



Code - Switching as a Discourse Mode : **A Study of a Kadazandusun Family.**



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Jeannet Stephen has been working with Universiti Malaysia Sabah as a lecturer in Pusat Penataran Ilmu dan Bahasa since 1997. She obtained her B.Ed.(Hons.) in TESL from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 1996 and later her Masters of Arts in Applied Linguistics and Bilingualism from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom in 1997. Her field of research interest includes language and ethnic identity, language policy, as well as sociolinguistics and language learning. The author now resides in Papar, Sabah.

*"Montok di Odu ku. Sombol Guyakou. om i Moing ku.
Madius Remegius Martin"*

Preface

The maintenance and preservation of ethnic mother tongues is a serious and dedicated work. Yet in the face of competition from far more dominant languages, it is unavoidable that code-switching occurs amongst especially the younger generation of the ethnic community. It is very noble as well as encouraging that at present there are Kadazandusun institutions which try to instill the use of the mother tongue at home in Kadazandusun families. This effort should be commended and wholly supported. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are passive Kadazandusun-Malay bilinguals within the Kadazandusun community. "Passive Kadazandusun-Malay bilingual" is a term which is used in this occasional paper to refer to Kadazandusuns who are able to understand but is unable to speak the Kadazandusun language, having grown up with Malay as their first and home language (L1). It further implies that these individuals are only able to use the receptive skills more than the productive skills with the Kadazandusun language. Thus, one often hears sentences that have both the Kadazandusun and Malay in many Kadazandusun villages nowadays. Criticisms have been levelled at Kadazandusun parents who are fluent speakers of the mother tongue but did not use it as the home language with their children who have now grown up as passive bilinguals. Consequently, there exist subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) hints of disapproval from several members of the Kadazandusun community about the passive bilinguals' inability to speak the mother tongue. This disapproval often leads to remarks that touch upon the question of group membership being heavily dependent upon the ability to speak the mother tongue. However,

this occasional paper is not interested in responsibility but rather the code-switching phenomenon and the analysis of a positive approach to this phenomenon . The positive approach refers to the acceptance of the passive bilingual in conversation with bilinguals. Though the passive bilinguals code-switched in their interaction with their more fluent elders, there was no communication breakdown between them. Code-switching did not render the passive bilinguals, in this case study, “less Kadazandusun” than the more fluent participants.

Being a passive bilingual myself and in an effort to contribute to the research on the Kadazandusuns, I was inspired to do this research on code-switching as a discourse mode in a Kadazandusun family. Code-switching does not only happen among the younger generation of the Kadazandusun community but also with other younger generations of indigenous communities in Sabah. It is a fact that we must face and deal with positively. Whilst worthy efforts are being undertaken to ensure that the mother tongue does not fade in its use, we must also not be too harsh with the criteria for group membership for individuals within our community who do not share certain abilities. These individuals, although at a slight disadvantage compared to the others, are able to contribute to the community in their own ways.