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## **Close and Dense Networks: Do They Lead to Maintenance of the Ethnic Language? Focus on the Telegu Community in Kuching, Sarawak**

### **SUMMARY**

This paper sets out to examine the issue of language shift among the closely-knit minority Telegu community in Sarawak. According to L. Milroy (1987) a closely-knit social network system is a significant device of language maintenance and can be applied universally. However, local researches on Malaysian Indians such as M. K. David's (1996) study on the Sindhi community, S. Govindasamy and M. Nambiar's (2003) study on the Malayalees, and M. K. David and F. Noor's (1999) study of the Portuguese community in Malacca show that although these minorities have close and dense networks, yet they are moving away from their ethnic languages. This paper investigates whether or not the closely-knit minority Telegu community in Kuching, Sarawak, has also shifted to other languages. Data from conversations in the home domain will determine the dominant language used by members of the community. The attitude of the community towards the use of the heritage language will also be discussed. The information will emerge from unstructured interviews with members of the community. It is found that close and dense networks do not necessarily result in language maintenance.

**KEY WORDS:** Telegus, language shift, language maintenance, Kuching, Sarawak, close and dense networks

### **1. Introduction**

This paper determines if the minority Telegu community in Kuching, Sarawak is maintaining the use of the Telegu language. Milroy (1987) contends that a closely-knit social network system is a significant device of language maintenance and can be applied universally. The social network concept introduced by Milroy (1980) was a way to group people together in order to study linguistic behaviour. Milroy *argues that if a community has strong and dense networks, chances of language maintenance are strong*. In the studies of the Malaysian Sindhi (David, 2003), Punjabis (David, Ibtisam and Kaur, 2003), Malayalees (Govindasamy and Nambiar, 2002), Tamil Chitty (Vijaya-personal communication), and Portuguese in Malacca (David and Noor, 1999) –

all communities who have strong and multiplex networks – shift has occurred. Use of the new language, English, has not resulted in the breaking of ethnic ties and the communities still retain close networks and maintain other ethnic and cultural norms (see David, 2001, on how the Malaysian Sindhis have maintained their ethnic and cultural norms of discourse in the English they use). This finding alerts us to the dangers of accepting results in the West and assuming that the same will apply in multilingual settings like Malaysia.

Map 1: Sarawak, Malaysia



The aim of this study is to investigate the language choice of the minority Telegu community in Sarawak with a view to determining if the community has shifted from their ancestral language in the home domain, despite having strong networks.

As no study has ever been conducted on the Telegu community in Sarawak, the data is obtained from recorded conversations in the home domain in the Telegu settlement in *Batu Satu*. Since one of the researchers is a descendant of Sarapa (a first generation Telegu) as an insider getting entry into the homes of community members was not difficult. The home domain is chosen for data collection because according to Gal (1978) this domain is often viewed as the last bastion for beleaguered or endangered languages. The purpose was also to determine “who was speaking what language to whom and when” (Hymes, 1972). A total 5 hours of recordings of 22 conversations were made at different intervals. The transcriptions were analyzed for dominant language used and Auer’s conversational analysis (1988, 1995) and Gumperz’s interactional sociolinguistics (1982) were used to determine this. In addition, interviews were conducted with older members of the community to obtain a historical background of the Telegu community. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with subjects from

each generation in order to determine their attitudes towards Telegu and the other codes used.

Map 2: Part of India from where the Telegus came



The early South Indians came as tea planters brought in by Charles Brooke in 1920's and they stayed in the Matang area and planted tea on the slopes of Mount Serapi. This has been proved by the discovery of an ancient Hindu temple on one of the slopes of Mount Serapi by Dayak jungle trekkers in 1971.

## 2. Research site

The study is located in the closely-knit Telegu community at 1<sup>st</sup> Mile Tun Abang Haji Openg Road, adjacent to Sarawak General Hospital in Kuching City in Sarawak. It is the only Telegu settlement found in Sarawak. This study focuses on the descendants of Sarapa (1895–1979) some of whom still live together in the settlement called *Batu Satu*. There are three families consisting of three generations who still stay in four units of big wooden/brick houses. Although most of the younger generation and their parents have moved away from the settlement, *Batu Satu* is still the point of conver-

gence for all the Telegu descendants of Sarapa, who meet regularly and have a close network.

Although the *Statistical Bulletin* has given the number of Telegus in this settlement to be merely 33, based on our calculation there are more than 92 Telegu people (see Table 1).

Table 1: Population size of the Telegu community in the city of Kuching

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
First (60 years old and above)	4	5	9
Second (35 years old – 59)	20	25	45
Third (below 35)	18	20	38
	42	50	92

Of Sarapa's 12 children only 9 are still alive and they are classified in this study as First generation belonging to the age group of 60 and above. Of these only the youngest son married a Telegu woman. The other 8 children contracted exogamous marriages with Tamils and Malayalees, Malay, Chinese or Dayaks. The third generation is able to speak English, Standard Malay and Sarawak Malay.

The 92 subjects meet regularly whenever they gather at *Batu Satu* for leisure activities. Those who still stay in *Batu Satu* consist of 5 elderly (First generation), 11 in the second generation and 12 in the third generation (see Table 2). Some of the descendants who are not staying in this settlement come to *Batu Satu* every day to leave their children with their grandparents. Yet there are also others who have their meals in *Batu Satu* daily. A few of those in the second generation are involved in direct selling and keep in contact with one another regularly. As 9 of the second generation are school teachers, they share a lot of things in common and often meet during seminars and school activities besides meeting at community functions in *Batu Satu*. Members of the younger generation mostly attend the same government schools such as St Joseph's (boys), St Teresa's (girls) and Green Road (co-ed) schools.

Women of the first generation (G1) keep in touch with each other almost frequently through phone calls or social visits. All of the first generation males have retired and meet regularly at the junction of *Batu Satu* where there is a bench for them to sit and relax in the evenings. At times, members of the younger generation join them and listen to their stories.

The early Telegus were generally poor and worked on farms, and helped to maintain road and drainage systems. One of G1 operates a small food business. Only two G1 women once worked as janitors in government offices whereas the majority are/were housewives. The second generation of Telegus has a better socio-economic status and all with the exception of 4 are housewives. G2 women are employed as teachers and clerks. The males are civil servants, teachers, storekeepers, technicians and also operate cloth and food businesses. The third generation is mostly in schools, colleges or tertiary institutions. Younger members of the third generation are financially better-off as com-

pared to their parents and grandparents. The Telegus of Sarawak are generally considered to be in the lower and middle income group.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Intra-generational language choice in the home domain

Below is a description revealed by transcripts and observation of language choice in discourse amongst three generations of Telegus living in the city of Kuching who are also the only Telegus found in Sarawak who came during the White Rajah period. This study does not include Telegus who came to Sarawak from India or West Malaysia in the last five years to work as their linguistic patterns and choices would not be the same as the Telegus who came to Kuching three generations ago.

##### 3.1.1. First generation

The first generation comprised of 4 males and 5 females and their language situation is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Language choice of first generation of Telegus in the city of Kuching

<i>GENERATION 1</i>	<i>Male (n=4)</i>	<i>Female (n=5)</i>
<i>Within the same gender</i>		
Telegu	0	5
More Telegu less Malay	4	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Across gender</i>		
Telegu	0	5
More Telegu less Malay	4	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

##### 3.1.1.1. Language choice – first generation same gender

Telegu is the dominant language used among the G1 women (60 years and above) when they meet other G1 women. There is no displacement of the language in G1 women peer interaction as all of them speak stand alone Telegu to one another. Since they always visit one another in *Batu Satu*, the recordings in the home domain show that the hereditary language is very much used especially when they do not have to accommodate to the second or third generation. Their topics of conversation mostly centre on everyday chores, health and family matters. These older women felt very comfortable in Telegu.

G1 men in contrast appear to be more proficient in Malay as they have more extensive and constant contact with the local people as compared to G1 women, due to the nature of their jobs. All of the G1 men worked with the government as storekeepers

or road construction supervisors. The bilingualism that exists is also mainly due to the fact that all the men with the exception of one, as mentioned earlier, contracted exogamous marriages. Code switching between Malay and Telegu is common in G1 male discourse and all prefer to use more Malay and less Telegu when speaking to one another. For this generation there is hardly any use of English even though some of the G1 men could speak the language. It appears, therefore, that G1 men feel more comfortable with Malay than English in peer discourse (see Extract 1).

*Extract 1*

<p><i>a) Stand alone Telegu</i></p> <p>FG1 (A): <i>Meeru yatak ki pota ru?</i> (Where are you going?)</p> <p>FG1 (B): <i>Nanu angiri ke potanu.</i> (I'm going to the sundry shop.)  <i>Beemu tisko tanu Beemu ledu intila. Anamu shay lak`</i> (Buy rice. No more rice at home. Want to cook rice.)  <i>Anamu shay shi, sharu shay lak. Un du ronco pu.</i> (After rice, cook vegetables. Wait for a while.)</p>
<p><i>b) More Telegu less Malay</i></p> <p>MG1 (A): <i>Repo yatapotau?</i> <b>Harap ari bagus.</b> (Where to go tomorrow? Hope the weather is fine.)</p> <p>MG1 (B): <b>Belum tau lagi.</b> (Don't know yet.)</p>

Key: italic – Telegu; bold – Malay

*3.1.1.2. Language choice – first generation across gender*

All G1 men use more Telegu and less Malay when speaking to G1 women. In contrast, all G1 women use stand alone Telegu to G1 men. This shows that the dominant language is Telegu in the discourse between G1 men and women. It is the G1 men who appear to have led the language shift to Malay and are responsible for the mixed Malay/Telegu discourse in the home domain (see Extract 2).

*Extract 2*

<p><i>a) More Telegu less Malay</i></p> <p>FG1 (A): <i>Yemmi nu tak tau?</i> (What do you want to drink?)</p> <p>FG1 (B): <i>Yem mundi? Naki ochi lilu tagel lak. Naki usru po tan ney lilu tagel lak.</i> <b>Kaseh saja apa ada.</b>          (What do you have? I want to drink water. I'm thirsty, I want to drink water. Just give what is available.)</p>
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Key: italic – Telegu; bold – Malay

**3.1.2. Language choice of second generation**

The Second Generation comprised of 20 males and 25 females born and bred in the city of Kuching and their language choice today is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Language choice of second generation Telegus of the city of Kuching

GENERATION 2	Male (n=20)	Female (n=25)
<i>Within the same gender G2</i>		
Malay	8	13
More Malay less English	6	10
More Malay less Hokkien	4	2
More Hokkien less others	2	0
<i>Total</i>	20	25
<i>Across gender G2</i>		
Malay	10	13
More Malay less English	6	10
More Malay less Hokkien	4	2
<i>Total</i>	20	25

### 3.1.2.1. Language choice – second generation same gender

When G2 women communicate with each other, unlike the G1 women, they have shifted to stand alone Malay (13). However, educated G2 women just like the G2 men have shifted to code switching of more Malay and less English (10) followed by more Malay and less Hokkien (2). The G2 men have also shifted to using stand alone Malay (8), more Malay less English (6) among the educated males, more Malay less Hokkien (4) and more Hokkien less Malay (2). The data discloses that Malay is the language which has totally replaced Telegu for the second generation of Telegus in Sarawak (see Table 3).

The G2 are fluent in English, Sarawak Malay, Bahasa Melayu and Hokkien depending on their educational level. However, more G2 men are proficient in Hokkien compared to G2 women. They learnt English and Malay at school, and acquired Hokkien and Sarawak Malay which are *lingua francas* in the city of Kuching. When communicating among themselves, G2 who are highly educated use more Malay and less English. It should be pointed out that since Chinese (Hokkien speakers) are also found in the research site, this has influenced the linguistic repertoire of the Telegus in the *Batu Satu* settlement. The Hokkien Chinese have been staying in the squatter area next to the Telegu settlement for many generations. When the G2 men were younger, they played with the Hokkien boys in the squatter area almost every day. Through language contact, naturally the Telegu boys learnt the Chinese dialect when playing games as children and Chinese card games as adults. The Telegu G2 females on the other hand are less proficient in Hokkien since their parents were strict and did not allow them to go to the squatter area for safety and moral reasons. It was observed that G2 men until today still speak mostly Hokkien to the Chinese in the squatter area. However, at home, the G2 men tend to shift between English, Malay and Hokkien when talking among themselves. The dominant language, however, is Malay followed by English and Hokkien.

However, like G2 women, those who are better educated would speak more English and less Malay and Hokkien. Not a single item of the Telegu language is noted in the conversations of G2 Telegus as shown in some examples of G2 conversations in Extract 3. This clearly indicates that language shift has occurred in the discourse of G2.

*Extract 3*

<p><i>a) More Malay less English</i></p> <p>MG2 (A): <b>Mana lo rang tengok movie it</b>, which cinema? (Where did you watch the movie,.....?)</p> <p>MG2 (B): Eh... Cineplex, <b>lu belum tengok lagi kah?</b> (You haven't watched it yet?)</p>
<p><i>b) More Malay less Hokkien</i></p> <p>MG2 (C): <i><b>Wa kak e kong lia, sudah dia kasih tau sama lu?</b></i> (I've already told him. Did he inform you?)</p> <p>MG2 (D): <i><b>Aboi lagi. Lu kak e kong hamik benda? Ee tiak kaseh tau saya pun.</b></i> (Not yet. What did you tell him? He didn't tell me.)</p>
<p><i>c) Stand alone Malay</i></p> <p>MG2 (E): <b>Geram betul aku tengok dia bila dia dreba lagu macam itu.</b> ( I get piss off seeing the way he drives.)</p> <p>MG2 (F): <b>Puduli dia, biar palak dia kenak lantak batu, baru nyaman rasa.</b> (Don't bother, let him hit his head against the stone then he knows how great it feels.)</p>
<p><i>d) More Hokkien less Malay</i></p> <p>MG2 (G): <i><b>Wa aboi chiak, lu ai ki be mi kia chia mai?</b></i> (I haven't eaten yet, do you want to buy food?)</p> <p>MG2 (H): <i><b>Mai, wa u tan lang. Ka teng e lai wa boh ti, kangko.</b></i> (No, I'm waiting for someone. If he comes and I'm not here, it'll be difficult.)</p>
<p><i>e) More Malay less English</i></p> <p>FG2 (A): Did the priest come? I thought the body will be brought straight to church for funeral. <b>Balit rumah dolok. Bagus juga bah. ... Kaseh</b> the mother a chance <b>untuk sama dia sekejap walaupun tiak dapat tengok.</b> (Go back home first. Good too. At least give the mother the opportunity to be with him even though she's unable to see him.)</p> <p>FG2 (B): What to do? Everything happened so suddenly. My God! He was only 34 years old. The poor mother still couldn't accept it. I don't think she ever will. Well... we just pray to God. <b>Udah kita masuk, join sama dorang maok sembahyang Rosary dalam sana.</b> (All right, we'll go in and join the others for Rosary prayers.)</p>
<p><i>f) Stand alone Malay</i></p> <p>FG2 (C): <b>Sekarang ni tosay maok cakap pasal orang lain, sendiri punya rumah pun mengareh jugak.</b> (Now we don't have to talk about others because our own house is in a mess.)</p> <p>FG2 (D): <b>Kalo sudah pulang kerja lambat sepa maok masak lagik, makan sajak barang senang masak punya.</b> (If we get back late from work, just cook easily prepared food will be good enough.)</p>

Key: bold – Malay; italic bold – Hokkien

### 3.1.2.2. *Second generation across gender*

Codeswitching from Malay to English and even Hokkien is also a common pattern of language use among G2 men and women. The women learnt Hokkien in schools where the majority of the students were Hokkien Chinese. Such use of language shows that the G2 Telegu of both genders have become a multilingual community and can switch to any of the three codes during their naturally occurring conversations at home.

There are three patterns of language choice, namely stand alone Malay (male = 10, female = 13), codeswitching using more Malay and less English (male = 6, female = 10); followed by more Malay and less Hokkien (male = 4, female = 2) as shown in the transcripts analyzed (see Table 3 and examples in Extract 4).

#### *Extract 4*

<p><i>a) More Malay less English</i></p> <p>MG2: You lead the prayers tonight. I won't be able to come.</p> <p>FG2: <b>Sayakah?</b> I will do it but <b>kalau ada orang lain mahu</b> lead <b>saya biar saja</b>. (Me, is it?.....if there's others who want to ....., I'll let them do it.)</p>
<p><i>b) More Malay less Hokkien</i></p> <p>FG2: <b>Mana semua orang pergi. Lu u kua tiok</b> Philip? (Where is everybody? Have you seen Philip?)</p> <p>MG2: <b>Boh leh. Tamchia wa kuak tiok ee ti aboi. Cuba suruh anak check.</b> (No. Just now I saw him at the back. Ask the child to check.)</p>

Key: bold – Malay; italic bold – Hokkien

### 3.1.3. *Language choice of third generation*

As mentioned earlier, G3 below 30 years of age have a higher standard of living as compared to their grandparents. They are also better educated. For them, English has become their first language. Yet there are some G3 families for whom Malay has become the first language. Although the usage of this unique variety of Malay is less frequent now and described as “funny and strange ” by the English-speaking G3, yet it can be heard in some G3 homes. This variety has been largely replaced today by the more Standard variety of Malay, i.e. the variety used in schools as the medium of instruction.

The data shows, however, that G3 women unlike G2 do not use Hokkien. They have moved away from Hokkien to English and Malay. Even the Malay used has shifted to the standard variety. Code switches using both Malay and English are rampant and Malay is no longer the dominant language as was the case with G2. The language choice of the third generation of Telegus living in the city of Kuching is stand alone English and this is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Language choice of third generation Telegus of the city of Kuching

GENERATION 3	Male (n=18)	Female (n=20)
Same gender G3		
English	18	20
Across gender G3		
English	18	20
Total	18	20

In fact, the dominant language used across gender among the third generation speakers is English (see Extract 5).

#### Extract 5

FG3: There is no new intake for B.Ed Tesl this coming semester.
MG3: Is it? I applied for other courses. I have gone for the interview but the interviewer asked me to change my course.
FG3: In that case you have a good chance.

### 3.2. Inter-generational language choice

Inter-generational language contact is very common among the closely-knit Telegu community in the city of Kuching. They meet almost daily for various reasons in *Batu Satu* and in the homes of Telegus who have moved out of *Batu Satu*.

#### 3.2.1. Language choice between G1 and G2

When G1 speak to G2 code switching between Telegu and Malay are noted again. English is hardly used because G1 are generally not proficient in English. G1 accommodate G2 who are not proficient in Telegu and use Malay with them. In fact G2 tend to use more Malay than Telegu to G1 due to G2s' limited knowledge of Telegu (Extract 6).

Table 5: Language Choice between G1 and G2

GENERATION	Generation 1 (n=9)	Generation 2 (n=45)
More Telugu less Malay	9	5
Malay	0	40
Total	9	45

An example of exchange between G1 and G2 is shown below.

*Extract 6*

a) *More Malay less Telegu by G2*

G1: *Ni ki angkar mu tini.* **Makan saja jangan buang** (You're spoilt. Just eat don't waste.)

G2: **Sudah kenyang.** *Titu du.* (I'm full. Don't be angry)

Key: italic – Telegu; bold – Malay

**3.2.2. Language choice between G1 and G3**

Some G1 women have picked up English and use this to accommodate G3s' preferred language choice. The dominant patterns used by both generations in inter-generational discourse are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Dominant patterns used by both generations in inter-generational discourse

GENERATION	Generation 1 (n=9)	Generation 3 (n=38)
More Telugu less Malay	5	0
More Telugu less English	4	0
More English less Malay	0	38
<i>Total</i>	9	38

Some examples are shown below.

*Extract 7*

G3: **Awa**, eat first before going. (Grandmother....)

G1: Already Uncle house. Where Mummy?

G3: Sent Terence for tuition.

G1: Justin go take Awa bag. Put inside house.

G1: **Pergi mana lorang**, raining (Where are you people going?)

G3: **Sini ajak**, no go anywhere

Key: bold – Malay

**3.2.3. Language choice between G2 and G3**

There are two patterns of language choice between G2 and G3, stand alone Malay is used by G2 (10) when speaking to G3, whereas 7 of G3 used stand alone Malay when accommodating to G2 who are less educated. However, 35 of the G2 used more Malay and less English when speaking to G3 while 31 of the G3 used the same pattern with G2 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Language choice between G2 and G3

GENERATION	Generation 2 (n=45)	Generation 3 (n=38)
Malay	10	7
More Malay less English	35	31
Total	45	38

An example is given in Extract 8.

#### Extract 8

G2: <b>Bising! Tiak belajar boh.</b> Play, play non stop. School holidays so your book restlah! (Noisy! Not studying.....)
G3: Relax Ma. Holidays two weeks. Rest one week. Next week promise study. <b>Janji. Bagi can satu minggu saja.</b> (Promise. Give me chance for one week only.)

Key: bold – Malay

## 4. Discussion

The shift away from Telegu has moved from one language to another for the three generations. The shift has occurred from Telegu to Malay and English. The reasons for the shift to these three codes are as follows:

### 4.1. Exogamous marriages

Even though the younger generation has moved out from *Batu Satu*, they still meet regularly socially. Although they have close networks, are related to one another, and live nearby, it appears that such dense networks in themselves do not result in language maintenance. Other factors like exogamous marriages, which are common among the Telegus, have caused a breakdown over time in language maintenance. Like the Catholic Malayalees of Malaysia (David and Nambiar, 2001), exogamous marriages in minority Indian communities in Malaysia prompt language shift. Since the Telegu community in Sarawak is small and all are basically related to one another, they tend to contract exogamous marriages. These marriages even started with G1s who married Tamils and this pattern of exogamous marriages was noted among G2, who contracted such marriages not only with Tamils but also with Malayalees, Chinese and Dayaks. If the older Bengali women in Mukherjee's study (2003) have so much regenerative contact with their mother country and are able to find brides for their sons, the Telegus in Sarawak have almost lost contact with their ancestors in India. Attempts to choose Telegu brides for the sons have not been successful because the issue of language shift has never been taken seriously by the Telegus themselves. Harrison and Pietsch (1980) point out that, in bilingual families, language choice is determined by mothers and the mother's choice is in turn determined by socio-economic considerations. However, this is not the case

amongst this community. The data shows that the G1 men often used the Malay dialect at home, whereas the women maintained Telegu. However, dominant use of Malay in the larger educational and socio-economic environment resulted in dominant Malay in the home domain.

G2 women, i.e. the mothers, determined the language choice in the home domain. G2 only contracted exogamous marriages and G2 Telegu men, unlike G1 men, tend to spend less time at home due to work commitments. Among educated G2 women, there is a strong tendency to speak English at home.

#### **4.2. Socio-economic reasons**

The reason for language shift to Malay and English is also due to employment needs. G1 men were mainly labourers and low paid jobs workers in the government service. Their employers were mostly Malays and so they had to speak Malay. The variety of Malay spoken by the Malay bosses to their subordinates was *Bahasa Pasar* (a low variety of Malay) and it is still used in interethnic communication, especially among the less-educated non-Malays today. The average income of the Telegu household then was about RM 300 per month and often the men would supplement the family income by doing petty business such as selling cloth in the periphery villages of Kuching City. Malay became a language used daily by the males in their interethnic communication and knowledge of it was necessary for survival in the multilingual environment. G2s however have better socio-economic status with an average household income between RM 2500–RM7000 per month. They are better educated and able to speak not only Standard Malay but also English, which was their medium of instruction. They realize the economic value of learning these two languages and ensure that they are able to communicate well in domains such as education. Even G2 school dropouts were aware of the need to learn and speak Hokkien, as this would enable them to get jobs with Chinese employers in the construction business. In G2 homes, the dominant languages varied. In the homes of the better educated Telegus, dominant use of English with less Malay is noted whereas in the homes of the less educated G2s, dominant Malay with less Hokkien is used.

Interviews conducted with G2s clearly indicate that they do not want their children to speak the variety of Malay that is spoken by them, as they do not perceive it to have economic value. As the Telegus get better educated, they realize that upward social mobility comes with the ability to communicate in the language of business, which is English. In fact, G3s regard English as their first language or mother-tongue and use it in all domains.

#### **4.3. Attitude towards Telegu, Malay and English**

The Telegus today feel a great loss, since they have lost their hereditary language. Many of the G2s and G3s tend to blame G1s for not using the language all the time at home. Ironically, even though they are offspring of exogamous marriages, G3s look upon the Telegu language with pride, a language once spoken by their ancestors, but are sad because they are not able to speak it today. If the younger generation of

Orang Miriek are ashamed and regard *Bahasa Miriek* as *bahasa kuno* (Tunku Zainah, 1978), the Telegus today on the other hand are ashamed that they are unable to speak Telegu or any Indian languages. Unlike the Pakistanis of Machang, Kelantan (David, 2003) or the younger generation of the *Orang Miriek*, the Telegus have yet to marry Malays or want to be identified as Muslims since they are all devout Catholics.

G2 are gradually becoming ashamed of using Malay when talking among themselves in the presence of others, especially other Indians. Members of the educated G2 also reported that they were often ridiculed by other ethnic groups for speaking a strange Malay dialect, which is neither *Bahasa pasar* nor Standard Malay. They therefore insist that English is spoken to their children. It is not surprising that even G1 are learning and using English rather than Malay with their grandchildren. The second generation went to English medium schools and with the prestige accorded to English today, they are proud if their children are able to communicate well in the global language. Furthermore, G1 worked under the Brooke administration and were aware of the prestige of the English language and are therefore keen to accommodate to the third generation by learning how to speak English.

#### 4.4. Pressure of the dominant languages

Bahasa Melayu and English are the dominant languages used in Malaysia. The former is used as the medium of instruction in schools and the latter in interethnic communication, especially among the increasingly educated Sarawakians. Milroy's argument that the dense and close network system can be applied universally to determine language maintenance does not apply to the Telegu community, mainly because of the linguistic pressures around them. Being a minority community, the Telegus are forced to have daily language contact with other ethnic groups in the multilingual environment in both formal and informal domains. To communicate with the other ethnic groups such as the Hokkien Chinese and Dayaks, who are found next to the Telegu settlement, Malay is mostly used with less Hokkien especially among the less educated Telegus. In contrast, educated Telegus will speak stand-alone English or a mix of more English with less Malay. Thus, as far as interethnic communication in areas around *Batu Satu* is concerned, the Telegu dialect has never been of use when speaking to the other races. In fact, English, Malay and Hokkien – depending on the socioeconomic status of the Telegu speakers – are also used to communicate with Telegus outside *Batu Satu*.

Being a minority group, the Telegus have to accommodate to the other races around them by speaking either in English, Malay, Hokkien or a mix of these languages. The Telegus are aware if they have to survive in such a multilingual environment, knowledge of these codes will always be of advantage to them. In fact, since Malay is the official language in Malaysia and Hokkien is the *lingua franca* of the Chinese who control the economic sector in Kuching, and English a prestige language the community has apparently chosen to abandon their hereditary language and change their language allegiance from Telegu to Malay and English to serve their socio-economic needs.

The shifting patterns of language use by the Telegus are quite similar to those of the Sindhis of Malaysia (David, 2001) although the latter came to Malaysia in a bigger number and were able to withstand early pressures because they were initially quite de-

pendent on one another, compared to the Telegus who had to depend on other races to survive. Nevertheless, like the Sindhis who shifted from Sindhi to English and Malay, the Telegus, too, were unable to maintain the use of the hereditary language in the home domain, considered the last bastion for survival of beleaguered languages (Gal, 1979).

Today, although these Telegus, like the Sindhis (David, 2001), still maintain close networks with each other, such networks have not facilitated language maintenance. In fact, the codes have changed in each generation according to the demands of society. We see the third generation of Telegus, like the Sindhis, unable to speak their hereditary languages but instead able to speak, read and write in impeccable English and Standard Malay. Today, the Telegus are very comfortable with English and Malay and regard the Telegu language as belonging to their forefathers and slowly being forgotten. They have accepted the fact that the Telegu language will totally disappear when the elderly first generation passes away. Although they have abandoned their Telegu language, the Telegus strongly believe that they should not abandon their Indian identity and therefore adopt Indian cultural markers such as wearing *kurtas/jeepas*, *sarees* or modern Punjabi suits during special occasions, such as attending weddings or visiting Sikhs and Hindus during *Diwalis*. Their meals still consist of mostly Indian cuisines, and spouses who are non-Indians are encouraged by their in-laws to learn cooking Indian dishes. The Telegus have always enjoyed watching Indian movies and have picked up words in Tamil and Hindi, which they often use jokingly with one another.

## 5. Preservation of Telegu identity

Although they have abandoned their Telegu language, the Telegus strongly believe that they should not abandon their Telegu identity and therefore adopt Telegu or Indian cultural markers such as:

- a) Clothes: The second and third generation females are encouraged by the first generation to wear modern Punjabi suits and sarees to work and during special occasions such as weddings and on Deepavali and Vasakhi. The males however wear *jeepa* during these celebrations.
- b) Food: Their meals still consist of mainly Indian cuisine and spouses who are non-Telegus are encouraged by the in-laws to learn how to cook Indian dishes.
- c) Movies: Younger Telegus are also encouraged to watch Telegu movies on CD and video.
- d) Terms of address: Lifestyle at home also shows that the older generation is encouraging the younger generation to follow certain Telegu customs, e.g. respecting the elders by using Telegu terms of address.
- e) Telegu spouses: The younger generation is also encouraged to look for Telegu spouses. Those who are studying or working in West Malaysia are often reminded by their parents to consider looking for Telegu spouses. However up to date, no one belonging to the third generation has married a Telegu. Since there is some contact with relatives in India, a few members of the second generation have gone to India to renew ties with marriage as an objective.

- f) Today efforts are made by the Telegus themselves to communicate with other Telegus outside the community. Since there are some West Malaysian and Indian Telegus working in the city of Kuching, contacts and home visits are now being made.

## 6. Conclusion

The shifting pattern of language used by the three generations of the Telegu community in Kuching, Sarawak is summarized in Table 8.

*Table 8: Language choice of three generations of Telegu in the city of Kuching*

<i>Telegus</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Generation 1	Only Telegu	More Telegu less Bazaar Malay
Generation 2	Educated: More English, less Bazaar Malay Less educated: more Bazaar Malay, less Hokkien	Educated: More English less Bazaar Malay Less educated: more Bazaar Malay less Hokkien
Generation 3	English	English

This preliminary study has highlighted the shifting patterns of language use by the early descendants of the Telegu community in Sarawak. In a society that places a premium on English and Malay in all official and unofficial domains, there is hardly any pragmatic use for the Telegu language. Further, it has to compete with the dialects and languages spoken by the numerous ethnic minorities in Sarawak. The linguistic pressures are tremendous and even G1 men did not use Telegu all the time. Being a minority group, the Telegus have totally shifted to the prestigious language – English – by the third generation. In fact, even the variety of Malay used by the early Telegus has shifted. The variety of Bazaar Malay spoken by the Telegu in Generation 1 and 2 is not used by the third generation. Although the third generation is fluent in Standard Malay they do not use it at home. High rates of exogamous marriages of both G2s and G3s have also aided in the shifts to different languages by the different generations. Despite such marriages, the community has maintained close and dense networks. Notwithstanding such close networks, the community has committed linguicide by abandoning their ancestral language and surviving on prestigious languages like Malay and later English. They also shift from one language to another as they become better educated and have better jobs. The community is proud of their Telegu ethnicity even though they can no longer speak the language.

## Notes

1. During the period of this study, a 34 year-old second generation school headmaster was drowned in the Pelagus Rapids. The language situation of the whole population was observed during the mourning period of 40 days in the home of the deceased.
2. The language situation in the ancestral settlement of *Batu Satu* was observed in addition to the homes of the second generation who have settled outside *Batu Satu*.

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## OSIGURAVAJU LI ZATVORENE I GUSTE MREŽE OČUVANJE NARODNOGA JEZIKA? PRIMJER TELUŠKE ZAJEDNICE U KUCHINGU, U SARAWAKU

### SAŽETAK

U radu se propituje problem jezičnog pomaka u tijesno povezanoj teluškoj manjinskoj zajednici u Sarawaku. Prema L. Milroyu (1987), čvrsto povezan sustav društvene mreže važno je sredstvo u očuvanju jezika te se može univerzalno primijeniti. Međutim, mjesna istraživanja malezijskih Indijaca, kao što su studija M. K. David (1996) o zajednici Sindha, studija S. Govindasamy i M. Nambiar (2003) o Malajalima te studija M. K. David i F. Noor (1999) o portugalskoj zajednici u Melaki pokazuju da se te zajednice, premda imaju čvrste i guste mreže, ipak udaljavaju od svojih narodnih jezika. Autori istražuju je li se tijesno povezana teluška manjinska zajednica u Kuchingu u Sarawaku također pomaknula prema drugim jezicima. Podaci sakupljeni na temelju razgovora u domaćem okruženju pokazuju koji je dominantan jezik kojim se služe članovi zajednice, a raspravlja se i o stavu zajednice prema uporabi jezika predaka. Te su informacije prikupljene putem nestrukturiranih intervjua s članovima zajednice. Zaključuje se da zatvorene i guste mreže ne osiguravaju očuvanje jezika.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Teluzi, jezični pomak, očuvanje jezika, Kuching, Sarawak, zatvorene i guste mreže

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## LES RÉSEAUX FERMÉS ET DENSES: MÈNENT-ILS VERS LA SAUVEGARDE DE LA LANGUE ETHNIQUE? CONCENTRATION SUR LA COMMUNAUTÉ TÉLÉGOUE À KUCHING, SARAWAK

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a pour but d'examiner le problème du glissement linguistique dans la communauté minoritaire télégoue à Sarawak, une communauté possédant des réseaux denses. Selon L. Milroy (1987), un système de réseau social dense est un moyen important de sauvegarde de la langue et peut être universellement appliqué. Toutefois, les recherches locales sur les Indiens de Malaisie, comme l'étude de M. K. David (1996) sur la communauté Sindhi, l'étude de S. Govindasamy et M. Nambiar (2003) sur les Malayalams et l'étude de M. K. David et F. Noor (1999) sur la communauté portugaise à Malacca montrent que, bien que possédant des réseaux fermés et denses, ces communautés s'éloignent de leurs langues ethniques. L'article examine si la communauté minoritaire télégoue à Kuching, Sarawak, qui possède des réseaux denses, s'est elle aussi tournée vers d'autres langues. Les données recueillies au cours de conversations à la maison détermineront la langue dominante utilisée par les membres de la communauté. La position de la communauté à l'égard de l'utilisation de la langue d'héritage sera également discutée. Ces informations se révéleront dans des entretiens non structurés avec des mem-

bres de la communauté. Il est conclus que les réseaux fermés et denses n'entraînent pas forcément la sauvegarde de la langue.

MOTS CLÉS: Télégous, glissement linguistique, sauvegarde de la langue, Kuching, Sarawak, réseaux fermés et denses