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Adjacent cross-border Iban communities; A comparison with reference to language


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A Comparison with Reference to Language

1. Introduction

The Iban comprise one of the most numerous of the indigenous groups in Borneo and, while in Sarawak (in East Malaysia, on the island of Borneo) they constitute an indigenous majority, in neighbouring Brunei they are a minority group, as well as being considered non-indigenous to the state. Given that a number of minority groups in Brunei appear to be undergoing a process of ethnolinguistic assimilation under the hegemony of the numerically and politically dominant Brunei Malays, one might reasonably enquire if there has been cultural and linguistic assimilation among the Iban of Brunei (despite their relatively strong ethnolinguistic vitality rating (Martin 1995:32)).

Cultural and linguistic shift in Southeast Asia and the Pacific rim have received increasing attention in recent years. Important contributions include: Thurston 1987, Mühlhäusler 1989, Florey 1991, Kulick 1992, Dutton (ed.) 1992, and Dutton and Tryon (eds) 1994. In Brunei there has been the work of Eva Kershaw (1994) on the position of Dusun and that of Martin (1995) with respect to the ethnolinguistic vitality of indigenous languages under the domination of Brunei Malay, while Sercombe (1996a) briefly considered the ethnolinguistic situation among the tiny group of Penan (officially considered non-indigenous), former hunter-gatherers for whom the transition to a settled existence has itself been a radical change.

To date, the Iban in Brunei have received little close attention other than in the demographic studies of Austin (1976, 1977a and 1977b) and in Nothofer’s survey of Brunei languages (1991). The Iban in Sarawak, however,
have received rather more consideration from scholars in recent times. Kedit's work on modernization (1980a and 1980b), Asmah's description of Iban grammar (1981), Freeman's detailed ethnographic study of Iban agriculture (1992 (1970)), Sutlive's account of the effects of urbanization (1972 and 1992a), and Jawan's analysis of the Iban in the arena of Sarawak politics as well as economic development among this group (1992 and 1994) are just a few of the more widely known published sources on this subject.

This paper compares the circumstances of two Iban longhouses situated approximately two miles apart, but otherwise located in the separate nation states of Brunei and Malaysia. The two groups inhabit areas with markedly different environments, despite their close geographical proximity, especially as regards economic conditions, which, I believe, have had and continue to have a significant effect on their patterns of language use. The picture given here is a general one and does not give detailed consideration to the potential significance of age and gender differences, which might otherwise have revealed finer distinctions in language use between various subgroupings within each community.

2. Background to the study

2.1 History of the Iban people

The history of the Iban in Sarawak is thought to have commenced with their migration from the Kapuas River region in western Kalimantan by way of the low-lying watershed between the Kapuas and the Batang Lupar River (around three centuries ago). They are reported to have come in search of new land for cultivation and to expand their territory (Sandin 1967:1 and 1994:79).

The Iban have been particularly noted for their considerable mobility (Austin 1976:64), and this accounts for their spread into and throughout Sarawak since they first arrived on the island of Borneo, compared with the less widespread movement of other groups. Ibans, however, remain numerically predominant in western Sarawak.

Groups of Iban subsequently began to migrate eastward across Sarawak to the Baram River in significant numbers between 1900 and 1941. Here they settled largely in the lower Baram area and on the larger tributaries, the Bakong and Tinjar. They were prompted in this both by their own desire to acquire new land and by the encouragement, during the earliest decades of the present century, of the ruler of Sarawak, Charles Brooke, who regarded the Iban as a buffer against the Sultanate of Brunei as well as a useful means of keeping the inhabitants of the Baram district in check (Pringle 1970:269-72).
2.2 Economy of the Iban people

The Iban have been traditionally characterized as dry-rice shifting cultivators. The swidden method of agriculture meant that there was a continual search for new land, which the Iban were then able to continue colonizing until fairly recently. Theirs is basically a rice culture, aimed at ensuring ample supplies of this staple food. In recent decades, however, cacao, pepper and rubber, among others, have been planted as cash crops. Nowadays, increasing numbers of Iban are seeking work in urban, coastal areas (see Sutlive 1992a), in the same way as members of other ethnic groups throughout Borneo, in order to satisfy changing needs and values. Symbols of status are rapidly becoming 'consumeristic, mass cultural and alien to local ethnic traditions' (Mulder 1996:175), as has been observed also in the case of groups in Java, Indonesia, undergoing similar kinds of change. Both longhouse communities considered here now tend to buy video players and televisions for the home – a trend that is certainly not exclusive to Iban – instead of acquiring the large ceramic jars that were the traditional wealth totems (even though these are still esteemed, though more as antiques or relics of a past era than as modern symbols of prestige).

2.3 Social organization of the Iban people

Ibans (like the majority of other indigenous groups throughout Borneo) have traditionally occupied longhouses, generally located beside and facing rivers. They have comprised mainly autonomous communities, which are unstratified, unlike those of many other Bornean groups, which are generally more institutionally hierarchical in their social organization (see Revel-MacDonald 1988:80). They are not necessarily egalitarian (see Rousseau 1980:52-63), however, and every longhouse village has a headman (tuai rumah) or – exceptionally – a headwoman. Since the arrival of European colonizers, the way an Iban longhouse leader is viewed, and the way in which he retains his position, has come to be more influenced by factors outside Iban society, particularly the central government. As was recognized by Steward, trying to account for cultural change among primitive societies around the world, 'In states, nations and empires the nature of the local group is determined by these larger institutions no less than by its local adaptations' (Steward 1955:32).

2.4 Distinctive cultural features of the Iban people

The Iban have tended to remain strong adherents of certain traditions and are famous throughout Sarawak and West Kalimantan for their gawai (festivals), particularly the harvest festival, held annually at the end of May. This is despite massive social, political and economic changes throughout Borneo, especially since Sarawak became part of Malaysia in 1963 (see Cleary and
Eaton 1992:3; Avé and King 1986:65). Significant here is the fact that even when Ibans embrace a major religion such as Islam or Christianity, many continue to observe their traditional festivals with vigour.1

2.5 The Iban language

Iban is an isolec of the Malayic subgroup of the Austronesian language family. Cense and Uhlenbeck, in their critical survey of Borneo languages, actually treated Iban as a dialect of Malay (Cense and Uhlenbeck 1958:10), a view which, when put forward in the Malaysian media, sparked considerable controversy (see Ejau 1987; Masing 1987). The notion that Iban is a Malay dialect is not accepted by most Ibans, who themselves would prefer to be seen as a separate ethnic category. Moreover, Iban and Malay are considered to be mutually incomprehensible by those who clearly identify themselves with one or the other grouping. Adelaar (1992:v) states that 'Historically Iban [...] underwent a separate development from other Malayic isolects', and cites Hudson's opinion that, while Iban and Malay are closely related, Iban is 'a language in its own right' (Adelaar 1992:1). Adelaar subsequently distinguishes Iban as 'an isolec widely spoken by non-Moslem peoples in the western part of Borneo' (Adelaar 1992:4).

Iban seems to have remained relatively homogeneous, with few significant differences occurring between the areas in Borneo (West Kalimantan, Sarawak and Brunei) where it is spoken (see LeBar 1972:180). Nevertheless, it diverges widely from many other Bornean languages, apart from Malay (a point long since noted by Hose (Hose and MacDougall 1912:254)).2

Iban furthermore is primarily a spoken language, although, since an orthography was developed (Howell and Bailey 1900) and later standardized (Scott 1956), there has been a steady output of literature published in the language, dictionaries being a well-represented genre. These include Howell and Bailey's A Sea Dayak dictionary (1900); Scott's A dictionary of Sea Dayak (1956); Richards' Iban-English dictionary (1981); Bruggeman's English-Iban vocabulary (1985); and the Sutlives' Dictionary of Iban and English (1994), among others. The latter two publications also contain comprehensive bibliographies of the language and literature of Iban.

While social, economic and cultural changes throughout the Malaysian

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1 For instance, although approximately half of the one hundred inhabitants of the Iban longhouse of Melilas, in the interior of the Belait district of Brunei, embraced Islam in 1992, they continue to perform traditional Iban rituals and celebrate their annual harvest festival in a unified manner (Sercombe, field notes from Melilas).

2 Wurm has declared with regard to Borneo languages that 'All the languages (except those in the northeast extension of Borneo) belong to a comparatively simple type of Western Austronesian with a moderately developed range of prefixes and suffixes and simple indication of possessives' (Wurm 1994:122).
Map 1. Brunei, with particular reference to Rumah Teraja and Rumah Ridan in Sarawak
parts of the island of Borneo are bringing about a rapid decline in the rich oral literature of ritual, myth and epic in Iban (see Richards 1981:vi), there has recently been a small revival in the publication of Iban folk literature and epics (in Sarawak), as in the works of Jimmy Donald (1989a, 1989b, 1992 and 1993), Thomas Bangit (1991 and 1993) and Jimbun Tawai (1989 and 1991). An encyclopaedia of Iban culture is also in preparation (by Sutlive).

The Iban people and their language are now widespread throughout Sarawak and Brunei. Moreover, while there are no figures to show how many people speak Iban as a second or additional language, it has been described as being of 'regional importance' in the Malay archipelago (Clark 1990:173). In fact it, rather than Malay (the national language of Malaysia and Brunei), is often the lingua franca in areas where Ibanes are numerically predominant (see Wurm 1994:95) – a significant factor when one considers the situation of the Iban language in Brunei.  

In institutional terms, Iban receives some support through the daily broadcasts in Iban by Radio Televisyen Malaysia in Sarawak. These broadcasts can also be heard throughout Brunei.

3. Ridan longhouse in Sarawak

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia, with an area of one hundred and twenty-four thousand four hundred and forty-nine square kilometres and a population of over one and a quarter million. Ibanes are spread through every district of the state.

In 1988 the Iban comprised around sixty-four per cent of the population of about fifteen thousand of the Marudi political constituency of Sarawak, in which Ridan is located (Jawan 1992:97). This means that the Iban make up the largest ethnolinguistic group in this district of Sarawak.

3.1 Ridan longhouse

Ridan longhouse has forty-four doors, or separate family compartments (bilek), and a population of just over three hundred, and is situated in a rural area (of mixed lowland dipterocarp, peat swamp and kerangas-type forest)
about eight miles east of Marudi town, itself only accessible from the coast by river or air (see Map 1). The village is linked by a sandy path (which follows the course of the Ridan River, a minor tributary of the Baram) to a road that continues to Marudi. The longhouse has occupied its present position since 1989, although it was first established in 1942 by Ibans originating from the Kapit, Sibu and Lubok Antu areas in central and western Sarawak. The inhabitants of Ridan own the land they occupy, having bought it at a nominal price from the state government at the time they originally settled there.

Of crucial importance here is the manner in which the people of Ridan earn their living, for it affects their language repertoires, their language use and their language attitudes: for the most part they are subsistence farmers cultivating dry or hill rice⁵ and a variety of vegetables and fruits, all for domestic consumption. Food is not generally shared with other families in the longhouse (unlike in many other Iban longhouses) or with relatives across the border in Brunei. Wildlife is hunted with guns, blowpipes, dogs and traps, the latter method being increasingly common due to people occupying much of their non-farming time with means of earning cash income by planting and maintaining cash crops such as rubber and pepper, as well as preparing sawn timber.⁶ A number of men in the longhouse also make furniture for sale from rattan, either gathered or bought in nearby Marudi, as an additional means of supplementing their cash incomes. Out of the total population of the longhouse, there are five males working as labourers in Marudi and nine in Brunei. The majority of adults, then, spend their work time with other residents of the village, and at present they have little time for continuous contact with other groups, Iban or otherwise.

There is no one from the longhouse working in government service at the moment, and this is felt to reflect poorly on the longhouse in terms of achievement. While there is a high level of attendance at primary school, there are few children at secondary school, currently, it seems, because of the demands of earning a living from farming. This has been noted as a general phenomenon by Jawan in his book *Iban politics and economic development*, covering the period 1963 to 1990, where he remarks that 'the dominance of the agricultural economy chains the *ulu*⁷ Ibans to numerous labour-intensive activities in the pursuit of their everyday needs' (Jawan 1994:72).

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⁵ They do not, however, plant wet rice, which is more productive than hill rice. Considerable effort is required to establish wet-rice fields and this, the residents of Ridan currently claim, is beyond their resources. There were generally poor harvests in 1995 and 1998, the former due to heavy flooding and the latter due to drought.

⁶ They receive five hundred Malaysian dollars per ton for this sawn wood, although strictly speaking they are only supposed to make use of wood for domestic purposes, not for sale.

⁷ *Ulu* means 'upriver', but in local discourse is synonymous with and commonly used to refer to 'the interior', in contrast to urban, coastal areas and people.
Throughout Ridan longhouse, consumer items are relatively few in number compared with the larger quantity in Teraja in Brunei. There are twenty individually owned outboard motors and a dozen motorbikes and bicycles, and in addition five television sets paid for with money earned in Brunei, although most homes do have a portable radio.

The inhabitants of Ridan remain active in terms of ritual practices. There is no longhouse shaman (manang), but there is a bard (lemambang). Rice cultivation rituals are performed and most inhabitants continue to believe, at least notionally, in bird augury. Bejalai (the practice of males travelling far afield to see the world and gain wealth and status) seems not to have the same significance as in earlier times: people still go abroad to work, as mentioned, but now do so to acquire cash rather than accrue social prestige.

There is no official border crossing between Brunei and Malaysia at Marudi, so journeys using the connecting path to Brunei (taking around an hour and a half on foot) are illegal. There is a much longer route via the coast, for which a passport is required, but most adults from Ridan walk into Brunei on average around once in two months; a few go in search of or already have wage employment in Brunei, but most go to buy petrol or monosodium glutamate, which are cheaper there (despite the current exchange rate, by which the Malaysian ringgit is worth less than half the Brunei dollar).

The families of Ridan have many consanguineous and affinal relatives across the border in Brunei, particularly in Teraja longhouse. Even so, social contact between the two villages is less frequent than one might expect, particularly when it comes to the Iban of Teraja in Brunei visiting Ridan in Sarawak.

Despite their somewhat harsher circumstances (compared to the Ibans in Teraja), no residents questioned in Ridan felt they would want to move elsewhere unless forced to.

3.2 Language use and attitudes among Ridan inhabitants

Besides Iban, all residents of Ridan of school age and above know colloquial Bahasa Malaysia. Many say they have acquired Bahasa Malaysia through informal contact with members of other groups and exposure to the local

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8 Five families in the longhouse have become Catholic, however, and no longer take part in rice-planting ceremonies or the annual harvest festival, as a marked consequence of their conversion to Catholicism.

9 Certain birds are believed to be incarnations of supernatural beings, and the signs they give are felt to be important to heed, especially when one is undertaking something important (see Freeman 1992:117-20).

10 Interestingly, a map of Sarawak in the Malaysian information yearbook of 1994 does show a road connecting Marudi with Brunei (Abdul Rahim Ismail 1994:635), perhaps reflecting Malaysia's aspirations for greater ease of movement between the two countries.

11 A flavour enhancer which is popular in the preparation of savoury foods.
media. Certainly for some business contacts and most encounters with the bureaucracy, colloquial Bahasa Malaysia would be the normal medium of communication in interactions with people who do not know Iban (see Table 1). However, formal education has also probably stimulated their acquisition of Bahasa Malaysia, despite the fact that few residents in Ridan have attended school beyond primary level. Of the twenty residents questioned on the topic of Brunei Malay, all said they were unable to speak it but could understand it when they heard it spoken.12

There are two members of Ridan longhouse who have some active fluency in English; these include a Kayan woman married into the community, who has retained some of the English she learned during her formal secondary education (when English was still the medium of instruction in Sarawak13), and an Iban male who has learned some English from working in a hotel in Brunei. Both these individuals are keen to use their English with non-Iban/Malay speakers.

Residents of Ridan perceive few differences between the Iban used in Brunei and that spoken in Ridan, except as regards the use of certain items of vocabulary. So, for example, in Ridan the word badu' is used and in Teraja in Brunei umbas for 'enough' or 'finished'.

Although most people in the longhouse have basic literacy, so far they have had relatively little continuous exposure to the cultures of formal institutions like schools. The residents, especially those in their teens or younger, usually crowd round the available television sets in the evenings to watch a variety of programmes in Malay and English, the favourites being American action shows, although they say that they cannot follow what is being said other than through Malay subtitles, if these are provided. Radio programmes broadcast in Iban are listened to during the day when people are at home.

In addition to showing fairly low rates of attendance at school beyond primary level, the Iban of Ridan interact minimally with people outside the Iban ethnic category (as mentioned in the previous section). Thus they have little opportunity to acquire and use other languages. It is not surprising, therefore, that, besides Iban, they are only proficient in colloquial Bahasa Malaysia.

Of the adults I interviewed, all stated that they would like to see Iban taught in primary and secondary schools, and this language thus to be given a higher official profile. Currently, Iban is an optional subject in Sarawak

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12 In isolectal terms, Brunei Malay is a 'variety of Malay spoken by the puak Brunei' (Martin 1996:28). It has a three-vowel system, a distinctive vocabulary (of which considerable use is made in local writing and the media), a number of particles (including bah and tah), and, according to Poedjosoedarmo (1996:58), a predominant syntactic pattern of verb + subject in informal speech.

13 The last year of English-language education in secondary schools in Sarawak was 1988.
schools and is not taught in the primary schools attended by children from Ridan. A few children from the village are receiving Mandarin Chinese-medium primary education in Marudi at the insistence of their parents, who see an advantage in knowledge of Chinese. Most Iban children, according to their parents, are not happy to attend these schools, however, where they have fewer Iban friends, besides having to face the challenges of instruction in Mandarin, to which they would otherwise have little direct exposure.

The same longhouse members also said they would prefer their children to have an English-language education, if it were available, arguing that a knowledge of English would be an additional advantage to them and give them greater access to otherwise unattainable jobs in both the private and the government sector, thereby enhancing both the longhouse’s status and level of wealth. This tends to support the view put forward by Pennycook that in Malaysia ‘for many non-Malays, language policies are perceived as Malay rather than Malaysian’ (Pennycook 1994:199). Language thus is an issue of some concern to the residents of Ridan. Many adults perceive an overall lack of material and social achievement in the community (in contrast to the residents of Teraja in Brunei), attributing this, at least in part, to the minimal knowledge of languages other than Iban and Malay among residents of Ridan.

4. Teraja longhouse in Brunei

Brunei is considerably smaller in area than Malaysia, or even Sarawak, encompassing less than six thousand square kilometres, with a population of around three hundred and twenty thousand (Government of Brunei 1993). The economy is virtually dependent on oil, with the petroleum industry accounting for ninety-nine per cent of all exports. This has created a wealth of continuing job opportunities. As Austin has said, 'the oilfields have for much of the twentieth century represented the ideal goal for Iban bejalai' (Austin 1977b:162). Iban, then, travelled to Brunei largely impelled by two mutually dependent motives: they went there firstly to seek wage employ-

14 See Ariffin and Teoh 1994 for a discussion of what they describe as 'the marginalization of Iban in Sarawak'.
15 There are both historical and political dimensions to the concern of some Iban about the language used in education in Sarawak, and these are significant but beyond the scope of this paper. See Sutlive (1992b:244-6) for further details of these concerns. The opinions reported here contrast with Harris' findings in a study among Murut communities in Sabah in East Malaysia, who responded positively to the idea of Malay-language education (Harris 1996:17).
16 It is interesting to note that in the entry for bejalai in Richards' dictionary, the name of a town in Brunei is used to help illustrate the meaning of the word: 'Maioh kami sa-rumah nyau bejalai ka Seria' (Many [men] of our house have gone to Seria) (Richards 1981:34).
ment and secondly to answer the call of bejalai (mentioned earlier as the custom of travelling far from home with the aim of seeking wealth, seeing the world and winning the social prestige of the widely travelled man). This was caused by the Sarawak government's emphasis on settled agriculture, the reduced opportunities for acquiring new land in Sarawak, the expansion of a monetary economy, and the consequent demand for wage-earning jobs (Austin 1976:64). Bejalai for many Iban became pindah ('to migrate permanently') when workers did not return home (Kedit 1980b:124). For, instead of returning to Sarawak, many Ibans settled down in Brunei to farm, establishing their longhouses mainly on the Belait, Temburong and Tutong rivers. Earlier migrants tended to settle upriver, and later arrivals generally downriver.

At this stage it is necessary to explain that the situation of the approximately fifteen thousand Iban now settled in Brunei is, in certain respects, very different from that of the Iban of Ridan, and of Sarawak in general. Firstly, in the interior of Brunei there continues to be an abundance of both primary and long-standing secondary-growth rain forest within easy reach. Furthermore, the area has a low population density and much undisturbed flora and fauna.

Secondly, with the availability of relatively well-paid employment on the coast, the incoming Iban in Brunei have had the best of two worlds. Concomitantly with this there has been an inexorable change of attitude towards the rain-forest environment, particularly among younger people – a point that will be discussed later with particular reference to the younger generation of Teraja longhouse.

Thirdly, the Iban in Brunei, like other Bruneians, have access to English-language education under Brunei's bilingual education system. On the other hand, they are less likely to have access to institutional or overt manifestations of Iban culture. Iban school students seem to be just as likely to identify with Malay peers as with Ibans in the school environment, where, especially in secondary schools mostly in coastal areas, there is a tendency to use exclusively Malay in oral interaction, at the expense of minority languages.

Fourthly, until recently there was only an English-language national newspaper in Brunei. A Malay-language publication has appeared recently, while newspapers in Malay (or English and Chinese) from Malaysia are also available locally. Besides the broadcasts of Radio Televisyen Brunei (in both

17 Freeman states that only a travelled man is entitled to be tattooed, and also is more likely to win the wife of his choice (Freeman 1992:225). Tattooing nowadays seems to be little practised, however, although it is still to be observed frequently among older-generation Ibans.

18 See my description of the easier material circumstances of the Penan of Brunei (Sercombe 1996b) as compared with those of their relatives in Sarawak. The contrasts in their circumstances are not dissimilar to those between the two Iban groups under discussion here.
English and Malay, as well as other languages), there is also an international television network offering sports, drama, news and popular music programmes, nearly all of them using English as their medium.

Fifthly, Brunei has a relatively large English-speaking expatriate community working in both the private and the public sector, particularly education. Many primary schools have at least one non-Bruneian teacher on their staff (often more), while certainly every secondary school has native English speakers, many of them contracted to teach English. Besides the substantial formal contact with foreign teachers, then, there are also more opportunities for observation of and occasional informal contacts with people from overseas.

At the same time it should be noted that the Iban (like the fifty-five Penan who occupy a longhouse on the upper reaches of the Belait River) in Brunei are not regarded as being indigenous to the area, in consequence of the Brunei Nationality Act of 1961 (Roger Kershaw 1998).

The above factors give some indication of the extent of the difference in social circumstances between the Iban in Brunei and their ethnic counterparts in Sarawak.

4.2 Teraja longhouse

Teraja longhouse was first established in 1948, although the present building was constructed in 1986. It has six doors or separate family compartments, with a population of just fifty-seven. Some half of these reside on the coast during the week, in the towns of Seria or Kuala Belait, where the adults are in wage jobs. This means that, effectively, every family has at least two homes at its disposal. The longhouse, situated in largely undisturbed lowland dipterocarp forest, has its own generator, as well as road access to the coast; moreover, the government telecommunications department has installed a telephone receiver aerial. Residents own the land they occupy (each bilek family possessing approximately ten acres), although they are not permitted to sell this.

Families grow wet or hill rice, the former in locations up to twelve miles from the village (to which they drive in their own cars), all produce being for domestic consumption, with the surplus being shared among relatives.¹⁹ No one under thirty-five grows rice on a full-time basis, however, and as a result only the older generation works the farms. A range of vegetables is intercropped with hill rice. In addition, pigs and chickens are reared (also for domestic consumption) and hunting is practised, using dogs and spears, as well as traps.²⁰ No cash crops are cultivated, nor is any craft work produced.

¹⁹ Some families grow both hill rice and wet rice, which allows them a healthy surplus.
²⁰ The possession of personal firearms is illegal in Brunei.
for sale. Five members of the community aged over fifty previously had paid work (either in the police force or with the local municipal council) but chose to resume their agricultural lifestyle after saving up sufficient cash for their needs, or simply going into early retirement to return to the longhouse, which had been established when they had first come to Brunei.

Every family has at least one adult member who has some form of wage work on the coast, and every family has a television set, a radio and a car of its own. Uja (1994:2), in her discussion of the circumstances of the Iban in Brunei, says that 'The younger generation have been attracted to cash incomes that require less physical effort, besides the facilities that tend to be available in urban areas'. This, along with education (which is both in English and Malay), is having an influence on their language knowledge and attitudes. Formal education, attractive job opportunities and increasing communication facilities in Brunei are creating greater opportunities for social and geographical mobility and have made for an increase in the distance between home and work (see Mulder 1996:174 for a description of a similar kind of phenomenon in Java). The opportunities for material and social advancement in Teraja are illustrated by the recent university graduation of one longhouse member as a teacher.

There is a longhouse shaman, in this case a dukun (not a manang, who uses Malay-style medical cures in addition to traditional Iban methods), while the community also occasionally makes use of both bards (lemambang) and Iban traditional healers (manang) from other Iban communities in Brunei. Rice cultivation rituals are still performed, though mostly by members of the older generation. Young Terajans have said that they are often coaxed into performing certain Iban rituals, which they do not resent but with which they feel unfamiliar, as they have grown up and received their school education on the coast and have become socialized in a national cultural atmosphere rather than a local Iban village one.

For the younger generation, the longhouse with its surroundings is not a home in the practical sense (although that is what they call it), but rather is a place that forms a connection with the older generation or a weekend destination where Iban culture and life can be experienced on a part-time basis. Depopulation of the interior, the loss of forest lore and the influence of the attitude of a Malay-dominated society to the forest as a recreational resource are increasingly widespread phenomena in Brunei, which equally affect the Ibans (see Ellen and Bernstein 1994:16). Adults working on the coast admit the likelihood of the Teraja longhouse eventually being abandoned in the future, although they are saddened by the prospect of this.

21 Unlike in Ridan, in Teraja there is an absence of the carved wooden figures that are normally placed at the edges of the longhouse compound to ward off evil spirits.
The residents of Teraja continue to some extent to maintain social networks throughout Brunei and Sarawak and claim they visit the places of origin of their families (in Sarawak) at least once every three years. They continue to value the names of ancestors by using them in the naming of offspring – an illustration of links with the cultural and genealogical past (see Azmi Abdullah 1996). Austin (1976:66) states that 'The Ibans of Brunei have not been separated for a period of time long enough to have permitted any noticeable amount of divergent culture change' (from their ethnic counterparts in Sarawak). I would suggest that younger Ibans in Brunei are, in fact, beginning to show signs of cultural divergence, first and foremost (like modern-generation Iban elsewhere) by decreasing involvement in traditional longhouse activities and at the same time more continuous experience of Bruneian life beyond the domains of the longhouse (features of which were described above). In short, Ibans in Brunei are no longer just Ibanic: they have in many cases come to feel, as they themselves say, distinctly Bruneian.

4.2 Language use and attitudes among residents of Teraja

As one would expect, the code used in intra-ethnic contacts in Teraja is Iban, and there appears to be no major interference from other languages in the village domain. Of interest here is the fact that Iban is used as a lingua franca throughout much of the interior of Brunei, although this is not as remarkable as it may seem, given the numerical dominance of Iban in Brunei's otherwise sparsely populated inland areas (see Map 1).

The bilingual education system in Brunei (English and Malay), instituted in 1985, has enabled many Iban (among, of course, other Bruneians) to become proficient in English and Standard Malay, besides the prestigious national code, Brunei Malay. Residents of Teraja respond very positively to the idea of bilingual education, saying that English has given them access to a wider range of jobs, while Malay has facilitated cultural integration in a society dominated by Brunei Malays (see Martin 1995:33).

There are currently four Iban from Teraja at secondary school. Those I questioned (as well as other male adults who had left school since) testified to a sentiment that Iban has low prestige in Brunei (see Uja 1994:3) and said they (as Ibans) felt impelled to use Malay in the school environment. This is interesting in light of what Kulick writes with reference to an ethnolinguistic minority in Papua New Guinea, namely 'To present themselves in a positive light, speakers of minority languages speak the majority language' (Kulick 1992:262). At the same time, Teraja Ibans continue to write in their mother language.

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22 This was evident during a period of mourning at which I was present at the nearby home of a deceased Iban youth, where I saw how many sympathizers were there and how far some had come, both from Brunei and from neighbouring Sarawak.
tongue for informal purposes. Ibans in Brunei are in a situation where the implicit message of the school to the children is that there is no need for them to use their mother tongue (see Kulick 1992:222 on a comparable situation with respect to speakers of minority languages in Papua New Guinea). Respondents in Teraja nonetheless feel Iban to be an important language in Brunei because of the relatively high number of Iban (compared to other minority groups) and because Iban is known and used in each of the four districts of Brunei, albeit in the less populated interior areas.

Nothofer, in his survey of Brunei languages, identified a number of features which, he claimed, differentiate the Iban spoken in Brunei from other varieties. The most significant difference in his view was the diphthongization of all vowels except a in open final syllables, such as in atey instead of ati, ‘liver’, and ngasow instead of ngasu, ‘to hunt’ (Nothofer 1991:157).23 Despite interaction with Ibans from different parts of Brunei, however, I have not discovered any significant phonological distinctions between the variety of Iban spoken in Rumah Teraja in Brunei and Rumah Ridan in Sarawak – a point corroborated by a lecturer of Iban origin at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (personal communication Azmi Abdullah).

Features that distinguish Iban in Teraja from Iban in Ridan include differences in lexical items, such as the above-mentioned umbas (Teraja) versus badu’ (Ridan). There is also some evidence of code-switching in Teraja, though this only involves single word utterances. Examples of this are the use of nda’ (no), an innovation from Malay, versus the Iban nadai used in Rumah Ridan in Sarawak; the common use in Brunei of the particle bah, with a range of functions, to express concurrence, both in isolation or as part of a longer utterance (see Ozog and Martin 1990); and the seemingly marked alternation of Iban kemari’, ‘yesterday’, with Malay kelmarin.24

Other apparently marked speech practices in Teraja include the use of English in phatic communion between younger men meeting each other after a period of absence. However, while exemplifying an extended language repertoire, this may have been to impress the author and/or other bystanders.

The circumstances of the Iban of Teraja are similar to those of other Iban and other minority groups in Brunei whose use of their mother tongue has become limited to the family and intra-ethnic domains. An exception might be the acquisition by local shopkeepers – mainly Chinese, but occasionally

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23 This is a form of vowel breaking whereby a glide precedes the final vowel, creating an on-glide resulting in a diphthong (see Crowley 1992:49).

24 Whereby Ibans pronounce the Malay in the following way: the central schwa is replaced by the front mid vowel /e/, the liquid /l/ is inserted as a form of excrescence (see Crowley 1992:44), and the final glottal is substituted with the nasal alveolar /n/, with the stress remaining on the penultimate syllable.
Malay – of the most widely spoken tongue in a given district in order to improve trade opportunities, the language in these contexts having a predominantly transactional function (see Table 1).

It is both interesting and relevant to observe briefly here (as a point of comparison) that Ibans of Kampong Siol Kandis, a suburb of Kuching in Sarawak, freely mix Malay and Iban both intersententially and intrasententially. The Ibans and Malays living there interact socially to a considerable degree, which I would suggest reflects a degree of boundary-breaking, while in Brunei, Iban interact informally with Malays to a lesser degree. Consequently, the view here of the homogeneity of Iban in Brunei reflects both internal cohesion in Iban communities and a degree of social boundary maintenance.

5. Concluding notes: Patterns of language use among the residents of Ridan and Teraja

Ridan and Teraja are both examples of small communities that have not yet undergone urbanization in the physical sense. Teraja’s ‘residents’ are undergoing a gradual process of integration into Brunei national culture. As Edwards remarks, ‘[that] some elements of ethnicity decline and others linger is obviously a reflection of social adjustment. That is, it indicates a desire to move away from segregation without undergoing complete submersion’ (Edwards 1984:281). There is less evidence of integration into the national culture in Ridan, however, where the residents appear to be less affected by the state as a result of their physical and cultural remoteness from the ‘centre’ in comparison with their Iban neighbours in Brunei.

Patterns of language use are more uniform throughout the different generations and sexes in Ridan in comparison with Teraja, where they vary according to age, work, educational level, and probably sex. This is not surprising, given the more varied circumstances of the Iban of Teraja. Their more regular and continuous contact with members of society beyond the Iban ethnic category has increased both vertical and horizontal modes of cultural and linguistic transmission (see Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 1981:53-62). This contrasts with the more restricted situation and opportunities of residents of Ridan. Still, in both communities the conversational partner is generally the most important factor determining the choice of code by the villagers, who have a strong sense of linguistic accommodation (see Kulick 1992:75).

The Iban in Brunei are, to some extent, in a unique position as the largest non-Moslem Bornean group. Unlike other indigenous groups here, such as the Belait, Dusun and Tutong, all of whom appear to be in various stages of shift towards Brunei Malay, the Iban appear to be continuing to maintain...
their language, even when they have embraced the major local religion, Islam — a move that might be expected to entail a shift towards Malay identity, which is inextricably bound up with Islam. The presence of the relatively large number of Ibans in surrounding Sarawak no doubt helps to reinforce both social ties and language use (see Martin 1995:35), and so far only intermarriage seems to be a decisive factor in language shift among the Iban in Brunei (see Uja 1994:3).

Access to bilingual education among Terajans obviously has stimulated not only bilingualism in Iban and Malay, but also knowledge of English (among the younger generation at least), besides bidialecticism in Standard Malay and Brunei Malay. Iban has a more esoteric function for the residents in Teraja, since in urban areas in Brunei (unlike Sarawak) this language is unknown to members of other ethnolinguistic groups, in addition to its having much less status than in Sarawak.

Table 1. Language use among Ridan and Teraja residents by domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Ridan</th>
<th>Teraja</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic contacts</td>
<td>I/CM</td>
<td>I/BrM/CM/E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>CM</td>
<td>BrM/E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>StM</td>
<td>E/BrM/StM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter-writing</td>
<td>I/CM</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops: local</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I/BrM/CM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-local</td>
<td>I/CM</td>
<td>BrM/E/CM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BrM = Brunei Malay; CM = Colloquial Malay; E = English; I = Iban; StM = Standard Malay.
(The above is a general picture and does not take account of sex differences, since it is based largely on male responses.)

There has obviously been a reduction in the domains of use for Iban in Brunei; since the migration of Ibans here, pragmatism has overridden ideology. As Edwards says, 'The relationship between language and economics is [...] a strong one, and practical considerations underlie most linguistic patterns and alterations' (Edwards 1985:164; see also Coulmas 1992:59 and Table 1). At the same time, knowledge of a new language and identification with its speakers may be an additional advantage for the fulfilment of specific functions. The apparent intact state of Iban in Brunei suggests that it has so far resisted significant change. This is contrary to Nothofer's conclusion (1991), drawn on the basis of his substantial interaction, throughout the 1990's, with Iban from various parts of the country (in particular inhabitants of the longhouses Melilas, Biadong, Buau and Teraja, in the Belait district of
Brunei). While there is unquestionably some evidence of variations in lexical choice – understandably, given the increased exposure to other languages and other groups as a result of increased work and educational opportunities – there are no signs of language shift, or even vowel shift, as suggested by Nothofer (1991:158). This leads me to posit that it may be partly because Iban are not considered indigenous to Brunei that they remain unassimilated and are able to keep both a metaphorical and a material and linguistic distance from the dominant Brunei Malays, while at the same time still feeling Bruneian. To my mind there has so far been little shedding of culture among Iban migrants, but rather the incorporation of elements of another culture. ‘The notion that ethnic identities are not necessarily fixed but malleable, in at least some circumstances, has rightly become common wisdom’ (Verdery 1994:36). As Edwards (1985:160) states with reference to language behaviour, moreover, ‘Change need not imply loss’. In contrast to some of the indigenous languages of Brunei, I would tentatively suggest that the future for Iban, in the short term, looks fairly bright.

The situation I have outlined briefly here illustrates the crucial influence of the social and physical environments on language repertoires, attitudes and affiliations. The residents of Ridan, in their position of relative isolation from mainstream urban society and greater subjectivity to the demands of an agricultural economy, have yet fully to enter the mainstream of society and acquire a sense of national identity. The immersion of Ibans from Teraja in Brunei society, on the other hand, has given them not only a larger linguistic but also a larger cultural repertoire, as well as a wider sense of affiliation with members of other groups in Brunei.

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