LANGUAGE IN KEDAH IN LATE 19TH CENTURY - LANGUAGE SITUATION IN A MALAY STATE IN LATE 19TH CENTURY

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Abstract

This is a study of the language situation in Kedah in late 19th century based on a corpus letters of Sultan Abdul Hamid Shah of Kedah written during the period. In order to achieve a holistic picture of the linguistic situation of Kedah during that period, a two-pronged approach is applied. One is a description of the multilingual situation in Kedah. The other is the Sultan's own language choice as an individual and in carrying out his duty as ruler of the state.

KEYWORDS: SOCIETAL MULTILINGUALISM, SPEECH COMMUNITY, LANGUAGE CHOICE

Introduction

A study of language situation in a given area in history is only possible through recorded texts. The current study is based on a collection of letters left by Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah, a state in the northern part of present-day Peninsular Malaysia. The letters were given recognition by UNESCO in 2001 as World Heritage, listed under The Memory of the World Register. It is now kept in the National Archive, Kedah Branch, Alor Setar, Malaysia, bearing the category name *Surat Menyurat Sultan Abdul Hamid 1882 – 1943*. In fact, the collection itself has letters dating from 1881 C.E. (1299H), the year he was made Sultan on the death of his brother, Sultan Zainal Rashid in September of that year.

The letters of 1881 show clearly that he was already a Sultan in that year. As he was only twenty years of age, there was a council of royals to advise him, consisting of his grand-uncle, Tunku Akil, and three uncles, Tunku Yaakub, Tunku Dziauddin, and Tunku Yusof. At that time Kedah was under the indirect rule of Siam, and the new Sultan had to present himself to the King of Siam as the new ruler of Kedah. This he did about a year later, i.e. in 1882. It was on this occasion that he was given the Siamese title *Phya Cheraiburi* (King of Cheraiburi).¹ Historians seem to take the date 1882 as the beginning of his kingship, disregarding the fact that he was already crowned as Sultan in his own state in 1881. (Badriyah Haji Salleh, 2015).² When this happens, they have unwittingly deleted a whole year in which the Sultan was a rightful ruler to the Kedah throne, legitimately crowned by a council of Kedah royals for the purpose. In so doing, an important Malay tradition has been undermined for an external one.

These letters tell a story of the speech communities in Kedah during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid, and the choice of language in the different domains in the daily life of the society. In addition, they also depict the Sultan's choice of language when interacting with different personalities through his letters. These two approaches in dealing with letters as a source of data provides a holistic picture of

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the language situation in Kedah in late 19th century.

The Corpus

This study focuses on a portion of the extremely large corpus, and that is the part defined by the time frame 1881 to 1895 C.E. (equivalent to the 1299 to 1313H of the Muslim calendar). This period bears witness to an intensity of correspondence between the Sultan and personalities in Siam, i.e. the king of Siam, senior ministers in the kingdom, and governors in the provinces under the suzerainty of Siam. The collection within this time frame also comprises letters sent to other personalities, i.e. the Malay rulers, and British officials in Penang, as well as the Sultan's own subjects, but these are few compared to those sent to Siam. After 1895, correspondence with Siam seems to have petered out. Letters from the Sultan after this date are mostly directed to Malay rulers of other states, officials in the Kedah government, and the British in Penang as well the British Advisor of Kedah.

The word *letters* which has been attributed to the collection is the translation of the Malay word *surat*, which can be interpreted in two ways. One is the traditional letter, i.e. a form of communication in writing where the participants or interactants (i. e. the sender and the recipient) are clearly indicated by their personal names with or without other designations. Due to the high social status of the recipients, this category of letters follows a format, opening with appropriate salutations, followed by the message itself (which may run into several parts in consonance with the length of the letter), and a closing statement. (See Asmah Haji Omar 2014 for a detailed study of these letters). In this article they are referred to as 'letter(s)'.

The other interpretation which can be given to the word *surat* is also a form of communication but the participants are wholly or partly de-personalised. These are documents relating to ownership of properties, taxes, laws in use, gifts and donations, invoices and receipts, censuses etc.; circulars to local chieftains concerning the implementation of new regulations; police reports on crimes committed; judgments of court cases, and the like. These *surat* do not have a uniform format, and for the purpose of the discussion in this article they are referred to as 'non-traditional *surat*'.

In the whole corpus of 1881 – 1895 C.E. there are about a thousand *surat* which are almost equally divided between the letters and the non-traditional *surat*, i.e. about 500 items in each category. In terms of length which also means the quantity of language used, the traditional letters far exceed the other category. In their original forms, both categories are rendered in the *Jawi* (Malayised Arabic) writing but have been transliterated into the Romanised script. (See Asmah Haji Omar, 2013, Chapter 2).

Almost all the traditional letters of the period under consideration originated from the Sultan himself, through a dictation to *jurutulis* (literally 'one who takes a dictation'). All the letters sent to the king of Siam, his representatives, and governors of the provinces within the kingdom, end with a statement that the letter was dictated in two scripts (*huruf*), the *Jawi* and Siamese scripts, and that the contents were the same. What this means is that the letter has two different language versions – Malay and Siamese, each identified by its own script. The Sultan himself was a Malay-Siamese bilingual having had his education in Bangkok, in the school known as Pensiri attended by Kedah royal sons together with those of Siamese aristocrats. In some of the letters he used the word *rencana* (dictation) at the beginning of the letter to inform the recipient that the letter was dictated by himself to his two *jurutulis*, or secretaries in our modern sense.

The question that arises is: How was the dictation conducted? There could have been two possibilities - to dictate in succession, beginning with one language and continue with the other; and to dictate

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simultaneously. The first alternative runs the risk of resulting in a divergence of information in the message, besides the fact that it takes more time. The second ensures that the information given in the two versions are the same, and there is no loss of time. Of the two, the second seems to have been a better choice for the Sultan, especially when his main concern was that the contents of one should equal that of the other⁴. He must have used the strategy of code-switching between Malay and Siamese, and this can be inferred from a letter addressed to the Governor of Senggora (present-day Songkhla), that the letter concerned only had a Malay version, as the Siamese language assistant at the time of preparing the letter had gone on leave to the Langkawi Island. This means that the two versions are not the result of two successive dictations, or even a translation from one language-version to the other.

The language used by the Sultan in the letters is the Kedah dialect of the written or literary variety. What this signifies is that the dialect had a spoken as well as a written form. The latter variety is used in Kedah literary texts which are now included as classical Malay literature, the most known being the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (a prose form), *Hilayat Terong Pipit* (also a prose form), and *Sha'ir Sultan Maulana* (a verse form). Kedah laws in the old days reflect the same language variety in use as the one in which those texts were written. The word used to refer to this language variety, be it spoken or written, was *loghat* 'language' (taken from Arabic *lughat*). So it was the *loghat* of Kedah that was official language of the state in the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The word *bahasa* was used to mean the Malay language in general.

A word equivalent to *dialect* in English, which suggests low variety speech as opposed to the high variety represented by the standard language, did not exist until the choice was made of a standard form of Malay (based on the Johor dialect) after 1948 when Kedah joined the other Malay states as part of the Federation of Malaya, as a British Protectorate. The status of the Kedah *loghat* (as it is with the *loghat* in other Malay states) has since been taken over by the standard language. Although Kedah was under the indirect rule of Siam, there was no coercion on Kedah to use Siamese in the governance of the state. And bilinguals of Malay-Siamese were only those in high office in the state. All instruments of administration from the Sultan's palace were carried out in the Kedah dialect, except in the correspondence with Siam where both Kedah Malay and Siam shared a common role.

Speech communities in Kedah in late 19th Century

In the period under consideration Kedah was already a multilingual society. Besides the Malay speech community, there were the sea-people, the Siamese and the Chinese who had their own speech communities which were geographically delineated. There were also residents from other countries who spoke their native languages but did not form speech communities of their own, and these were the Arabs and the Indians.

The Kedah Malay Speech Community

The Kedah Malay speech community consisted of indigenous Malays who spoke the variety of Malay known as the Kedah dialect. In today's language situation, this dialect has a geo-linguistic distribution well beyond its borders. In the Malay Peninsula itself, it also covers Perlis and Penang which were once territories of the greater kingdom of Kedah. The dialect spills into Perak, along its eastern border into Gerik and as far as Taiping to the south. To the north this dialect extends through Perlis into Thailand as far as the Isthmus of Kra, covering the greater part of Southern Thailand where the Malay population still speak this speech system although there has been a considerable shift to Thai as the dominant language. However, in the southeastern part of Southern Thailand, i.e. Narathiwat, Yala and Patani, the variety used is Patani Malay which is closer to the Kelantan Malay dialect.

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The Kedah dialect area as described above had already existed in the period under discussion. An inference can be drawn that the use of Malay in Southern Thailand was more intensified at the end of the 19th century, in the sense that it had more first-language speakers then than it does today. At that time although the greater part of the region was already under Siamese rule, the language policy stipulating the use of Thai in all schools for the purpose of assimilating all ethnic groups into Thai society had not yet existed. It only came into being in 1921 with the implementation of the 1921 Education Act. (Priwan, 1974, p. 179).

Kedah Malay, as mentioned previously, was the language used for all purposes and it covered almost all domains, including in the domain of governance. There is no mention in any of the letters of an accepted standard variety as opposed to other varieties in any of the letters. If there is any divergence in usage, it is only in the salutations at the beginning of the letters and in the use of titles be they royal or hereditary, or the prefixing of designations according to the recipients' status in society, etc. In general, and with the exception of a couple of letters to the Sultan of Perak, the Sultan's language usage does not seem to include lexical items that are known as *bahasa sastera* (literary language) as one sees in letters of Malay Sultans of the past centuries. This is despite the fact that during the period under discussion, there had already been in existence literary prose and verse forms written in the Kedah dialect, such as *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* and *Sha'ir Sultan Maulana* which have now been placed in the category of classical Malay literature. This shows that the Kedah dialect at that time had its own presence within its own dialect boundaries, before the Federation of Malaya (1948) came into being, when it had to give way to standard Malay.

The Orang Laut/Urak Lawoi' Speech Community

Orang Laut (literally 'sea-people') inhabited the islands off the west coast of Southern Thailand, in the Andaman Sea, and today the majority of them are in Adang Island, the largest in the archipelago. This region (about 64 nautical miles to the north of the Langkawi Islands) was part of the Kedah kingdom before it was transferred to Thailand following the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. Using their own dialect, they are usually referred to as *Urak Lawoi'*. Not much is mentioned of them in the letters, except that Kedah was collecting taxes from birds' nests and other sea produce from the islands collected by these people. The *Urak Lawoi'* language is a dialect of Malay quite different from but showing a close affinity with the Kedah dialect (Asmah Haji Omar, 2015: Chapter 19). Today there are a few hundred of the sea-people left, but it can be surmised that there were more of them in late 19th century. In the *Sha'ir Sultan Maulana*, an account of the war between Siam and Burma during which Siam was able to wrest Ayuthaya from the Burmese, these sea-people were part of the Kedah army which was obliged to fight on the side of Siam.

The Siamese Speech Community – the Siamese Belt

The Siamese community as reflected in the letters occupied the northern border of Kedah, from Kodiang in the west (northward to the south of Perlis), extending eastwards to Jitra, covering almost the whole region of Kubang Pasu, and from there to the eastern part of Kedah covering Sik and Baling. This region will henceforth be referred to as the *Siamese Belt*.

The presence of the Siamese and the easy passage of the people across the border can be deduced from letters narrating on events involving them, such as theft and robbery which were brought to the attention of the Sultan. An example is a message in a letter from the Governor of Senggora, (present-day Songkhla) to the Sultan complaining about the theft of twelve buffaloes belonging to a Muslim Indian in his province, which were taken to Kedah. The Sultan conducted an investigation, and in his letter to the Governor dated 2nd Zulkaedah 1308H he informed the latter that the thief was a Siamese who took

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the animals to Jitra in Kedah. He ordered the chieftain (*penghulu*) in Sadao (which was under Kedah, but now is part of Thailand) to co-operate with Nai Keow Nai Kiat, the chief in Senggora, in the investigation into the theft and assist him in taking the buffaloes back to Senggora.

Smuggling of buffaloes and cattle was rife on the Siam-Kedah border, and this motivated the Sultan to suggest to the Governor in a letter dated 18th Zulkaedah of the same year, that there be a border pass between Kedah, i.e. at the Sadao border, and Senggora, to mitigate the situation. Border passes were also issued at ports and landing places in Kuala Muda and the Adang Island. The former had emerged to be a passage for the transportation of opium from Penang into Kedah, while the latter was to guard the entrance to the mainland from the direction of the Andaman Sea in the west.

Another attestation as to the existence of the Siamese Belt is the presence of Siamese (Buddhist) temples, known as *vat*; the Malay term as given in the letters is *wat*. For any group of people not just the Siamese, a place of worship indicates that they have formed a community in which they are able to practise their religious belief, besides communicating in their common language. The temples (until today) can be found in the Siamese Belt. At the request of Siam, the Sultan carried out a census on the Siamese temples in Kedah, inclusive of Sadao. The results of the census showed that in the Siamese Belt there were 15 such temples, with Padang Kerbau having the most, six in all, i.e. Tekai, Teming and Teloi each had two, while Sadao, Jitra and Baling each had one. There were in totality 86 priests (*sami*) and priestesses (*endin*). Most of the priests had the Siamese title of honour, *Khun*. The results of the census were sent to Bangkok in a letter dated 28th Zulhijjah 1308H.

Place names in Siamese which remain until today bear witness to the presence of their speakers in the Siamese Belt, such as the names Jitra, Teloi, Tekai, Kodiang, Koplu, Koluang, Asun, Hosba, Canglun, and Baling, to name a few. The names of these localities and the presence of the temples can be taken as indicators that in each of these localities there was a sizeable number of people who formed a community. However, with the passing of time and with changes in the socio-cultural and political situation in Kedah in tune with those taking place in the other Malay states, the Siamese people of Malaysia today do not seem to be as visible as the Chinese or the Indians. This may be due to the speed of the migration process of the two latter groups, especially with the intervention of the British in the state after the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 when Siam ceded its indirect rule of Kedah to the British.

The Hokchew and Teochew Speech Communities

The Chinese have a clear presence in the letters, particularly in the non-traditional *surat* – in the account of expenses of the Sultan and lists of taxes collected. They were involved in almost every sector of trade – opium, tin ore, rice, birds' nests, rattan, timber, poultry, gambier, and salt. Their localities as mentioned in the letters were Sanglang in the north, Kota Setar the state capital, and Kuala Muda and Kulim in the south. Most of them were shopkeepers selling sundry goods. There were also jewellers and tailors, mostly in Kota Setar.

Except for the community in Kulim and nearby Karangan, where the Malays were in the minority, there is no indication of their population size as a whole or the dialect groups they belong to. Kulim was a tin-mining area, populated by the Hokchew and Teochew, and the total number was about 7,000. There was a special mention of them in the Sultan's letters to Siam due to the constant conflict between the two dialect groups. The situation was reported to Chao Phya Pol Tib in Bangkok in the Sultan's letter dated 24th Rejab 1305H, stating that there were about six thousand Chinese in Kulim and more than eight hundred in Karangan. As for Malays in Kulim there were about two to three hundred, and a much smaller group in Karangan.

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The Sultan was full of anxiety over the safety of Kedah on account of the conflict between the two groups of Chinese there, Hokchew and the Teochew, and had informed the king in Bangkok of his intention to buy guns for the purpose of quelling the conflict. In the same tone he opined that the Chinese had changed in behaviour over the years, implying that they were not recent immigrants.

The Chinese were also the subject of letters between the Sultan and the British in Penang concerning opium trading and the existence of secret societies in the British colony of Penang. In skirmishes between the gangsters, their leaders always ran off to hide in Kedah. In a letter dated 8th Zulkaedah 1309H sent to the Resident Counsellor of Penang, the Sultan referred to the Counsellor's letter of 21st June 1892 requesting him to arrest the criminals from Penang should they be in Kedah. The Sultan reported that his policemen had investigated the matter, and found that the gang leaders, Lee Hai and Ang Kim Seng, were at first in hiding in Sanglang (in North Kedah) among the Chinese community there. Later they crossed over to Perlis. The Sultan added that should the two return to Kedah, he would certainly arrest them.

Likewise, criminals living in Kedah were likely to escape to Penang. Once in the same year four Chinese stole a rowing boat as well as a fishing boat from a fellow Chinese. This happened in the Langkawi Island. The Sultan through the Crown Prince sent a letter dated 21st Sha'ban 1309 to the Resident Counsellor of Penang requesting for the latter's co-operation in arresting the criminals.

In the letters the Chinese in Langkawi, Sanglang and Alor Setar are not referred to according to their dialect groups. However, in a framework presenting the speech communities in Kedah (see Table 1 below), consideration should be given to the fact that there could have been others who belonged to dialect groups other than Hokchew and Teochew. One of the letters mentions in passing that there were Muslim Chinese from Kwangtung in Alor Setar. It can be hypothesised that the last-mentioned group of Chinese was too small in size to make a mark on the map of speech communities of Kedah, and there is also a possibility that being Muslims they had become assimilated with Malays through intermarriage.

The Indians

There is a problem in the categorisation of the Indians based on the languages they spoke as there is no mention of any language from India spoken in Kedah. There is also no information on the places of origin in India of the people referred as Indians. In the letters the Sultan appears to divide them into three categories based on religion – the *Keling* (who were the Muslims), the Sikh or Sepahi, and the Hindus. Of these three groups, the one which can be identified with a region in India is the Sikh or the Sepahi, and that is Punjab, with Punjabi as their language. As for the Muslims, in history books on Malaya, Muslim Indians are mentioned to be among the early missionaries of Islam who came to the Malay Peninsula; and they were from Gujerat; hence, it can be inferred that the *Keling* group was from Gujerat, with their Gujerati language. But Muslim Indians could also be Bengali from present-day Bangladesh, or Muslims from Southern India. Hence, the language referred to in the letters as *bahasa Keling* (language of the Keling) could be any of these, or even two or three different languages spoken by Muslim Indians. As for the Hindus, they could be from anywhere in India, and even Sri Lanka; like the Muslims they too belonged to more than one ethnolinguistic group.

Of the three Indian groups, the Muslims seem to occupy more space in the narratives of the Sultan as given in his letters. Comments are made in some of the letters that there was a deluge of them entering Kedah from Penang with Kuala Muda and Kulim as their favourite destinations, a reason being that these places were close to Penang. The Muslims were merchants plying their articles of commerce between Penang and Kedah. In the appendices of his letters sent to Bangkok on the subject of setting up telegraph posts in Kedah, there is mention of buying equipment for this particular purpose from

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Muslim Indians. The names of merchants which appear in those documents are Maula Abdullah, Rautin Naina, Ali Thamby, and Sheikh Maidin. The population of the Muslim Indians could be quite large, judging from the fact that among them were those who were employed to be interpreters in the court of law, from their language to Malay, and vice versa. This is an indication that there were Indians who were able to read and write in Malay; and this skill could have come naturally to them especially when they intermarried with the Malays.

As the Malays were also Muslims, it was easy for intermarriages to take place between them and the Keling Indians, and with the passing of time the latter became one with the Malay community. The descendants of intermarriages of Malays and Muslim Indians are known as *Jawi Peranakan*. (Halimah Mohd. Said and Zainab Abdul Majid, 2004). Wan Yunus, the interpreter mentioned in one of the Sultan's letters to Siam on a court case, who was able to handle texts in both Malay and *bahasa Keling* (the Keling language), could have been a *Jawi Peranakan*.

The Sikhs are ethnically Punjabi; and the term *Sikh* denotes their religious faith. In the letters they are described as soldiers in the service of the Sultan, or *sepahi* (from a North Indian word *sepoy* used by the British in India to mean 'soldiers in the Indian army'). They are specifically mentioned in the letters for their role in putting down the conflict between the Hokchew and the Teochew in Kulim.

Very little is mentioned of the Hindus except that they were manual labourers (coolies). This group could be much smaller than the Muslim group and that their arrival in Kedah was much later than their Muslim counterpart. This inference is made based on information that the Indian labourers came to Kedah later than 1895, to work in the building of the railway and the opening of the rubber estates in Sungai Petani in Central Kedah.

The Arabs

Like Muslim Indians, Arab men intermarried with Malay women, and became part of the Malay community, including becoming members of the ruling class. In the 19th century, there must have been a great number of them who had become Malays. Unlike Muslim Indians who have left clear evidence a community which resulted in their intermarriage with the Malays in the *Jawi Peranakan*, there is no such community of descendants of Malay-Arab intermarriages in Kedah (or in any of the Malay states). Their ancestry can be identified only by their names which are prefixed with the hereditary titles of *Syed*, *Sheikh*, and *Sharif* (for the men), and *Sharifah* (for the women). A most illustrious example is Syed Hussein Jamalullail who married a member of the Kedah royal house, and later became the first Raja of Perlis, once a district in the greater kingdom of Kedah. Assimilation into the Malay ethnic group has resulted in Arabs using the Malay language as their mother tongue, and as such there has been no Arabic speech community in Kedah (or in any of the other Malay states) to this day.

A summary of the speech communities as derived from the Sultan's letters is given in the table below.

Table 1: Speech communities reflected in the Sultan's letters

No.	Speech Community	Native	Non-Native	Process of Settlement
1.	Kedah Malay	+	-	-
2.	Orang laut	+	-	-
3.	Siamese	-	+	Cross-border
4.	Hokchew	-	+	Migration

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5.	Teochew	-	+	Migration
6.	Other Chinese Dialect(s)	-	+	Migration

The Keling and other Indian groups are not included in the Table above because there is no indication in the letters as to their localities – meaning that they had not yet formed communities of their own. Communities of people speaking Indian languages in Malaysia started to emerge in Kedah only with the intervention of the British at the dawn of the 20th century. And Indian communities that appeared were the non-Keling ones, as the Keling easily became part of the Malay community.

Language Choice of the Sultan

Language choice, in sociolinguistics, refers to the preference of language users for a variety among other varieties of a particular language, or for a language among several languages in a multilingual community, for use in specific situations. This study focuses on the language choice of the Sultan as an individual as well as the ruler of his state. The discussion below shows his choice is determined by the type of relationship he had with the recipient of his letter.

As ruler, the Sultan had carried out the tradition of governing his state using the Kedah Malay dialect. This was also his language of choice in his correspondence with Siam and foreign governments, as well as merchant companies. He was repeating the tradition of his predecessors as evident from the letters and document kept in the Kedah Department of Archive in Alor Setar. Of the speech systems of the communities given in Table 1, it is only Kedah Malay and Siamese that had official roles in the Sultan's business in governing his state. The use of the other languages or dialects were confined within the boundaries of their specific community.

The Kedah Malay dialect, besides being the official language in the governance of the state, was also the common language or the lingua franca of the whole state; that is to say it was the only form of communication between the different communities shown in the above table. Communication between members of the different speech communities and the Sultan, and between the Sultan and village chiefs was in the Kedah dialect, as evident from the letters. A letter from a Chinese or an Indian could have been written by the sender himself, or by a native speaker of Malay; either way it shows that the dialect was the accepted medium of official communication. The law court provided interpreters for those who could not understand Malay. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Malay of the Kedah variety was used in letters to personalities in the government of Siam and its provinces. Letters to the Resident Counsellor in British-governed Penang and the British Resident in Perak (Sir Frank Swettenham) as well as to the Governor of the Straits Settlements in Singapore were rendered in Malay with no English-language version, and so were letters from the British to the Sultan.

As Siam held power over Kedah, letters to the Siamese royal court as well as to governors of Siamese provinces had to be written in the two-language versions of Kedah Malay and Siamese as mentioned above. However, Siamese was not used as an official language in letters to officials in Kedah, or even to the Siamese people in the Siamese Belt, a region which was also populated by native Malays. In this region, as the Siamese acquired the language of the Malays, so did the Malays of the Siamese language. Today Malays who are Malay-Siamese bilinguals still make up the population of the Siamese Belt, and are referred to by other Kedah Malays as *Samsam* (meaning 'half-Siamese'). Members of the Kedah royal family until the 1960's used to be Malay-Siamese bilinguals, but since then the place of the Siamese language as a high language has been taken over by English.⁴

In its use in society each language/dialect is seen to have certain social functions, or at least one, and this is its functional load. In Table 2 the functional load in the use of language/dialect in the multilingual

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society of Kedah is assigned with a numerical value. Four types of functional load are identified, and the optimum value for each is 2, making the total score as 8. Kedah Malay has the optimal score of 8. Siamese has 5; its score for lingua franca is 1 as this function is restricted to the Siamese Belt between Siamese and Malay; 1 for official use taking into consideration that all official matters between the Sultan and Siam had to be in Siamese; 1 for inter-state correspondence, i.e. only with Siam. All the other speech systems in the entry manage to score the minimum, as their use was confined to their own community.

Table 2: Functional Load of languages/Dialects

No.	Speech Community	Community	Lingua Franca	Official	Inter- states	Score
1.	Kedah Malay	2	2	2	2	8
2.	Urak Lawoi'	2	-	-	-	2
3.	Siamese	2	1	1	1	5
4.	Hokchew	2	-	-	-	2
5.	Teochew	2	-	-	-	2
6.	Other Chinese Dialect	2	-	-	-	2
7.	Keling/Muslim Indian	2	-	-	-	2

The social rating of speech systems in a community or society can be done according to the theory of diglossia as proposed by Ferguson 1959, also in Hymes (ed.), 1966, pp. 429 - 438), and Fishman (1967). An application of this theory to the letters shows that Kedah Malay and Siamese can be placed on the same level of high language (H), while others are on the low level (L). (See Asmah Haji Omar, 2013, pp. 114 – 120). The same ranking given to Siamese as to Malay is based on the social functions and prestige of the Siamese language as a language that was used in Siam, not just in the Siamese Belt in Kedah. If consideration is given only to the use of Siamese in Kedah, as given in Table 2, the result would show that Siamese would be on a level lower than Malay, but above the other speech system; the result in this case is a triglossia.

Conclusion

This article sets out to depict a picture of the language situation in Kedah in the period 1881 – 1895. This is just a small slice of the Sultan's reign because he went on to rule for another 48 years until his demise in 1943. As the focus is on societal multilingualism and the language choice of the Sultan, the social situation in Kedah especially with regard to the speech communities form the background of the study, with the purpose of giving a clearer picture of the language situation in Kedah in late 19th century.

Societal multilingualism in the state can be said to be at a young stage in the period defined by this study. The Siamese speech community was the first non-Malay community, and the earliest to settle in a region which was Malay in origin. After the Siamese community, it was the Chinese although their arrival can be said to be much later than the Muslim Indians and the Arabs; the latter two were easily absorbed in the Malay community.

Today societal multilingualism in Kedah has metamorphosed with a change in size of those communities that had already been there. The Siamese speech community in the Siamese Belt has decreased in size due to intermarriages mainly with the Chinese with whom they share a common religion, Buddhism, and hence their absorption into the Chinese community that was expanding at the dawn of the 20th century. The increase in the size of the Chinese community has involved a change in the composition of the dialect communities. With the closing down of the tin mining industry in Kulim,

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the Hokchew and Teochew dialect speakers have become minority groups. They have been taken over by the Hokkiens who began to populate the urban areas at the beginning the new century.

There have been additional speech communities from the sub-continent of India, with the Tamil speaking community being the most visible compared to the Bangalis and the Punjabis. The Tamil speakers were brought into the state by British and other European companies to work on the rubber estates at the beginning of the 20th century, and with the rubber industry came the railway. Most of the rubber estates in Kedah are in the central region, i.e. the Sungai Petani area and its vicinity, and the largest Tamil-speaking community in the state is in this region. All these changes were in line with socio-economic development in the whole of the Malay Peninsula, although the composition and size of the racial and dialect groups may not be the same from state to state. (A detailed study of the rise in societal multilingualism in Malaysia is given in Asmah Haji Omar, 1992, Chapter 1: The Linguistic Scenery in Malaysia).

An examination into the Sultan's choice of language in his letters provides an insight to the relationship between the Sultan and his superiors and colleagues in Siam, as well as with the British. The letters also show his stand on language. Although he was proficient in English and had native speakers of English as his assistants, his letters to the British were in Malay, and in response they too wrote to him in Malay. There was no English-language version of these letters. Due his tenacity in perpetuating this tradition, Kedah had a record of not using English as an official language during the British rule compared to the Federated Malay States of Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang.

Notes

1. The term *Cheraiburi* was the official name for Kedah; in colloquial Siamese, even to this day it is *Saiburi*, which is a phonological variation of Cheraiburi.
2. In listing out the transliterated Romanised version of the letters according to the 'books' in which they appear, Badriyah seems to have missed out the letters of 1881. See Badriyah Haji Salleh, 2015, p. 144. In a forum in Kedah in November 2016, a well-known historian of Malaysia said that in records of the Siamese and the British (two erstwhile powers who ruled over Kedah "indirectly", in succession of one another), the date given is 1882. So historians have to accept this date.
3. There does not seem to be any trace of the letters written in Siamese in the Archives in Malaysia. No one seems to know whether they still exist in Bangkok. The same can be said of those letters written by the Siamese rulers and governors which were addressed to the Sultan and mentioned in the Sultan's response to them.
4. Sultan Abdul Hamid and his brothers, as told in the letters, were educated in Bangkok, and while they were there they were under the supervision of the royal palace of Siam. There was a letter in the collection concerning the Sultan's brother, Tunku Mahmud, who was still in school in Bangkok, who was very homesick and wanted to return to Kedah. The Sultan had to write to the King of Siam for permission to bring him home for a short break. This tradition continued to the sons of the Sultan, among them the first Prime Minister of Malaya/Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra.
5. The theory of diglossia was first introduced by Charles Ferguson in his article, 'Diglossia' (1959, also published in Hymes 1964, pp. 429 - 439).

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