



LANGUAGE AMBASSADORS 2015



Datuk Ramli Sarip

Datuk Ramli Sarip, fondly known as ‘Papa Rock’, started his music career as the frontman of local band, Sweet Charity. First formed in 1969, it was largely credited as the band that ignited a ‘rock explosion’ in Singapore and Malaysia between the 70s and 80s.

In 1985, he left the band to pursue a solo Malay music career. As a solo artist, he transitioned from rock tunes to a more contemplative, Malay folk and traditional-inspired sound. His best-loved original compositions include ‘*Bukan Kerana Nama*’. With over 12 solo albums to his name, he has garnered 12 platinum discs and 10 gold discs for best-selling albums to date.

As *Duta Bahasa*, Datuk Ramli firmly believes in the power of music to heighten language appreciation and connect people through lyric and song. He is also an example of how the Malay language is still alive and relevant today as he uses the language everyday in his life as well as singing career.

While his ability to sing in both Bahasa Melayu and English has been beneficial to his musical career, he feels that it is essential for one to master his or her own mother tongue.

Learning and practicing the language is also important to Datuk Ramli. He suggests that although we may not use Bahasa Melayu as frequently in school or at work, one can still find opportunities to practice by speaking it with family members at home, with one’s Malay neighbours, or when visiting other countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Southern Thailand.



Nur Hafiza Osman (Fiza O)

Nur Hafiza Osman, whose moniker is Fiza O, is a popular radio deejay and personality on Malay radio station RIA 89.7FM as well as a Malay television show producer that few would be able to guess she was more fluent in English than her mother tongue when she was younger.

While Fiza had always been a student of higher Malay in school, she realized that as she grew older, her verbal command of the Malay language diminished as she found herself conversing in English about 90 per cent of the time. Her writing skills remained significantly well but she had difficulty conversely fluently in Malay and sounded awkward when doing so. It was then that she made the decision to do something to improve her spoken Malay before her proficiency worsened.

As a first time mom to one-year-old son Isa Awsam, the importance of preserving and passing on the Malay language to the next generation becomes even more real as she strongly believes that language binds her to her roots and Malay culture.

For Fiza, being proficient in using both Malay and English has proven its practical worth as it has allowed her to further her career especially when she's taking on hosting or translation work. She also feels that her bilingualism has made her a more engaging deejay because it equips her with a good set of communication skills which results in better and deeper engagement with her radio listeners.

On a personal level, Fiza finds comfort in knowing that with a fluency in Malay, she can now describe things and situations to her elderly relatives and friends in Malay without getting flustered while trying to find the correct words to use.



Hairianto Diman

In his line of work as a journalist at Berita Harian, Hairianto is daily reminded of how important it is to know and understand a language.

When he first applied for a position with Berita Harian, the English Language graduate remembers being apprehensive as he had little job experience then that required an extensive use of the Malay language. However, having to write and practice the language every day provided him with the opportunities to improve his language competency. With all his colleagues speaking Malay, Hairianto also realized that the best way to learn or increase one's language proficiency was to immerse oneself in an environment where the language is used extensively.

Bilingualism is another skill that Hairianto strongly believes is important in today's society. From a career standpoint, this ability to comfortably and fluently use both languages has allowed him to effectively communicate with his interviewees in the language that they are more comfortable with, especially the older generation who prefer to converse in Malay. This helps him to relate to them better as well as creates a relaxed atmosphere for everyone involved.

With family and friends, Hairianto takes a more casual approach to the language, sometimes speaking in Malay or English or a mix of both. However, he knows that certain expressions are sometimes best conveyed in Malay, especially if they are pertaining to the Malay language or culture, because there may not be an English equivalent or translation that fully captures its essence. This also reflects Hairianto's awareness that bilingualism has given him the privilege of having access to the experiences related to the two languages and their cultures, which in turn has broadened his perspectives and provided richer learning experiences for him.

Personally experiencing the benefits of being fluent in Malay, Hairianto wants to encourage others to use the Malay language not only because it helps us to understand and preserve the Malay culture but because it is also a language that is relevant, "cool and hip" and has practical economic benefits.



Siti Aisyah Mohamed Salim

Siti Aisyah Mohamed Salim, or better known to many by her pen name Chempaka Aizim, is an award-winning short story writer whose written works have been published in several newspapers and magazines.

Since young, Chempaka had always been taught to think in Malay and spoke Malay with everyone at home and in school. Learning the language and being fluent in it since young really helped her a lot, and fueled her interest in pursuing a bachelor's degree in Malay literature. These years in the National University of Malaysia (University Kebangsaan Malaysia) taught her more about the language and allowed her to enjoy it even more because she was able to connect with the origin of the words in relation to the Malay culture.

Despite her high level of proficiency in spoken and written Malay, Chempaka is not one to rest on her laurels. As a writer, she is always open to answering and discussing questions regarding her choice of words as well as the meaning of the words used in her stories. This same attitude of a lifelong learning also applies to her role as a teacher at Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah where she often checks with the other Malay language teachers whenever she is unsure about the grammar used in her students' work.

In school, Chempaka's passion for creative writing is passed on to her own students through a variety of teaching methods to show them how interesting the language and culture can be. This includes encouraging her primary students to write short stories and her secondary students to write poems that she sends in to competitions and publications to show them that they have done well. Chempaka also practices an open written assignment in class where she allows her students to write about any topic that interests them and pass whatever they have written to her for checking at anytime.

As a Malay, Chempaka personally feels that it is important for her to instill a passion and respect for the Malay language and culture among the people of her own race. She also hopes that her role as a writer and teacher will inspire many to enjoy the language as much as she does.