
The Language Choice Among Chinese-Indian Mixed-Marriage Families in Malaysia

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Abstract

In Malaysia, under certain cultural, social and political conditions, a minority community might adopt a different language and become monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. However, the more general trend, especially among well-educated individuals, is that they tend to become English speakers. This may occur among children from inter-group marriages where English is the only common language between the spouses.

The main objective of this study is to examine the language choice among Malaysian children from inter-group marriages where one of the spouses is either Tamil or Chinese. Another objective is to identify the role of attitude in language choice. The Chindians comprise dyads of Indian-Chinese mixed marriage children and their parents from urban areas. The data will be gathered through questionnaires and structured interviews administered across both groups. Analyses of the data will include a comparison of the language choice among the Chindians in the urban areas and the role of language as a marker of self/group identity. The domains examined are home, school, workplace and places of worship.

Introduction

In a multilingual set-up as in Malaysia which comprises of individuals from several ethnic backgrounds, it is almost impossible not to be linked to one another. According to Schmidt-Makey (1971), there has been an increase in the number of marriages that occur between individuals who come from different ethnic backgrounds and hence, also speak different languages.

Baker (2000) and Harding-Esch & Riley (2003) show that both nation-wide and across international borders, mixed-language marriages are on the rise. This has resulted in many families raising their children to be at least bilingual (Malave, 1977).

Linguistic development of children can be influenced by a number of reasons. Children are found to be very sensitive to the choice of language used by those people around them and more so if the language is directed to them (Harrison & Piette, 1980). The role of parental influence as an influential adult can be a major factor. In an investigation of bilingual children in English and Spanish, Kasuya (1998) found that parental language choice has the potential to encourage active language selection in their children.

In Malaysia, the general trend, especially among well-educated individuals, is that they tend to become English speakers. This often occurs among children from intergroup marriages where English is the only common language between the spouses. Since Malaysia is a multiracial country, there are many opportunities for inter-marriages between the different races. Nowadays, there are increasingly more mixed marriages between the Indians and Chinese.

The focus of this study is on the offsprings of parents of Indian-Chinese mixed marriages. Their children, comprising a certain part of the Malaysian population, are often referred to as *Chindians*. The study also focuses on the Indian and Chinese parents who both share the responsibility of raising their *Chindians*, in an environment where at least one or more languages are used.

The objectives of this study are:

- (i) to examine language choice among *Chindians*
- (ii) to identify parents' role of attitude in language choice
- (iii) to identify different domains where the native language is used

The research questions are as follow:

- (i) What is the language choice among Malaysian *Chindians*?
- (ii) What is the role of parents' attitude in children's language choice?
- (iii) Which are the different domains where the native language is used?

This study on a contemporary issue related to cross-cultural communication in Malaysia gives an insight on the use of native and neutral languages in a multi-racial country. Factors that influence language choice

among *Chindians* are important in a nation with such a rich cultural diversity. This study also provides an insight on the role parents play in their *Chindians'* choice of language(s) in different domains.

Literature Review

Malaysia is a multilingual country, with three major races and numerous minority languages being spoken by people of different ethnic backgrounds. In terms of linguistic choices, a study by Lim (2008) shows that while Malay youths prefer to use their ethnic language, Chinese and Indian male adolescents prefer to use English, the international language in their daily in-group and out-group interaction. Children who come from inter-ethnic marriages are seen to have the advantage of picking up at least two different languages spoken by their parents. David (2008) cites studies by Nadarajan (1994) and Arumugam (1990) which reveal that *Chindian* children have a tendency to be multilingual. They also acquire and speak most of the major languages spoken in Malaysia, namely Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. According to Arumugam (1990), exposure from family members and friends is the main contributing factor for this ability

In addition, these children acquired the ability to read, write and speak Malay and English at school. In short, *Chindian* children have the advantage when it comes to languages as they in most cases have the languages of one or both their parents and in all cases use both the national and international languages. In the Malaysian context, this scenario is rather common where most children of Indian-Chinese mixed marriages are able to master at least more than two languages. In many occasions, however, they use a neutral language to communicate to the parents. The neutral language is not the native language of either parents. There is a clear advantage of being able to communicate with family on both sides (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, Blum-Martínez, 2002, Harding-Esch & Riley, 2003).

Another obvious benefit is that the child is socialized in both languages and both cultures, which contributes greatly to the success of bilingual acquisition (de Houwer, 1999b; Parke & Drury, 2001). In a multilingual country like Malaysia, not only are these children exposed to their parents' native languages (i.e. Tamil and Chinese) but they are also learning other languages like English and Malay. This is more so when there are close contacts with their other extended family members.

As shown in a study by Harding-Esch & Riley (2003), close contacts with extended family are not only vital for a child's development in both languages and both cultures, but important for building relationships, which

cannot be done without language. According to Barron-Hauwacrt (2004, p. 88), grandparents may play a key role in the linguistic development of children, especially in the minority language, as it allows “for extra language input and forms strong person-language bonds that will help them maintain their languages” Children of mixed marriages not only are encouraged to inherit their parents’ native languages but also continue to embrace the cultures that come with the languages.

According to Baker (2000), children as young as 17 years of age, can notice a clear separation of languages. When growing up in a home where bilingualism is encouraged, children are able to make the necessary adaptations when they encounter new or unfamiliar linguistic environments (Parke & Drury, 2001).

Research shows that bilingual children are not simply inclined to speak one language over the other; they make a deliberate choice (Malave, 1997, Parke & Drury, 2001). Bilingual children are able to sort out languages in their mind, consciously choose to use one or the other (Parke & Drury, 2001). They are also believed to be able to keep their languages in balance as de Houwer (1990) and Meisel (1989) reiterate in their studies. It has also been said that they can choose their language according to the intended recipient even when that person may not be present (Harrison & Piette, 1980) as well as according to the setting or location in which the child heard the language (Deuchar & Quay, 1999).

In mixed-lingual families, specifically where both languages are valued and are a means of socialization, “the child learns that one class of social interactions corresponding to one set of scripts can make use of two sets of linguistic rules according to a number of situational variables, such as interlocutor, topic and context” (Hamers & Blanc, 1989:74).

A study has confirmed that people speak like those with whom they wish to be identified and those with whom they interact (Chaika, 2008). Bilingual children are aware of the existence of two distinct codes and are, therefore, able to switch between the two, long before they have mastered all the rules of the languages they are exposed to (Fantini, 1985; Hamers & Blanc, 1989).

According to Buda (2006), one’s language choice may also be affected by utilitarian considerations. In other words, by using a particular language a speaker feels that he is in a better position to be accepted in a group or social context. In some situations, a person may have a personal reason in his choice of language. For example, a foreign student may prefer to use a target language whenever possible, with the sole intention of improving his language proficiency in the language.

The choice of a code in a multilingual context which involves 'who speaks what language to whom, when, where and even why?' is a complex task. It can be said that there is a large number of factors which can influence language choice such as language user's social background, linguistic profile, profession, educational background, attitudes and social domains. Some of these factors may work either with or against each other, producing a complex web of interaction which makes the task of describing any one language-choice event extremely difficult.

Finally, it needs to be recognized that language choice events do not exist in a vacuum. As Buda (2006) reiterates, language is, after all, a medium for interaction and communication between people and the use of language will reflect the infinite complexity of human relationships. It is also very much affected by the domains which they are found to be interacting.

A number of studies (e.g. Fishman, 1972, Gal, 1979; Parasher, 1980; David, 1999; Hohenthal, 2003 and Yeh, Chan, & Cheng, 2004) found that people use language as per status of the domains. A study in New York by Greenfield (1972) on a bilingual Puerto Rican community reports that Spanish is used in intimate domains such as family and friendship while English is chosen for employment and education.

A local study looks at the patterns of language choice in the domain of office among undergraduates at University Putra Malaysia by Mostafizar Rahman (2008). In the study, non-Malay respondents are shown to be more inclined to use English in the workplace domain. The study concludes that the choice is influenced by language proficiency and ethnicity of the respondents.

Several other studies recognized the domain distribution of language use. In a study by Parasher (1980), mother tongue is used in the family domain by people in India. On the other hand, English is the preferred choice in domains such as education, government and employment. Other similar studies such as by Nercissians (2001), Arua & Magocha (2002), Goebel (2002), Hohenthal (2003) and Yeh *et al.* (2004) also report similar findings where mother tongue is favoured for use in family or home domain.

Definitions

In this study, the following definitions are used:

1 CHINDIANS

Chindians refers to the children / off-springs of Malaysian mixed-marriage couples where one parent is Indian and the other Chinese.

2. NATIVE LANGUAGE

Native language refers to the main language acquired and used in childhood (Gupta, 1998).

3. LANGUAGE CHOICE

Language choice refers to the deliberate choice of language made by a speaker in a given context.

4. ATTITUDE

Attitude refers to the viewpoints and opinions of *Chindians* as well as their parents towards language choice, shift and maintenance.

5. DOMAIN

Domain refers to a particular environment or area of activity or interest that *Chindians* are exposed to in their daily lives.

Methodology

The sample comprises of *Chindians* of mixed Indian-Chinese parentage and their parents from urban areas. The *Chindians* are randomly selected from the urban towns in Malaysia. A total of 13 *Chindians* and 6 parents (either parent Indian or Chinese) participated in this study

Among the 13 *Chindians*, there are 7 males and 6 females. Their ages range from 8 years old to 30 years old. All of them are from urban areas. They comprise primary, secondary or tertiary students; and young working adults.

Among the 6 parents interviewed, there are 2 males and 4 females. 3 of them are Indians whereas the other 3 are Chinese. Their educational qualifications range from doctorates to Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education. 3 are university/college lecturers, 1 businesswoman, 1 housewife and another, a contractor

Questionnaires are given to the *Chindian* children by the researchers. Telephone interviews with the parents of these *Chindians* are conducted by the researchers over a week. The questionnaire has been pilot tested on 2 *Chindians* and some amendments have been made to improve the questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprises four sections. (A) Biodata and (B) Language Choice. Section A comprises 5 questions and Section B, 15 questions. All the questions are a combination of structured and open-ended

questions. The interview schedule comprises 14 questions, both structured and open-ended questions. The researchers conducted telephone interviews with all the parents of the *Chindians*.

Data are analysed based on the responses indicated in the questionnaire and information which have been obtained from telephone interviews with the parents. Analysis includes the language choice among *Chindians* in the urban areas, the role of language as a marker of self/group identity; and the different domains where the native language is used. The data obtained is analysed quantitatively and qualitatively

Findings and Discussion

Questionnaire

In this study two sets of respondents have been included in helping the researchers investigate the choice of language among Chinese-Indian mixed families in Malaysia. The study focuses on children of the inter-marriage group of Chinese and Indian (*Chindians*) whose ages range from 8 years to 30 years old. A total of 7 males and 6 female *Chindians* participated in this study. Most of the children's fathers are Chinese. The *Chindians* are mostly young people studying in schools/universities, with an exception of 3 *Chindians* who are working.

77% of the children have no problems identifying their race with only 23% stating that they are unsure which race they want to identify with. It is also interesting that for most (85%) of these children, they see themselves as mostly *Chindians* although their race in the national registration is either Chinese or Indian. Only two (15%) children consider themselves as belonging to either Chinese or Indian race only. According to most of the *Chindians*, their inability to speak one of their parents' languages, seldom thinking in either parents' language(s), and not seeing themselves as belonging to either group, have caused them to feel more comfortable being identified as *Chindians*. However, most of the parents interviewed see their children as belonging to the father's race.

Identifying their race is easy in Malaysia as the children follow their fathers' race in their birth certificates and identity cards. One *Chindian* has stated that it is not important to be identified as a particular race. However, most *Chindians* say that being the children of mixed marriages have made them feel very special. According to one *Chindian*, belonging to neither race may cause them difficulties in finding partners in future.

Another *Chindian* claims that because of his identity, he seems to be more popular than those who have the typical look of a certain race. One of the 3 *Chindians* who are unsure of deciding their race, has reasoned that since he prays to Hindu gods, he is an Indian.

Most of these *Chindians* admit that in most occasions (67%) they are mistaken as belonging to either a Malay race (63.2%), Eurasian (15.8%) or others (21%) while 33% say that they are sometimes mistaken as belonging to the races mentioned earlier. Those who have been mistaken as belonging to other groups (21%), are sometimes thought of as foreign nationalities such as Brazilian, Spanish, Portuguese or of Sabah and Sarawak origins.

46% of *Chindians* like to be referred to as *Chindians* and the remaining (54%) are indifferent to the term. Those who like the term say that it makes them feel unique as there are not many *Chindians* in the world, it is not wrong to be termed as one; they are already used to the term, to state their race as Chinese-Indian or Indian-Chinese is too long and best of all, they are able to celebrate both traditions and cultures. 62% agree that they are conscious of their *Chindians*' status while 23% indicate that they are not conscious at all, the remaining 15% admit to being conscious sometimes.

A total of 6 parents (2 males and 4 females) have taken part in the interview. They are mostly parents of children in this study with an exception of one parent. An equal number of Chinese and Indian parents have given their co-operation in answering the interview questions. The parents' levels of education are from Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education, Malaysian Certificate of Education, Masters and Doctoral level. Their occupational background also varied as there is 1 housewife, 1 contractor, 1 business woman and 3 university lecturers. Overall, these parents have an average of 3 children in a family and have 2 or 3 of their children taking part in this study. The parents' responses are mainly related to their role in choosing the language(s) that their children speak.

Although more than half the *Chindians* has not been given a language choice, all of them (100%) state that they have no problems in deciding which language to speak in. The *Chindians* regard English as their native language, the language that is mostly spoken at home. But if given a language choice, the *Chindians* have identified all the 4 languages spoken in Malaysia as one of their choices although English appears to be the most popular language. Most of the *Chindians* realize the advantage of being able to speak in more than one language. Among the *Chindians*, 22.7% have identified Chinese as their language choice; 18.2% identified Tamil and

13.6% identified Malay. The remaining 45.5%, however, prefer to speak in English as they feel more comfortable and proficient in English. They view English as a language that enables them to interact with a wider circle of people, especially people from different ethnic backgrounds.

90.1% of *Chindians* are not affected by how others view their choice of language whereas 9.9% of them are. Regarding the influence of parents on the *Chindians*' choice of language, 46.1% say they have been influenced by their parent(s), 30.8% say they haven't been influenced, while the remaining 23.1% say that they may have been influenced by their parents. In general, more *Chindians* say that it is important for them to speak the mothers' native language than the fathers'. All *Chindians* (100%) intend to teach their own children the language of their choice.

Reasons for choosing the language or languages as stated by the *Chindians* are mostly related to the language use with close family members rather than to other people outside the family circle. 69.2% *Chindians* want to identify with their mother(s) and 69.2% *Chindians* with their siblings; 61.5% want to communicate with their friends and peers. 53.8% *Chindians* also feel that the language chosen enables them to identify with their father while 46.1% of *Chindians* agree that it helps them to identify with their teachers or lecturers. Only 23% and 15.4% believe that their language choice helps them to identify with their religious authorities or colleagues, respectively.

For most *Chindians* (92.3%), it is important to be able to speak in their choice of language with their siblings. It is also important for them (84.6%) to be able to use the language chosen to communicate with their parents. As the language is the only language spoken at home, some *Chindians* (69.2%) feel the importance of being able to use it. In addition, by choosing the language, they are trying to accommodate their grandparents' language(s) and maintain relative ties with other family members (53.8%). The *Chindians* (53.8%) also feel that being proficient in the language also helps them in their language choice, especially since the language is neutral to the family members.

The majority of *Chindians* (43.8%) who have identified English as their preferred language, agree that it is important for them to communicate effectively in the language; get a good education (37.5%) rather than getting a good job (18.7%). Their ability to speak in a particular language(s) is felt to have influenced the feeling of acceptance by their friends and peers among 61.5% *Chindians*. Acceptance by grandparents and other family members (46.2%) is also regarded as important although acceptance by parents, siblings and colleagues share equal (38.5%) importance for the

Chindians. Members of the community are shown to have less effect (31%) on their choice of language use.

The majority of *Chindians* (91.7%) admit to have been using the same language since their childhood and for most of them, it is the language that is spoken by most of their friends and family members. Being in the same language environment since childhood has also reduced their need to use another language. Moreover, both parents also use the same language so communication is easier.

Language Domain and its Importance

Different languages may be used in certain domains. For instance, the use of the English language in the schools/universities domain (84.6%) seems to be the most important among the four domains identified for *Chindians*. The second most important domain is the workplace domain (61.5%); home domain (53.8%) is the third most important; and places of worship (38.5%) is the least important domain.

When asked to rank the importance of the four languages (Tamil, Chinese, English and Malay) at the national and international levels, *Chindians* list Tamil as the least important language at both levels. While Malay is viewed as important at the national level, its importance at the international level is ranked as unimportant. However, Chinese language is equally important at both levels. This is also true for English which is regarded as more important at both levels. In retrospect, their perception towards the importance of these languages has also been influenced by their knowledge and experience about these languages as users and learners of the languages.

With regard to the home domain, the data show that English (47.4%) has been identified as the language that is mostly spoken at home which is followed by Chinese (26.3%), Tamil (15.8%) and Malay (10.5%). These languages are often used by 92.3% *Chindians* and seldom used by 8.2% *Chindians*. Most *Chindians* who have identified English as being the most chosen language spoken at home, also indicate that they (69.2%) regard it as their native language. An equal number of *Chindians* has not considered a neutral language, Malay, as a native language.

Although these *Chindians* have come from either Chinese or Indian background, none of their parents' native languages has been identified as the popular choice when *Chindians* are outside the home domain. It must be noted here that for many *Chindians* (53.8%), language choice has not been given to them. However, 23.1% *Chindians* has been given the choice of choosing a particular language or 23.1% are unsure if they have been

given the option to speak in their language choice. To support their answers, they have given reasons like: that is the way they have been brought up; they have never felt any pressure to speak the language(s) spoken by their parents/family

37.5% of *Chindians* use another language when communicating with family members and friends. According to them, it is an important way to keep in touch with both heritages, as well as be multilingual for effective communication.

From a total of 13 *Chindians*, more than half (54%) say that it is important for them to speak their fathers' language. Their reasons range from the importance to indicate that they are part Chinese; Chinese is widely spoken in the community; there is a need to communicate with relatives, and to preserve their fathers' language. 36.4% of *Chindians* state that it is unimportant to speak Tamil (father's language) as they do not have Tamil friends, that no one speaks Tamil to them, that they find Tamil difficult as the majority of the family members speak English. The remaining 9.1% *Chindians* are unsure whether it is important, as long as they can communicate, they are satisfied regardless of what language they use.

In contrast, 75% *Chindians* say that it is important for them to speak their mother's native language. This is because many people speak Chinese and they want to be with their Chinese relatives, they also want to know more Chinese than Tamil, or they are part Tamil so it is important to speak Tamil to communicate with the mothers' side. A reason given is that her first teacher is her mother who has taught her to speak. Hence, mothers play an important role in teaching their *Chindian* children to speak their native language or a neutral language. This is probably because mothers tend to spend more time nurturing their children than the fathers so the children see a greater need to speak their mothers' language. The other *Chindians* (16.6%) say it is not important as Tamil is not an international language and that they use English to communicate.

With regard to speaking their grandparents' language, 61.5% say 'yes' while 30.8% say 'no'. Those who feel that it is important emphasize the need to speak Chinese in order to understand their grandparents better. Communication is important to them and language is a means of identifying and reflecting their race. 30.8% of the *Chindians* who said 'no,' explained that English is used by their grandparents so they get by with English. Hence, there is no need to learn their grandparents' native language(s).

All the *Chindians* (100%) want to teach their own children the language of their choice in future. As for teaching the language of their parents, 46.2% of them say that they will do so only if their children want to

learn the language(s). One interesting finding is that the majority of Chindians (77%) think in English while they were answering the questionnaire; only 23% thought in Tamil or Chinese. The reason given is that all the questions are in English so they (77%) think in English. This can also be attributed to the fact that most *Chindians* in this study use English as a neutral language. For the school domain, none of the parents' native languages has been identified as the popular choice among *Chindians* when they are outside the home domain. In most cases, where a language is used at college, workplace or at places of worship, English has been identified as a language of choice by most *Chindians*; followed by another neutral language - Malay

Tamil is least spoken at workplaces, schools or places of worship. Malay language, however, is identified as another popular choice when communicating with others in schools or workplaces but not in places of worship. Chinese is spoken too but not as often as English or Malay

According to 33.3% *Chindians*, the influence by their friends and peers is felt especially so when they are older. However, the majority (66.6%) are not influenced by their friends and peers at school. The *Chindians* are still using their native language to speak to their friends as they feel proud of their own language. In their mind, once a language is learnt and used, it will be difficult to forget it easily.

In general, the findings indicate the majority of Chindians have been using the same language since their childhood as it is the language spoken by most of their friends. The change in language choice occurs when they start schooling or when they are influenced by their peers.

In the workplace domain, 23.1% *Chindians* foresee themselves using another language in the near future. The reasons are they want to widen their scope of language or to use it in their workplace. However, these Chindians stressed that they will not forget their native language. The other 53.8% *Chindians* say that they will still use English as they are more proficient in this language. 3 Chindians state that they usually use English at their workplace as their colleagues communicate in English.

For places of worship, in most cases, where a language is used at places of worship, English has been identified as a language of choice by most of the *Chindians* (69.2%). However, in some situations, Chinese and Tamil maybe used especially if the order of worship is conducted in these languages. Where there are bilingual services conducted at places of worship, the Chindians state that they prefer English as the medium of communication.

Interview

Based on the data collected in the interviews, all *Chindians* parents (100%) have 2 to 4 children per person. All of them (100%) speak English to their *Chindians* children. In addition to English, some parents speak Tamil (16.6%) and Chinese (33.4%) to their children. However, none of the parents use Malay to converse with their children.

The parents themselves speak several languages. Besides speaking English (100%), they also speak Malay (66.7%), Chinese (33.3%) and Tamil (16.7%). Their *Chindian* children respond to them mainly in English although 1 child responds in Tamil, Chinese and Malay (7.7% respectively.) When speaking to the other parent, 15.4% *Chindian* children use another language, 23.1% do not and 7.7% do it sometimes. Based on the data, English seems to be the choice of the *Chindian* children and their parents when communicating with one another.

Although the term '*Chindians*' is used in Malaysia, 66.7% parents do not consider their children as *Chindians* whereas 23.1% parents do. 1 mother (16.7%) says that she sometimes considers her child *Chindian*. Among the reasons given for not considering their children as *Chindians* is the stigma attached to the term '*Chindians*' 33.4% parents dislike the term *Chindians* as they find it derogatory and racist. 1 mother (16.7%) who is indifferent to the term, says that her children are more Chinese or Malaysian than *Chindians*. However, 33.4% parents who like the term, describe *Chindians* as a unique term as not many people use it. The parents describe their children as being proud to be *Chindians* who can speak several languages and that they are beautiful, happy people who are not typically Chinese or Indian, just *Chindians*.

Regarding whether the children are conscious of being *Chindians*, 33.4% parents say 'yes' while the other 66.6% say 'no.' All the parents (100%) say that they have no problems deciding which language(s) their children should speak in. This is because the issue of language choice doesn't arise; and that English has been used since their children's childhood. 1 mother (16.7%), however, pointed out that her son was initially confused with his language for his first 3 years so he spoke Tamil although his father is Chinese.

All the parents (100%) are not worried about their children speaking a neutral language, which is English. What concerned them most is that their children can communicate effectively and are comfortable with using the neutral language of their choice. In fact, the majority of the parents (83.5%) say that they do not make any conscious effort to teach their children their

native language. As long as their children can communicate with their family, they feel that English is the best language for them as they are all proficient in English. There is seldom the necessity to speak the parents' native language(s) as the children can communicate effectively in English with their grandparents. Based on the data, it can be concluded that the parents have no objections to the use of English among their *Chindian* children as long as effective communication takes place.

Another interesting finding is dissent on the issue on whether the parents' attitude towards the language choice affected the children's choice of spoken language. 23.1% parents felt that their attitude has played a role in their children's perception of their native language. 1 mother (16.7%) admits that her own prejudice against Tamil has sub-consciously affected her children who have become very hostile towards Tamil, their father's native language. Her children refuse to learn Tamil even during the compulsory Pupils Own Language (Tamil) classes in school. The situation is made worse since the father himself does not see any necessity in teaching his children Tamil since they converse fluently in English and Chinese. Another mother (16.7%) expressed regret that she has not made any effort to teach her children Tamil (their father's native language) as both parents have become too comfortable with English, and are too lazy to use other languages.

About one third of the parents (33.4%) feel that there is a loss of identity if their children do not use either parent's native language. This is because the children should learn the native language in order to communicate better with family members and relatives who may not be fluent in English. However, the parents (66.7%) are adamant that English is an asset, not a liability as English is an international language. Moreover, language is just one aspect of a person's identity and it is more important that the children speak the language they prefer.

In general, English is the choice of *Chindians* and their parents when communicating. More than half of the parents do not consider their children as *Chindians* and their children are also not conscious of being *Chindians*. With regard to whether parents' attitude affects their children's spoken language, three quarters of them say 'No'. Most of the parents do not feel there is a loss of identity if their children do not use the native language. They regard English as an important international language.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In a multilingual nation like Malaysia with so many languages and dialects, the choice of language is not only in the public domain but also in the home domain. Education, rural-urban migration, increased interracial interaction and interracial marriages are among factors that influence language choice, especially in the home domain. Malaysians have the option of choosing which language(s) to use: Malay, the national language; English the second language; the native languages, or a mixed discourse comprising several languages.

In this study, the language choice among Malaysian *Chindians* is English. English has become a neutral language to 'bridge' the language gaps between mixed marriage couples and their *Chindian* children. This is especially true among educated parents with *Chindian* children living in urban areas. English is also the language used by some *Chindians* in their homes, where traditionally, native languages dominated.

The *Chindians* do not see any need to use other languages besides English as it is also the language taught and spoken at school. The majority of children from mixed marriages identify themselves as mostly *Chindians*. They do not regard themselves as either Chinese or Indian and hence, they adopt English as their native language.

Notwithstanding the fact that Malay is the national language in the work domain particularly in the private sector, the linguistic code that is preferred by most *Chindians* speakers in the work domain is English. It is clear that English is also of great importance when compared to Malay. The language choice of the *Chindians* is noted in their preference of language in both the workplace and school domains. Malay language, however, is identified as another popular choice when communicating with others in schools or workplaces but not in places of worship. Chinese is spoken too but not as often as English or Malay. Tamil is least spoken at workplaces, schools or places of worship.

Living in an urban area where English is commonly used by speakers of various races is one factor which promotes the use of English. This is supported by David's (2008) study, which identifies residency in an urban area like Kuala Lumpur has undoubtedly affected and influenced the language choice of *Chindians* children.

Parents' attitude does influence their children's language choice. In this study, parents who have a negative perception towards the native languages will indirectly encourage their *Chindian* children to choose a neutral language, English. On the other hand, the other parents with

neutral perceptions toward the native languages do not affect the children's language choice.

As this study only focuses on a small sample of *Chindians* from urban areas, a more in-depth study with a larger sample of *Chindians* from urban and rural areas is recommended. More data on the language choice among the *Chindians* can be obtained through questionnaires, interviews as well as observations. This is merely a preliminary study on *Chindians* and their parents from urban areas only. Hence, the results cannot be generalised across the Malaysian population especially as the sample is taken randomly from urban areas.

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