

Language maintenance and competing priorities  
at the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

Papia Kristang or Malacca Creole Portuguese, is the 'language' of the descendents of the Portuguese who conquered Malacca in 1511 and it has been spoken by the Kristang speech community at the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca for at least five centuries. However, in 1984 the creole is listed on the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages. A community's awareness of and its response to its endangered language situation is a fundamental factor that will determine the future of its language. While the quest for socio-economic development and economic mobility over language preservation are reasons often cited for the lack of focus to reverse the language shift taking place, often there are other issues from a minority community's perspective that influence its priorities. Data from interviews and an attitude and subjective vitality (ASV) questionnaire indicate that the belief systems of the community and the socio-political context of inter-group relations in the country are interlinking factors that determine language maintenance and competing priorities at the Portuguese Settlement. In conclusion, the lack of urgency for language maintenance is best analyzed and understood by taking into consideration the context of its minority status and intergroup relations in the country.

Keywords: language maintenance, attitude, core values, minority status, inter-group relations.

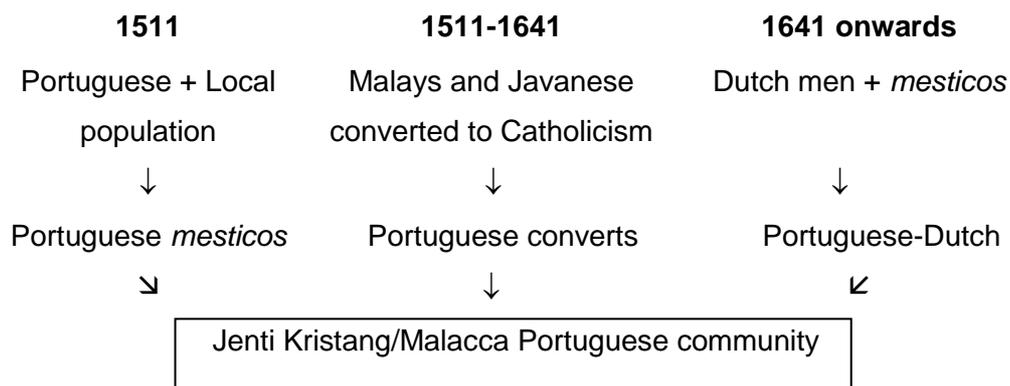
**1. The Kristang speech community: Sociohistorical background**

As a result of its strategic location in the spice trade routes of South-East Asia, a great variety of merchandise was traded at the port of Malacca during the rule of the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511). Attracted by its supreme economic reputation and sowing hopes of stalling the dominance of Venice in the trading of rare spices (cloves, nutmeg, mace, sandalwood) from the Moluccas and the Banda islands (Villiers, 1988), the Portuguese conquered the port of Malacca on 24 August 1511. After the acquisition of Malacca, the Portuguese encouraged a policy of intermarriage with the local people to provide manpower and ensure loyalty to the Crown of Portugal. The fusion produced an ethnic group known then as *mesticos* – a term to describe all Portuguese descendants in places where Iberian Portuguese had fathered or mothered children with local inhabitants (Sta Maria, 1982:23). As is often

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the case with Portuguese colonies, such mingling of heritage resulted in a community of people of European and Asian (Eurasian) ancestry, bonded by a Catholic faith and speaking a restructured variety of the Portuguese language which eventually emerged as a Portuguese lexified creole. In addition to this group were local Malays and Javanese who converted to Catholicism and carried Portuguese names and those who intermarried with the offsprings of the *mesticos*. In 1641 the Dutch captured Malacca and with no policy of intermarriage with the locals, most of the Dutch men married local ‘Portuguese’ women, embraced the religion of their wives (Boxer, 1973:167) and assimilated into the Catholic ‘Portuguese’ community. Bonded by a common Catholic faith, the three groups – the *mesticos*, the ‘Portuguese’ converts, the Dutch Portuguese – evolved into a distinct speech community known as the ‘Malacca-Portuguese’ or Jenti Kristang (Kristang people) speech community (cf. Figure 1; for discussions on Dutch and Portuguese interethnic relations, refer DeWitt, 2010).



‘+’ means ‘married’

**Figure 1:** The Multiethnic Roots of the Kristang Speech Community

### 1.1 The Portuguese Settlement (PS) of Malacca

The Portuguese descendants who remained in Malacca after the Dutch capture of Malacca lived in various parts of Malacca. In 1926, during British rule of Malaya (now Malaysia), the British High Commissioner set aside a twenty-eight acre plot of land for the Malacca-Portuguese community that ‘their cultural heritage be preserved’ (Sta Maria, 1994). The settlement became known as The Portuguese Settlement, the streets in the Settlement carry Portuguese names in honor of their seafaring Portuguese ancestors and a *Regedor* (Headman) takes charge of the welfare of its residents. To date, the PS comprises a hundred and ten houses and is the core of Kristang culture and activities. Although diminishing in numbers, the PS contains

some of the oldest and most fluent speakers of the Kristang creole and thus is often visited by researchers researching on Kristang matters.

## **1.2 The Language: Papia Kristang (PK) or Malacca Creole Portuguese**

Creole Portuguese of South East Asia, that is, those from the Indonesian islands and Malacca, are referred to as the Malayo-Portuguese variety of Portuguese-derived creoles. As early as the 1800s creolists have shown interest in the Portuguese-based creoles of the Malayo-Portuguese group. Coelho (1882) studied Java Creole Portuguese while Schuchardt (1891) looked into Singapore Creole Portuguese. Both these South-East Asian creoles including the Indonesian varieties which were spoken on the islands of Sumatra, Java, Flores, Timor, Celebes, Ambon and Ternate in the Moluccas are closely related to Papia Kristang (PK) or Malacca Creole Portuguese, the Portuguese creole spoken by the Kristang speech community at the Portuguese Settlement (for a more detailed discussion of creole Portuguese in Indonesia, refer Holm, 1989; Baxter, 1984, 1990). The South East Asian creoles share a common Bazaar Malay<sup>2</sup> substrate. The Malacca Portuguese creole carries a variety of different names: Papia Kristang to researchers, Kristang to the community, Bahasa Grago (Shrimp Language) in Malay while the spelling of the language is sometimes spelt as Cristao. In this paper, Papia Kristang (PK) refers to the creole spoken by the community while Kristangs refer to the Creole community although the speakers use Kristang and PK interchangeably to refer to their language (in the interviews).

According to Baxter (1995:51), although its pronunciation and the bulk of its rule of grammar is very close to local colloquial Malacca Malay (that is, the non-standard Bazaar Malay), the vocabulary of PK is '95% Portuguese-derived and generally quite recognizable to speakers of European Portuguese.' While the largest proportion of lexical items is traceable to Portuguese and some of the vocabulary are identifiable with modern Metropolitan Portuguese, many PK words are archaic or originate from dialects (for examples of PK vocabulary refer to Hancock, 1969; 1970; 1973; for a detailed description of the grammar of PK, refer to Baxter, 1988).

As with creoles from a region, PK has been subjected to substratum influences, particularly from Bazaar Malay; similarly, about four hundred Portuguese words have been incorporated into the Malay language. Baxter and de Silva (2004) highlight that although PK is derived from older varieties of Portuguese, it is not

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<sup>2</sup> Bazaar Malay (Market Malay or Pasar Melayu) is non-standard Malay; Bazaar Malay has been the lingua franca in the Malay archipelago since the fifteenth century.

Portuguese or a variety of Portuguese but rather a language in its own right – a creole language.

## **2. The threat of language shift**

Hancock's (1973) explicit listing of the threats against the future of PK as early as the seventies suggests that the language shift of PK (to English) had already been taking place but may not have been noticed much by the community then. By the time Baxter completed his research on the grammar of PK in 1984, he confirmed the status of PK as endangered and listed it on the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages, having observed that not all Creoles know PK and that various domains of PK language use have already disappeared or were in the process of disappearing. According to Baxter's (1996) map of Portuguese and Creole Portuguese in the Asia Pacific region, PK is dying due to the receding use of the language in the community. Kristang families with higher socioeconomic status normally communicate in English even with members of the family as they regard Kristang as a low prestige language (Baxter, 1988). English is replacing Kristang as the language of the community while Bahasa Malaysia (standard Malay) which is the national language of the country, language of public administration and education, is becoming more accessible and useful to the younger Kristang generation. Fluency in Bahasa Malaysia contributes to success in national examinations and provides access to higher education in the local universities. Is the community aware of its language shift situation? What is its response to its language endangerment predicament? This paper reports on the community's awareness of its language shift situation, the community's response (attitude) to its language situation and the underlying factors that influence the community's response to its language shift dilemma.

## **3. Theoretical Orientations**

To comprehend a community's response to its language shift situation, it is useful to look at the behavior of the language group towards languages, towards themselves, and towards other groups since the general values and language attitudes of a minority group will have a major influence on the maintenance or displacement of its ethnic tongue. One of the ways to gain an insight into the collective behavior of the minority group is by examining the attitude and core values of the group, the socio-psychological effects of identity in the minority group and the socio-economic context

of majority-minority relations in the country which are often couched in the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group.

### **3.1 Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV): Objective and Subjective Vitality**

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) was first proposed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977: 308) to refer to 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and collective entity within the inter-group setting.' Vitality or the propensity to turn to each other rather than act individually sets the basis for the group's ability to survive as an active and distinctive group. The construct of EV lists three sociostructural variables that determines a group's EV: demography, institutional support, and status and the sum total of these three objective factors provide a group with a low, medium, or high vitality. Naturally the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group possesses, the more likely its chances of surviving and maintaining its language and culture as an exclusive group in a multilingual setting. A social psychological aspect was added to EV in the Subjective Vitality Questionnaire (SVQ) by Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal (1981). The SVQ takes into consideration the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality (SEV) of the group as it looks into how group members perceive their own group and outgroups on vitality items; this is significant since a group's perceptions of the objective vitality factors are equally important in shaping (language) behaviour at the individual level. Within the macroscopic model of bilingualism by Landry and Allard (1987), the concept of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality (SEV) is formulated as a set of beliefs which : (i) can better explain the attitudes of minority group members towards the use of their mother tongue as well as their motivations to learn and maintain it (ii) is a very good predictor of language behaviour. As the SVQ differentiates well between in-and-out group vitality but not vitality differences within a group, Allard and Landry (1986) refined it by adding four types of beliefs that could predict behavior, namely non-self beliefs (general beliefs 'About how things are' and normative beliefs 'What should exist') and self beliefs (personal beliefs 'About one's own behavior' and goal beliefs 'About one's desire to behave in a particular way'). In their study, Allard and Landry (1992) found that self (personal and goal) beliefs are better predictors of language behavior because self beliefs are more strongly related to language use. Accordingly, by analyzing the attitude and the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality (SEV) of the community, we can explore the link between the sociological (collective) and the socio-psychological (individual) accounts of language, ethnicity and intergroup behavior of the community. In short, sociolinguistic processes affect attitudes and language choice

and use which in turn are reflected in the maintenance or shift of the language. In short, there is crucial interaction between macro and micro variables impacts on the long term viability of the minority language (Grenoble and Whaley, 1998).

### **3.2 Core Values and Attitudes**

Another area where the distinctiveness of a group can be observed is in the (cultural) core values of the group which include its ethno-specific language, national dances, music, items of food, religion, and so on. According to the theory of core values which was developed by Smolicz (1981a), some of these diverse items can be shed without affecting the stability of the group, but some are of prime importance to the group's viability and integrity that they are regarded as the 'pivots' supporting the social and identification system of the group. These 'pivots' or core values act as identifying values that symbolize the group and its membership and through which the social groups are identified as distinctive cultural communities. When a group loses its core values it ceases to exist as a community in its own authentic and creative right. The core values of a group becomes more significant and more clearly discerned when the group faces threat to defend its culture and identity against external pressures.

Cultural groups differ in their emphasis on the mother tongue as a core value: in some groups the ethnic language is a vital symbol of ethnic identity; in others, language is just a vehicle for communication. In language-centered cultures where the mother tongue is a core value of their culture, the survival and existence of the group is dependent upon the preservation and maintenance of the mother tongue (e.g. the Keres language in Cochiti culture, Benjamin et al, 1997). In such groups, language is both a symbol of ethnic identity and a condition for group membership. A group's resilience in maintaining its language and culture in a multilingual setting is dependent on how successfully the culture of the group interacts with new cultural inputs from the other groups; from these 'interactions', members of a group formulate their own personal system of cultural values such as one's attitude towards one's language.

The ideological attitude towards a language can be positive, negative or neutral. Positive attitude respondents consider the ethnic language as vital for their group's survival, negative sentiments prefer the language to be forgotten, indifferent subjects consider the language as irrelevant to the current situation. Individuals who express a positive ideological attitude to their language may not necessarily be able to speak it although they may be aware of the language being of core significance to

the group and may express a desire to know or learn it, as in the case of the Chinese in Smolicz's (1992) study whereby the importance of Mandarin as a unifying value for all Chinese is undoubted despite the Chinese community's own linguistic pluralism of dialect use among members of each regional group. Even those who cannot speak Chinese recognise the language in general terms as a core value of Chinese culture. Further, a positive attitude towards language as a central element of Chinese culture is strongly supported by other factors such as the Chinese family structure, family continuity and Chinese descent.

Holm (1993) emphasizes that language values have their origins in the sociohistorical developments and conditions of a community. Thus, although the core values of a group play a significant role in the maintenance and loss of language and culture in minority groups in plural societies, the maintenance and survival of the ethnic language is not solely dependent on the group's linguistic tenacity, other factors such as the dominant group's view, attitude and support towards linguistic pluralism in the society play contributing roles.

#### **4. Concerns of the Kristang community**

As with most minority groups, the Kristang community faced a variety of problems, some as a result of its minority status while others are community and culture-specific. Among the concerns that vex the community are land issues and Kristang ethnicity and identity. The significance of these issues cannot be underestimated as they contribute to an increased awareness of the community's minority status and a greater sense of Kristang identity, consciousness and solidarity.

##### **4.1 Land Issues**

With reference to Appendix 1, from the late 40s to the 90s, a series of land issues surfaced, namely, land status issues and land encroachment issues, all of which threatened the security of the PS as reserve land set aside for the Portuguese-Eurasian community by the British government in the 1920s. Although the land reclamation project did not materialize due to the economic recession in South East Asia in 1997, the constant and decades long struggle about 'Portuguese land' with the authorities has taken its toll on the relationship with the government.

##### **4.2 The Question of Kristang ethnicity and identity**

Throughout its history, Malacca has always been a cultural melting pot. The strongest testimony to this claim can be found in the existence of three creole

communities (the Babas, the Kristangs and the Chitties) in the state, their languages, and their cuisine. However, despite its multiculturalism, ethnic distinctions are politically significant in predominantly Muslim Malaysia because political parties in the country were formed based on racial lines and it was not until the early millennium that racially divided parties began to form alliances in order to secure votes/seats in the parliament.

Unlike the Babas (Chinese Creoles) who are politically affiliated to the Chinese political party due to their Chinese ancestry and the Chitties (Indian Creoles) who are still regarded as Indians due to their Hindu religion, the Kristang creole community has no 'race' party to relate (or belong) to, politically.

The following discussions on the definition of the term *Eurasian* and the community's ongoing quest for *bumiputra* ('sons-of-the-soil') status from the Malaysian government since 1995 further illustrate the dilemma of Kristang ethnicity and identity.

#### **4.2.1 On being Eurasian**

The 1940s in Malaya was the era of nationalism and ethnicity was an increasingly pronounced issue. In spite of a unified Malayan Union front working towards independence from the British, each of the three main races in Malaya – the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians – was engaged in the formation of a political party based on ethnicity, to champion their individual races' rights and concerns. Due to their European and Asian ancestry, the Eurasians were caught in the dilemma of being without one identifiable race. As Sta Maria (1982), a Kristang political activist pointed out, '...when race is a decisive indicator of voting trends, a Eurasian candidate is always at a disadvantage.' Reference to Article 160 of the Federal Constitution (of Malaya) did not help as the Article classifies race as i) Professing one Common religion, ii) Speaking and conversing one Common language, iii) Having a Common practice of customs and traditions. The only bond the groups of Eurasians had was their Catholic faith. Since the Eurasians did not speak a common tongue - the better educated Eurasians spoke English and avoided speaking/learning Kristang, the 'language' of the less educated Malacca Portuguese - they could not qualify as an ethnic group under the provision of the Federal Constitution.

The Eurasian race problem was left unsolved until de Silva (1979), a Malacca-Portuguese, highlighted that unlike other Eurasians, the Kristangs 'have our (own) culture, language, tradition and an identity' and invited the Eurasians of non-Portuguese descent to adopt the language and cultural traditions of the Kristang

community to pave the way for a united Malaysian Eurasian community. In the same vein, Fernandis (1995), also a Malacca-Portuguese, suggested that 'if ever any unified effort be made to form a national body of Eurasians, it should show the word 'Portuguese' and the term 'Portuguese-Eurasians' should be used to connote the assimilation of the other Eurasians who have intermarried and assimilated into the Portuguese community.' The suggestion bears social and political implications. Socially, there is effort working towards a breaking down of social barriers between the Eurasian groups; politically, the Kristang speech community is gradually but firmly gathering support from all Eurasians that their ancestry since 1511 be recognised and foregrounds the Malacca-Portuguese/Kristang community interest to acquire *bumiputra* (sons-of-the-soil) treatment from the government.

#### **4.2.2 On being *bumiputra***

The term 'bumiputra' means 'sons-of-the-soil' or indigenous people of the country of Malaysia. Holding a 'bumiputra' status provides access to privileges such as reservations for positions (particularly jobs) in public services, scholarships, grants or other educational facilities and permits, licenses, loans for business and trade operations. *Bumiputras* are also entitled to a 5% - 15% discount on the purchase of property in the country and, usually about 65% of entries into local universities are reserved for *bumiputras*. In a predominantly Muslim country where at least 60% of the population are Malays, all Malays in Malaysia are classified as *bumiputra*. *Bumiputra* status is also extended to the aboriginal groups in Malaysia (e.g. the Orang Asli), to minority groups (e.g. the Thais in Kedah, near the Thai border) who are insignificantly small in numbers (and hence pose no political threat) and to the indigenous groups of people in East Malaysia (e.g. the Ibans and the Melanaus) who form the majority of the population in Sabah and Sarawak and whose votes the ruling party obviously needs to prevent a decentralized government.

One of the benefits of being a *bumiputra* is the opportunity to buy or invest in Amanah Saham Bumiputra (ASB), a national unit trust scheme for *bumiputras* to save and also to help promote *bumiputra* participation in the share equity of the nation's corporate sector. *Bumiputra* minorities such as the Thais in Kedah, the Aborigines (Orang Asli) and the Kristangs are also eligible to save in the scheme. However, while the Kristang community has the right to invest in the ASB scheme, they are not accorded all the *bumiputra* privileges throughout Malaysia; for instance, in some states, they are entitled to a *bumiputra* discount when purchasing properties, in some they are not, unlike other *bumiputra* groups. In view of this, the status of the

Malacca-Portuguese community is equivalent to semi/quasi 'bumiputra' status. In view of this, since 1993 the community has been pursuing full *bumiputra* status from the government for fear of being marginalized politically and economically (for further discussions on this refer Fernandis, 2000; Sarkissian, 2000; Sarkissian, 2005). The term and concept of 'bumiputra' is being introduced here as far as necessary to explain how the policy has come to affect majority-minority group relations in Malaysia, especially the socio-economic and socio-political relations between the different races and why the Kristang speech community is bent on acquiring *bumiputra* status (for further discussion of the term and concept and race relations in Malaysia, refer Kahn & Loh, 1992; Lee, 1986; Fernandis, 2003).

### **5. The race between the races**

Economic mobility and success is highly sought after in Malaysian society and the two main pathways are through educational success and/or business ventures. Between the three main races, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians, competition is fierce as each ethnic group tries to acquire a bigger slice of the economic cake. In the eyes of the other races, as the ruling government is predominantly Malay, the Malays/Muslims are the most fortunate as there are all kinds of economic aids designed by the ruling party to help them achieve and acquire a better economic position, based on the 'bumiputra' principle. The Chinese, well known for their hard work, business acumen and aggressive strategies, are often economically comfortable and successful; among the Indians, the divide between the professional educated rich and the uneducated poor is wide. Thrust against this ongoing dynamic economic competition and the quest for wealth between the races (that has been blamed as the cause for racial riots in the 60s and the rise of the 'Tiger economies' in the region in the 90s), small minority groups like the Kristang community are constantly jostled into the need to better themselves financially or face being marginalised economically. Consequently, for most minority communities, educational progress and economic development often take precedence over communal matters such as language issues.

### **6. The Study**

As early as the seventies, the threat on PK has been highlighted. In 1973 Hancock warned that the creole is undergoing language shift, in 1984 Baxter listed it as endangered, by 1996 Baxter confirmed that PK is dying. There were two parts to this study: to establish the causes for the language shift of PK at the PS and to analyze

the community's awareness of and response to its language endangerment situation. This paper reports on the second part of Lee's (2003) (larger) study: the community's awareness and response to its language situation and the interaction between the overt and underlying reasons for the lack of focus to reverse the language shift of PK.

## **7. The Methodology**

The first step was to investigate whether the community is aware of its language shift (LS) situation. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted with various sections of the community (community leaders, language activists from the community as well as ordinary members of the community). Based on an agenda of topics relating to the LS of PK, the semi-structured interviews enquired on the community members' observations and opinions of the LS taking place at the PS and the community's interest and response to reverse the LS. Following the interviews, an Attitude and Subjective Vitality (ASV) questionnaire was administered on fifty respondents from the community. The questionnaire contains two sections: Section A enquired on the community's attitude towards PK, section B which was adapted from Bourhis et al. (1981)'s subjective vitality questionnaire, elicited the community's assessment of its own and the other groups on the objective vitality factors. The aim of the ASV questionnaire is to gain insight into how the community's attitude, belief system and language maintenance behavior in response to its language shift situation is influenced by the community's perception of its own group and other groups on macro (objective) vitality variables.

## **8. Results**

### **8.1 Analysis of responses in the interviews**

The interviews showed that by and large, there is a substantial level of awareness that PK language use at the Settlement is changing, indicating to the speakers that a language shift is taking place. Older, more fluent speakers are concerned about how the usage of some words has changed among the present generation. Respondents cite three major signs that their language may be confronted with imminent language loss, namely, a generational loss of lexicon, a semantic shift and a decreasing proficiency in PK, among others.

### 8.1.1 Generational loss of vocabulary

According to the interviewees, there is a difference in the PK spoken then (in the 60s and before) and the PK spoken today and, one of the main differences noticed is the loss of vocabulary across generations:

**Extract 1:**

*...They'd use 'Yo pun...' instead of the Kristang word 'Yo taming...' Also the word 'sama' instead of 'egual'. Except for the people in my generation, I think the younger generation have lost it.*

### 8.1.2 Semantic shift

Semantic shifts or (PK) words that have changed or lost their meanings is further evidence to the speakers that their language is undergoing shift. Fluent PK speakers believe that the present day PK speakers are either not able to discern the difference in meaning of like-sounding words or that despite knowing the difference, they are not bothered to use the correct form in their speech:

**Extract 2:**

*...'Portre' –'door', 'potra', 'porta' means a person having hernia, 'portre' of course is 'door'. But now 'porta' and 'portre' is the same, although the meaning is entirely different, it's still used as the same meaning because everybody uses it incorrectly! Nobody cares to check them.*

### 8.1.3 Decreasing proficiency in PK

A decreased proficiency in PK among the young is another aspect of language loss that adult members of the community are concerned about. One parent relates her exasperation that since her children did not (will not?) learn PK, they are not able to comprehend what is being said when spoken to in simple PK:

**Extract 3:**

*Yo papiah Kristang ku yo sa krensa krensa, olotu nadi papiah... rayu olotu! Kantu teng jenti, yo lo falah, "Bazah agu, da." Krensa krensa lo falah, "Mummy, what telling?!" (Laughter)*

*{I talk Kristang to I-POSSESSIVE children, they won't talk... naughty they! If got people, I will say, "Pour water, give". Children will say, "Mummy what telling?"*

*{I speak Kristang to my children, they wouldn't speak...naughty them! When there are people (visitors) around, I will say to them, "Pour water (drinks), give*

*(to the visitors).” The children will say, “Mummy, what (is she) saying?!”}*

In addition, most members of the community associate the lack of proficiency in PK as premonitory signs of a shorter life span for PK:

**Extract 4:**

*I'd give it maybe two generations... Yes, two generations...because I know, my children know and the next one, some... Of course my children know less and their children will know less than them...*

#### **8.1.4 Intolerance towards borrowing and codeswitching**

An interesting factor is, although the older generations (G1 and G2) are also bilingual and the speakers themselves codeswitch in their speech, the mixing and borrowing of words from other languages into Kristang-based sentences are not tolerated; in fact, the use of words from other languages to replace PK vocabulary is viewed as a loss of the ability to use the correct word. The following views from two second generation (G2) Kristangs demonstrate that fluent speakers of PK often regard all forms of language change as signs of language degeneration and there is a tendency for these older speakers to adopt a puristic attitude:

**Extract 5:**

*The older generation spoke perfect Kristang...when I say 'perfect' I mean there were more 'Portuguese' words...a word for everything. The younger generation have replaced some words with Malay, Chinese, and English. There's a lot of code switching, code mixing or whatever you term it... Malay is often used in our conversation to replace 'Portuguese' words which we have forgotten...*

**Extract 6:**

*...Yes, they use the word 'campur', Malay word. But 'Portuguese' we'd say 'misturadu'... There is a language but they don't want to use it, they change i*

Since PK is not spoken, both in quality and in quantity, the next question is, is the community concentrating on reversing the language shift taking place at the PS?

#### **8.1.5 Reversing LS: The community's view**

Despite awareness of and concern with the generational loss of vocabulary and decreasing proficiency in PK, some members of the community are confident that PK is not in immediate danger of becoming extinct as they are convinced that the very

existence of the Portuguese Settlement itself and the opportunity to live together as a community can help sustain the language over some period of time:

**Extract 7:**

*...if this Settlement is still here another five hundred years, I think the language will not die...But if we are broken up into smaller cells, yes...the language will go, the tradition will go, the customs will go. If we have our Portuguese Settlement people living close knit together like this, is where the culture, the tradition and the language will exist...*

In spite of Hancock's (1973) warning of the fate of PK, there has been no urgency to reverse the language shift. In fact, it is visits and increasing contacts with researchers from foreign and local universities that helped to kindle interest in the revitalization of PK:

**Extract 8:**

*...Actually outsiders...researchers like you [laughter] are more keen on the issue than we are! In a way, they create more awareness of the issue and awaken us to it... In the past three to four years there has been some interest in this...what we need now is to enhance this, make it faster, speed it up...*

According to the leaders of the community, to survive extinction, the creole must not remain an oral language therefore, much hope is placed on the role of a Kristang dictionary to effectively 'teach' and rescue the language:

**Extract 9:**

*First of all, Kristang has to be a written language otherwise how do you teach the language? That is the base so we have to create this base...*

**Extract 10:**

*...Once we have a document to refer to, they will tend to use the documented words instead of coining their own words. After all, how do you define a language? You have to have some base, you can't allow too much code switching, code mixing otherwise the language will lose its originality...So through the documentation we will ensure that the language is taught and learned the right way. Right now if we allow people to teach, we will get a lot of 'rojak'(M)(mixing) inside the language...*

#### **8.1.6 Educational and economic concerns**

While there are no current figures to verify the most recent socio-economic status of the community at the PS, observations from Baxter (1988), my fieldwork as well as interviews with members and leaders of the community confirm that the educational and economic standing of the majority of the Creoles is still very much wanting. Except for a few educated and a few well-off families, a large proportion of the community at the PS did not finish school and a majority of the community can still be considered 'poor'. Consequently, both the community and its leaders tend to focus their time and energy trying to raise the educational achievement of the young and the economic advancement of the families. The impact of this focus is that when language issues compete with educational or economic development, often the latter takes priority. Comments from the interviews support this observation:

**Extract 11:**

*It's true, economic development always comes first...Everybody is not giving a thought to language...*

**Extract 12:**

*It has to be education, academic development for the young...This take priority over language maintenance and preservation because to be economically strong we need to be academically strong. When you get the economic value (power) you can do a lot. The language...it's not dead (yet)!  
[Laughter]*

Added to this is the dilemma of lack of funds and commitment to language work for long term:

**Extract 13:**

*Finance is one question. Secondly, I don't think the Panel members have the time to attend to it...We are all stretched out...*

**Extract 14:**

*We need funding...and we need people who have the commitment to get involved and finish the job, not halfway. At the moment it's the academic community...researchers like Baxter and you and some officials from the Portuguese consuls who can spare the time or who want to give their time (Laughter) to this language cause...The response from our own people...from the community is still not good...I would say they are not bothered yet...*

Data from the interviews also indicate that the attitude of individuals in the community is another significant factor that is undermining the urgency for language revitalization work:

**Extract 15:**

*...we still have people in the community and the committee itself who don't consider it (language preservation) an important thing...they say it's not relevant!*

**Extract 16:**

*Academically... theoretically, with professionals, we can do a lot but on the ground the situation is different. In fact, I can bet, if I say, 'On Sunday there will be Kristang tuition class, I think you won't get five people!*

The views expressed in the interviews show that a negative attitude is not the only factor that delays language revitalization work, a laid-back attitude is equally damaging. The next question that arises is, what makes this community which is critically aware of its LS situation, behave in such a manner? What can be the underlying factors contributing to this lack of 'language loyalty', a term used by Crystal (2000:17) to refer to 'the concern to preserve a language when a threat is perceived'?

## **8.2 Analysis of responses to the attitude and subjective vitality (ASV) questionnaire**

Questions 1-5 (section A) focus on the attitude of the community towards PK; questions 6-10 (section B) investigate on the subjective vitality of the community. Responses to the questions are first briefly analyzed on a question to question basis following which the responses are grouped into the three main issues that surfaced from the questionnaire. All the responses are calculated for the 'average' or 'mean' score; since the ordinal variables are arranged in order of importance with '1' as the least important and '5' as the most important, the higher the mean score the more important the issue is to the respondent and vice versa.

**Question 1.** *How important is it for your children to know and learn the following languages?*

**Table 1 :** Important language(s) for children to know and learn

<b>Language (s)</b>	<b>Order of Importance</b>					<b>Mean Score</b>
	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>PK</i>	-	21	29	-	-	2.58
<i>Malay</i>	-	-	-	30	20	4.4
<i>English</i>	-	-	-	12	38	4.76
<i>Chinese (Mandarin)</i>	-	17	33	-	-	2.66
<i>Tamil</i>	25	20	5	-	-	1.6

\* 1 least important

5 most important

With reference to Table 1, the Kristang community considers English as the most important language and Malay as the second most important language for their children to know and learn. Surprisingly, slightly more respondents consider Chinese as the third important language for their children to know and learn, indicating that although Kristang is their mother tongue, they still recognize the (economic?) value of knowing Mandarin.

**Question 2:** *Would it affect the survival of the community if PK becomes extinct?*

**Table 2:** PK and the survival of the community

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>
Yes	18 (36%)
No	22 (44%)
Not sure	10 (20%)

Responses Table 2 show that only 36% of the respondents think that the extinction of their language will affect the survival of the community; 44% do not think so while 20% are not certain.

**Question 3-5:** *How important is it that Kristang/Malay/English be spoken in the home?*

**Table 3:** Language(s) that should be spoken in the home

Language s	Order of Importance						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>PK</i>	-	-	2	8	40	-	3.13
<i>Malay</i>	-	7	35	8	-	-	1.68
<i>English</i>	-	-	6	37	7	-	2.51

\* 0 Not important at all

5 Extremely Important

With reference to Table 3, PK emerged as the most important language that should be spoken in the home followed by English and then Malay. The responses here speak well for PK although the data here contradicts the choice of English in Table 1 as the most important language for the children to know and learn.

**Question 6:** *How proud are the following racial groups of their cultural history and achievement in Malaysia?*

**Table 4:** Pride in their cultural history and achievement

Ethnic groups	Level of pride						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Kristang</i>	-	-	-	-	10	40	4.0
<i>Chinese</i>	-	-	-	-	5	45	4.08
<i>Malay</i>	-	-	-	-	-	50	4.16
<i>Indians</i>	-	-	-	-	20	30	3.91

\*0 Not proud at all

5 Extremely proud

The Malays are viewed as the group with the highest level of pride for their cultural history and achievement. There is not much difference between the Chinese and the Kristangs, that is, both groups are viewed as almost equally proud of their cultural history and achievement; following close are the Indians. These views show that from the Kristangs' point of view, overall there is a strong sense of ethnic pride in each of the ethnic groups in Malaysia.

**Question 7:** *How well represented are the following ethnic groups in the cultural life of Malaysia (e.g. festivals, concerts, art exhibition)?*

**Table 5:** Representation in cultural life

Ethnic groups	Level of Representation						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Kristang</i>	-	-	-	-	8	42	4.03
<i>Chinese</i>	-	-	-	7	38	5	3.30
<i>Malays</i>	-	-	-	-	-	50	4.16
<i>Indians</i>	-	-	-	9	35	6	3.28

\* 0 Not well represented

5 Very well represented

Table 5 shows that the Malays, the ruling group, are considered to be very well represented in the cultural life of Malaysia. After the Malays, the Kristangs consider their group to be well represented too in their cultural life while the Chinese and the Indians share almost the same level of cultural representation.

**Question 8:** *How much political power do the following ethnic groups have in Malaysia?*

**Table 6:** Political power among the races in Malaysia

Ethnic groups	Level of political power						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Kristang</i>	-	22	18	10	-	-	1.46
<i>Chinese</i>	-	10	5	15	10	-	2.08
<i>Malay</i>	-	-	-	-	38	12	3.53
<i>Indians</i>	-	10	15	20	5	-	2.0

\* 0 No political power at all

5 Complete political power

The Malays are viewed as having substantial political power since they are the ruling race; on the other hand, the Kristangs view themselves as having very little/the least political power compared to the other races.

**Question 9:** *How wealthy do you think the following ethnic groups are in Malaysia?*

**Table 7:** Wealth between the racial groups

Ethnic groups	Level of wealth						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Kristang</i>	-	35	10	5	-	-	1.16
<i>Chinese</i>	-	-	-	5	15	30	3.75
<i>Malays</i>	-	-	-	12	20	18	3.43
<i>Indians</i>	-	5	10	13	12	10	2.70

\*0 Not wealthy at all

5 Extremely wealthy

According to Table 7, the Chinese are considered the wealthiest ethnic group in Malaysia followed by the Malays. The majority of the Kristang respondents view their race as nearer the poverty end, even the Indians are considered economically better off than the Kristang group.

**Question 10:** *How much control do the following groups have over economic and business matters in Malaysia?*

**Table 8:** Control over economic and business matters

Ethnic groups	Level of economic control						Mean Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Kristang	-	25	20	5	-	-	1.33
Chinese	-	-	-	5	10	35	3.83
Malays	-	-	-	8	17	25	3.61
Indians	-	13	17	5	5	10	2.20

\* 0 No control at all

5 Major control

According to Table 8, the Chinese are considered to have a major control of economic and business matters followed by the Malays and then the Indians. The Kristangs view themselves as having the least control over economic and business matters in the country.

## 9. Discussions

Analysis of responses in the interviews and responses to the Attitude and Subjective Vitality (ASV) questionnaire survey reveal three main issues: the attitude of the

community towards English and PK, the mother tongue as a core value and belief systems and its impact on language maintenance.

### **9.1 The attitude towards English and PK**

Table 1 (Important languages for the children to know and learn) and Table 3 (Languages that should be spoken in the home) show the discrepancy that often exists between what speakers say is important and what speakers actually do in real life. In Table 1 English is rated as the most important language for the Kristang children to acquire while in Table 3 PK is considered as the most important language that should be spoken in the home. It is clear that although there is a strong ideological attitude towards the maintenance of PK, there is a lack of action to put it into practice.

Secondly, Malay is considered 'the most privileged language in the measure of education privilege in Malaysia (Gupta, 1997) yet despite this privileging, English continues to be held in higher regard to the national language, Malay. Interestingly, PK did not even take second place for the language that children need to know and learn. Malay and Chinese comes second and third place respectively with the community. When one's own mother tongue is not considered top or second choice, it certainly does not speak much for the significance and positive attitude the community claims regarding the importance of its language. Analysis of responses to the other questions/subsections further supports this observation.

### **9.2 The mother tongue as a core value**

In Table 2 (PK & the survival of the community), the majority (44%) of the respondents do not think that the survival of the community will be affected by the extinction of PK while 36% feels that it will. The balance 20% are not certain whether there is any relationship between the survival of the community and their language. These figures imply that there is a lack of conviction on PK as a core value for the continuity of the community. According to the theory of core values, language-centered communities possess positive attitudes towards the community language and consider the survival and existence of the group as dependant upon the preservation and maintenance of its language. For the Kristang community, Sudesh (2000) reports a positive attitude to 'save' their language but based on data from this study I would label the community's attitude towards the preservation of its language as not one of positive or negative but 'laid-back' – a matter they will attend to when they have the time and funds.

### **9.3 Belief systems and its impact on language maintenance (LM)**

The belief system of a community affects the group members' attitudes towards the use of its language. Despite critiques on the concept (see Harwood & Giles, 1994, Williams, 1992, Husband & Khan, 1982) and the need to refine and innovate the notion of EV (see Ehala & Niglas, 2007; Ehala, 2009; Ehala, 2010; Yagmur & Ehala, 2011), the questions in the ASV questionnaire have managed to serve the need to capture the Kristang community's assessment and perceptions of its group against the other racial groups on vitality items. Analyses of the responses to the ASV questionnaire indicate that the Kristang community has high vitality in their cultural significance and representation but low vitality perceptions of their economic and political status in the country which reflect the community's dissatisfaction with the distribution of wealth, economic control and political power of the community and explain the group's innate desire and goal to achieve and have access to the objective vitality resources. Given this belief system, the quest for wealth and economic betterment including their ongoing pursuit for full *bumiputra* status which would grant them access to all the benefits of the policy overshadows the urgency for language issues such as the maintenance of their mother tongue.

### **10. Conclusion**

To comprehend the Kristang community's (overt and covert) responses to its endangered language situation, one needs to take into consideration the socio-historical, socio-political, and socio-economic context of the minority group and its inter-group relations, namely, the power relations between the ruling group and the minority group and between the Kristang community and the other communities and the length of contact and sense of history with the different generation of Kristangs.

Under British rule of Malaya (1789-1957), the 'Portuguese' community was not only given a place (the Portuguese Settlement) to call their own but the British education system also opened avenues for a number of first and second generation (G1 and G2) Kristangs to better themselves with an English education system and accordingly acquire jobs in the British administration. Thus, the relationship between the ruling and the minority groups was cordial and non-threatening and therefore encouraged the learning of English as a prestigious language for interaction with the ruling power. With Malayan Independence in 1957, the power relations changed. First, fluency in Malay became the criterion for access into government service and institutions of higher learning. Secondly, the *bumiputra* policy provided privileges to certain groups of people hence minority groups such as the Kristang community felt

the brunt of this imbalance of power and opportunities. The relationship between the ruling group and the minority group was no longer relaxed: the community had to learn to be proficient in Malay yet they are not assured of acquiring jobs in the government service like they were used to during British colonial rule. The 'land issues' further aggravated the relationship as parts of the Portuguese Settlement (which the British had set aside specifically for the minority community) were 'taken away' for (Malay) government use. In addition to this, the economic success of the other ethnic groups, namely the Chinese and some of the Indian community, further contributed to the Kristang community's fear of being marginalised economically and politically. Within such a socio-political context, English followed by Malay became more important languages to learn and be proficient in than the community's mother tongue, PK.

In most speech communities language is often closely bonded with the identity of the community. For the older Kristangs speaking PK is part of the identity of being a Kristang and the sense of being 'Portuguese' or Creole is very strong among the G1 and G2 Kristangs as some of their forefathers were Portuguese. Also, the older Kristangs have lived through at least one colonial power (the British rule) and now they are under the Malay government - the experience of different cultural contexts can contribute to a heightened sense of pride for one's ancestral roots (including one's ethnic language). In contrast, the younger Kristangs were born and bred in a Malaysian society, they never had any direct contact with their Portuguese ancestral past and neither were they immersed in a totally 'Portuguese' language socialization input (by the time of British rule, most Kristang homes were already bilingual). Thus, culturally, other than their Portuguese surnames, the younger Kristangs do not share a sense of 'Portuguese' history and identity with their ancestral past and the language but rather can identify better with being Malaysian Eurasians than Creole Portuguese. As a result of these socio-political and cultural contexts, the use of PK became more and more meaningless and hence (seriously) endangered now.

To conclude, the findings of the study indicate that while economic concerns are the overt reasons for the community's lack of focus on language maintenance efforts, there are other competing priorities (covert factors) that determine the community's response to its language endangerment situation. Macro variables such as the socio-historical background, the socio-cultural values and the socio-political dynamics of minority-majority group relations in the country have a bearing on the

micro variables of attitude and language behavior of members of the community towards its LS situation.

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**Appendix 1****Land issues at the Portuguese Settlement (PS)**

Year	Land Matters	Impact/the community's response
1926	Formation of the Portuguese Settlement	-
1949	PS land declared as Crown/government land; 99 year lease granted to the RC Bishop of Malacca for the construction of the Cannosian Convent in the PS	The residents are not entitled to ownership of the land. Land at the PS can be leased out by the government.
1953	Construction of the Customs quarters	Encroachment on PS land.
1964	4424 sq. ft of land allocated to the Fisheries Dept, for the construction of its crew quarters	Encroachment on PS land.
1976	The state government issued 99 year lease titles to the residents of the PS	Confirmation that PS land does not belong to the community.
1979	The Malaysian Customs Dept. proposed to build multi-storey flats at the PS	Encroachment on PS land; a Save the Portuguese Community Committee (SPCC) was formed to call for unity among all Eurasians to save their cultural heritage.
1987	The residents' 99 year lease is reduced to a 60 years lease	Fears that the PS will one be taken away from the residents; a Land Action Committee (LAC) was formed to champion their sole rights to the land.
1994	Proposal to reclaim land along PS coast	Livelihood of the Kristang fishermen threatened; formation of the Reclamation Action Committee (RAC) to oppose the proposed reclamation.
2006; 2009	Urban Renewal Project in the PS; state government's proposal to sell Hotel Lisbon	The community was not consulted on the intended sale of Hotel Lisbon.