BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF IBAN AND MALAY MULTIWORD EXPRESSION: AN INSIGHT INTO L1 AND L2 ACQUISITION AND COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines usage and use of multiword expressions (MWE) among Iban youths in Sarawak. The questionnaire data were from 80 Iban youths who had to identify 15 MWE (similar, nearly similar and different) in Malay and Iban, and use them at the word, phrase and sentence levels. The findings revealed that close to 67% of the respondents could not recognise or use expressions in Iban, suggesting some loss of productive knowledge and language empowerment. However, respondents with recent schooling experience were able to use the expressions in Malay and reproduce them in written forms. Formal instruction and the written language have helped to extend local knowledge and use of MWE expressions for Iban youths. The study suggests that documentation, preservation and maintenance efforts stand to benefit when there is greater sharing and consciousness raising of common features between and among languages in the region.

Keywords: oral tradition, multiword expressions, Iban, Malay, written expressions

Introduction

As the functions of World Englishes and national languages expand, the domain of use of regional languages and languages of wider communication shrink (Kachru & Smith, 2009). Set against the backdrop of rapid loss of linguistic diversity, the languages of Sarawak in Borneo (e.g., Kelabit, Kayan, Kenyah, Melanau, Bidayuh) are

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at risk.   As far as other languages of wider communication in the region are concerned (e.g., Chinese, Malay, English), they may not be faced with immediate challenges due to the existence of native speakers in other parts of South East Asia. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suppose that some words and concepts from English and other dominant languages have undoubtedly infiltrated the cultures and shaped the minds of the youths and is of concern to the local communities (Chua, 2009). Added to this is that the Standard Malay which is taught in schools is not a single entity but exists in a diglossic relationship with local varieties such as Dialect Melayu Sarawak and Brunei Malay which vary greatly from Standard Malay in many respects (Clynes & Deterding, 2011). As such, a vocal support for language revitalisation by the leaders of well-respected language communities, both big and small, is key to any large scale revitalisation. Furthermore, collaboration with applied linguists and enthusiastic educators is what is needed at the moment.

As mentioned by Cope and Penfield (2011), the educational needs of endangered language communities are great, varied and in requirement of stronger efforts than currently being practised (Sarok, 1998). Indicators from ethnolinguistic vitality theory can probably reveal the real status (Allard & Landry, 1992; Allard, Real, & Landry, 1986) of many Sarawak languages. Elsewhere, the world is recognising that documentation, preservation and maintenance efforts are not going to save many indigenous languages given existing constraints. What is of greater concern is that within a generation or two, the world will be witnessing the loss of fully half of humanity's social, cultural and intellectual legacy (Davis, 2009, p. 3) and some Sarawak languages may be marked as well. To contain the rapid changes and challenges to the environment and languages of Sarawak, a reasonable suggestion for the moment, would be to build a stronger team of researchers and language practitioners to meet the need for language revitalisation, stabilisation and education efforts and needs of Borneo's Indigenous communities (e.g., Iban, land Dayak, Kayan, Kenyah).   However, this is best initiated by the speakers of the communities themselves, even if help comes from outside. Noteworthy are the joint efforts of the Dayak Bidayuh National Association and local non- governmental organisations that worked together on the United Nation's initiated preschool programmes.

Ethnolinguistic vitality theory suggests that status, demographic, institutional support and control factors make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups (Allard et al., 1986; Allard & Landry, 1992). This is based on the assumption that low vitality groups are more likely to go through linguistic assimilation and as such less likely to make up a distinctive collective group while high vitality groups generally maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings. Nevertheless, such differences need to be viewed from Sercombe (1999, p. 613) view that "change need not imply loss" (p. 613) especially given current trends where development and ethnic identities are highly priced. What gets overlooked in the process is the fact that academic and linguistic skills in minority languages get transferred easily into the second or dominant language (Baker, 2006). Second language research indicate that abrupt language changes due to pragmatic needs generally have adverse effects for the cognitive development of the young and contribute to significant loss of cultural knowledge. Many indigenous communities have come to

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recognise this effect and have begun to collaborate with experts in a number of fields to delay the effect of language loss. Nevertheless, it is still rare to see applied linguists or educators being called into the field to help with systematic language documentation or development of mother tongue education (e.g., Austin, 2007; Christison & Hayes-Harb, 2006; Nathan & Fang, 2009; Penfield & Tucker, 2011). This is unfortunate given that in Sarawak, it is both the applied linguists and educators who are able to reach out to places which are often inaccessible to many western linguists (e.g., Ting & Campbell, 2017).   Also, given the logistics and linguistic diversity of Sarawak, the gap between formal linguistic documentation efforts and the critical state of many endangered languages; language documentation and educational needs could and should be filled by applied linguists and teacher trainers. Presently, Cope and Penfield (2011) have outlined two opportunities for research and communities to work together which are as follows:

a) The applied linguistic field needs to move in to increase training and awareness among interested students on the way to reach out to the field of endangered work (with some kind of state support), and
b) Formally trained linguists need to collaborate with applied linguists/educators to help with preservation and maintenance efforts.

In settings where it may not be practical or impossible to reach out, the alternative would be for linguists to work towards becoming more informed of local initiatives and joined efforts and help develop/expand the educational needs of target communities.

Challenges to Preserving and Developing Local Knowledge

The proliferation of global communicative technologies and nation building has made it difficult for local languages and languages for wider communication to sustain. However, this has not stopped indigenous communities from developing a "voice" for showcasing their cultures and language features as often seen on Wikipedia and other local websites. Then again, the issue of acquiring, using and developing local knowledge and communal wisdom is much more complex, changing, conflictual and extends beyond the common L1/L2 dichotomy and showcasing of wordlists and feel-good blogs. According to Chua (2009, p. 339), when the relations that bind communities to specific places and task are severed or weakened, so too is the deep knowledge that communities sustain. In Sarawak where development, transmigration and resettlement are rife, the question that arises is how communities maintain, manage local knowledge and cultural resources when people (including the people who know about deep and shallow language resources) move out of the village and chose to spend most of their life in cities and survive with imported languages.

As mentioned by Barth (2002), knowledge serves as base for human action and social interaction (p. 1) but being by itself ontologically passive, it can only affect the world if it is "produced, represented, transmitted and applied" by the people themselves (p. 10). This can be seen alongside the indigenous tropes of "knowing" –

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such a *pu'an* (Chua, 2009) in Sarawak. Chua (2009) highlights several Bidayuh communities where young Bidayuhs often concede the "adat Gawai" as their tradition and agree the tradition will be lost because no one will know about it. However, when probed to tell more, the same individuals will reiterate by insisting that they know nothing about it and suggest that the rituals were something followed by the older generation in the olden days. The author argued that this indifference cannot be dismissed easily as basic lack of knowledge, but as an invocation of ignorance which is a means of dealing within an environment where religious conversion is ongoing, incomplete and this made not knowing a pragmatic choice.

Undoubtedly, the link between loss of knowing and relationality is not unique to Sarawak alone, but it is still possible to gain conceptual illumination on how people revive loss cultural knowledge and turn the table of pragmatic needs by turning to disciplines that share similar concerns. Strathern (1999) argues that a good start would be with "'self- knowledge' as often done by Western {Euro American} communities, where the act of getting the young to acquire information on one's parentage has an 'immediate social effect'" (p. 77) on the community. This act is not seen as a matter of knowing about personal roots and identity relations alone, but perceived as a revival of communal bond, ethnic pride, extension of one's cultural roots and an act of giving back to one's posterity. Research indicates that it is every community wishes to exercise a choice of wanting to know about their ancestors, their culture and take pride in the collective wisdom of their communities (Carsten, 2007, p. 414). It would be useful to extend this kind of "self knowledge" on Sarawak youths to revive their communal bond.

Figurative Languages and Multiword Expressions

Figurative language or MWE is of interest   to the contemporary world due to growing awareness that phenomena such as metaphors and figurative idioms are a part of everyday life. Figurative language is challenging to second language learners, teachers and NLP experts (Sag, Baldwin, Bond, Copestake, & Flickinger, 2001) since it extends beyond the sum of grammatical and lexical parts. Figurative languages also arise from the role of phrases in discourse and need a combination of cognitive and linguistic knowledge. According to Kramsch (2011) the competent speaker (in this situation native speaker) is capable of understanding what words in the language say and what they reveal about the mind. This informed speaker is seen as being aware of the performative, speech acts, symbolic actions ritual (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1967) and capable of explaining what words and MWE can say, do and reveal about human intention. The native speaker also has intuitive knowledge which is considered tacit, rather than articulate, that is, the individual may know how to say something in the mother tongue, but be unable to easily recall or explain this in social or linguistic terms due to lack of use of passive knowledge or limited language skills. Nevertheless, new technologies including literacy can help explain or document this tacit MWE when the speaker has difficulty explaining (Postill, 2007) and this has enabled many indigenous or oral communities caught between multilingual setting to document and recall previous or passive knowledge.

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Educational research indicates that it is possible for two languages to develop both autonomously and inter-dependently due to the function of transfer between types of languages. In Sarawak where both Iban and Malay which are spoken and taught, literacy has helped extend, maintain and manage local language and culture. This study assumes that literacy does not alter indigenous languages oral traditions in any fundamental way (except where the society chooses not to) but actually helps extend and locate knowledge within a wider culture.

Challenges to Learning MWE

Multiword expressions (MWE) are broadly classified as lexicalised phrases and institutionalised phrases (terminology adapted from Bauer, 1983). Also defined by Sag et al. (2001) as "idiosyncratic interpretations that cross word boundaries (or spaces)" (p. 2), MWEs exists in most cultures and pose significant problems for foreign researchers and second language learners because to the untrained mind and eye MWEs can be seen as isolated words or in terms of linguistic analysis and contribute to an over generation of words problem. To the less familiar with the language, headword, compounding and collocational frequency can result in a football in English (Malay = *bolasepak*) being translated into * ballfoot or a trashcan (American) to dustbin (British/Australian), or might generate perfectly possible words, but unacceptable examples as wastepaper basket and trashbin. A second problem for documenting this approach is the idiomaticity problem which would be how one predicts, for example, an expression like kick the bucket, which appears to conform to the grammar of English verb phrases, has a meaning unrelated to the meanings of kick, the, and bucket. There is the added parsing problem due to nonconformance with patterns of word combination as predicted by the grammar (e.g., the determinerless in line).

Arnaud and Savignon (1997) highlight that MWE challenges even advanced learners, the rationale being native speakers generally do not distinguish between literal and figurative meanings but rely on pragmatic knowledge when processing inactive metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2002). Conversely, indigenous learners (given the linguistic diversity of Sarawak) when dealing with unfamiliar sense of words in the dominant language are more likely to look for literal meanings and readings based on their knowledge of established senses rather than pragmatic knowledge (Charteris-Black, 2002). A bigger problem is when similar or near similar expression frequently occur in the second language (L2) curriculum in schools (e.g., Malay versus Iban), there will be a greater tendency to fall back on the literal meanings of the second language due to its being in the learners' active memory. Over reliance on literal readings can also contribute to learners overlooking speaker evaluation or connotations in the language. Besides, with learning it cannot be ignored that semantic and pragmatic meanings tend to be initially separate but converge with advance learners when there is communicative competence (Danesi, 1994).

Johnson (1996) claimed that since L1 knowledge of metaphors and MWE exists prior to L2 knowledge, there is potential for positive transfer of metaphorical knowledge. He further argued for explicit instruction in the conceptual system of the target language when conceptual systems are different. Deignan, Gabrys, & Solska,

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1997) suggest a comparative analysis of conceptual metaphors which lead to the identification of four types of variations between two languages. These are: the same conceptual metaphors and equivalent linguistic expressions (e.g., rolling stone gathers no moss versus *batu bergolek tidak mengumpul lumut*), the same conceptual but different linguistic expression (e.g., idle hands versus *tangan berat*), different conceptual metaphors, and words and expressions with the same literal meanings but different metaphorical meanings (e.g., get a grip water versus *dalam tangan*). Charteris-Black (2002) used MWE with similar linguistic forms and equivalent conceptual basis.

In sum, it can be said that figurative language is rooted in conceptual systems of traditional cultures and have a place as self-knowledge and communal wisdom. In Sarawak, a number of cultures share similar MWEs and this can confuse, extend and enable learners to expand and constrict their knowledge and language use.

Purpose of Study

To evaluate the level of MWE awareness and ability to use common MWE expression in Sarawak, a study was conducted. The main question addressed was whether knowledge and awareness of Malay and Iban led to more effective acquisition of selected MWE when all other factors besides education is controlled. The respondents were required to identify the meanings of three sets of MWE in Iban and Malay within a selected time.

Hypotheses derived from the question were:

H1: The respondents will gain in their knowledge of Iban MWE if the expressions have been formally taught in Malay.
H2: Given the amount of time spent learning the MWE in schools, the respondents who have just taken their SPM and STPM will gain for Iban MWE

H3: Knowledge of MWE will be quantitative (number of meanings known and not known) and qualitative (increased depth of knowledge)
H4: Gains in the ability to provide appropriate answers will increase for Iban compared to Malay MWE

The Study

Respondents

The data were collected from the district of Saratok where there is a larger population of Iban. Eighty youths from four categories of proficiency level (20 x 4) were recruited. They were 22-27 years of age (42 males and 32 females). The four categories were: a) completed lower secondary school education, b) obtained their Ordinary/SPM certificate, c) youths who were taking their advance level certificate/diploma/STPM, and d) undergraduates. All students were required to complete an online questionnaire using google.doc. The study was a mix between purposive and convenience sampling.

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Fifteen MWE in Iban and Malay were selected: 15 Malay MWEs were selected from The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Website and 15 Iban MWEs were selected from an Iban books of Proverbs. Two Iban speakers and two Malay speakers assisted with the task. The Iban and Malay figurative expressions were confirmed with the DBP online corpora to ensure that it is current. For this study snowballing method was used where a few individuals were selected and asked to contact and recommend other individuals in the region who could respond online.

Instrument

Wesche and Paribakht (1996) Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) was adapted to assess word knowledge and word use. This instrument was selected based on its theoretical basis which includes Eichholz and Barbe (1961), Gass (1988) and Taylor's (1988) category of knowledge which provide a comprehensive view of vocabulary knowledge (Table 1).
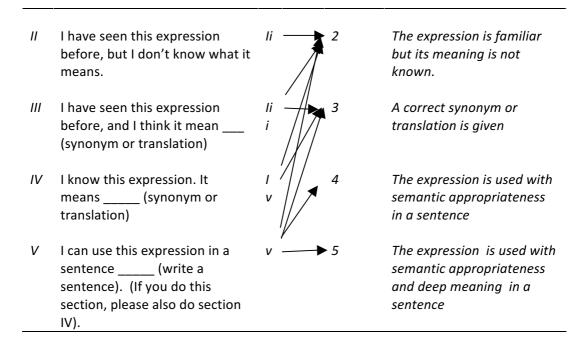
Table 1
Theoretical constructs of VKS

Cronbach's (1942) categories of increasing knowledge of words	**Taylor's Categories of Knowledge (1988)**
1. Generalisation: being able to define the word 2. Application: selecting an appropriate use of the word 3. Breadth of meaning: recalling the different meanings of the word 4. Precision of meaning: applying the word correctly to all possible situations 5. Availability: being able to use the word productively.	1. Frequency of occurrence 2. Word register 3. Word collocation 4. Word morphology 5. Word semantics 6. Word polysemy and the relationship of sound to spelling 7. Knowledge of the equivalent of the word in the mother tongue

The VKS (Paribakht & Weshe, 1997) used a 5-point scale combining self-report and performance items to demonstrate knowledge of specific words and expression in written form. Respondents were presented with a list of target MWEs. They were required to indicate their level of knowledge for each (refer Table 2).

Table 2
MWE Knowledge Scale and scoring categories

Student's self -report category		**Researcher's scoring category**	
Self- Report Categories (student's view)	*Self-report categories*	*Possible scores*	*Meaning of scores*
I I don't remember having seen this expression before	*I* ⟶	*1*	*The expression is not familiar at all*

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II	I have seen this expression before, but I don't know what it means.	*Ii* → *2*		*The expression is familiar but its meaning is not known.*
III	I have seen this expression before, and I think it mean ___ (synonym or translation)	*Ii i* → *3*		*A correct synonym or translation is given*
IV	I know this expression. It means _____ (synonym or translation)	*I v*	*4*	*The expression is used with semantic appropriateness in a sentence*
V	I can use this expression in a sentence _____ (write a sentence). (If you do this section, please also do section IV).	*v* → *5*		*The expression is used with semantic appropriateness and deep meaning in a sentence*

The basic idea behind the scale being that it is able to measure degrees of MWE knowledge and awareness. There were inbuilt scores and for this study (Table 3).

Table 3
MWE Knowledge Scale in Malay

Skala	Skala Pengetahuan Perumpamaan – Kategori Self Report
I	Saya tidak tahu maksud perumpamaan ini
II	Saya pernah lihat perumpamaan ini tetapi tidak tahu maksudnya
III	Saya pernah lihat perumpamaan ini dan saya rasa ianya bermaksud ___(terjemahan)
IV	Saya tahu perumpamaan ini. Ianya bermaksud ___ (Bahasa Iban atau Bahasa Melayu)
V	Saya boleh guna perumpamaan ini dalam ayat: _____ (Bahasa Iban atau Bahasa Melayu)

Level I is not really a level but reflective of what the individual knows or does not know. Levels II, III and IV are measures of recognition. Level V is that of productive knowledge. The study is based on the assumption that parts of word knowledge are learned sequentially and word knowledge includes a movement from receptive types of knowledge to productive types. Generally the VKS has been used with reading classrooms but for this study it is used to obtain data about language users' receptive and productive knowledge. The VKS was translated into Malay for the purpose of this study (refer Table 3). For this study the respondents were given 15 MWE expressions that were closely similar in sense and meaning in Malay and Iban. Respondents were required to respond based on three types of MWES.

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Test Items

The following paragraph considers the different types of test item for the different units.

Table 4
Summary of contrastive model for MWE

Category	Linguistic Form	Conceptual basis
Type 1	=	=
Type 2	~	=
Type 3	#	=

=equivalent # different ~similar

Using the design from Charteris-Black (2002), for Type 1 five MWE from Iban and Malay were selected on the basis that the senses are equivalent in both languages (Table 4). It was assumed that learners would have little difficulty with this type of figurative expressions due to the proximity between Malay and Iban.

Example 1 (Type 1)   Equivalent MWEs
Iban   *Baka sangkuh adung, dibatak pedis, diasur pedis*
                 PP   NP   VP   VP
                 Like adung sword pulled pain pushed pain
Malay   Bagai ditelan mati emak, diluah mati bapa
                 PP   VP   N   VP   N
                 Like swallowed die mother spit die father
 Meaning   *Difficult to make a decision since both options happen to be*
                 unfavourable
                 (English Expression) Caught between the devil and deep blue sea

Example 2 (Type 2) Similar MWE
Iban   Baka munsuh dalam kibung
                 Prep   NP   PP
                 Like enemy in mosquito net
Malay   Bagai musuh dalam selimut
                 Prep NP   PP
                 Like enemy beneath blanket
 Meaning   *Enemy within close family members/ friends*
                 Similar to English Proverb : Sleeping with the enemy

The word "similar" in this context refers to part of the phrase that is equivalent in each language. The literal translation provides an identical sense. A second category contains a slight modification. The assumption is that the Iban learner would need to spend additional time in order to arrive at the meaning if the MWE is in Malay and the respondent is no longer schooling. Type 3 are those with a completely different surface form. It was difficult to find words with similar conceptual meanings since the informants were not able to immediately recollect many similar phrases in Iban

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and Malay. Nevertheless, five expressions were identified for the purpose of the study.

Example 3 (Type 3) Contrasting Surface forms but similar meanings

Iban	Baka batu tungku nemu bersengki
	Prep NP VP
	Like stones thrown will hit.
Malay	Bagai gigi dengan lidah, lagi tergigit
	Prep NP pp VP
	Like teeth and tongue, will bite
Meaning	*Differences are bound to occur within family members/kin*

It was assumed that the different sense of semantic experience will make Type 3 slightly challenging. The study was meant to evaluate levels of active and passive recall.

Results

Descriptive Results

This section will explain the findings before moving on to the discussion. A comparison between MWE ability to recognise Iban MWE and Malay MWE (shown in Table 5) revealed that the respondents recognised more Iban MWEs (70%) compared to Malay MWEs (65%).

Table 5
Recognition of MWE Iban and Malay

	Iban (N=80)				Malay (N=80)			
MWE	**Recognise**		**Know Meaning**		**Recognise**		**Know Meaning**	
	x	**%**	**x**	**%**	**x**	**%**	**x**	**%**
Type 1	55.4	69.28	23.6	29.58	53.4	66.76	25.6	32.02
Type 2	53.6	67.2	25.4	31.76	48.4	60.5	30.6	38.26
Type 3	60.4	75.52	18.6	23.28	55	68.78	24	30.02
Average	**56**	**70**	**23**	**28**	**52**	**65**	**27**	**34**

When it came to recalling the meaning through the written expression, most respondents did not seem to recognise the proverbs in their L1 (Table 5). Only 28% believed they could write out the meanings in Iban and 34% wrote the meanings for the Malay MWEs. The respondents appeared to perform better for MWE that were similar and equivalent compared to contrasting MWEs for Iban. The *t*-test results were significant as indicated in Table 6.

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Table 6
t-test scores for knowing the meanings at the phrase level

			Test Value = 0			
			Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
	t	df			Lower	Upper
Type 1	6.274	79	.000	2.925	1.997	3.852
Type 2	4.964	79	.000	3.162	1.894	4.430
Type 3	2.989	79	.004	.800	.267	1.332

As for knowing the meanings at the phrase level based on education or proficiency level, the relationship for knowing the meaning at the phrase level, the Pearson correlation for knowing the meaning of MWE in Malay and Iban respondents for SPM students were high for both similar and contrasting MWEs and the results were significant. Similarly, the contrasting MWE for SPM and STPM students were significant (Table 7).

Table 7
Knowing the meanings at the phrase level

Education			N	Correlation	Sig.
<PMR	Pair 1	Equivalent MWE	20	.621	**.003**
	Pair 2	Similar MWE	20	.593	**.006**
	Pair 3	Constrasting MWE	20	.544	.013
SPM	Pair 1	Equivalent MWE	20	.420	.065
	Pair 2	Similar MWE	20	*.783*	**.000**
	Pair 3	Constrasting MWE	20	.645	**.002**
STPM	Pair 1	Equivalent MWE	20	.516	.020
	Pair 2	Similar MWE	19	.353	.139
	Pair 3	Constrasting MWE	20	.695	**.001**
Undergraduates	Pair 1	Equivalent MWE	20	.458	.042
	Pair 2	Similar MWE	20	.329	.157
	Pair 3	Constrasting MWE	20	.638	**.002**

Knowledge at Discourse Level

The analysis revealed that only 3 to 33.75% of the respondents were capable of constructing sentences or using it in context as indicated in (i-iii) but few could explain the meaning beyond the surface level. Deep responses or elaborations were few as indicated in Table 8 for Iban MWE. Response (iv) is an example of an elaborated response for the Iban MWE but the meaning was written in Malay.

i.   (L1): Anang nyadi baka <u>munsuh dalam kibung</u> nama deka begulai manah enggau orang, enggai ke orang enda pecaya
ii.   (L1): om nya sebenar iya baka <u>munsuh dalam kibung</u> laban selalu bejaku ka bala kaban iya

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ii.   *(L1): Sangka aku nuan kaban aku ti manah, nemu nyak nuan*
       munsuh dalam kibung

iv.   *(L2): Orang yang berada di dalam keadaan yang sama atau pasukan*
       yang sama namun bertindak untuk menjatuhkan ahli pasukannya.
       Dalam erti kata lain, berpura-pura sepasukan

Table 8
The ability to construct sentences using MWE

MWE	Accurate Context (%)	Inaccurate/(Partially) context (%)
Type 1	33.75	66.25
Type 2	27.6	72.40
Type 3	3	97

The responses to one of the open ended questions are as indicated in Appendix 1. Overall, it can be said that out of the 80 respondents, less than 33% were able to construct sentences using the MWE in Iban or Malay but some respondents did respond accurately though simplification appeared to be the general trend.

Results for Statistical Testing of Hypothesis

H1: The respondent will gain in their knowledge of Iban MWE since the expressions have been formally taught in Malay.

While almost 60-70% of the respondents recognised MWE in Iban only 23-29% were able to provide an accurate meaning at the word/collocation level which is suggestive of shrinking knowledge. The level of accuracy was determined by a native speaker. The fact that the respondents fared slightly better for Malay MWE depicts a certain loss of interest in traditional knowledge or lack of conceptual awareness in this field. The respondents had not gained in terms of knowledge by being exposed to the L2 in the environment.

H2: Given the amount of time spent learning the MWE in schools, the respondents who have just taken their SPM and STPM will gain for Iban MWE

The strength of relationship for knowing the meaning at the phrase level was stronger for respondents from schools. This is related to direct learning since the others were also exposed to informal exposure. While similar and equivalent MWEs did help many respondents, it was evident that the similarities were problematic to respondents at the advanced level. The exposure to explicit instruction through Malay, which had near similar expressions, evidently did help the learners with their conceptual understanding but MWEs were not noticed.

H3: Knowledge of MWE will be quantitative (number of meanings known and not known) and qualitative (increased depth of knowledge)

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It was evident that very few respondents were capable of providing semantic interpretations in Iban. While it is arguable that the respondents were not interested in constructing written sentences since it involved additional mechanics (e.g., language accuracy and spelling), the alternative option to orally state the sentences was not taken up. As for the quality of responses, it was obvious that there was evidence of intralingual transfer in the responses to the items. The respondents were encountering difficulty when it came to framing the concept of family, kin and friends and therefore were vague in their partially accurate responses (Refer Appendix 1).

H4: Gains in the ability to provide appropriate answers will increase for Iban compared to Malay MWE
Based on the number of phrase level, sentence level and discourse level responses in Iban, it was evident that the Iban speakers were able to extend the meanings in the written form but the numbers remained few. More respondents chose to write in Malay or English. Contrastive figurative expressions were also a problem across levels. With regards to comprehension and the ability to use MWEs, a combination of surface level attention to teaching MWE in schools and literal transfer of L1 concepts to L2 learners (e.g., teaching Malay MWEs in schools) evidently had resulted in some blurring of meanings for contrastive MWE. L2 research has found this as likely among learners of average or below average ability (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2002).

Implications

The study revealed the Iban respondents as having difficulty when it came to writing down the meanings for many Iban MWEs despite the MWEs being high frequency proverbs found in most schoolbooks. This raises an important question. What is the use of languages big or small, if it cannot be applied or recognised beyond the classroom? Reverting to the subject of local languages, the languages of Sarawak generally rest on a continuum where at one end are dying languages and cultures that need help because the young are leaving the longhouses, and on the other end are schooled languages which need attention because the young are either indifferent since it is pragmatic to feign ignorance or they simply do not know. Opting for a more functional language or a mainstream language as the alternative might not help because minus the initial concepts acquired from the mother tongue through interaction, the unfamiliar concepts and shallow words in the L2 will cut across the interlanguage continuum of the learner. This can result in many young learners lacking the intuitive and tacit knowledge that comes with being a native speaker. What is even more unfortunate is when learners continue to perceive local languages as subordinate to foreign and international languages and yearn to master foreign and international languages at the expense of their mother tongue. Lack of conceptual understanding of simple MWEs can eventually silence young people who yearn to communicate. This argument can be extended to the Malay language (Bahasa Melayu) which is fast replacing local languages in the region. While there are pros and cons related to this, the Malay language should by right, be

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seen as Bahasa Melayu if the language is meant to be inclusive and promote greater unity in the region.

The findings of the L1 and L2 MWE knowledge for one language group in Sarawak has helped raise the issue of other oral languages in the region (Lewis, 2006). Iban is considered the dominant language in Sarawak and sometimes described as a threat to local languages. There are two ways of looking at this situation. First, knowledge of the written expression helped the respondents to articulate their meanings in both Iban and Malay at varying levels. As such the presence of the Malay language is helpful for extending, broadening and preserving meanings. This experience can be extended to the other local languages. Literacy and the ability to transcribe one's cultural knowledge into images and print can extend local knowledge and cultural wisdom. Iban can serve as the buffer for meaning creation of other local languages in the region. Second, what happens to the other languages when a language is given more attention in education at the expense of others. This study is not meant as a voice for or against Iban. Rather, it is speak up for indigenous literacy and the need for languages to coexist, extend and help one another manage one another's diminishing   language and cultural resources where possible. As it is, it is already difficult for most regional languages to survive, notwithstanding the fact that the whole of Borneo is going through challenging times, given the pressures on communities, e.g., creeping neoliberalism, ongoing religious proselytisation, among many others. In this matter, it would be also wise to consider Kachru and Smith's (2009) cautionary note on Sri Lanka: "elevating any one indigenous language in a multilingual society may lead to explosive unrest, violence and division along ethnolinguistic boundaries" (p. 2). Change might not be bad but abrupt changes can unsettle. While civil disobedience due to language difference may be unlikely in this part of the world, elevating one language over another can still contribute to dissent, lack of confidence. Language loss needs to be checked before it is too late.

Borneo needs to wake up to the value of practical non-theory driven language research and education. There is also the need to recognise that language documentation is no longer the concern of anthropological and Sarawak's linguistic communities alone but the task of all individuals concerned about diminishing language resources. The region has good reasons to thank all linguists who have helped Borneo discover many of its languages (e.g., Summer Institute of Linguistics). However, the emphasis for local communities to recognise the need to stake a claim on self-knowledge and come up with potential educational resources for sustainable literacy materials remains. In sum, what is being advocated through this paper is the need for closer collaboration between the applied linguists, educators and communities working with language and cultural materials. Now, the ambiguity may lie in the word "potential" because without the knowledge of, assistance of or partnership with applied linguists, many of the archived   materials on oral traditions and collected evidence found in our resource centres (e.g., *Sarawakiana section* of the Sarawak State Library) will be of little eventual use. This can be related to the fact that the original researchers most probably wrote it in standard English based on their perceived models and language experience and presently where even local English varieties (e.g., Singlish and Malaysian English) are at risk, fewer communities

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may be able to interpret it alone. This would make existing resources less and less valuable to language learners or teachers at the local level (Cope & Penfield, 2011). There are gaps in what researchers can provide when it comes to addressing the educational needs of indigenous communities in Sarawak, but only the community can tell where the differences lie and what matters.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1
Response to MWE 6 (The Bean that forgets its Skin= Forgets one's roots)

Phrase level	Sentence level	Discourse Level
lupa asal usul *(Forgets roots)*	orang yang tidak mengenang budi (Ingrate)	Dia melupakan keluarga angkatnya yang telah membesarkannya setelah berkahwin dengan orang kaya bagai kacang lupakan kulit. *(He forgot his adopted family after marrying a rich person like the peanut that forgets its shell).*
Orang yang lupa diri *(One who forgets himself)*	orang lupa akan orang yang pernah menolongnya *(One who forgets individuals who helped)*	Dia bagaikan kacang lupakan kulit meninggalkan orang yang telah banyak membantu semasa dalam kesusahan. *(He is like the peanut that forgets the shell as he left the people who helped him during his difficult days).*
*Mudah lupa (forgetful)	Kawan yang lupa persahabatan *(a friend who forgets friendship)*	Orang yang melupakan kebaikan seseorang digelar sebagai kacang *lupakan kulit.* *People who forget the good deeds of another is known as the peanut that forgets its shell.*
*mudah lupakan kawan *(easy to forget friends)*	melupakan asal usul *(Forgets roots)*	Janganlah bersikap sepeti kacang lupakan kulit kerana hidup kita tidak akan bahagia nanti. *Do not behave like the peanut that forgets its shell because our lives will not be blissful later.*
* seseorang yg melupakan budi orang lain terhadapnya *(one who forgets individuals who helped*	Lupa daratan *(Forgets the ground)*	setelah alisa berjaya dalam kerjayanya dia bagaikan kacang lupakan kulit. *After Alisa succeeded in her career she became like the peanut that forgot its shell.*
Lupakan seseorang yang pernah rapat *(Forgets a close friend)*	seseorang yang dah berjaya lupakan masyarakat *(Successful person who forgets his community)*	Orang yang lupa asal usul diri atau orang yang lupa pertolongan orang lain selepas mendapat kesenangan. *Individuals who forget their origins or help of others after attaining success.*
lupakan sahabat yang menolong	A *Orang yang lupa akan usaha	Setelah setahun berpisah syelin tidak pernah bertanya khabar kawannya di

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(Forgets helpful friends	awal dirinya sendiri. *(One who forgets his early difficult times)*	sekolah. *(Syelin did not ask about her school friends despite being separated for a year).*

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