

# **Participatory Methods for Language Documentation and Conservation: Building Community Awareness and Engagement**

Christina Lai Truong & Lilian Garcez  
*SIL International*

## **0. ABSTRACT**

Language conservation and revitalization initiatives face the challenge of mitigating or reversing the impact of many powerful sociolinguistic factors which push speakers of minority language communities to shift away from their heritage languages. While practitioners of language documentation are very often concerned about language endangerment issues and value minority languages for their intrinsic worth, many language documentation programs, even when done in collaboration with a few members of the target community, do not engage with larger segments of the community, nor garner sufficient resources to address factors underlying the decline of language vitality.

This paper describes three participatory methods developed to engage communities in research, planning, implementation and evaluation of language programs for their own benefit. These methods facilitate investigation of sociolinguistic phenomena to inform and spur planning for effective documentation and conservation initiatives. In a series of guided interactions, members of language communities together build visual representations of collective knowledge about their language and patterns of language use using text, symbols, and pictures. They are then invited to react to the resulting representation and discuss changes they would like to see in their situation. The first of these three tools is designed to investigate language variation, intelligibility and attitudes towards varieties of the minority language, enabling the community to discuss the scope of a language program. In the second activity, patterns of bilingualism among demographic sub-groups are diagrammed and analyzed by the community. In the third activity, the community creates a diagram of language use in various situations and the frequency with which each language spoken in the community is used in these domains. Several pilot tests of the methods have been conducted with groups of minority language speakers in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Applications for these participatory methods include 1) identifying which variety of the language would have the broadest extensibility for use in materials (audio recordings, video, books, literacy efforts), 2) assessment of language vitality and underlying factors, and 3) identifying domains which should be targeted first for documentation or conservation. However, the most valuable impact of using participatory methods is that the process itself builds community awareness and engagement with language conservation issues. The process of thinking critically about their own language situation is a step from passivity towards engagement that creates an opportunity for the community to participate in, shape, and own collaborative documentation and conservation initiatives for their language.

## **1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

Beginning in September 2008, SIL Asia Area held a series of trainings in participatory methods

---

1 We would like to thank Sue Hasselbring for her encouragement to write this paper, and Chari Vilorio, RynJean Gonzales, Rindu Simanjuntak, as well as many other colleagues whose involvement in participatory methods training and discussion greatly enriched our understanding of these topics.

to address our own need to better engage minority language communities and other key stakeholders in SIL's language-based development efforts throughout Asia. Language-based development here refers to holistic, community-based development-related efforts through linguistic research, translation, and literacy (see Quakenbush 2007 for background on the term and SIL International with focus on Austronesian languages). The movement in SIL towards participatory methods was motivated by a desire to explore how language-based development-- including language description and documentation-- can be done more collaboratively with more sustainable benefit to the communities in which we serve. Sue Hasselbring, Sociolinguistics Consultant for SIL Asia Area, was instrumental in organizing and developing the content of these trainings, and facilitating wider discussion about the use of participatory methods in language programs. The methods and pilot tests described in this paper represent an outgrowth of this discussion and training. In particular, we will discuss three participatory methods for investigating sociolinguistic phenomenon in language communities that may be of benefit to practitioners of language documentation. We will also describe selected pilot tests for these methods which were conducted by the authors together with colleagues from SIL and other organizations in Malaysia and Indonesia.

## **2. RATIONALE FOR PARTICIPATORY METHODS**

### **2.1 Community engagement as essential to language documentation and conservation**

Language conservation and revitalization initiatives seek to mitigate or reverse the impact of many powerful sociolinguistic factors which push speakers of minority language communities to shift away from their heritage languages. While practitioners of language documentation are very often concerned about language endangerment issues and value minority languages for their intrinsic worth, many language documentation programs, even when done in collaboration with a few members of the target community, do not engage with larger segments of the community, nor garner sufficient resources to address factors underlying the decline of language vitality.

In spite of the fact that members of the language community are the ones most affected by the prospect of language loss and the ones most directly able to affect change in their situation, the community at large might not be aware of the threatened state of their language or the value they might gain should it be documented, developed for written purposes, or revitalized. Additionally, language endangerment often is linked to political disempowerment, lack of socioeconomic opportunity, and marginalization that fosters negative attitudes towards the use of the heritage language. So even if a community realizes that their language is threatened, they may not feel empowered or motivated to participate in its revitalization or conservation. Nonetheless, community buy-in and involvement in language initiatives is not optional if these initiatives are to succeed at bringing about positive changes with regards to language vitality.

### **2.2 Participatory methods for sustainable community involvement**

For sustainable community participation to happen, it is crucial that the people are fully aware of their potential, resources and capacity to make the changes in their community. In recent decades, the increase in use of participatory methods such as PRA<sup>2</sup> by development practitioners has been premised on the goal of seeking the participation of the community in order to include

---

2 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is sometimes now referred to as Participatory Reflection and Action due to its application in urban as well as rural areas (Kumar 2002).

their ideas, resources, and aspirations into programs and activities that are being planned. The distinguishing features of this family of participatory methods are that they “emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans” and “use group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analysis, and action among stakeholders” (World Bank 1992:183). Development practitioners have found that when the valuable contributions of community members are an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction efforts, the community is not only more knowledgeable about what is being planned but also more willing to take responsibility for their ideas and input and fulfill the commitments being made (Chambers 1994).

Similarly to development programs, effective language conservation and revitalization programs require the early and substantive involvement of all stakeholders in the design of activities that will affect them. When the people involved feel that their participation is meaningful, the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of language initiatives will improve. Also, a consensus has emerged among development practitioners that those who are affected by development initiatives have a right to participate in them. In the same way, language communities also have the right to participate and provide input in activities involving the documentation, development, or use of their language as a part of their cultural heritage. Thus, it can be said that there is both pragmatic and ethical justification for implementing participatory approaches in language-based development, documentation, and conservation.

The term participatory methods as used in this paper refers to guided facilitations with a small group of community members brought together to discuss their own language situation. As such, dialogue among community members and between outsiders and community members is a key theme in participatory approaches. Dialogue is a process in which people exchange thoughts, opinions, needs and hopes. As a process, dialogue enables the community to analyze their own choices and situation, thereby helping them to gain new perspective and formulate steps forward to interact with their reality and achieve their desired goals. Dialogue cannot happen when parties are isolated or with a pre-set package of conclusions and solutions created beforehand. For dialogue to happen, all parties must be willing to trust each other’s capacity and knowledge. Participation in formulating the fundamental goals as well as in planning and carrying out activities empowers the community and fosters a sense of ownership. This might be a very new exercise for communities accustomed to having their problems analyzed, discussed and solved by outsiders or a few key leaders. It may also be new for outsiders used to the traditional way of analyzing problems and planning solutions for communities.

### **3. PARTICIPATORY METHODS FOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION**

This paper describes three participatory tools<sup>3</sup>, namely Participatory Dialect Mapping, Bilingualism Venn Diagram, and Domains of Language Use Venn Diagram, which were developed to engage communities in research, planning, implementation and evaluation of language programs for their own benefit. These methods facilitate investigation of sociolinguistic phenomena to inform and spur planning for effective documentation and conservation initiatives. In a series of guided interactions, members of language communities together build visual representations of collective knowledge about their language and patterns of language use using

---

3 These methods are described briefly in an unpublished paper by Hasselbring (2008) outlining their use with the Kamayo language community on the Island of Mindanao in the Philippines.

text, symbols, and pictures. They are then invited to react to the resulting representation and discuss changes they would like to see in their situation.

Table 1 shows pilot tests of these participatory methods which were conducted by the authors along with other researchers including Jackie Menanti, Johnny Tjia, Rindu Simanjuntak, Matthew Connor, Herly Sitorus, and Brendon Yoder. Sample results and observations from the pilot test are discussed in greater detail below. During the pilot tests, facilitators used Malay or Indonesian to guide the discussion and communicate with participants. Participants sometimes used their heritage language in discussion with one another.

TABLE 1. Pilot tests conducted

Language	Location	Tools	Participants	Date
Kadazan	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia	Dialect Mapping Bilingualism VD	3	3 Sep 2008
Javanese	South Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia	Dialect Mapping Domains VD	5	22 Oct 2008
Javanese	Depok, West Java, Indonesia	Bilingualism VD	4	24 Oct 2008
Betawi (Jakarta Malay)	Depok, West Java, Indonesia	Dialect Mapping Domains VD	10	24 Oct 2008
Aceh	Banda Aceh, Aceh, Indonesia	Dialect Mapping Bilingualism VD	6	7 Nov 2008

### 3.1 Participatory Dialect Mapping

The Participatory Dialect Mapping tool is designed to investigate language variation, intelligibility and attitudes towards varieties of the language. This tool is helpful in that it allows the community to articulate knowledge about their language situation from an emic perspective and creates the opportunity to discuss the scope of a language program. Particularly for non-standardized language varieties, agreement may not yet exist on which varieties should be considered part of the same language<sup>4</sup> or more practically, which varieties could share the same language program, orthography, literature and audio materials, and participate in the same language-related organizations or activities.

#### 3.1.1 Procedures

A small group of individuals from the same language community is gathered and asked to participate in a discussion about their language. The facilitator explains the purpose of the discussion and how the results will be recorded, distributed, and used, then asks the participants for permission to proceed. The facilitator asks participants to name all the language varieties which are similar enough to their variety that they can understand at least some of what is said. Alternately, the group can name groups of people (clans for example) who speak these varieties

---

<sup>4</sup> Languages are often discussed as if they constitute distinct and discreet units. While language varieties in a given setting most often have complex overlapping relationships with one another, the description of languages as units is a useful myth in practical contexts such as organizing for language initiatives.

or geographic places where the varieties are spoken. Participants write these descriptors on pieces of paper, which are arranged in the center of the group for all to see. If some of the participants are non-literate, they may choose to draw symbols to represent the language varieties or designate a literate member of the group to write for them. The language variety labels are arranged by the group spatially to represent their real-life geographic locations. The participants are then asked to group the varieties which are the same using loops of twine. Each group of varieties is evaluated by the participants, classified, and marked with a visual symbol accordingly. Classifications can vary based on context and local needs. Classifications used in pilot tests are listed in Table 2. Discussion at each step of the process is encouraged, and participants are free to rearrange or reassign classifications as necessary. A digital photograph of the resulting dialect map is taken. The facilitator may then ask for a volunteer to give a summary of the results, which is recorded (either written or audio format). At this point the group may be prompted to discuss implications relevant to the context. This facilitation is perhaps best conducted with several groups throughout the language area, as the synthesized results from many groups will give a more accurate picture of perceived language groupings that are relevant when discussing next steps for a language program.

TABLE 2. Classifications and symbols used for Participatory Dialect Mapping

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Classification system</b>
Perceived grouping	Which varieties represented here are the same?	Varieties that are the same are grouped with a colored rope.
Intelligibility	How difficult do you find it to understand a speaker of X variety?	Understand everything/ Understand some/Understand a little/ Do not understand at all.  and/or  Numerical rank by difficulty with 1 being easiest to understand
Inter-group Language Use	What do you speak when you meet people from X variety?	Our own variety/their variety/ LWC.
Materials extensibility	Which of these varieties do you think could use the same written/audio materials?	Varieties that can share literature are enclosed with a colored rope.
Preferred Variety	Which variety of Y language is the best?  Which variety of Y language would you prefer for reading a book/listening to a story?	Variety chosen by consensus is marked with a colored token.  Or  Participants vote by placing colored tokens next to their preferred variety's label.

### 3.1.2 Sample pilot test results

As shown in Figure 1, the Javanese pilot test resulted in a dialect map showing three main groups of varieties, as well as outlying varieties in the far eastern region of Java and Sundanese in West Java that were not considered to group with any other varieties. One interesting outcome is that though all participants in the group chose a variety from Central Java when asked to pick the variety they consider to be “the best” Javanese, during the discussion, participants agreed that they would rather listen to a story in the Malang variety, which grouped with East Java varieties. The participants described the Malang variety as pleasant to listen to and speak even though the Yogyakarta variety is more polite. This is in contrast to the conventional opinion that Javanese from Yogyakarta is the central variety which should be used for literature. While broader input and further testing would be recommended, this example shows how discussion among community members can lead to new insights that can inform the successful creation and promotion of heritage language materials for use in the wider language community.

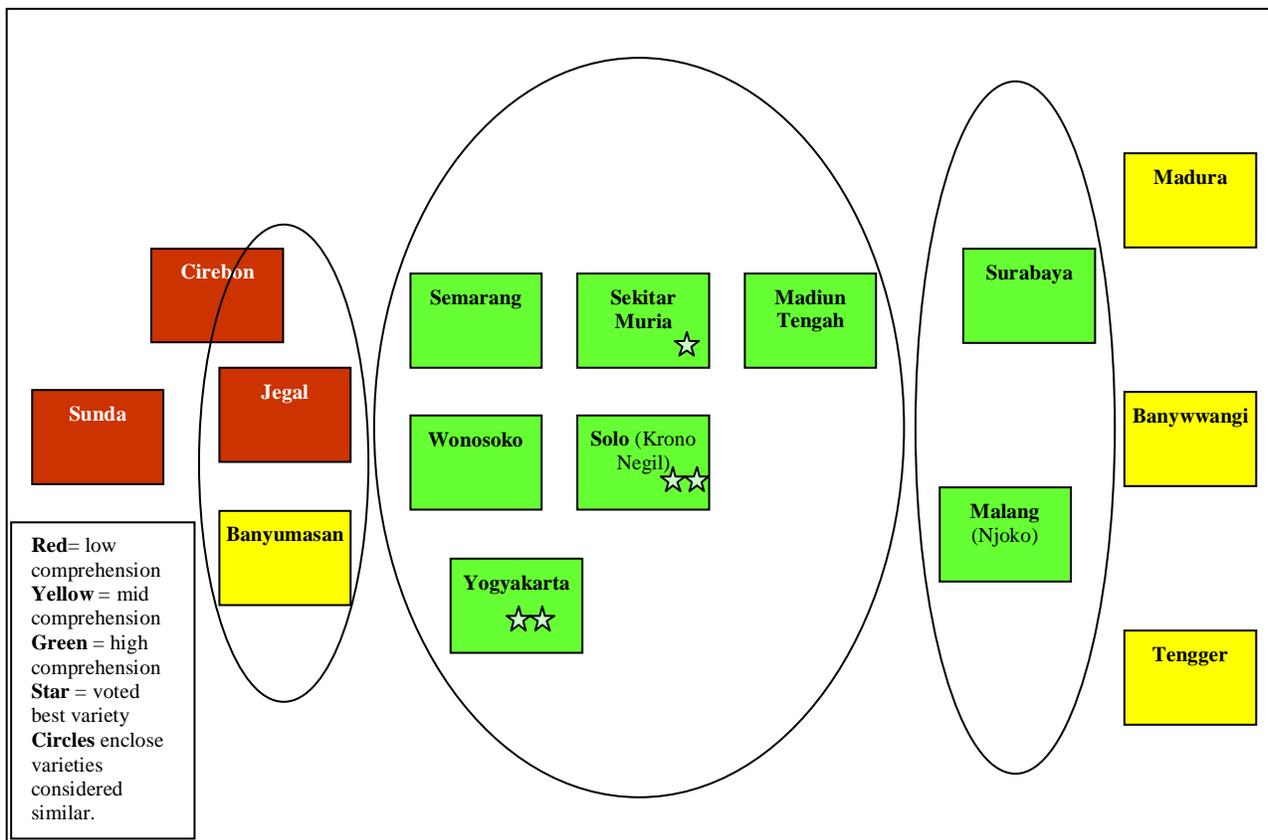


FIGURE 1. Participatory Dialect Map created by Javanese speakers living in Jakarta, Indonesia

One difficulty encountered during the pilot tests was the matter of deciding which varieties are close enough to be included in the map. This came up multiple times, including the Javanese pilot test, in which participants decided to include Sundanese and the Sundanese-influenced Cirebon variety of Javanese. In the Aceh pilot tests, participants debated whether Gayo should be included in the map along with Aceh varieties since it is a language of the province of Aceh. Facilitators should feel free to let participants decide which varieties to include in the map and it should become clear as the facilitation proceeds if the questionable variety has a close or distant linguistic relationship (based on intelligibility) with the other varieties. If pressed, the facilitator

can return to the original prompt for the facilitation, emphasizing that the language varieties included should be closely enough related so that native speakers of the local language are able to understand at least some of what is said in those varieties.



FIGURE 2. Speakers in Depok, West Java, Indonesia creating a participatory dialect map of Betawi.

### 3.1.3 Implications and Applications

The pilot tests suggest that Participatory Dialect Mapping is an appropriate and useful tool for investigating language variation and encouraging speakers of minority language to discuss and decide who and which language varieties should be included in the scope of a language program. The facilitation can be used to start a conversation about standardization and use of the local language in education, and audio or written materials for use in the community. The formation of local organizations to promote and preserve the heritage language could be informed by this type of data, which would suggest who should be invited to participate. The selection of “best” and “preferred” varieties as well as information about intelligibility across varieties would be helpful for projects to promote heritage language literacy and media production for the widest possible audience.

### 3.2 Domains of Language Use Venn Diagram

The Domains of Language Use Venn Diagram tool (hereafter Domains Venn Diagram) is designed to investigate the choices that a language group makes regarding language use when they interact with others within and outside their community. It also provides indicators as to the ethnolinguistic vitality and attitudes of the community towards their own language. This facilitation creates the opportunity for the community to identify the choices they make for language use with different people and in various situations of their daily lives. It reveals an emic perspective on how people groups are identified by the community and the situations in which they use language that might not be perceived by outsiders. Particularly for bilingual communities or communities where there is low vitality in the heritage language, the visualization created at the end of this facilitation helps the community to start thinking more

specifically about what is happening with their own language in relation to more dominant language varieties and provides opportunity for them to articulate their thoughts and feelings towards what they see and realize about their language situation.

### **3.2.1 Procedures**

A small group of individuals from the same language community is gathered and asked to participate in a discussion about their language. The facilitator explains the purpose of the discussion and how the results will be recorded, distributed, and used, then asks the participants for permission to proceed. The facilitator asks the participants to think about situations and places during the day when they speak to others, or categories of people with whom they speak. Participants write down their descriptions in large letters on pieces of paper, which are arranged in the center of the group for all to see. If some of the participants are non-literate, they may choose to draw symbols to represent the people, situations and places they want to describe or designate a literate member of the group to write for them. The facilitator then asks the participants to group together labels which are the same (replacing them with one overarching label) or to create more specific labels where appropriate. For instance, participants might want to break down the category “friends” into more specific groups, such as friends from the same ethnic group, friends from other ethnic groups, older and younger friends, etc., if such distinctions have an effect on language use.

Now the participants are asked to think about the languages they use for each label referring to a situation, place, or group of people. They are asked to identify which labels name situations in which they only speak in their own heritage language and place them in a column under a header naming the heritage language. Then they identify which labels name situations in which they speak other languages and place them in columns under the appropriate columns headed by the names of the other languages or sets of languages. As they indicate the languages they use, they might also think of more groups of people or communication situations that they may want to add. They might also decide to divide some categories and represent these situations with two labels because they speak different languages to different subgroups.

The facilitator then asks the participants to rank the labels according to the frequency that community members engage in the communication events represented by each label. More frequently experienced events or situations are moved towards the top of the column, and less frequent events are moved towards the bottom of the column. The facilitator places as row headers labels for frequency categories such as “daily”, “weekly”, and “monthly” or “often”, “sometimes”, and “rarely”. For the best visual effect, the facilitator may place dividers to more clearly show the boundaries between the frequency categories. Finally, the facilitator invites the participants to express what they see on the diagram. In order to stimulate discussion, the facilitator may ask the group to talk about what the diagram tells them about their language use, what are their feelings towards it and if there is any desire for change. The facilitator may then ask for a volunteer to give a summary of the results, which is recorded (either written or audio format). A digital photograph of the resulting domains diagram is taken. The facilitation may be repeated with several sets of participants in order to get input from many different demographic groups (e.g. age, gender, geographic location). The synthesized results from groups with different combinations of sociolinguistic factors may improve the accuracy of the picture of the use and vitality of that language.

### 3.2.2 Sample pilot test results

For the Betawi group, the Domains Venn Diagram showed high language vitality for the vernacular language, with Betawi preferred in the majority of day-to-day language situations. Betawi and Indonesian together are also used in some daily situations, including religious contexts. Indonesian alone to the exclusion of Betawi is used infrequently, and only in formal contexts or places in which speaking with non-Betawi individuals is likely. The visual representation of this data as shown in Table 3, demonstrates how the language use situation is displayed clearly for both facilitators and participants present in the discussion.

**TABLE 3. Domains Venn Diagram for Betawi**

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Betawi</b>		<b>Both</b>	<b>Indonesian</b>
Daily	Speaking with family With friends Coffee shop With close friends Badminton court	With parents By the railroad tracks At the motorcycle taxi stand On the street At bus terminal	Prayer time at the mosque Religious meetings Traveling by vehicle At the gas station At sports center	
Weekly	Barber Market Social gathering for neighbors Fish market	Brother's house Mechanic shop With old friends		
Seldom	Family gathering While fishing			In office Meeting with school teacher Neighborhood meeting Recreation place Hospital Birthday party

In the Javanese pilot test conducted in Jakarta, the participants had some disagreement about where to place labels for interactions with family members. This arose because one of the participants did not use Javanese exclusively in communicating with his family members. The participants resolved this by choosing to place multiple labels for each differing language use pattern. For example, communicating with in-laws was included under the Javanese column, but also again in the Indonesian column to represent that at least one participant used Indonesian to speak to his in-laws. At the end of the discussion, the participant who uses Indonesian and not

Javanese with his children expressed concern that his children would not be able to speak Javanese in the future, and told the other participants that he sees a need for the Javanese language to be maintained for future generations.



FIGURE 3. A Domains Venn Diagram facilitation conducted by another group of researchers with Dusun and Kadazan speakers in Sabah, Malaysia.

### 3.2.3 Implications and Applications

The pilot tests suggest that the Domains Venn Diagram can be used to investigate the languages spoken within a community, attitudes of the community towards the heritage language, and the vitality of the heritage language. The resulting diagram gives a clearer picture of language use to both researchers and community members themselves, and can help to raise awareness if language vitality is low. The discussion following the diagram's creation encourages member of the community to think about their heritage language and helps them to consider whether they want to make any change about the language situation that is laid out through the diagram. This facilitation can be particularly helpful in starting a conversation with the community about strategies for promoting revitalization and maintenance of the heritage language. The diagram indicates visually domains of language use for which community members have switched to a more dominant language, thus indicating which domains might be targeted first for documentation or conservation.

### 3.3 Bilingualism Venn Diagram

The Bilingualism Venn Diagram participatory tool is designed to investigate the bilingualism patterns of demographic groups within a language community. It creates a visual representation of the bilingualism pattern of the language community as described by the participants. It also provides indicators as for the vitality of heritage language and the language attitudes of the community.

### 3.3.1 Procedures

A small group of individuals from the same language community is gathered and asked to participate in a discussion about their language. The facilitator explains the purpose of the discussion and how the results will be recorded, distributed, and used, then asks the participants for permission to proceed. The group is asked to name the languages spoken in their community, including the heritage language and the most prevalently used language of wider communication (LWC). The group is asked to name descriptors for groups of people that speak the heritage language well. They are then asked to name descriptors for groups of people that speak the LWC well. Examples of descriptors include age groups, geographic location, urban/rural, level of education, kinship, gender, occupation, location by political unit, and religious affiliation. The participants are encouraged to create descriptors that are meaningful and appropriate in their context, and the facilitator should draw out participants' ideas and help them to brainstorm a large number of descriptors. Each descriptor is written or represented with a picture on a slip of paper that is placed in the center of the group for all to see.



FIGURE 4. Javanese speakers in Depok, West Java creating a Bilingualism Venn Diagram.

At this point the facilitator forms two overlapping circles made of colored twine in the center area, explaining that one circle will represent those who speak the heritage language well, and the other will represent those who speak the LWC well. The overlapping area represents those who speak both languages well. The group places the descriptor labels in the appropriate place in the circles. Facilitators give an opportunity for the group to create additional group labels that had previously been overlooked, if any. The facilitator then asks the participants which circle represents the most people in the community and which categories are increasing or decreasing. The resulting diagram is summarized and the summary is recorded (written or audio). A digital picture of the diagram is taken. The group then is asked to reflect on the diagram and make comments about the situation they have diagrammed and any changes that they would like to see in their situation.

### 3.3.2 Sample Pilot Test Results

In the Kadazan pilot test, the Bilingualism Venn Diagram exercise showed that increasingly, the number of people who were monolingual in Kadazan is decreasing, and the number of people only competent in the LWCs (Malay and/or English) is increasing. For this groups, it was an opportunity to think about the implications of this language shift on their community, and the desire to increase language competency in the heritage language was expressed.

As shown in Figure 5, in the Aceh pilot test three language circles were used instead of two, one to represent Aceh, one to represent Indonesian, and one to represent other local languages (Gayo, Batak, and other minority languages in Aceh). This worked well, though the resulting diagram was more complicated. Facilitators can help participants to decide together the number of circles which should be included in the diagram so that it the resulting picture will be clear, meaningful and acceptable. In reflection on the diagram at the end of the facilitation, several participants expressed that they feel proud that the majority of people in Aceh Province speak both Aceh and Indonesian. Some participants expressed a desire that everyone in Aceh should be bilingual in both Aceh and Indonesian, which would entail expanding competency in Indonesian to people living in remote areas, and teaching Aceh to those ethnic Aceh city dwellers who only speak Indonesian, and to people of other ethnic backgrounds.

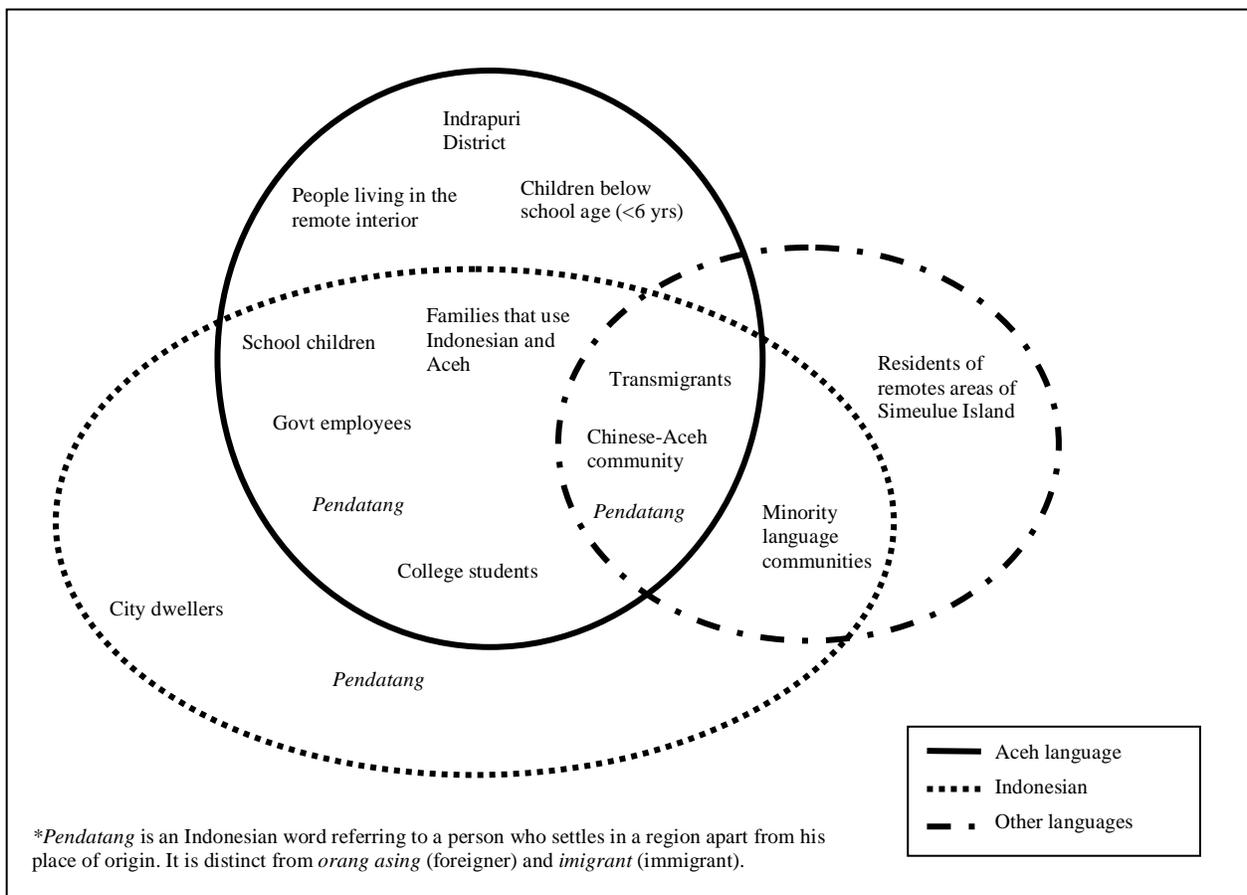


FIGURE 5. Bilingualism Venn Diagram for Aceh Province created by Aceh and Gayo speakers in Banda Aceh.

### **3.3.3 Implications and Applications**

The pilot tests suggest that the Bilingualism Venn Diagram tool can be used with positive results for investigating patterns of bilingualism and ethnolinguistic vitality with members of a language community. The resulting diagram creates a visual representation of bilingualism in the community by demographic group, allowing participants to easily perceive their language situation as described by themselves. In situations where the heritage language is threatened, the Bilingualism Venn Diagram can be used to increase awareness of the need to conserve the heritage language. It can also be used to inform project planning and strategy with focus on outreach to demographic groups within the community for inclusion in language conservation and documentation initiatives. Low ethnolinguistic vitality in the heritage language, particularly in urban areas, is sometimes accompanied by social fragmentation of the community (United Nations 2008) and the loss of social institutions that facilitate dialogue and group identity formation. In these cases, gathering individuals together for participatory methods facilitation groups is a first step towards creating a forum to discuss language issues where community members can share knowledge and build a shared understanding of their language situation and desires for the future.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Participatory methods for sociolinguistic research as described in this paper can be useful to practitioners of language documentation and conservation for 1) identifying which variety of the language would have the broadest extensibility for use in materials (audio recordings, video, books, literacy efforts), 2) assessment of language vitality and underlying factors, and 3) identifying domains which should be targeted first for documentation or conservation. Hopefully, the dialogue that is started with community members about language issues will not end with these facilitations, but will be used to lead into further planning and activities to promote the participants' expressed goals for the future of their language community.

Benefits of using participatory methods for language-based development, and language documentation and conservation include:

- Effectiveness of activities increases, because there is a greater match between needs, priorities and values of the community and relevant efforts to address them.
- The community will be able to identify and use the broadest range of resources that is available within the community itself, such as local knowledge and skills.
- Inclusion and participation of marginalized groups such as non-literates, women, minorities and the poor in planning of language programs.
- The community is empowered to develop further language programs independently without the initiative of outsiders.
- Better chance for sustainability of programs as the community feels responsible and committed to them.

Potential drawbacks to the use of participatory methods for language programs include:

- Some stakeholders might feel uncomfortable or threatened by the idea of community participation and decision-making.

- It is possible for facilitation sessions to be dominated by the traditional elite of the community, who by virtue of their status and position are deferred to by other participants.
- The results of participatory research are generally qualitative and emic, which might not be satisfactory for some stakeholders who are used to quantitative data, such as government agencies.
- Those expecting quick results may be disappointed by the large amount of time required for participatory methods, especially for community preparation and follow-up.
- The community may have unrealistically high expectations for projects, which might still lack sufficient support and resources especially in early stages.

Despite these drawbacks, the risks of using participatory methods are outweighed by the potential benefits to language programs and the language community. Participatory methods need not be used to the exclusion of other more traditional linguistic research methods, as long as the value for community knowledge, input, and ownership is maintained. The most valuable impact of using participatory methods is that the process itself builds community awareness and engagement with language issues, which are essential elements for success of language conservation and development efforts. The process of thinking critically about their own language situation is a step from passivity towards engagement that creates an opportunity for the community to participate in, shape, and own collaborative documentation and conservation initiatives for their language.

## 5. WORKS CITED

- Chambers, Robert. 1994. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of experience. *World Development* 22(9), 1253-1268.
- Hasselbring, Sue. 2008. Participatory methods for language programs. Unpublished paper.
- Kumar, Somesh. 2002. *Methods for community participation: A complete guide for practitioners*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.
- World Bank. 1996. *The World Bank participation sourcebook*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Quakenbush, J. Stephen. 2007. SIL International and endangered Austronesian languages. In D. Victoria Rau and Margaret Florey (eds.), *Documenting and revitalizing Austronesian languages*, 42-65. Language Documentation and Conservation Special Publication, 1. Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/1352>
- United Nations, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. 2008. Background paper, International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages, January 8-10. New York: United Nations. [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/EGM\\_IL\\_backgroundPaper.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/EGM_IL_backgroundPaper.doc)

Christina Truong  
christina\_truong@sil.org

Lilian Garcez  
liliangarcez@hotmail.com