Language, Identity & Tourism in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo

Language in Tourism

- Communication
  - Major barrier to cross-cultural tourism
  - Ability of service staff to speak the language of the tourist

- Overlooked as a Commodity Attraction
  - COMMONPLACE, MUNDANE EXPERIENCE
    - Taken for granted, most of the time
    - Similar to: Sleeping, Walking, Seeing, Hearing, Touching, and our Workaday World

- Language as Tourism? … Heritage Tourism?

Case Study: Sabah, Malaysia (Ba!)

Ethnic / Linguistic Diversity

- 32 Major Ethnic Groups
  - Bornoean: Kadazan-Dusun (17%), Murut, Paitanic
  - Austronesian: Bajau (Phillipines & Indonesia)
  - Bruneis (Malay) & Chinese

- About 50 Languages
  - Over 200 dialects
    - West Coast Bajau = 7 dialect groups
  - Many near extinction

- Illegal Immigrants:
  - ~900,000 (2010)
  - 27% (+) of Sabah's total pop.
  - Philippines & Indonesia
1. LANGUAGE CONTEXT
   a. Authentic/Historical/Heritage Language
   b. Minority/Majority Language Vitality

Tourism Elements
1. Linguistic Landscape (Placenames & Signage)
2. Language Museumization
3. Linguist Distance in Tourism Settings

Local Words in the Tourism Landscape

Selling Sabah's East Coast
Tourist Talk

Tourism Places, Sites & Establishments
- Cater to the Tourist's Environmental Bubble
- Hybrid / Fusion between Local Language & Tourist Language
  - Adaptation to the Tourist's Language
  - Diffusion of Tourist's Language
    - Form of Pidginization (“Pidgin English”)

Tourist Talk (TT) -or- Tourist Language (TL)
- a subset of Foreign-Directed Speech -or- Foreign Talk (FT)
- a subset (or “register”) of the Host Language (HL)

1. Language Context
   Museumization at the Sabah Harvest Festival

2. LANGUAGE DYNAMICS
   a. Language in Cultural Change / Culture Drift
   b. Language as Social or Cultural Capital
   c. Language as Personal Experience

   Tourism Elements
   1. Language in Reenactments
   2. Language Brokers
   3. Language Learning
      (Role Transformation)
**Harvest Festival 2012**

**Living History & Performance**

- **Display of Historic Period Costumes, Practices & Language**
  - Immersive role-playing *Simulacra*
  - Increasing use by museums (*museumization*)

- **Historic Reenactments**
  - History & Biography told in a Regional Dialect
  - Language as Living History
  - Experiential & Subjective Experience

**Language Learning**

**Linguistic Commodity / Heritage Commodity**

- **Heritage “Badge of Local Authenticity”**
  - = Sign value
  - For entrepreneurial competition
  - Focus on consumers & tourists who will spend

- **Language as a Local Cultural & Heritage Asset**
  - Distinct Language or Dialect
  - Sense of place-identity (Localization)

- **Language as Role Transformation**
  - Diaspora Tourism
    - “Roots” and self-identity seekers
  - Second Language Learners
    - Business people, Cosmopolitans
3. LANGUAGE USES
   a. Language in the Political Economy
   b. Language in Place Identity

   Tourism Elements
   1. Language in Place Marketing
   2. Language in Brand Imaging

Political Identity Through Words

'BORNEO POST online'

‘UBA to revive Sabah’s nation status if voted’
Posed on May 4, 2012. Friday

TAMPARULI United Borneo Alliance (UBA), if voted into power, will mobilize all the legal instruments and means to ensure that Sabah’s status as a nation is revived within the Federation of Malaysia.

Place Identity through Food

Roti Cobra Kambing (Indian)

and

Wantan Ho (Chinese)

Selling Sabah
Language Attractions & Destination Marketing

(1) Living History – as Tourist Attraction
   a) Museumization & Language Learning

(2) In-Group – Out-Group Identities – as Tourist Attraction
   a) Creates “Back Regions” for tourists to explore
   - Trying to Speak Local Dialects & Languages
   - Learning Local Dialects & Languages – Formal & Informal

(3) In-Group – Out-Group Identities – as a Marketing Tool
   a) Can Sell a Destination’s Unique Selling Proposition
   b) Need to Balance Exotic with Familiar

(4) Subtle, possibly Covert, Language – as a Marketing Tool
   a) Integrated & Unconscious part of Everyday Life Experience
   - Food, Place names, Festivals, Local Talk …

Terimah Kasih, Ba!

INVITATION
2nd Coastal, Island & Tropical Tourism Conference
and
6th Tourism Outlook Conference
16-18 April 2013 - Kota Kinabalu

Linguistic Heritage & Tourist Markets

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>International</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Moderate*</td>
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*Varies by specific market

Type of Tourist

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<th>Local – Sabahan (maybe Sarawak and Brunei)</th>
<th>Domestic – Peninsula MY</th>
<th>Regional – Philippines &amp; Indonesia</th>
<th>International – Rest of the World</th>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>- Tourist Familiarity with Sabah’s linguistic diversity</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- Tourist Interest in Sabah’s linguistic diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>- Intentional use of Sabah’s linguistic differences in Destination Marketing</td>
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