonological differentiations in SMD.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration that Sabah has a great diversity in terms of socio-cultural, socio-economics, socio-linguistics with numerous languages and dialects and heterogeneous speech communities, a study using the urban dialectology approach needs to be applied where the social context and stylistic differentiation are taken into consideration as determiners of language variations. These are the factors which indicate the distinctiveness of the Sabah Malay Dialect.