



Gender, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Language Choices of Malaysian Youths: the Case of the Family Domain

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships between gender, ethnicity, ethnic identity, and language choices of Malaysian multilingual youths in the family domain of language use. Five hundred undergraduate students who belonged to different Malaysian ethnic groups were selected as participants of the study. The participant aged between 17 to 25 years old. To select the participants, a random proportional stratified sampling strategy was developed. A self administered questionnaire survey comprising three sections was used for gathering information about participants' demographic profiles, their language choices in the family domain, and the concepts of their ethnic identity. To make analyses about the most used languages of the participants and the relationships between variables, SPSS software was run. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the participants' profiles as well as participants' used languages in the family domain of language use. Inferential statistics was used to examine relationships between variables. According to results of the study, in the family domain five codes were mostly used by the participants. These five codes were respectively, the Malay language, mixed use of Malay and English, Chinese, Mixed use of Chinese and English, and English. Furthermore, in the family domain, gender did not exert any influence on the choice of language of the multilingual participants, but ethnicity was found to be a determinant of language choice. Ethnic identity was found to influence the language choices of the Malays as well, but it did not affect the Chinese and Indian participants' language choices in this domain of language use.

Keywords: multilinguals, family domain of language use, choice of language, ethnicity, gender, ethnic identity

1. Introduction

In a multilingual country, members of ethnic groups speak their indigenous languages inside their speech communities (Elias, 2008, p. 8). In such linguistic ecologies, parallel to the indigenous languages, there is often another language that is used in more formal social events such as governmental debates, judicial environments and educational settings (Adams, Matu, & Ongarora, 2012). This formal language could be the language of the former colonial government, which was introduced to a country during its colonial era. Alternatively, it could be a promoted indigenous language that was selected as result of a language policy of a particular newly established state (Ferguson, 2006; Cooper, 1989). In the latter case, the selection of the formal language could also be evaluated as a reaction towards colonialism and used for nation building purposes (Cooper, 1989; Fishman, 1975).

1.1 Malaysia: A Multilingual Country

An understanding of the interwoven multicultural/multilingual social life in Malaysia is normally dependent on a discussion of language choice (Venugopal, 2000, p. 11). The socio-cultural history of the peoples who comprise Malaysian civil society has clearly influenced the linguistic behavior of Malaysian individuals. Various ethnic groups live in Malaysia, but three ethnic groups, i.e. the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians are considered as the major inhabitants of the country (Venugopal, 2000, p. 21). Venugopal (2000, p. 31) also noted that other ethnic minorities (the Others) such as Thais and Eurasians comprise 4% of the Malaysian populace. Furthermore, Venugopal (2000) pointed out that according to local regional varieties, the indigenous Malays speak the Malay language with its dialectal variations. For example, Hafriza Burhanudeen (2006) categorized the dialects of West Malaysia under four main groups. Burhanudeen (2006, p. 11) maintained:

The North Western dialect typically found in Kedah, Perlis and the Penang region, the North dialect (Kelantan, Pahang and Teregganu), the Eastern dialect (mainly the subvarieties of the North-Eastern dialect) and the Southern dialect (Johar, Melaka and Selangor).

Non-indigenous languages, Hafriza Burhanudeen (2006) further declared, encompass the languages that were brought to the country mostly by Chinese and Indian immigrants. Malaysian Chinese immigrants, depending on the Chinese Maritime Provinces that they migrated from, speak different dialects of the Chinese language (Hafriza Burhanudeen, 2006, p. 11). Hafriza Burhanudeen also noted that Malaysian Indians speak with different languages of the continent India and Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, in the multilingual Malaysian linguistic ecology—apart from obvious distinctions of phonology, morphology, lexis, and syntax—linguistic behavior can be dominated by the Malay, Chinese and Indian languages that are widespread in use (Venugopal, 2000, p. 46). Moreover, because of the legacy of British colonial rule and because of the effects of language policy and education, the English language is ubiquitous among Malaysians (Lee, S. K., Lee, K. S., Wong, & Ya'akob, 2010, p. 88; Asmah Hj. Omar, 1992, p. 70). Consequently, both the Malay language, which is also referred to as Bahasa Malaysia (BM), as the national language of independent Malaysia, and the English language as the language of higher education, political and judicial debates and international relationships function as linking pivots of different Malaysian ethnic communities (Hafriza Burhanudeen, 2006, p. 14).

In a multilingual setting such as Malaysia, according to context of language use, there is a tendency for multilingual speakers to shift from one language to another. Gal (1979, p.99) attributed multilingual individuals' language shift to speakers' identities (such as gender and ethnicity) rather than social situation. However, a social setting that a communication takes place there may be significant in language choice of multilingual individuals (Rahman, Chan, & Ain Nadzimah, 2008).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender and Language Choice

There are controversial studies' results about the effect of gender on language choice. For example, in a research study of language choice in Malaysia, Rahman et al. (2008) reported the factor of gender as a non-significant element in the choice of language among Malaysian multilinguals. This finding is in tandem with Chan's (1994) research that studied the Minnanren's language choices in Taiwan, and did not find gender a significant factor in the language choices of the participants of her study. In contrast to Rahman et al. (2008) and Chan (1994), Lu (1988) reported that differences in gender among Taiwanese participants resulted in different attitudes towards language choice. According to Lu, gender was a determinant of language choice among Taiwanese participants. Lu explained that the choice of language among the participants of the study was due to gender differences among them. In line with this argument, Yeh, Chan, and Cheng (2004) found that gender was a significant element in choosing Mandarin for communication purposes among three ethnic groups in Taiwan.

2.2 Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity and Language Choice

There is a mutual bond between ethnicity and language. Fishman, Gertener, and Milan (1985, p. 4) defined ethnicity as:

The sensing and expressing of links to one's own kind (one's own people), to collectivities that not only purportedly have historical depth but, more crucially, share putative ancestral origins and therefore, the gifts and responsibilities, rights and obligations deriving there from.

As such, a language is not only an individual's possession, but it also belongs to the whole speech community that practices it. According to Hudson (1996), a determining factor of belonging to a speech community is the use of its language. Hudson (1996, p. 10) maintained that language is an important factor that assists individuals to express their memberships in social units such as tribes and ethnic groups. Moreover, Hudson (p. 232) added that solidarity among members of a speech community is mostly achieved by the use of their common language. Hudson concluded that performing efficient communication in any social organization requires choosing a proper language. Thus, members of ethnic groups have a natural tendency towards the use of their ethnic language in their inter-communal relationships.

Yeh, et al. (2004, p. 81) highlighted three components of "Being, knowing and doing" in the above mentioned Fishman et al.'s (1985) definition of ethnicity. Accordingly, language functions as a determining factor in all the three components of ethnicity. In other words, language is not only a reflection of people's self-perception but also it is a medium through which social life is performed.

Although ethnicity is a biological attribute, it is demonstrated via ethnic culture and ethnic language (Fishman et al., 1985, p. 4). Similarly, a language may function as a marker of ethnic identity of an ethnic group. Furthermore, language maybe affected politically. This means that a language as a reflection of an ethnic identity may be also used in governmental policies to arouse people's awareness of their identity (Fishman, 1975, pp. 29-31). Additionally, language is utilized to promote actions to defend ethno-cultural values that belong to people. Likewise, language can be used to reject those cultural values that are evaluated as a threat to the existence of an ethnic group. However, whatever ethnic values are used for, one basic question is whether language choice is affected by ethnicity and ethnic identity or not.

Fishman et al. (1985) proposed that ethnic identity exists in the two levels of the conscious and unconscious. Fishman et al. (1985) also noted that the conscious level of ethnicity is associated with language use. Nevertheless, in case of disappearance of an associated language, ethnic identity may revive unconsciously. This argument is in line with Kamwendo (2006), who reported that as soon as the apartheid regime in South Africa collapsed, ethnic groups were again unconsciously encouraged to use and promote communication by using their mother tongues.

2.3 Domains of Language Use

In order to conduct research on the choice of language in bi/multilingual settings, Fishman (1968, 1972) introduced a domain model. According to Fishman, domains are institutional contexts that are regarded as constellations of other factors such as topic, location and participants. Fishman (1968) asserted that in multilingual settings and in any specific domain of language use, one language could be more appropriate than others. Consequently, Fishman (1972, p. 20) defined domain as:

A socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships and interactions between communicators and locales of communication in accord with the institutions of a society.

Accordingly, a domain is definable in terms of the social context in which an interaction takes place. Moreover, domain, as a theoretical concept, can be employed in language research to explain how language choice and topic, setting, interlocutors, etc. are related to current and accepted socio-cultural norms and social expectations. In other words, multilingual individuals' language choices are communication strategies that are not only influenced by who the individuals are talking to and the topics of the interaction, but also dependent on the settings in which the conversations take place.

Therefore, in a multilingual society language choices can be predictable phenomena in different contexts of social life. Those researchers (e.g., Rahman et al., 2008; Namei, 2008; Lim, 2008; Hafriza Burhanudeen, 2006; Yeh, et al., 2004; Parasher, 1980) who are in tandem with this perspective of domain analysis have opined that in multilingual contexts the choice of a language in a domain of language use depends largely on the setting. Furthermore, by utilizing Fishman's (1972) theoretical perspective in domain analysis, Rahman et al. (2008) evaluated domain itself as an influential factor in selecting a linguistic code. As a result, Rahman et al. referred to family meetings as a context of language use namely, the family domain of language use.

3. The Present Study

3.1 Statement of the Problem

The focus of research on language use in Malaysia has traditionally been on describing the language choices of Malaysian multilingual speakers within particular communicative events. However, the present study attempted to uncover the motivations behind language choices of Malaysian multilinguals. Motivation for language choice in this study refers to multilinguals' adjustment to social context in terms of choosing (consciously or unconsciously) a proper language to communicate efficiently. Consequently, the present study attempted to investigate to what extent the demographic factors of gender, ethnicity, and ethnic identity may exert any influence on the choice of language of Malaysian multilinguals in the family domain of language use.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

In a multilingual country like Malaysia, Multilingual individuals' characteristics such as gender and ethnic backgrounds may influence their choice of language. The present study aimed at examining the relationships between the Malaysian multilingual language choices from one side and their gender, ethnicity and ethnic identity from the other. Hence, the participants' gender, ethnicity and ethnic identity were considered as independent variables and the participants' choices of languages in the family domain of language use were considered as dependent variables. Specifically, the study was intended to answer the two following research questions:

1. What are the most used languages of Malaysian youths in the family domain of language use?
2. What is the relationship between Malaysian youths' most used languages and their gender, ethnicity and ethnic identity in the family domain of language use?

3.3 Methodology

At Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), as location of the study, the sample of the study was extracted from its targeted population, i.e. Malaysian undergraduates (N = 14, 343) who were studying at 15 different UPM faculties. As such, 500 undergraduate students were selected as participants of the study. The undergraduate participants were local students (Malays, Chinese, Indians, and some other ethnic group minorities).

For the purpose of data collection, a proportional stratified sampling strategy was utilized, i.e. the same procedure as in random sampling was used, except that the selection was from subgroups. The subgroups that the data were collected from were 15 different faculties of UPM. Proportional to population size of each faculty, sample participants of that particular faculty were randomly selected (a table of random numbers was used). Furthermore, in order to gain access to profiles of the participants, their language choices in the family domain of language use and for examination participants' perceptions of ethnic identity, a self-administered questionnaire comprised of three sections was used. Since participants' gender and ethnicity were two important independent variables of the study, Section 1 of the questionnaire aimed at gathering demographic data of the participants. Section 2 sought to collect data in relation to the choice of languages in the family domain of language use. To accomplish this, 12 social events were introduced to the participants, and they were instructed to highlight their choices of language in each social event according to a five point Likert scale ranging from never to very frequently (see Table 2). Section 3 of the instrument sought to obtain

information about the perception of ethnic identity of the participants. Section 3 was a standard scale named Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measures (MEIM) and consisted of 12 item statements.

The MEIM was first introduced by Phinney (1992) in order to provide a global scale for measuring ethnic identity of young adults of different ethnic groups. The MEIM is theoretically based on Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory and the development theory of Erikson (1968). In order to adapt the scale for the Malaysian situation, minor modifications were made to some of the wording of the MEIM's statements. Participants were instructed to respond to the 12-item statements by marking the appropriate boxes that corresponded to their agreement in terms of a four point Likert scale.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

External validity of a quantitative study is dependent on its capability of generalizing the results of the study to the outer world (Bartlett, Kotrlík, & Higgins, 2001, p. 43). In order to enhance the external validity of the present study, by using Cochran's (1977) formula, the sample size of the study was determined as 384 participants. Bartlett et al. (2001) pointed out that in research studies in which a survey method is used as the data collection technique, "the response rate is typically under 100%" (p. 46). To overcome any probable shortcoming, Bartlett et al. (2001) recommended increasing the sample size "by 30%-50% to account for uncooperative subjects" (p. 46). Consequently, with 116 extra respondents (30% of the sample size), the total participant number of the study was calculated as $n = 384 + 116 = 500$, which was the above-mentioned study sample size.

On the other hand, since content validity of a measurement is concerned with "meaning and interpretation of the scores" (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 256), there is no any numerical index to prove the content validity of a test. Accordingly, evidence based on content of this questionnaire was achieved by peer reviews and the logical examination of a panel of experts.

To prove the evidence of consistency and stability of the measurement, for reliabilities of Sections 2 and 3 of the instrument, i.e. statements about patterns of language choice in the family domains of language use and the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) respectively, the Cronbach Alpha measure was used. The computed reliability coefficient for Section 2 of the questionnaire (items about the choice of languages in the family domain of language use) was 0.942. Furthermore, the reliability coefficient for Section 3 of the questionnaire—the Multi group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)—was 0.845. Thus, the overall Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient test of the questionnaire's scales was 0.893. Since Kline (1999) stated that a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.7 or higher may be interpreted as a reliability factor of a scale, the computed overall Cronbach Alpha of 0.845 was considered as a reliability index of sections two and three of the study's instrument.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of the respondents

The information about the age group, gender, and ethnicity of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Accordingly, the respondents were categorized into three age groups of 17-19, 20-22, and 23-25. The majority (71.7%) of the respondents belonged to the 20-22 year old age group. There were more female (71.1%) than male (28.9%) respondents, and the majority of the respondents were Malays (71.5%). The remaining minority comprised respondents of Chinese ethnicity (21.7%), Indian (3%) and, lastly, other ethnic groups (3.8%).

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age Group, Gender, and Ethnicity

Variables		N*	Pct (%)
Age Group	17-19	73	14.7
	20-22	357	71.7
	23-25	68	13.6
Gender	Male	144	28.9
	Female	354	71.1
Ethnicity	Malay	356	71.2
	Chinese	108	21.7
	Indian	15	3.3
	Other ethnic groups	19	3.8

*N indicates frequency of respondents

4.2 Most Used Languages in the Family Domain

In the family domain, the participants' language choices and use were examined by presenting 12 social events to the participants (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Family Domain and its 12 Social Events

Domain of Language Use	Social Events: What language do you use?
Family	1. Speak to your grandparents
	2. Speak to your parents
	3. Speak to your siblings [brother(s) and/or sister(s)]
	4. Express your happiness towards your siblings [brother(s) and/or sister(s)]
	5. Express your anger towards your siblings [brother(s) and/or sister(s)]
	6. Discuss a personnel matter at home
	7. Joke with your family members at home
	8. Watch movies/television shows
	9. Speak to a Malay relative/guest
	10. Speak to a Chinese relative/ guest
	11. Speak to an Indian relative/guest
	12. Speak to your family members in the presence of a relative/guest of a different race

In each social event, the participants were asked to indicate their choice(s) of language(s) for the four under investigation languages (Malay, Chinese¹, Indian² and English) according to a five-point Likert scale with 5=very frequently, 4=frequently, 3=sometimes, 2=rarely, and 1=never.

It was hypothesized that in the Malaysian multilingual context of language use, the participants' language choices in the family domain might be a single language or a combination of two languages. To make the data sensitive to this trend, combinations were added to reveal possible choices of languages in the domain under study. As such, 10 choices of language that might have been used by the respondents were identified and codified as: 1=Malay, 2=Chinese, 3=Indian, 4=English, 5=mixed use of Malay and Chinese, 6=mixed use of Malay and Indian, 7= mixed use of Malay and English, 8= mixed use of Indian and Chinese, 9= mixed use of English and Chinese, and 10= mixed use of English and Indian.

On the other hand, according to the employed five-point Likert scale that ranged from a minimum score of 1(=Never) to 5(=Very frequently), each participant for each used language (Malay, Chinese, Indian, and English) in each social event could obtain a score ranging from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 60 with a median score of 36. Since Linneman (2011, p. 85) stated that the median of a scale can be selected as a cut-off point to categorize data, the median score of 36 was selected as a cut-off point to determine the most used language(s) of each participant in each social event.

As the next step, a comparative syntax was developed (see Table 3). According to the comparative syntax, in any social situation of the family domain, if any participant's score of any of the 10 above-stated codes was equal to the cut-off point, i.e. median (36) or more than the median (36), the code was considered as the most used language(s) or choice of language(s) of the particular participant in the associated social event in the family domain of language use.

Table 3. Syntax for Determining the Most Used Languages in the Family Domain of Language Use

Participant's Choice of language(s)	Syntax
1=Malay	IF score of Malay=36 or >36, and score of Chinese <36, and score of Indian <36, and score of English <36, the choice of language was considered Malay.
2=Chinese	IF score of Malay <36, and score of Chinese=36 or >36, and score of Indian <36, and score of English <36, the choice of language was considered the Chinese language.
3=Indian	IF score of Malay <36, and score of Chinese <36, and score of Indian=36 or >36, and score of English <36, the choice of language was considered the Indian language.
4=English	IF score of Malay < 36, and score of Chinese <36, and score of Indian <36, and score of English=36 or >36, the choice of language was considered the English language.

¹ Chinese language denoted most common spoken dialects of it including: Mandarin, Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka etc.).

² Indian language denoted: Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi, Telegu, Malaylees.

5= Mixed use of Malay and Chinese	IF score of Malay=36 or>36 and score of Chinese=36 or> 36, and score of Indian<36, and score of English<36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the Malay and Chinese languages.
6= Mixed use of Malay and Indian	IF score of Malay=36 or>36, and score of Indian=36 or> 36, and score of Chinese<36 and score of English<36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the Malay and Indian languages.
7= Mixed use of Malay and English	IF score of Malay=36 or> 36, and score of Chinese< 36 and score of Indian<36, and score of English=36 or>36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the Malay and English languages.
8= Mixed use of Indian and Chinese	IF score of Malay<36, and score of Chinese=36 or>36, and score of Indian=36 or> 36, and score of English< 36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the Indian and Chinese languages.
9= Mixed use of English and Chinese	IF score of Malay<36, and score of Chinese=36 or> 36, and score of Indian<36, and score of English=36 or> 36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the English and Chinese languages.
10= Mixed use of English and Indian	IF score of Malay< 36, and score of Chinese<36, and score of Indian=36 or>36, and score of English=36 or>36, the choice of languages was considered as mixed use of the English and Indian languages.

*36= Median of participants' language choice on a scale ranging from a minimum 12 to a maximum of 36

The results of the comparative syntax revealed that in the twelve social events of the family domain, from the list of the 10 hypothesized used codes illustrated in Table 3, eight codes were used by the participants. These eight used codes are illustrated in Table 4. Out of the eight used codes, five of them were used more frequently than other codes.

Table 4. Participants' Most Used Languages in the Family Domain of Language Use

Domain of Language Use	Most Used Language(s)	Frequency of Respondents N (%)
Family	1=Malay (code 1)	263 (52.8)
	2=Mixed use of Malay and English (code 7)	107(21.5)
	3=Chinese (code 2)	80 (16.1)
	4=Mixed use of English and Chinese (code 9)	21(4.2)
	5=English (code 4)	14(2.8)
	6=Indian (code 3)	6(1.2)*
	7=Mixed use of Malay and Chinese (code 5)	2(0.4)*
	8=Mixed use of English and Indian (code 10)	5(1)*
Total number of the respondents		498 (100)

Note: N indicates frequency of participants. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of N

*Figures marked with asterisks, due to low frequencies of use, were excluded from the analysis

The five most used languages were first, the Malay language (52.8%), second, mixed use of the Malay and English languages (21.5%), third, the Chinese language (16.1%), fourth, mixed use of the Chinese and English languages (4.2%), and fifth, the English language (2.8%). The Indian language, mixed use of the Malay and Chinese languages, and mixed use of the Indian and English languages with respective low frequencies use of 1.2%, 0.4%, and 1%, had negligent use among the participants and were excluded from the analysis. The low frequency used codes are marked by an asterisk (*) in Table 4. As such, the further analyses were performed by considering the five most used codes.

4.3 Influence of Gender, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, on Language Choice

In order to investigate the influence of the participants' gender, ethnicity, and ethnic identity on the choice of language(s) in the family domain of language use, the participants gender, ethnicity, and levels of ethnic identity (see Table 8) were considered as independent variables and the choice of languages were considered as the dependent variable (see Table 5, Table 6, and Table 9). Due to the categorical nature of the study's variables, the Chi-square Test was utilized to perform the analysis. This decision was in line with Bahaman Abu Samah and Turiman Suandi (1999) who recommended the non-parametric Chi-square Test for investigating relationships between categorical variables.

4.3.1 Gender and Language Choice

In order to conduct this part of the study, first the frequency of the respondents who used any of the five most used codes were extracted from Table 4. Second, according to Table 5, the genders of the respondents were computed (see

Table 5). Then the relationships between variables were examined. Accordingly, the results of the Chi-square Test ($\chi^2=1.788$, P Value > 0.05) did not support the hypothesis that gender can be a determinant of language choice in the family domain among the study's participants (see Table 5).

Table 5. Gender and Language Choice in the Family Domain of Language Use

Domains of Language Use	Most Used Languages	Frequency of Respondents	Gender		χ^2	P* Value
			N (%)	Male		
Family	1=Malay (code 1)	263	77(54.2)	186(54.2)	1.788	0.778 >0.05
	2=Chinese (code 2)	80	27(19.2)	53(15.5)		
	3=English (code 4)	14	4(2.8)	10(2.9)		
	4= Malay and English (code 7)	107	27(19.0)	80(23.3)		
	5= English and Chinese (code 9)	21	7(4.9)	14(4.1)		

Note: N indicates frequency of respondents

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of N

*Significant at 0.05 level

4.3.2 Ethnicity and Language Choice

By considering the participants' ethnicity as independent variables and the most used languages as dependant variables the relationships between variables were examined. The results of the Chi-square Test ($\chi^2= 523.952$, P Value <0.05) supported the hypothesis that ethnicity was a determinant of language choice in the family domain among the participants (see Table 6).

Table 6. Ethnicity and Language Choice in the Family Domain of Language Use

Domain of Language Use	Most Used Languages	Ethnic Groups				χ^2	P Value
		(N=Respondents' Frequency)					
		Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others		
Family	Malay	257(97.7)	0(0)	0(0)	6(2.3)	523.95 2*	0.000 <0.05
	Chinese	0(0)	80(100)	0(0)	0(0)		
	English	1(7.1)	6(42.9)	4(28.6)	3(21.4)		
	Malay and English	97(90.7)	0(0)	0(0)	10(9.3)		
	Chinese and English	0(0)	21(100)	0(0)	0(0)		

Note: N indicates number of respondents

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of N

*Significant at 0.05 level

4.3.3 Ethnic Identity and Language Choice

Ethnic Identity across Respondents' Different Ethnic Groups

As was discussed in the Methodology section, to collect data about participants' ethnic identities, a standard scale named Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measures (MEIM) was used (see Table 7).

Table 7. Multi-group ethnic identity measures (meim)

1	I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2	I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
3	I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means to me.
4	I think a lot about how my life is affected by my ethnic group membership.
5	I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to.
6	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
7	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
8	In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I often talk to other people about my ethnic group in order to learn more.
9	I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
10	I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as eating ethnic food, listening to ethnic music, and practice ethnic customs and traditions.
11	I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12	I feel good about my cultural and ethnic background.

The MEIM which was firstly developed by Phinney (1992), can be used as a valid scale for measuring youths' ethnic identity in different multilingual settings (Granhemat, Chan, & Ain Nadzimah, 2014; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Roberts, R. Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, C., & Romero, 1999). The participants of the present study replied to the 12 items of the MEIM according to a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree. In consequence, the participants' ethnic identity scores ranged from a minimum score of 12 to a maximum score of 48 with a normal distribution (mean score=37.87 and standard deviation=4.93). The respondents' ethnic identities were then categorized as low, moderate and high (the cut-off point values of mean score \pm 1 standard deviation were evaluated as moderate ethnic identity, lower and higher values more than moderate values were respectively evaluated as low and high ethnic identity) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Ethnic Identities

Ethnic Identity Level	N	Pct (%)
Low	64	12.9
Moderate	336	67.5
High	98	19.6

Note: N indicates number of respondents.

In order to present a clearer picture of participants' levels of ethnic identity, they were tabulated according to their ethnicity (see Table 9). Frequency distribution of this variable (ethnic identity) shows that a majority of the respondents were identified as having moderate ethnic identity (see Table 9). Harmoniously, the information in Table 9 also shows that a majority of the Malays, Chinese, and other ethnic group's respondents had moderate levels of ethnic identity. However, a majority of the Indians had high levels of ethnic identity.

Table 9. Frequency Distribution of Participants' Ethnic Identity Based on Ethnicity

Ethnic Identity Level	Ethnic Groups			
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others
Low	39(11)	22(20.4)	3(20)	0(0)
Moderate	253(71.1)	64(59.3)	4(26.7)	15(78.9)
High	64(18)	22(20.4)	8(53.3)	4(21.1)

Note: N indicates number of respondents

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of N

Influence of Ethnic Identity on Language Choice

To perform this part of the study about the relationship between participants' ethnic identity and their choice of languages, levels of participants' ethnic identity (low, moderate, and high) were considered as an independent variable

and respondents' most used languages in the family domain of language use were considered as dependent variables. A Chi-square Test was utilized to examine the relationships between variables (see Table 10). Accordingly, the majority of the Malays with moderate ethnic identity had more tendencies towards the Malay and mixed use of Malay and English languages. Furthermore, the Chi-square result of $\chi^2 = 7.997$ with a P value < 0.05 supported the hypothesis that the Malay ethnic identity significantly affected the participants' choices of language in the family domain. The Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic groups' participants' ethnic identities with P values > 0.05 did not support the existence of any relationship between their ethnic identities and their choices of language in the family domain (see Table 10).

Table 10. Ethnic Identity and Language Choice in the Family Domain N

Ethnic Groups	Used Languages	Ethnic Identity Level			χ^2	P value
		Low	Moderate	High		
Malay	Malay	35(13.6)	180(70)	42(16.3)	7.997*	(0.016) <0.05
	Malay and English	4(4.1)	71(73.2)	22(22.7)		
Chinese	Chinese	18(22.5)	46(57.5)	16(20)	2.031	(0.391) >0.05
	Chinese and English	2(9.5)	13(61.9)	6(28.6)		
Indian	Indian**	0(0)	2(33.3)	4(66.7)	2.813	(0.671) >0.05
	English	1(25)	1(25)	2(50)		
	Indian and English**	2(40)	1(20)	2(40)		
Others	Malay	0	5(83.3)	1(16.7)	0.348	(1) >0.05
	English	0	2(66.7)	1(33.3)		
	Malay and English	0	8(80)	2(20)		

Note: N indicates number of respondents, Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of N

*significant at 0.05 level

Due to low frequency of use, the two variables marked with two asterisks () were excluded from analysis in previous sections, but to find the relationships between the two variables and Indians' ethnic identity they were included in analysis in this part of the study

5. Summary and Conclusion

In multilingual ecologies, shift of language is a common social phenomenon. A multilingual individual's language choices are not static, pre-decided constructs. On the contrary, language choice is a dynamic social occurrence that may be influenced by a variety of social and political factors.

The present study tried to firstly shed light on the language choices of the Malaysian multilingual youths in the family domain of language use. According to the results of the study, the majority of the participants preferred to use the Malay language in the family domain. This result is in line with Ferguson (2006) and Cooper (1989) who asserted the official language policy may have an influence on the extent of language use. In Malaysia, the official language is the Malay language, and this is mandated as the medium of instruction in the national schools. However, the results of the present study indicated that 21.5% of the participants enjoyed using the mix use the Malay language with the English language. Only, 2.8% of the participants inclined toward using the English language. This pattern of language use in the family domain of language use is adaptable to the Malaysian diglossic context which as described by Ridge (2004). Moreover, Fishman (1972) observed that in multilingual settings governmental language policies may encourage the use of a particular language. According to the above results, although the participants belonging to different Malaysian ethnic groups enjoy using their indigenous languages in the family domain, the impact of language policies have encouraged the participants to frequently mix their mother tongues with English as the language of higher education in Malaysia.

Secondly, the study endeavored to examine the influence of gender, ethnicity and ethnic identity on the choice of language among Malaysian multilinguals belonging to different ethnic groups in the family domain of language use. The results demonstrated that gender was not a determinant of language use among the participants of the study. Although in literature there are studies such as those carried out by Lu (1988), Huang (1988) and Chan (1994) who reported that differences in gender among Taiwanese participants resulted in different attitudes towards language choice, the results of the present study are in tandem with Rahman et al. (2008) who conducted a similar study in the Malaysian context of language use. Rahman et al. did not find any relationships between gender and language choice in some investigated domains of language use in Malaysia. On the other hand, it was shown that ethnicity was a significant factor in the choice of language of the participants. This finding is in line with (Fishman, 1975, pp. 29-31). Fishman argued that a language may have the potential of being a marker of an ethnicity.

In order to investigate the influence of ethnic identity on the participants' language choices, first the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measures (MEIM) was used to measure the participants' ethnic identities. Then levels of participants' ethnic identity (low, moderate, and high) were considered as an independent variable and respondents' most used languages in the family domain of language use were considered as dependent variables. The analyses of the statistical results showed that only Malay ethnic identity was a determinant of language choice among the Malay participants.

Finally, one noticeable result of the study was that the participants were inclined to communicate by mixing their mother tongues with the English language. The study attributed this trend to the Malaysian language policy, which in parallel to encouragement of the use of Malay as the national language makes the English language use as the language of higher education among Malaysian youths.

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