A CASE STUDY ON THE USE OF KADAZANDUSUN LANGUAGE IN THE TEACHING OF MOTHER TONGUE LANGUAGE

by

Sandra Logijin
Ethnic Language Unit
Curriculum Development Centre
Ministry of Education Malaysia

Introduction

This paper discusses the teaching of Kadazandusun language as the mother tongue language of the Kadazandusun community in Sabah, Malaysia. It also discusses the factors that influenced the language shift and language domination among the Kadazandusun. Due emphasis is also given to the development process and implementation of the Kadazandusun language syllabus, as well as the steps taken to promote the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language. In implementing the Kadazandusun syllabus, factors such as strategies, support programmes, community mobilization, challenges encountered and the impact on the community are taken into account.

Background

Malaysia subscribes to a centralized education system. All primary schools throughout Malaysia follow a standardized primary school curriculum and the same goes for all secondary schools. Primary school is from Year 1 to Year 6 and secondary school is from Form 1 to Form 5.

The curriculum is designed to equip students with skills that are taught in a holistic and integrated manner and are essential for the development of the country. It aims to foster healthy attitude and instill good values and loyalty towards the nation. The use of the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, as the medium of instruction in schools aims to foster unity among all the races in Malaysia. To keep up with the development in this era of science and technology, these three subjects, namely science, mathematics and technology are taught in English. Apart from that, English is taught as a separate subject as it is the international language and, in general, enjoys the status of a second language.
Mandarin and Tamil are also offered in schools and students are given the option to learn them. Included in the school curriculum are the indigenous languages; Kadazandusun in Sabah, Iban in Sarawak and Semai in Peninsular Malaysia. Children of these ethnic groups are encouraged to learn their mother tongue to preserve their languages and cultures.

The Land Below The Wind

Sabah, a state in Malaysia, is the home of the Kadazandusuns. It is located on the northeastern part of the Borneo Island. It is also known as the “Land Below the Wind” because it escapes the typhoons that plague the region. The famous Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Malaysia, is found in Sabah along with many beautiful islands and coral reefs. Kota Kinabalu is the capital city and Sabah’s economy centres mostly in agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing. Sabah’s main exports are palm oil, palm kernel oil, crude petroleum, timber, to name but a few. The tourism industry is booming due to the scenic view, diverse culture and wonderful seafood. Sabah is divided into five administrative divisions: the Interior, the Westcoast, Kudat, Tawau and Sandakan Division.
The People

Sabah has a population of 3,387,880. There are 32 ethnic groups residing here but only 28 are recognized as indigenous. The largest indigenous ethnic group (17.8% of the population) is the Kadazandusun. Other ethnic groups that are considered prominent are the Bajau which forms 13.4% of the population and the Murut, 3.3%. Other indigenous ethnic groups make up 14.6% of the population of Sabah. Apart from that, there are also the Malays (11.5%), Chinese (9.6%) and Indians (4.8%) living mainly in cities such as Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau. Immigrants from the Philippines, Indonesia and other parts of the world can also be found living in Sabah.

The Language

The Malay and English languages are widely used besides the ethnic languages of the Kadazandusun, Bajau and Murut. However, the Malay spoken here differs from that in the Peninsular in its intonation and inflection aspects due to the fact that Kalimantan, which is part of Indonesia, is Sabah’s neighbour. Mandarin and some Chinese dialects are also very common in Sabah.

The Kadazandusun language is spoken by about 750,000 speakers living in districts in Sabah such as Penampang, Papar, Tuaran, Tambunan, Ranau and Keningau. However, the language is spoken in different dialects depending on the location. The Kadazandusun language in the Tangara dialect for instance is used predominantly in the Westcoast areas. Meanwhile the Bundu-Liwan speakers are more widespread in the interior areas. The differences between these two dialects are in the pronunciation and the various meanings a word can have from one district to another. Overall, the Kadazandusuns can understand the subtle changes of meaning in the dialects.
Currently, the active speakers of the Kadazandusun are the pre-independence generation, those belonging to the age group of 50 and above. The language is used in churches and in ceremonial events such as the Kadazandusun’s Harvest Festival. The local newspapers reserved a section of its daily publication for Kadazandusun language. There are also several Kadazandusun radio channels airing daily. A number of Kadazandusun literary works are found in bookstores and libraries. Songs in the Kadazandusun language are popular in the local entertainment scene.

On the other hand, the Kadazandusun children nowadays grow up knowing at least two languages; Kadazandusun as their mother tongue and Malay as a second language.

**Language Shift**

Language shift in the Kadazandusun community of Sabah has occurred gradually and subtly. The decline of the Kadazandusun language use was only realised in the late 1980’s when a language survey was conducted. By then, the Malay language was widely used in Sabah and the English language had already influenced the Kadazandusun community. The survey revealed that Kadazandusun children had become either bilingual or dominant users of other languages; Malay or English.

When Sabah joined the Federation Government in 1963, Malay was used as the language of instruction in schools and the official language in government offices. It became the language of communication among the multi-ethnic groups of Sabah. At the same time, parents also encouraged their children to use Malay at home so that their children would master the language to secure jobs in government offices. This language shift contributed to the decline in the use of Kadazandusun.

Generally, parents are of the opinion that English is the language of academia and prestige. This trend plays a part in the language shift in Sabah. Educated parents talk to their children in English rather than in their mother tongue. They also encourage their children to master the language for the purpose of gaining tertiary education overseas. Recently, parents’ belief that English must be mastered has strengthened due to the use of English in the teaching and learning of Science, Mathematics and Technology subjects in schools. The fact that the
private sector, especially the tourism industry in Sabah, requires employees to be fluent in English enhances the view that English is more important than the mother tongue.

Like other parents, the Kadazandusun send their children to language classes to study other languages such as Mandarin, French, German and Japanese. The purposes range from wanting to send their children overseas for education, to simply ensure a better future.

Efforts had to be made to arrest the downward slide and revive the Kadazandusun language. One way is to teach the language to the Kadazandusun children. In tandem, the Kadazandusun community also expressed their hope that the language be taught in schools in Sabah. The challenge comes in the form of choosing the preferred Kadazandusun dialect as the reference language for teaching and learning in schools. Hence, a symposium “Towards the Standardization of the Kadazan Dialects”, organized by the Kadazan Cultural Association was held in 1989. Through this symposium, the Kadazandusun reference language to be used in schools was identified. Following this, a spelling system for the Kadazandusun language was developed.

In April 1995, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Kadazan Cultural Association and the United Sabah Dusun Association was established. In the memorandum several aspects were agreed upon. First, the reference language shall be called the Kadazandusun Language. Secondly, the dialect chosen to be the Kadazandusun language is the Bundu-Liwan dialect (later the Bunduliwan dialect). Thirdly, the Kadazandusun language is to be enriched by the other dialects of the Dusunic family language. It must be pointed out that the Bunduliwan dialect was chosen as the Kadazandusun language on the basis that it has the most speakers.

**The Implementation of the Kadazandusun Language Syllabus**

In 1994, a prominent Kadazandusun leader Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Bernard G. Dompok proposed to the Federal Government that the Kadazandusun language be taught in schools in Sabah and this was made possible by the Education Act 1996, which states that

“…indigenous languages shall be made available if it is reasonable and practical…”.
That year, the Curriculum Development Centre initiated the planning and development of the Kadazandusun language syllabus for the primary school. In the planning of the syllabus, the Curriculum Development Centre invited the stakeholders for discussion to give their ideas and opinions on a suitable Kadazandusun language syllabus. The stakeholders are the State Education Department, the Kadazandusun teachers, Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF) and the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA) and experts on the Kadazandusun Culture and language.

The syllabus aligns with the requirements of the National Education Curriculum which aims to preserve and continue the Kadazandusun heritage. The syllabus was then introduced in 15 primary schools in 1997 on a trial basis. From then on, the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language in schools progressed steadily. In 1998, the Kadazandusun subject was accorded the status of an additional subject. As such it is to be taught 120 minutes a week (3 periods x 40 minutes) and taught outside the actual school timetable. In schools Kadazandusun language subject is offered when requested by at least 15 Kadazandusun parents. However, the class depends on the availability of trained or interested Kadazandusun teachers. In 2000, the primary school syllabus was revised and very much improved to suit the needs of the Kadazandusun community. The primary school syllabus was implemented in stages. In 2003 it was implemented to year 4 students, in 2004 it was implemented to year 5 and in 2005 to year 6 students. The Kadazandusun Language Syllabus for primary schools aims to enable learners to communicate in their daily lives using the language and it is also aims to continue the Kadazandusun heritage. At present there are 279 primary schools offering the Kadazandusun language as a subject to 20,451 students in years 4, 5 and 6 in Sabah.

Subsequently, the syllabus for Lower Secondary level was developed in 2003. In 2006 it was implemented to the Form 1 students and these same students are in Form 2 in 2007 and Form 3 in 2008. Below is the schedule of the implementation of the Kadazandusun syllabus.
## KADAZANDUSUN LANGUAGE FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SABAH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Orientation Courses for Master Trainers and Preparation of Textbooks</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Form I</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Form II</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Form III</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Form III</td>
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Source: Ethnic Language Unit, Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education Malaysia.

The aims of the Kadazandusun Secondary School Language Syllabus are to enable learners to use the language in their interaction with others, to understand ideas and information heard and read from various sources, to appreciate the language in different genres and to continue the Kadazandusun heritage. Currently, there are 38 secondary schools offering the subject to students in Forms 1 and 2. These are the Kadazandusun language syllabi and Syllabi Specifications that have been developed by the Curriculum Development Centre:

- Kadazandusun Language Syllabus for Primary School
- Kadazandusun Language Syllabus for Secondary School
- Kadazandusun Language Syllabus Specification for Years 4, 5 and 6
- Kadazandusun Language Syllabus Specification for Forms I, II and III

### The Syllabus Organization

The Kadazandusun Syllabus is developed in line with the needs of the Kadazandusun community. These are reflected in the Learning Outcomes of the syllabus which incorporates the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The language and sound system, together with the use of appropriate vocabulary are incorporated in the language skills. The Kadazandusun language syllabus is not designed thematically. However, themes
such as family, relationship, health, environment, citizenship and the love for one’s nation are imbedded in the syllabus.

**Language Use**

The three areas of language use in the secondary syllabus are the Interpersonal, the Informational and the Aesthetic. Language for Interpersonal purposes enables learners to establish and maintain friendships and to collaborate with people to do certain things. Language for informational purposes enables learners to use language to obtain, process and give information. Language for aesthetic purposes enables learners to enjoy literary texts and to express themselves creatively.

**Language Content**

The language content of the Kadazandusun syllabus comprises the sound system, morphology, syntax, idioms and quantifiers.

**Education Emphases**

In addition, the syllabus takes into account other education emphases such as thinking skills, ICT skills, Learning How to Learn skills, multiple intelligences, values and citizenship education.

**Support Materials**

Various support materials have been produced by the different Divisions of the Ministry of Education.

The Curriculum Development Centre, for example, has produced a Kadazandusun language reference book called the “Puralan Boros Kadazandusun Id Sikul”. It is a reference book on the Kadazandusun language system and is the first of its kind. In this book a section is reserved for Kadazandusun language quantifiers and idioms. However, this reference book is meant not only for teachers and students but for whomever is interested in the propagation of
the Kadazandusun language. It is hoped that the book will be the starting point for the production of more books on the Kadazandusun language system by other interested parties.

To help improve students’ proficiency in Kadazandusun, activity books for primary schools were produced by the Curriculum Development Centre and distributed to schools.

The Textbook Division of the Ministry of Education is entrusted with the production of the Kadazandusun language textbooks. With the help of Kadazandusun language experts and teachers, textbooks for primary and secondary schools based on the syllabi have been produced and distributed.

However, other teaching and learning materials such as the “Off-Air” listening pack, Kadazandusun children’s story books and a Kadazandusun picture dictionary are produced by the Education Technology Division of Sabah.

Non-governmental Organizations such as the Kadazandusun Language Foundation lend support by producing Kadazandusun Language Dictionary and CD-ROM language learning kit for the benefit of students in schools.

**Teachers’ Training**

For the successful implementation of the Kadazandusun language curriculum, teachers have to undertake courses to enable them to understand the syllabus. The training was given by the Curriculum Development Centre and teachers were exposed to the different strategies, techniques and approaches of teaching the Kadazandusun language. However, the training of these teachers followed the cascade model. First, selected Kadazandusun teachers, who act as master trainers were trained. Then, these master trainers will in turn train the other Kadazandusun teachers at the district level. Such training is also being given to new teachers of Kadazandusun as and when the need arises.
Monitoring the Implementation of the Syllabus

The implementation of the Kadazandusun language syllabus is monitored by the Curriculum Development Centre, State Education Department and District Education Officers. At the school level, principals are responsible for ensuring the smooth implementation of the subject. The Kadazandusun teachers in their panel meetings and discussions find ways to make the teaching and learning of the language interesting so that Kadazandusun students are interested in learning the heritage language.

Community Support

The Curriculum Development Centre gives continual support to the teaching and learning of the Kadazandusun language. Teacher training and the production of teaching materials are examples of the support provided. The progress of the Kadazandusun language in schools is being monitored by the Curriculum Development Centre with the help of the State Education Department.

At the state level, the State Education Department identifies potential master trainers for courses held by Curriculum Development Centre. These are teachers who are fluent speakers and have an in depth knowledge of the Kadazandusun language. To further improve professionalism among the Kadazandusun teachers, the State Education Department plans and coordinates Kadazandusun language courses and workshops. Together with the Curriculum Development Centre, the State Education Department identifies schools that merit the setting up of Kadazandusun language classes. To promote the Kadazandusun language, the State Education Department organizes road shows to inform the public on the aims and progress of Kadazandusun in schools.

Every year, the District Education Offices organizes story-telling competitions for primary schools in addition to a Kadazandusun Language Week Carnival. During this carnival, language activities and competitions such as story telling and the writing of compositions in Kadazandusun are carried out.
Committed individuals who are well versed in Kadazandusun voluntarily assisted the Curriculum Development Centre in developing teaching materials to be used in schools. They made time to attend workshops and were actively engaged in discussions to come up with ideas for the benefit of the Kadazandusun.

Support from teachers is encouraging. They are motivated and eager to teach the subject. Their willingness to share their expertise in developing teaching materials and teaching students after school hours positively impacts the teaching and learning of the language in schools.

Prominent local Kadazandusun leaders play their part in supporting the revival of the Kadazandusun language. Meetings held with the various heads of the Kadazandusun groups resulted in the agreement to make the Bunduliwan dialect the standard Kadazandusun language to be used in schools.

The Parent -Teacher Association (PTA) in schools plays its role by giving moral and financial support to popularize the language among parents, teachers and students.

The Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF) a non-governmental organisation, organizes workshops and courses for the Kadazandusun teachers and undertakes research to help revive, preserve and enrich the language. The KLF helps to promote the language by assisting the University of Malaysia, Sabah in the preparation of Kadazandusun language classes which are offered as an elective subject. KLF also conducts writers’ workshops to motivate and provide skills in literary production to Kadazandusun writers. At the same time, KLF also helps produce local writers’ works as well as preserve oral traditions such as the Humius (traditional Kadazandusun singing) and Mananong (traditional Kadazandusun story telling).

In addition, the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA), another non-governmental organization, promotes the use of the language through cultural programs and activities such as the Kadazandusun Harvest Festival celebration. KDCA also assists in the preservation, standardization and development of the multi-dialectical Kadazandusun language.
Funding

The development and implementation of the Kadazandusun language curriculum is fully funded by the Ministry of Education Malaysia which includes training Kadazandusun teachers every year.

However, workshops and courses for teachers conducted by the Kadazandusun Language Foundation were sponsored either by the foundation or local Kadazandusun leaders who are interested in the development of the language.

Challenges

In schools, Kadazandusun is taught outside the actual timetable. Creativity from the schools’ administrators is needed to encourage the students to attend the classes even after school hours. Parents need to be persuaded to allow the students to be in school longer. This is necessary as a number of parents find it cumbersome to collect their children in the evening.

Another short-coming in schools is the shortage of Kadazandusun language teachers. More teachers are needed to teach the language as more classes are being opened up. Short courses for the teachers should be offered to make them more confident, proficient and creative.

It is sad, however, to find some Kadazandusun parents deem the language as unimportant since it has no economic value. Their children are not encouraged to learn their mother tongue.

The lack of supplementary Kadazandusun literature in the market suitable for students is a challenge. It is therefore imperative that this situation be rectified.

Impact

The language and culture of the Kadazandusun are given recognition and importance when the language is made a subject in the National Curriculum. Introducing the language in schools has resulted in its revival. Oral traditions that are part of the Kadazandusun heritage, such as the Sundait (Riddles), Tudodoi, Hius, Taalaala (Kadazandusun Poetry) and Rinait
(Bobohizan chants) are now kept alive by having them taught in schools. The implementation of the Kadazandusun language as a subject in schools has created heritage awareness and the need to preserve ethnic languages.

More importantly, the standardized Kadazandusun language has unified the different Kadazandusun groups within the community.

**Conclusion**

No language should be allowed to die, because it is a great loss not only to the particular ethnic group but also to the human race in general. With it, all knowledge concerning the ethnic group will be lost forever. The Kadazandusun, for their part, must help to preserve the language because to lose their language is to lose their culture and identity.
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