

Brown Bag Seminar Series for Languages and Linguistics, 1/2018

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The work of making dictionaries describes impossibility because it is a daunting task to be carried out specifically by those from cultures which do not have the advantage of established and extensive documented history of literacy and lexical recording of their languages.

The task of compiling a document of indigenous lexicon for the use of the indigenous communities or for basic documentation so outsiders can learn about an indigenous community's language is no mean feat. Yet for two strongly motivated individuals, that is what they have done on their own with minimal assistance. Their efforts to document and preserve their indigenous languages into ethnic dictionaries were shared in the second Brown Bag Seminar for Languages and Linguistics recently at Bilik Mesyuarat Utama, PPIB. The speakers, Datuk Cosmas Abah and Mr. Ricky Ganang, indeed provided powerful motivation for the younger generation interested in ethnic dictionaries documentation.

With the theme "Challenges and the Future of Ethnic Dictionaries in Sabah", both speakers spoke on their individual journeys of developing their respective ethnic dictionaries which started as far back as 30 years ago. The audience were privileged to listen to first-hand information in the making of ethnic dictionary.

In his paper titled 'Challenges of making the Dusunic dictionary and the future of unwritten languages', Datuk Cosmas outlined the difficult challenges he faced in making the Kadazan Dictionary (in Tangaa Papar) which was published in 2016. The dictionary has 334 pages and contains four sections (Kadazan root words register, botanical terms, zoological terms, and English-Kadazan-Malay dictionary). It is a personal satisfaction to overcome the challenges given that Datuk Cosmas is an engineer by training and he had to learn linguistics on his own at the beginning of his venture.

The second speaker, Mr. Ricky Ganang, recalled how he started his Lundayeh – English dictionary before the age of computers and word processors. With basic pen and paper notetaking methods to the more systematically prepared present volume, the Lundayeh – English dictionary is a work of passion and love for his language which he feels is his contribution to his indigenous community. In summary, despite the challenges which are present in making dictionaries for indigenous language, the future is a positive one.

The speakers gave their talks to a full house with representatives from local partners such as SIL Sabah, the Kadazandusun Cultural Association, Sabah State Library, IPG Kent, Sabah Cultural Board, as well as students and academic staff from UMS.

The Brown Bag Seminar Series features local and international speakers sharing and highlighting their research in the fields of languages and linguistics - two very rich sources of research data on Sabah's indigenous communities.