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A CORPUS ANALYSIS ON THE SEMANTICS OF SEMAI IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous community in Malaysia is divided into three main groups which are Proto Malay, Senoi and Negrito. Semai community is a sub-group of Senoi which is the biggest group in Malaysia. (Nicholas, 2000, p.4). As the largest indigenous community in Malaysia, Semai has mostly 42383 speakers, representing several distinct dialects. Semai language is not a written language and most Semai speak the Aslian language, related to the Austro-Asiatic and the Mon-Khmer language family of mainland Southeast Asia. As it is not a written language, of late, there is a fear that the language may face gradual erosion and finally extinction as not all Semai people speak Semai language. The rapid growth of economic, education and urbanization, have affected the Semai lifestyles and attitudes on the many aspects of life including their native language. At school, the Semai younger generations learn majority languages such as Bahasa Malaysia and English and Semai language is not the main language learnt. Some of the Semai younger generation, feel inferior to speak their mother-tongue. Furthermore, the culture or life of a tribe is very much influenced by the language they use.

The language loss also would have a tremendous effect on academic linguistics as the information and knowledge about the indigenous oral language, have much to contribute to the general corpus of knowledge in terms of the indigenous arts, traditional knowledge and cultural values. Consequently, the loss of the Semai language will have a direct impact on the Semai traditional knowledge such as the destruction of its heritage and culture. Through this research, the researcher hopes to seek the variety of meaning- making mechanisms that exists in the Semai language by specifically focusing on the figurative languages such as idioms and to help preserve the Semai language through a corpus analysis on the semantics of the oral language by compiling the idiomatic expressions that exist in their language through the daily conversations, and stories. The language of this Semai community has to be preserved as one of national heritage.

Keywords: Indigenous people, idiomatic expressions, figurative language, semantic, corpus analysis

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