

Language maintenance or language shift among the Punjabi Sikh community in Malaysia?

MAYA KHEMLANI DAVID, IBTISAM M. H. NAJI, and
SHEENA KAUR

Abstract

This study of the Punjabi Sikh community in Petaling Jaya, using a 85-item questionnaire directed at 312 respondents, attempts to determine language choice and the dominant language of the community in the home and religious domains and with different interlocutors. The findings show that the community is shifting to English and/or using a mixed code that consists of three languages.

Aim of study

The aim of this study is to determine the language choices of the Punjabi Sikh community of Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, with the ultimate objective of determining if they are still maintaining their ethnic language. Although no research has been conducted on the language choices of the community, it is believed that Malaysian Sikhs of today tend to speak English (Sidhu 1991).

The country of origin

The original homeland of the Sikhs is Punjab, which lies in the northern province of India. Punjab is primarily an alluvial plain, which rises on the north to the foothills of the Himalayas. This geographical area contains a wide range of religious groups — Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims — all of whom go under the generic “Punjabi.” The Sikhs are primarily Punjabis for they claim Punjab to be their homeland and share with other Punjabis a common language (Punjabi), homeland (Punjab), distinctive dress (*salwar-kameez* for the women), history, family pattern, art, and value system (Helweg 1979).