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# TRILINGUAL NEWSPAPERS IN SABAH: THE NEEDS AND ITS EFFECT TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

The state of the local press industry in Sabah, Malaysia, pioneered by trilingual newspapers such as *Daily Express*, *New Sabah Times*, and *Borneo Post*, seems to be losing ground when they stop or reduce their Kadazandusun sections due to a major financial crisis. Therefore, this study will examine its needs and their effect on the local communities in Sabah. By using the Uses and Gratification theory, in-depth interviews were conducted. Results of the study found that trilingual newspapers in Sabah play an important role in both the political aspects and the local wisdom of the state of Sabah. In addition, this study also draws attention that the use of the standard Kadazandusun language in Sabah local newspapers affects the inter-ethnic relations of the Kadazandusun community itself.

**Keywords:** *newspapers, ethnic media, language standardization, Malaysia*

## INTRODUCTION

Printed media in any form including newspapers helps to establish an avenue to deliver information regarding politics, culture, economy, society, as well as religion. Local newspapers have been and continue to be an important source of information for many people. In Sabah, Malaysia (formerly known as North Borneo), a significant influence on the development of newspapers can be traced back to the colonial period, which lasted from 1882 to 1946. *North Borneo Herald and Official Gazette* that has been published on 14 March 1883 became the first colonial newspaper in Sabah and was adopted by the local Sabahan population (Jabatan Cetak Kerajaan Sabah, nd).

After the end of colonialism, local Sabahans continue to rely on printed newspapers to disseminate information in their communities. Based on Arkib Negeri Sabah (ww2.sabah.gov.my), it is estimated that at least 33 periodicals have been established in Sabah since then. These include a diverse range of monolingual, bilingual, and trilingual newspapers published between 1883 and 2020 in a variety of languages. Apart from using Malay (national

language) and English language as their lingua franca to communicate with their readers, trilingual newspapers also chose to utilize Kadazandusun language as their medium to reach the readers since Kadazandusun has been considered the prominent ethnic in this state.

Naturally, these newspapers create an avenue to highlight the language and the ethnicity itself. As a result, they qualified the trilingual newspapers published in Sabah to be the ethnic newspaper of the state. The demand for this newspaper format (trilingual) helps not just the *New Sabah Times* but also two of its successors *Daily Express* (1963) and *Borneo Post* (1978) to survive for over five decades. Moreover, as Shoemaker (1999) said that the information-seeking process from the newspapers is part of the modern fad and is expected in a setting with a variety of ethnic or races and well-established formats to the people of East Malaysia.

Trilingual newspapers such as *New Sabah Times*, *Daily Express*, and *Utusan Borneo* demonstrate that these periodicals are still in high demand by readers despite the presence of mainstream Malaysian newspapers such as *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian*, and *New Straits Times* in the market (Mohd Safar, 2013). However, the ubiquitous of advanced technology such as the Internet as a new medium has resulted in a plummet in the consumption of printed newspapers worldwide. This has caused a decreasing number of newspapers copy sales from 2012 until now (Shahrul Nazmi & Normah, 2015). More sadly, the *Daily Express* which has been published since 1963, ended its Kadazan section on 30 May 2020 (Lee, 2020). This means, there are fewer newspapers that have Kadazandusun section.

The local printed press industry in Sabah is slowly moving into the online version as one of the proposed 're-strategizing' methods. However, the editors and writers involved need to understand the type of article or news that is considered worthy for the readers for the local newspaper to stay relevant especially if they wish to maintain the Kadazandusun section.

This is because the vital aspect of media is the language of choice. Language is the standardized 'code' that carries out the information for the readers to decode later. However, the fact that trilingual newspapers in Sabah dedicated a specific column printed in Kadazandusun language which is one of the ethnic languages in Sabah in a way is a manifestation of language standardization and it could be either unifying or divisive in nature. Barlocco (2008) argues that language normative has been widely used as a 'regular method' to create language autonomy in many pluralistic communities. In European countries, for instance, to overcome the language diversity and for the sake of nation-building activists have implemented normalization by declaring the English language as the official language of the country.

Language standardization although considered a regular method to 'normalize' the multiethnic society such as the Sabahans community for the sake of nationalism and the spirit of togetherness, it is also considered the source of a much bigger problem. This is because the method used may also lead to race/ethnic segregation among the diverse community. In many cases, language normalization has the tendency to generate questions affiliated with equality, recognition, freedom, identity, democracy, and cultural preservation (Schmidt, 2006). Hence, emphasizing one native language in an official printed medium might make it hard to achieve a unified community. As a result, the trilingual format used in prominent local newspapers in Sabah might create a 'wall' and promotes segregation among the community. Therefore, this study intends to assess the roles as well as the effects of language standardization on trilingual newspapers.

## Ethnic Media

Community journalism whirls around various aspects of a community including culture, history, economics, identity, values, policy debates, public opinions, and more. Community journalism scholars such as Robinson (2014), Lessman (2003), and Reader and Hatcher (2011) find it hard to define the concept of 'community' in community journalism. Some scholars argue that the term 'community' in community journalism refers only to the geographical aspect of the community while others believe that it can refer to the community of interests, such as science and environmental issues (Reader & Hatcher, 2011). Nonetheless, community journalism is a new term that was coined to represent any non-mainstream media including the ethnic media (Deuze, 2006).

Ethnic media are effective social forces in the way which people from minority communities know about themselves and their collective identification relative to that of the majority community (Gordon & Mitchell-Kernan, 1982). However, most literature reviews about the ethnic media that exist today are often seen overlapping with the international media, immigrant media, and minority media (Georgiou, 2006; Johnson, 2010; Budarick, 2020). Yet the presence and exposure to ethnic media do not influence readers' self-confidence. Nevertheless, ethnic media, however, has proved capable of improving ethnic identity and efficiency because the mainstream media have the potential to lower the self-confidence of readers from ethnic minorities (Ramasubramanian et al, 2017). Furthermore, media are important transmitters of cultural signals and play a vital part in moulding culture, but the process is complicated (Weist, 2016).

Ethnic media is primarily state-owned. The government or the regional government invests a large amount of money in ethnic media support. Although non-state media outlets exist, their numbers, circulation, and audience reach are lower compared to the state-owned. And they are generally supported by advertising, subscriptions, corporate or individual donations, or the supply of specialized services, such as the creation and broadcasting of customized video snippets in Russian and ethnic languages (Gladkova et al, 2019). This media is needed when marketers or businesses target ethnic consumers because ethnic consumers with higher ethnic identity are also more likely to purchase and recommend products advertised in ethnic media (Hei & Lee, 2018).

The development of local newspaper industry in Sabah is closely related to the development of its education system. In 1931 only 5,461 out of 205,218 natives of East Malaysia are considered literate (Jones, 1960; Mat Zin, 2004). The establishment of missionary schools in Elopura (now known as Sandakan) and Penampang by the Christian missionaries was the starting point of the development of the education system in Sabah (Mat Zin, 2004). Interestingly, to achieve their main objective, which is Christianization through education, the missionaries had included the Dusun language as part of their curriculum. This explains the increase in literacy rate among the Dusun natives in Sabah.

Tun Fuad Stephens established his very first paper, *The Sabah Times* on 21 January 1953 before he decided to merge the paper and name it *The North Borneo News and Sabah Times* in 1954 that utilized Malay, English as well as Kadazan languages to convey information to its readers. The existence of *The North Borneo News and Sabah Times* as the pioneer of trilingual newspapers in Sabah is a manifestation of the spirit of Kadazan nationalism or 'Kadazanisation' (Hiroyuki, 2001). This shows the Tun Fuad Stephens's efforts on normalizing and popularizing Kadazan as the 'superior' ethnic in Sabah. Stephens was disturbed by the

fact that his fellow Sabah natives were not politically literate hence, the newspaper aims to educate the Sabah natives, especially to introduce them to local politics. The newly established newspaper creates an avenue for the exact purpose of ‘uniting the same-speech group of indigenous people’ (Granville-Edge & Devadason, 1999). Besides that, the existence of the trilingual newspapers in Sabah is the effect of the awareness to not just maintain but also to uplift the Kadazandusun language, culture, and to provide a channel for the exact purpose of the natives of Sabah to speak their minds and a chance to be heard (Tiung et al, 2013).

Prior to previous literature on ethnic media, it was found that many of them focus on the effects of ethnic media on the interethnic relationship within a polyethnic setting (usually a migrant’s community) (Mat Zin, 2004). Previous works also slowly created a path of discussion that focuses on the acceptance and views among the Kadazandusun intra-ethnic community. A study by Totu and Mohd Yakin (2014) found that the columns do not concern most of the students. His research shows that trilingual newspapers in Sabah mostly translate news to a different language rather than conveying different news to different communities using the Kadazandusun language. Besides that, research by Tiung, Othman, Nayan, and Jaymess (2013), indicates that the focus of the news is diversified, which includes multicultural issues and covers not just the subjects of the Sabah indigenous communities, but everything considered that can benefit them.

### ***Language Standardization in Trilingual Newspapers***

Language normative is not something new as it was long used to create language autonomy in many pluralistic communities. Although this act is trying to ‘normalize’ the multi-ethnic society such as the Sabahans community, for the sake of nationalism, there is no doubt this action also leads to ‘race/ethnic consciousnesses among the diverse community as language normalization has the tendency to generate questions affiliated with equality, recognition, freedom, identity, democracy, as well as cultural preservation (Patten, 2001). Emphasizing one native language in an official printed medium will make it hard to achieve a unified community (inter and intra) in Sabah when forging unity itself is already one of the major challenges towards achieving the National Transformation 2050 (Lee, 2017).

Within the language-sensitive literature, existing work on language standardization, especially using lingua franca, portrays standardized language as a significant resource that promotes communication, knowledge sharing, and coordination among groups (Heikkilä, & Smale, 2011). Standardized language has also been proposed to ensure market entry, control, and access to cultural knowledge that is not easily translated (Luo, & Shenkar, 2006). A study by Hossain and Veenstra (2017) indicates that the presence of an ethnic language as a lingua franca in a bilingual media influences audience’s emotion as the use of the language can generate double consciousness in its audience. While this research focuses on the diasporic community, it addresses the question of language choice in any medium of communication.

Researchers have identified several issues that can arise as a result of language standardization, including threats to language diversity (Heller, 2010), the potential for disrespect for employee rights and identities (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2008), and the possibility of employee resentment and resistance to language standardization and control over communication practices at work (Bermann, 2005). A study by Mat Zin Mat Kib (2003) that explores the development of various ethnic groups in Sabah, emphasizes the fact that

all census of the Sabah population since the 1960s is confusing as well as cluttered. Firstly, it is a fact that the Dusuns are the predecessor of every ethnic as well as sub-ethnics in Sabah. However, it is also a fact that there are many languages (at least 50) as well as at least 80 dialects used by different ethnicities in the state.

Stephen's action to introduce the term "Kadazan" to represent the 'city natives' as well as how he chose as well as developed a particular native language from the Kadazan area as well as used it widely in one of his political media (newspaper) as an act to standardize the native's language had received a strong backlash from the Lotud sub-ethnic groups in Tuaran as well as Kwijau in Keningau. Hence, the tension between Stephen as well as the leader of other sub-ethnics has strengthened the statement by Barlocco (2011) regarding the act of standardizing a native language in one of the columns in the local newspaper is likely to create a gap between the natives from different ethnography in Sabah.

The conflict that ensues after the standardization is confirmed is unsurprising, since establishing a standard for the exact purpose of a minority language is not a neutral process; it has consequences for the language's standing and how language users respond to the new standard (Gordon & Mitchell-Kernan, 1982). Standardization, as well as revitalization in minority language processes, usually includes social actors whose views are disregarded. This may happen because their views are seen as excessively harsh or aggressive as well as are thus ignored.

This, in turn, provides light on the role of power in standardization processes as certain users participate in standardization processes while others are bypassed, choose not to engage, or reject standardization procedures (Lane, 2015). Language standardization also continues to be a strong way of generating or building language, establishing languages as restricted, separate entities as well as social institutions, as well as increasing the social status of those who use them (Costa et al, 2017).

## Media Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) is concerned with how a human utilizes media, among other accessible resources in the environment, to meet needs that are eventually satisfied. While the media occupies a significant portion of our lives at this point in time a day, we frequently fail to consider why we utilize a specific medium as well as the influence it has on us. Katz et al (1973) indicated that uses and gratification, which emphasize the media-audience relationship, help to provide an "advanced understanding of mass media effects for both short-run as well as long-run".

Scholars like McQuail as well as Katz et al believe on the idea that readers use media to gratify their needs. For Katz et al (1973), people act based on their desire. Similarly, instead of the media having the power to control its audience, it is up to the audience to utilise the media for their own satisfaction. Hence, the power has been shifted from the media itself to its audience as well as at the same time debunking the idea of the passive readers.

Previous literature (Katz et al, 1973; McLeod, Ward, & Tancill, 1965; Totu, 2014) determined that there are dependencies between the reasons to use media as well as the gratification desired by readers (audiences). It starts with the idea that media can clarify the user's choices. It is to say that their needs determine readers' (audiences) choice of media.

Hence, the use of U&G theory is relevant in this study as it aims to understand the reasons behind the selection of specific media by readers to gratify individuals’ needs as they are very goal oriented.

Katz et al (1973, p. 3), listed at least five reasons that are often associated with the “uses” approach, namely, values, interests, associations, social roles, as well as fashion. Meanwhile, there are five categories of audience needs that can be satisfied by consuming media as suggested by Bryant (1992), namely cognitive needs, social-integrative needs, escapist needs, affective needs, and personal-integrative needs. Laswell (1948) and Wright (1960) explain that there are at least four main functions of media namely, surveillance, correlation, entertainment, and cultural transmission. However, McQuail (1972) summarised that these are also the four ways how media can gratify readers’ needs: surveillance, identity, diversion, and personal interest or relationship.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research is based on a qualitative approach. The element of qualitative research in this study is reflected through its nature which aims to decipher human experience in the real world. This study is also qualitative in its non-numerical representation and data. The qualitative data in this study were obtained through a semi-structured interview which is conducted with an interview guide prepared beforehand.

Interviews were done with four informants as follows:

Informants	Profession	Experience
Informant 1	Editor	Started his career in the newspapers industry in the 1970s.
Informant 2	Kadazandusun column editor/ journalist	Sub-editor and reporter for more than 10 years.
Informant 3	Researcher/ academician	Expert in politics and history of Sabah
Informant 4	Researcher/ academician	Experts in news framing, changing journalistic norms and values, communication laws and ethics political communication, and audience study

Interviews are a suitable technique when in-depth information regarding people’s ideas, beliefs, experiences, and emotions is required (Guest et al, 2013). The interview questions were aimed at eliciting relevant information concerning the trilingual newspapers in Sabah. Questions relating to the material (contents), procedures before the publication and translation of contents, perceived problems of trilingual newspapers, as well as the roles of the trilingual newspapers were asked in this interview.

At least two hours were allocated to complete each interview session. The sessions were voice recorded and then transcribed so that the content could be analysed thoroughly. The thematic analysis was conducted by reading through the transcripts and trying to identify codes. Inductive coding was applied by identifying the media gratification that has been found through the literature review, especially based on gratification stated by McQuail (1972), namely surveillance, identity, diversion, and personal interest or relationship.

## FINDINGS

From interviews that have been done with all informants, the findings will be divided into two subtopics: the need for trilingual newspapers in Sabah and the impact of language standardization in trilingual newspapers.

### ***The need for trilingual newspapers***

Based on the interview, two points were acknowledged as the prominent factors on why readers choose or need trilingual newspapers, which are the need for a source for Kadazandusun language related to knowledge and identity. Furthermore, trilingual newspaper such as the *New Sabah Times* has been considered one of the main references for students who wish to learn the Kadazandusun language. This can be seen from the answer given by the informants as follows:

I am not sure about the reason why it is necessary to include the Kadazandusun language in a newspaper, but at this point of time days, since the language itself has been introduced as a subject taught in school and even in tertiary education this newspaper provides a reference to the students.

(Informant 1)

The three languages accurately reflect the Sabah or, in a broader context, Malaysian society. Malaysians are typically trilingual, speaking their mother tongue, Malay, and English.... [The newspaper] Defending the heritage of the indigenous people of Sabah as well as promoting the culture of the indigenous people of Sabah to the outside world. Today when it comes to *aramaiti*, or *ka'amatan* or *Unduk Ngadau* everyone knows.

(Informant 4)

Although the *New Sabah Times* has discontinued its glossary section, they still considered that to ensure that many readers can understand the language (Kadazandusun) as part of their main objectives. The informants also highlighted the role of trilingual newspapers in creating a channel for readers to read casually, especially in the form of literature. It seems that this format also gratifies their readers with diversion or escapism.

However, conflict arises when there is less budget allocated to cater to this purpose as stated as follows:

They have no money to pay already. Previously we paid (the writers). I remember when earlier on when I was editor, we paid for short stories and all... If we talk about the role of the newspaper in developing our society then that point becomes relevant. We must have the answer to that. Although this may be true when the owner of the newspaper does not see it that way (inaudible) no budget is allocated.

(Informant 2)

Moreover, the informants also agreed that trilingual newspapers such as *New Sabah Times* became the medium for the locals, especially in the rural area to get the latest information regarding the state's political development. This is to ensure that the people in the rural area are not left behind.

The local newspaper still plays the same role, especially among the politicians, the local newspaper helps to deliver using easy languages (to cater to all readers) to ensure that all Sabahans received information from either one of the local newspapers.

(Informant 3)

Furthermore, this newspaper format is intended to satisfy the desire of its readers to gain a better understanding of their own culture and society.

Similarly, news in Malay and English language that helps readers improve their knowledge and skill mastery of both languages is available. We must not lose sight of the fact that language is also a culture. Behind the culture is also stored 'local knowledge,' such as traditional medicine, which is extremely valuable to the rest of the world. How can we reap the benefits of a local language or dialect if we do not understand it? The name *Bundu Tuhan*, for example, has nothing to do with God.

(Informant 3)

Besides that, readers need to gratify their needs to feel united which refers to a personal relationship. Hence, the trilingual newspaper provides a medium to achieve this unity through its standardization of the language itself in its publication. However, the medium that was supposed to gratify the need to feel united is also meant to gratify the sense of pride and to be dominant among the Kadazandusun community. This is another method for a 'dominant' group to establish a border with the rest of the community (subordinate groups) to maintain their current status quo. This statement is further supported by the following statement:

When we talk regarding elements, contributions, and the role of the Kadazandusun section in this newspaper though they revolve around the same news for me, it has to do with the sense of pride. The members of the ethnic wish to be highlighted (inaudible). I am not sure whether they will read or not, but they wish to see the language in this medium of communication.

(Informant 2)

The language of Kadazandusun is already taught in schools. As a result, the existence of the column or newspaper inserting the Kadazandusun language provides impetus and encouragement to the effort to preserve and develop the Kadazandusun language.

(Informant 3)

Besides that, the early years of the local trilingual newspapers in Sabah, it plays an important role in unifying the Kadazan intelligentsia. This has been said by Informant 3 as follow:



If you look at that moment, newspapers play a crucial role in uniting the intelligentsias.... This proves that the situation of having trilingual newspapers is normal within a setting where there is one dominant ethnic/race. In Sarawak, they also have a Malay language, English, and Iban languages in one newspaper. In Peninsular, they have *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Malaysia*. They were using "Rumi" and "Jawi" alphabets. However, the objective is the same which is to ensure the information received by the readers, ... and do not forget to mention the sense of belonging/oneness.

### **Impact on Language Standardization from Trilingual Newspapers**

Based on the interview, it implied that the trilingual newspapers in Sabah could become the source or a solution to conflicts among the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communities of the Kadazandusun society in Sabah. The fact that trilingual newspapers in Sabah have dedicated a specific column printed in Kadazandusun language, which is one of the ethnic languages in Sabah, is a manifestation of language standardization, and it has the potential to be either unifying or divisive, depending on the circumstances. For Informant 2, the word "Kadazan" column itself is already divisive. For him, this is because the idea of standardizing the language itself is not an easy matter since it derives from the multiple Dusun languages. This also can be seen in Informant 3 answered as follows:

Newspapers can be seen as a medium of unification, especially among the Kadazandusun, but we must remember that apart from language, Kadazandusun has different dialects. There are many dialects, and you see even Dusun has many dialects such as Dusun Tatana and more. The language that was used in the newspaper is only as Donald Stephen put it there are different versions of the meanings of the term Kadazan itself. However, for the literate people in the city, the newspaper can tie [the community] from the beginning.

(Informant 3)

In the effort to standardize the language used in the Kadazandusun column, many other communities that use different dialects from the standardized version felt left out. Informant 1 was also emphasizing the fact that most of the standardized words used in the Kadazandusun column are the words used by the community who speaks the Kadazan Penampang dialects. Thus, there is also the possibility that people in rural areas will not have the ability to understand the standardized language. As a result, even his co-worker has issues when writing news for the Kadazandusun column.

On the other hand, trilingual newspapers also create an avenue to help solve the problems among the Kadazandusun inter-ethnic community. Although the action of standardizing the language received mixed reviews from the society, it does deliver its job of uniting the inter-ethnic community. To make the language to be more inclusive, the standardized version took the same language elements from the members of the inter-ethnic community. Therefore, Informant 3 and Informant 4 disagree that the existence of trilingual newspapers promotes a gap among the diverse community in Sabah.

I disagree.... Why is it that we can learn our mother tongue from the time we are born until we enter kindergarten, then primary school, secondary school, and so on, where we use the national language (Malay language) or English in school if we attend a private or international school, and it is not a problem? On the other hand, stigmatizing the existence of other ethnic mother tongues will create a schism in Sabah's plural society. The discrepancy is not caused by language, but by an individual's attitude.

(Informant 4)

The gap issue is hard to tell, like I said before, the gap is more visible between the literate and illiterate individuals. For those who read the newspapers, the gap exists, but maybe not among those who can't read.

(Informant 3)

When the informants were asked about the solution to the problem of a smaller number of youngsters who chose to read the Kadazandusun section, the publisher sternly sticks to the idea that the column must survive. It is because its existence itself is important to attract the youngsters to read in Kadazandusun and retain the section in their online news channel. Apart from that, they feel education plays a vital role in ensuring the survivability of this section.

## DISCUSSION

The interviews that have been done indicate that one of the primary functions of trilingual newspapers in Sabah is to preserve the Kadazandusun language and culture as well as to be the main reference for the Kadazandusun language learners. This finding is in sync with Laswell (1948), Wright (1960), and Wiest (2016) that one of the main functions of media is cultural transmission and enhancing identity. The use of ethnic language as a lingua franca in Sabah's local newspapers will increase awareness of the Kadazandusun ethnic language and culture, particularly among the younger generation. By way of illustration, the Kadazandusun literature section will provide an opportunity for readers to practice not only their writing skills but also their knowledge of the language.

These newspapers also act as a medium of diversion gratification. In the context of media consumption, diversion refers to a kind of escapism. This finding serves as evidence to support Harwood and Vincze (2015) from the perspectives of publishing literature in a newspaper. The literature in the local trilingual newspapers will be developed and become a source of pleasure for its readers by providing a means for them to escape from routine and reality to experience emotional release. Moreover, this finding shows that there is a positive correlation between respondent's satisfaction with reading trilingual newspapers and the existence of a literature section in trilingual newspapers also proves that one of the fundamental characteristics of every media source, such as a newspaper publishing, is its capacity to assist its audience or readers in connecting with or disconnecting from reality to alleviate social stress as proposed by McQuail (2010).

Human nature is curious. We wanted to learn more and get more engaged in our community. As a result, "we subscribe, watch, listen, and debate" just like a statement previously made by Shoemaker (1999). All of this is consistent with a media's monitoring

role. Surveillance entails watching, analyzing, and collecting data. The media's involvement is critical since one of the functions of media such as newspapers, as previously stated, is to provide information and news to society, which makes newspapers the ideal medium for surveillance and information gathering. Surveillance is enabled by journalists and members of the press who have devoted their time to developing an organized monitoring system that keeps the public informed regarding events, persons, and circumstances that may impact society (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2016).

The surveillance function is classified into two types: warning surveillance and instrumental surveillance. Warning surveillance is when a newspaper warns its readers of long-term chronic dangers (whether genuine or imagined), such as a natural catastrophe or pandemic COVID-19. This is consistent with Blumler, Katz, and Gurevitch (2013), who said that a Warning Surveillance is necessary to instill a feeling of security in its readers and to give (safety) assurance. On the other hand, the instrumental surveillance as reflected in the findings of this research also conforms to Darwin's Theory of the Survival of the Fittest, since media outlets such as newspapers offer readers advice and safety precautions to ensure their survival (Shoemaker, 1999). Furthermore, this media plays a role depending on the specific needs of the community (Budarick, 2020).

Consumption of ethnic media, such as trilingual newspapers, is motivated by fear of threats from members of the other group (of a different ethnicity or race), who may see them as too exposed if they continue to expose themselves in an intergroup community. This mindset reflects the social rivalry that exists in many intergroup interactions. Consequently, this consumption is seen as a means for members of their own intragroup to compensate and also a technique used by a "dominant" group to draw a line between itself and the rest of the community (subordinate groups) to maintain their status quo (Harwood & Vincze, 2015; Harwood, 2016).

Initially, the publishing of Sabah's local newspapers used only English as their primary language. This was natural, given that the intelligentsia who pioneered Sabah politics at the time were those educated abroad and fluent in English. However, a language more familiar to the indigenous people has been adopted as the Sabah press's lingua franca. However, due to the proliferation of ethnic languages in Sabah, Donald Stephen decided to establish the standard version of the Kadazan language based on the Penampang and Papar pronunciation and at the same time introduce the concept of "Kadazanation" to the indigenous people in the hope to unify the Kadazandusun ethnic in Sabah.

When standardization for a minority language is approved, it is predictable that a dispute would erupt. After all, standardization is not a neutral process; it has implications for the language's status and how language users react to the new standardization (Gal, 2006). In minority language standardization and revitalization procedures, social actors whose opinions are not taken into consideration are often involved. This may occur when their points of view are seen to be overly harsh or confrontational and are thus dismissed. Thus, the role of power in standardization processes is illuminated, as some users participate in standardization processes while others are bypassed, refuse to participate in standardization processes, or reject standardization procedures (Lane, 2015). Language standardization, it seems, continues to be a powerful tool for creating or constructing language, establishing languages as limited, distinct entities and social institutions, and then elevating the social status of people who speak or write in them (Costa et al, 2017).

Despite this, the Sabah trilingual newspaper's role as a vehicle for racial unification was not universally accepted. According to the findings, minor conflicts continue to happen between members of the same ethnic group. Crises are bound to happen even among their co-workers when it comes to writing an article in the Kadazandusun column. Furthermore, incidents happen when there is dissatisfaction among co-workers of the same ethnic group on what type of spelling, they need to adhere to when it comes to the Kadazandusun column because they believe their understanding of the term "standard Kadazandusun" is different from each other.

However, although the ethnic and linguistic superiority or supremacy of the Kadazandusuns is directly mirrored in Sabah's local media, readers have strong ties to people who do not speak Kadazandusun, despite the widespread belief that there is a rift between the Kadazandusun ethnic group and the multi-ethnic community in Sabah, as well as in terms of language standardization. This suggests that the inter-ethnic community relationship is still positive. Accordingly, there is a difference between the inter-ethnic groups in Sabah when it comes to the concept of dominance. The fact that people of different ethnicities are not necessarily alienated from one another illustrates that the social difference caused by the introduction of trilingual newspapers is not at all times expressed by a sense of alienation from one another. It frequently arises naturally in the reader's mind and imagination.

## CONCLUSION

The consumption of trilingual newspapers as a form of ethnic media in Sabah has proven to have the ability to fulfill the needs of readers who long to satisfy their cognitive, social-integrative, personal-integrative, escapists, and affective needs. Thus, the study reveals that trilingual newspapers help to satisfy readers' curiosity as trilingual newspapers became one main source of information and they serve as a medium for native language learning.

This study should open the eyes of local trilingual newspaper publishing companies, and they should not have stopped publishing their newspapers as local trilingual newspapers play numerous important roles in the socio-political and educational aspects of the lives of the people of Sabah. Since this study shows the importance of literature in the Kadazandusun language as well as other ethnic languages inserted in trilingual newspapers, more funds need should be channeled to local trilingual newspaper publishers to implement their literary segments and invite talents to submit their works in Sabah's existing ethnic languages. This will benefit all parties: good for business, language development, and ensuring the sustainability of ethnic languages such as Kadazandusun.

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