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ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AT THE PORTUGUESE SETTLEMENT, MALACCA.

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s language endangerment which is defined as 'en mass, often radical shift away from unique, local languages and language practices' (Woodbury, 2011: 160) has gained tremendous attention in sociolinguistics. Accordingly, there has been a dynamic growth in the number of studies researching on the loss and shift of indigenous and minority languages around the globe. In the early millennium I undertook nine months fieldwork for my PhD thesis (Lee, 2004) which investigated on the phenomenon of language shift of Papia Kristang, the Portuguese creole spoken by the descendants of the Portuguese conquerors of Malacca in 1511. In this paper, I discuss the rationale for using the ethnographic approach to investigate language shift, the research design, namely, the research participants and the tools I employed and how I went about collecting data for my study, the experiences of being with the community and last but not least, what I have achieved conceptually and methodologically in carrying out the study vis-à-vis an ethnographic framework. As a conclusion to the sharing, I emphasised the rich experiences of my ethnographic journey at the Portuguese Settlement and expressed my gratitude to the community for the opportunity to metaphorically 'eat, sleep and dance' with them.

Keywords: *Papia Kristang, language shift/endangerment, critical ethnography, fieldwork.*

INTRODUCTION

According to the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages there are only about one thousand speakers of Papia Kristang but only one third of those below twenty years of age speak it. Often the context of language shift is not confined to just the use or disuse of a particular language but involves a variety of interlinking variables such as speakers' attitude, social networks, setting and ethnicity which ultimately affect a community's choice of language use. Also, highly related are the socio-political dynamics of minority groups in multicultural and bilingual societies. In view of this, research into the context of language shift in minority communities is usually carried out within an ethnographic framework due to a number of practical reasons: the very nature of the situation under study, the suitability of the methodology and the underlying assumptions of the approach. As ethnography deals with the investigation of patterns of social interaction and the comprehension of cultural knowledge via an `exploratory-descriptive' form of research, a large part of the ethnographic research design and analysis of data tends to be highly subjective and interpretive. Blommaert (2007) maintains that as a theory, ethnography is built on two vital assertions: ontological, whereby all (social) events are connected and hence carry multiple meanings;

epistemological, whereby knowledge of (these) events is situated within the individual/group/community in which the event takes place and is hence subjective. Thus, ethnographic knowledge (that is, knowledge gained from ethnographic research) will always be interpretive as it depends on the reality of the event(s) and the reality of those who observed and/or participated in the event(s). In other words, ethnography pays close attention to how individuals engage in social action construct and interpret their own practice. For sociolinguists studying linguistic behaviour in minority communities, engaging in ethnography here means observing and examining the use or disuse of (a) language(s) and correlating its use or disuse to the larger, external social contexts.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Data and Methodological Triangulation

In order to acquire a representative as well as accurate as possible a picture of the language shift situation and the Kristang community's response, the research design employed both data and methodological triangulation. For this particular study, data triangulation involved:

i. sampling from a variety of community members from different age groups (Generation 1 (G1), Generation 2 (G2), Generation 3 (G3) and from different social strata (community leaders, professionals, fishermen);

ii. sampling in different language use contexts: in the home domain, in the neighbourhood domain and during the celebration of Kristang festivals.

Methodological triangulation entailed the use of four main types of research instruments, each selected to seek specific information based on the premise that they are the most appropriate ways of addressing the research questions identified in the study:

i. a preliminary survey questionnaire of the households in the Portuguese Settlement, to gauge the language shift situation of Papia Kristang in the community;

ii. tape-recordings of conversations of people from different age-groups (between parents (G2) and children (G3), between grandparents (G1) and grandchildren (G3) and from different social strata (the villagers who live in the Portuguese Settlement) to acquire data of patterns of language use in intra-group interaction;

iii. participant-observation of the celebration of a Kristang festival 'Intrudu' to observe to what extent the celebration of these events strengthen ethnic bonding and the use of Papia Kristang;

iv. semi-structured 'interviews'/informal conversations with various members of the community: the community leaders, to gauge their awareness and plans (if any) for the revitalization of their language, community members who have written on Kristang issues to obtain their views on the language shift of Kristang, villagers or 'ordinary' members of the community for their opinions and feelings of the language shift situation.

The Research Participants

The number of research subjects used in the study varied according to the research instruments used to elicit the information needed. For the 'survey' questionnaire, 85 heads of households were 'interviewed' for responses to the questions posed in the short questionnaire. However, in the analysis of the population according to age groups, the total sampling taken from the 85 households is 470 of which:

a) 130 are 'children' (0-12 years);
b) 132 are 'youth' (13-30 years);
c) 121 are 'middle-aged' (31-50 years);
d) 87 are of 'retiring age.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES

In this section I provide an ethnographic narrative of how each of the research tools was employed to collect data for the study.

Reported Language Choice and Language Use (RLCLU) Survey

The 'survey' questionnaire was the first of the four research tools employed to collect data on the language shift situation in the Kristang community at the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca. The survey was administered on 85 (out of 110) households in the Settlement. The main aim of the survey was to obtain information on the general language choice and usage in the Kristang households according to age groups and generations. The RLCLU survey is a short, structured questionnaire consisting of twenty-three questions put forward to the head[1] of each of the 85 households that the researcher visited on a door-to-door basis. Instead of giving out the questionnaires and collecting them later, I chose a one-to-one meeting between myself or my research assistant (EF) and the head of the household to ensure that the respondents understood the questions asked and the data needed. Robson (1993) considers the survey more a research strategy than a method or technique which can collect a small amount of data in standardized form from a relatively large number of individuals. The survey is used here to elicit a quantitative picture of the community and to obtain a representative overview of the general relationship between language use, attitude, ethnic identity and language shift. As the first data collection tool in the research the survey was extremely useful for the researcher to get herself introduced to the families and the community.

Tape-Recordings (in the home and neighbourhood domains)

Following the survey which provided information on the general language choice and language use at the community level, tape-recordings of spontaneous interactions were carried out to obtain data of actual (as opposed to reported) language choice and language use in the home and neighbourhood domains. The aim of the recordings are two-fold: firstly, they are used to verify whether there is any discrepancy between what people report they do

[1] The head of the household refers to the breadwinner of the family or to whom the house belongs to.

(in the questionnaire) and what the speakers actually do when using the languages; secondly, tape-recordings of actual language use provided information about micro-level language interaction, for instance, actual language choice and code switching patterns and hence complement data obtained at the macro-level from the survey.

From the home domain, altogether nine families comprising six pairs of parent-children (G2-G3) interactions and three pairs of grandparent-grandchildren (G1-G3) interactions were tape-recorded. The sampling criteria is that all the adults, that is, the parents and grandparents, in the nine families are fluent speakers of Papia Kristang and secondly, they are the principal caretakers of the young in the home. The six mother-children interactions yielded thirty hours of recorded data while the three grandparent-grandchildren interactions provided fifteen hours of recorded talk.

To record language use in the neighbourhood domain, tape-recordings of various social interactions were made at various sites and on different occasions: at the food stalls, during Christmas, during the Kristang festival of Intrudu. Tape-recordings of talk in the neighbourhood domain yielded approximately twenty hours of data. For most of the recordings such as the 'gossip between friends', the celebration of an elder's 76th birthday' and 'Xmas', my informants recorded the talk as I felt that my presence may affect the intimacy and natural interaction between the interlocutors. For the recording at the food stalls, I was present for some (not all) of the time the recording was carried out but I made every effort to be inconspicuous. I was either a customer at one of the stalls or helped the housewives/sellers at the stalls. By helping out at the stalls and at the celebration of San Pedro, I was able to participate further as a participant-observer (my fourth research tool). This experience was of tremendous value to my data because despite some culture-specific references or jokes in my transcribed data, I was able to 'connect' immediately to the events in the recordings.

For recording conversations at the food stalls, after a few trial sessions to ensure that the community members are confident in handling the equipment, the recorders were given to the 'seller'/owner of the stall to carry out the recordings. The recorder was normally left unhidden on the table at the food stalls throughout the recording session therefore villagers who were observant were aware of its presence while others were not. The objective was to allow the recorder to 'blend' into the environment. Even in the recording at the other settings (e.g. friends gossiping or at the Ceki card game), one of the participants would carry out the recording. It was only at the bus stop that the conversation was recorded entirely by the researcher. After some time the residents at the Portuguese Settlement were so used to seeing a recorder that they even questioned and joked when they did not see any recorder around!

The amount of talk recorded in the home domain varied depending on how much verbal interaction took place between the interlocutors while in the neighbourhood domain the recorded interactions varied in length depending on the 'situations/occasions': some interactions were lengthy (e.g. the gossip between friends) while others, for instance, the conversation at the bus stop and especially the Ceki card game were extremely short. All recorded data were transcribed by the researcher with the assistance of my principal informant, EF, who is a fluent second generation speaker of Papia Kristang. Data were transcribed as soon as possible after they were recorded, countered checked by EF and supplemented by my field notes during participation observations. Of course the weeks of transcription were very stressful since on average, a one hour recording can take up to three

to four hours to transcribe thus in the months of recordings and transcribing the data I had only about five hours of sleep in the wee hours of the day.

Ethnographic Interviews[2]

In order to investigate the community's response to its language shift situation, semi – structured interviews or informal discussions were conducted with various sections of the community: community leaders as well as members of the community. The interviews were conducted towards the end of my fieldwork, by this time, 'due to the greater degree of familiarity with my participants and their social worlds I could 'adapt (my questions) to the degree of intimacy and rapport I had already developed with my participants' (Levon, 2013: 76). A total of fifteen people provided their responses to the language situation at the Portuguese Settlement. Of the fifteen, three were community leaders: the Regedor, the vice-president of the Regedor's Panel, the secretary of the Regedor's Panel; two were language activists – one who had been writing about Papia Kristang from the 60s and had co-worked with Baxter & de Silva (2004) to produce the Papia Kristang-English dictionary, another a language activist, GF, who had been contributing articles discussing community and Kristang language issues over the internet and, the president of the Malacca-Portuguese Eurasian Association (MPEA) who had been actively involved in trying to uplift the community economically through government policies. Also interviewed were a Canossian nun who has lived in the convent in the Portuguese Settlement for over thirty years and who has been involved in educating the womenfolk and the children of the Settlement, seven 'ordinary' members of the community – three fishermen, a restaurant owner, a teacher in the village kindergarten and two retired pensioners. For the selection of the interviewees, the sampling criteria were to choose members of the community from different sections of the community in order to obtain a representative view from the community.

The idea of having discussions or 'interviews as conversations', a term used by Burgess (1984), was based on two pragmatic reasons: firstly, a discussion is less intimidating than an interview and secondly, these 'discussions' could be 'continued', as and when the opportunity arose and in fact, a number of times they were 'continued' to help clarify issues raised at the first 'interview' or meeting. An agenda of 'topics' guided these discussion-cum-interviews and the 'chats' were recorded, transcribed and used as citations to support evidence of the community's views and response to their language situation.

Participant-Observation

The Kristang community celebrates eighteen festivals in a year, some on a grand scale, others at the family level only. Although some of the festivities arose out of local beliefs and miracles and hence are unique to the Malacca-Portuguese cultural heritage, most Kristang festivals are religion-based. During my fieldwork at the Portuguese Settlement I had the opportunity to observe as well as participate in three Kristang festivals, namely the celebration of Intrudu, Festa San Juang and Festa San Pedro. In the celebration of Intrudu I accompanied the group of 'kueh' sellers door-to-door selling *kueh* (local cakes) for the occasion. The conversations throughout the session were recorded and analyzed. No recording was made for Festa San Juang and Festa San Pedro as the festivals attracted a

[2] Refer Becker (2013) to differentiate between ethnographic and sociolinguistic interviews.

large number of outsiders hence talk was not confined to within the Kristang community. It was observed that very little Kristang was spoken during these festivities which provided evidence that celebration of Kristang festivals with a high attendance of outsiders/tourists tend to be conducted in English. Participant-observations provided vital information and background knowledge about the relationship between cultural maintenance, ethnicity and language use. For Martin (2012), participant observation is the hallmark of data collection in ethnography. During fieldwork participant observation is usually accompanied by field notes to document actual observations and the contexts within which the interactions take place.

In sum, I would say the range of information-seeking techniques utilized during my fieldwork complemented each other and worked towards obtaining various information and perspectives of the language shift phenomenon of Papia Kristang.

ON BEING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Levon (2013) lists four methodological principles when planning and conducting fieldwork: Be prepared – develop as much prior knowledge about the community you plan to study as it will help you to make the most of what is normally a relatively limited amount of time in the field; Be adaptable – remain flexible and open to change as you may need to adjust your data collection protocol accordingly; Be mindful – Remain attentive to even the most seemingly insignificant details in your interactions as they can turn up to be culturally important; Be respectful – your research participants deserve your respect and gratitude for allowing you privileged access to their lives. To these four, I would add a fifth advice: Be genuine – do not feign interest or affections in your interactions with your researched subjects as the relationships and friendships you develop in your fieldwork will last a lifetime.

Gaining Access

If you are a member of the community that you want to study, gaining access is simple and straightforward. However, most researchers who are studying language endangerment are engaged in studying minority communities that they have never met before and sometimes never knew existed. In these cases, the first challenge is gaining entry into the community. Most fieldworkers who do not have contacts with the community they are studying gain entry into the community directly through 'brokers' who are often community leaders (Schilling-Estes, 2007), some attend a meeting, introduce themselves as a researcher and directly ask for assistance while some contact an organisation related to the issue of study and was subsequently introduced to a member of the community that s/he was interested in studying, as Kulick (1998) did with the LGBT community. Most ethnographers orchestrate an introduction for themselves to the community using social networking strategies such as via the 'friend of a friend' method (Milroy, 1987; Milroy & Gordon, 2003) which often develops into a larger social network of acquaintances and this snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) is the most common method used in social sciences. For my fieldwork my initial contact was through a member of the community whom I befriended in the eighties at church. Initial contact with this friend led to further introductions to the Headman/Regedor and his panel members.

No matter which entry method you use, bear in mind that your initial contact in many ways shape your position in the community and has implications on how you are viewed. Thomason (2013) shared that in language documentation fieldwork many fieldworkers encounter community suspicions that linguists and anthropologists are trying to steal their language and use it to get rich and hence advise that we treat members of the language community with respect and even deference as a means to dispel this widespread belief. On the whole, I have had excellent reception from the Kristang community during my fieldwork at the Portuguese Settlement although occasionally I did encounter a couple of odd individuals who were suspicious and envious that I would make good earnings writing a book about them while the individuals I collected data from and the community gets nothing in return! For this I cannot stop thanking my principal informant, EF, who constantly informed them that I was collecting data to acquire a university qualification and get a job and this somehow mitigated the 'get rich' suspicions.

Building Trust and Rapport

An equally related issue with work in endangered language communities is about fieldwork being inevitably political. According to Dorian (1992: 578), 'the linguist cannot enter the threatened-language equation without becoming a factor in it'. My own experience with the researched community has taught me that besides issues with the ruling government, other types of political dimensions exist which can prove to be just as significant and, often in the eyes of the community, the fieldworker cannot avoid being part of it. Whyte (1994), in his recollection of the research process and his experiences, pointed out that the first steps of getting to know a community are the hardest and he verifies that ultimately his acceptance depended on the personal relationships he developed.

As mentioned earlier, often the researcher seeks entry into the community through the contacts of the 'ruling' leadership of the community which in the case of the Kristang community, is the Regedor and his panel. As with most ethnic communities, there exist differences in opinion within the Kristang community but when the differences are not only based on family allegiance but are also politically aligned, it is difficult for the researcher to acquire an objective view or agreement over even language matters because the differences between groups in the community overshadow commonalities. Whether the researcher desires it or not, you are pitched in one camp (that is, the people you make contact with and work with) against the other who does not agree with the ruling leadership of the community. In its simplest terms, I agree with Dorian's (ibid: 576) observation that 'one's fieldwork, however antiseptic it may try to be, inevitably has political overtones'. It becomes critical when one party is promoting the language issue and the other is opposing it not because they disagree with the (language) issue but do so to accentuate their differences. Can the researcher avoid being part of the differences? No, either way you are caught in the 'hostility' because by supporting the language issue, you are endorsing yourself as coming from one camp. What is the implication of this experience to the study of endangered languages? It shows that the study of endangered languages can involve some political dimension even in its broadest sense for the political overtones can come not only from the ruling body of the country but within the community itself. During my fieldwork when I was identified as coming from the 'other' camp and was caught in the tension of factionalism I found that being involved in community work (such as helping out with tutoring the poorer young children from both camps) eased the tensions. Firstly, through community work, I was able to show both groups that I am 'objective' about their differences and are not

involved in their internal politics, whatever it may be. Secondly, through service, I indicated to the community that outsiders/researchers are not always in the community to 'take' but also to 'give'. Thirdly, as I listened to the views of both sides and work towards finding a common ground for the common good of the whole community, I used the opportunity to work with young members of the community and indirectly trained them to be community, not group, oriented. These strategies do not eliminate the political dimension of the situation but they helped to downplay the political overtones in fieldwork and ease the tension between myself and the community 'right wing' members. Other researchers such as Walker and Hoffman (2013: 82) have also cautioned against belonging to the 'wrong subgroup' during fieldwork and advise fieldworkers to 'go beyond your extended social network and be open to re-examining any assumptions about the community' while Nichols (2013) acknowledged that her richest linguistic data came with her endeavour to 'give back' in ways valued by the community such as helping the young children with reading and the young adults with a weekly writing class.

It is very rewarding emotionally and psychologically when your relationship with your researched (participants) gradually develops into a trusting friendship. At the end of my fieldwork even though it was difficult for me to bid farewell and return to my academic life and career, I knew the special friendships established during my fieldwork would last a lifetime. In their discussion of building partnership in the field, Guérin and Lacrampe (2010) highlighted that the principal factor that assisted them to develop and maintain trust was spending progressively long periods (undertaking several fieldtrips) that last one to four months, all of which enabled them to be familiar with the speakers and their routine and adjust to their customs. In other words, they found that the more time they spent in the field, the more trust was conferred on them. Clearly, the time factor is crucial in ethnographic fieldwork in order to provide opportunities not only to collect sufficient data but also time for relationships to develop trust and rapport. As for my personal experience, being one of them and engaging with their local lives naturally bonded us (the researcher and the researched) and enhanced my emic perspectives of the social lives and the social reality of the community at the Portuguese Settlement. To this day I hold enduring memories of how I 'ate, slept, and danced' with the community: memories of learning and swearing in the Kristang language, attending church, confession, Good Friday penance with members of the community, buying ingredients to make *curry devil* and haggling at the night market (*pasar malam*) with the housewives, selling *kueh* house to house during Intrudu, persuading a quarrelsome old man to sell his *belacan* to one of the housewives because she was running out of the sundried prawn paste and needed it but he would not have sold it to her since their families were not on talking terms, having sore hands after hours of pounding the shrimps to make *belacan*, name calling folks 'kabalu' when they annoy you, accompanying the parade truck on foot from the *A Formosa* in Banda Hilir all the way to the Portuguese Settlement dancing to the tunes of the *Jingkli Nona* during Festa San Pedro… As with Mesthrie's (2013) hilarious recollection of his fieldwork conducted in the early eighties, generally, members of the community were friendly and sympathetic to this (mature) student who in their minds, has nothing better to do but to go around the village, recording their conversations and asking endless questions about their language.

Outsider and Insider Roles and Empowering the Researched

McLellan (2002) is of the opinion that the outsider/insider approach may become less relevant if more indigenous people in the communities of study are given the training to

conduct studies within their own speech communities. In view of this, McLellan suggests that 'insiders be empowered to adopt roles that are more than just that of the informant or the depersonalized data source in traditional anthropological research' (p. 85). This is a practical suggestion for when members of the community are actively involved in the research process, in the long term they can form a pool of manpower often urgently needed for work in revitalization projects. The problem faced by the Kristang leadership of not being able to find people from the community to form a language committee to attend to language matters confirms the need to train and involve indigenous people in the research of their own languages. According to some researchers like Craig (1992), the revitalization of languages itself contains elements of empowerment as the revitalization of threatened languages itself is not so much about creating a community of native speakers but more about 'issues of self-respect and empowerment, and about reclaiming one's ethnic identity – issues of human value which cannot necessarily be measured in terms of words or phrases learned' (p. 23). From these different perspectives, the notion of empowerment can be broadened to include work directed at enhancing the knowledge and capabilities of members of the community as well as giving dignity and esteem to ethnic languages and identity that have been stigmatized. Along these lines, researchers such as McGinty (2012) working on the cultural interface premise, advocates drawing upon indigenous knowledge (indigenous ways of knowing) to complement Western epistemologies as a means of engaging and putting value on indigenous subjects' participation in research and practice while Leonard and Haynes (2010) strongly recommends collaborative consultation (between the researcher and the researched) be the norm in field linguistics to empower the community under study.

With reference to the above discussion, as early as the nineties, best practices in ethnographic research have been calling for a more interactive methodology with a critical perspective to empower the researched and effect change. Critical ethnography according to Nwenmely (1996: 47) is 'a more socially responsive ethnography that has the potential of effecting change.' Thomas (1993: 4) defines critical ethnography as 'conventional ethnography with a political purpose.' Both these definitions imply active roles for the researcher as well as for the (researched) participants/subjects. In my view, critical ethnography is a variant of conventional ethnography; it retains some of the features of conventional ethnography while the expectation of the researcher as well as the participants to take active roles in the research adds a new dimension to conventional ethnographic research. This methodology encourages a two-way (interactive), reflective and collaborative research process which empowers both the researcher and the researched. Empowering research has been referred to as 'research on, for and with' the community (Cameron et al., 1992). In my opinion the part of a research that is most empowering for the community is 'research with' the community because it is at this level that the researcher acknowledges the equality in the relationship between the researcher and the researched, respect the hospitality and especially the input given to the researcher. In return, the researcher should expect to give continuing support to the community (after the research) so that the researcher can help the researched achieve their 'agenda'.

Two significant problems in the study of social reality is, the existence of differing conceptual frameworks (between the researcher and the researched) and the extent to which the researcher is able to situate him/herself within that framework in order to give an account of it. The ideal of the critical ethnographic approach, like all good science, is its underlying concern for finding out the "What is it?" versus the "What could this be?" in the research. The 'what is it?' is equivalent to the etic (outsider/researcher's) point of view and the 'what could this be?' refers to the emic (insider/community's) point of view. This notion

of “otherness” (Cameron et al., 1992) or the alternative view (of the researched) needs to be accommodated and accounted for not only to help the researcher present as accurately as possible this ‘other’ view but it is also necessary to stimulate and effect change in the community. When both sides, that is the researcher and the researched, have access to each other’s (the insider and outsider) view of the language situation and work towards effecting change to improve the language endangerment predicament of the endangered language then the research process can be said to be empowering the research subjects. Nevertheless, the desire to effect change must come from the community's’ own initiative for the researcher is bound by the ethical question of neutrality as far as what should be done with the language situation of the endangered language(s). In the case of the Kristang community, it is vital that the research fieldwork is not a one-off experience and that the research can be deemed as empowering if it has motivated the community to start working towards the revitalization of its mother tongue. So far, interest to revitalize the Portuguese creole has been generated by contact made with researchers from outside the community and the community leaders are very keen for researchers who have worked on Papia Kristang to help with the production of teaching materials for the young but before such plans can take off, teething problems such as the funding of the projects and finding manpower for the implementation of the projects have to be attended to. Future research on the ‘revitalization’ projects of Papia Kristang will report on this.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of the fieldwork I needed to ask myself this question, “What have I achieved conceptually and methodologically?” Perhaps a good starting point would be the discussion on the language extinction catastrophe initiated by Hale (1992a, 1992b) and Krauss (1992, 1993), debated by Ladefoged (1992) and further enhanced by Dorian’s (1992) observations. Both Hale and Krauss have each succinctly put forward a strong case for the need to preserve human languages for the future generation and namely for linguists to take a responsible and active role in the task. Hale contends that it is vital to both the linguist and the human race to safeguard linguistic diversity since the loss of languages can be equated to an irretrievable loss of cultural and intellectual diversity. Krauss (1993) echoes the same view, pointing out that ‘the loss of any one language diminishes us all aesthetically, spiritually, culturally, intellectually, historically’ (p. 45). To focus our attention on the language endangerment dilemma, Krauss draws our attention to the extremely high mortality rate of languages in the world – according to Krauss (1992, 1993), by the turn of the century, at least 50% of the world’s 6000 languages will cease to be spoken because these moribund languages are no longer learned by children as a mother tongue. Krauss compares language endangerment to the endangerment of biological species but he emphasizes that compared to the latter, language endangerment is not receiving as much notice, help or support as it should. The gist of the matter is, it is a moral responsibility of the linguist to take a serious interest in the loss and rescue of endangered languages. In contrast, Ladefoged (1992) points out that the attitudes and values of the speakers of endangered languages are not as universal as portrayed by Hale and his colleagues. Ladefoged notes that there are communities who, despite a high regard for their language, are willing to sacrifice their language for (usually economic) advancement and the key question is, are we (or have we the) right as linguists or sociolinguists to advise them to do otherwise and preserve their languages? Based on her long term fieldwork experiences with East Sutherland Gaelic (ESG), Dorian (1992) is convinced that in the long term, the tragedy and regrets of language loss will far outweigh the first generation of speakers’ choice to put

social betterment over maintenance of the ethnic language.

According to Krauss[3] (1992: 5), of the 6000 languages in the world, 15% (or 900) of the languages are from the Americas, 4% (or 275) are from Europe and the Middle-East, the balance of 81% are in Africa (1900), Asia and the Pacific (3000). Although there are also numerous endangered languages in the West, the problem is, Africa, Asia and the Pacific are the very continents and areas which are most susceptible to language endangerment both from world dominant languages such as English and Chinese as well as from the politically dominant local language(s). Clearly a main factor for this state of affairs is that in the majority of the countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific region (except perhaps New Zealand and Australia), often the governing regimes are not of the Western democracy types that take serious heed of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948 concerning parents' prior right to choose the kind of education or language instruction for their children. However, having said that, to be fair to the ruling governments, for the sake of political stability and peace, the nation states often have to focus on more urgent agendas such as nation-building and a common language has a vital role in maintaining national unity. As pointed out by Dorian (ibid), in most cases it would be more beneficial to respect these priorities than to encourage tribalism based on separate language use and identity. This being the case, those of us who are concerned with preserving linguistic and cultural identity need to find a way round the problem. At the beginning of this section, it was pointed out that biological endangerment seems to receive much more support from various sectors (governmental and non-governmental) than language endangerment. I would attribute this support to knowledge and awareness of the problem. In order to gain support for our mission to alleviate the language endangerment predicament, we need first to provide the ruling governments with as much knowledge as possible about the endangered language situation: the status of the language, the usefulness of the language to the community and the country and of course to mankind. It is insufficient that the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity be known and valued by the academic community; if we want the kind of support for an endangered language as such given to the extinction of biological species, we need to work in the direction of 'liberating' the governments of the endangered language communities of ignorance of the language situation. Increased support for endangered languages in many parts of the world especially in the areas where the threat of language extinction is most acute can only come about when the governments of these areas or communities are empowered with the knowledge of what the human race stands to lose when languages are lost. 'It's unlikely that linguists can ever persuade a group either to give up or not to give up the use of its language' (Ladefoged, ibid: 810) but when macrosocial forces such as the government are convinced that the preservation of languages is as important as the conservation of the environment and earth's biological species, the local response, attitudes and values of the speakers will be more positive. Within such a strategy it is very unlikely that the linguist will find himself divided between the state's "language for national unity" versus the community's "language for ethnic separatism".

To conclude, from my experience with this research I am convinced that there will always be a moral and political discourse in the issue of language shift and loss. In eco-linguistics language endangerment can be viewed not only as the struggle between strong (dominant) languages and weak (dominated) languages but the need for balance between the support systems that sustain linguistic diversity in our world. Interestingly, in research on

[3] Refer Simons & Lewis for a 20-year update on the world's languages in crisis.

language endangerment one must also strike a balance between the moral and political discourse: between encouraging communities to preserve their language and respecting their right to choose to save or abandon their language; between what the community needs and what the ruling government wants, and between what is observed by the researcher and what is reality according to the researched. As for conducting ethnographic fieldwork, personally for me, the data collection experiences, memories and friendships made at the Portuguese Settlement are as rich, interesting and satisfying as the data I collected. I am deeply grateful to the Kristang community for taking me in and giving me the opportunity to be one of them for the nine months.

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