

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REASONS FOR LANGUAGE CHOICE**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the reasons for language choice of Filipino-Malaysian couples. It examines and analyzes the views of the participants in the interviews to determine the couples' reasons for choosing one or more languages in their interactions in the home domain. The findings are analyzed to explore and describe the occurrence and reasons of language choice in interracial couples' interactions.

#### **6.2 Reasons for Language Choice**

The findings in Chapter 5 show that interracial couples choose English with some switching in Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, and Filipino as the medium of communication in the home domain. Such use of English and code switching in interactions occurs for some reasons. The interviews conducted with Filipino-Malaysian couples reveal a number of reasons for choosing English and for switching from English to Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Filipino.

##### **6.2.1 To Accommodate the Spouse and Other Family Members**

Accommodation has become a common practice among Filipino-Malaysian couples in interactions. They tend to accommodate each other by choosing a language that they both understand. The interviews show that couples choose English as the medium of communication in order to accommodate their spouses. Some spouses said:-

*“FCMA: English is understandable to both of us”*

*“FCCA: English is the only language that the two of us can understand”*

*“FCCB: We prefer English because my husband does not speak Filipino”*

*“FCIB: We prefer English because it is easy to understand and my husband does not understand Filipino”*

*“FCIB: I prefer English because my in-laws can understand it”*

*FCMA: Malay spouse; FCCA: Malaysian Chinese spouse; FCCB, FCIB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

English is chosen as the medium of communication in the home domain because both husband and wife understand the language. English is easy to understand and it helps to provide a clear message. English which is not the first language of both spouses is used to accommodate others. English has become the choice because it is understood by both spouses and couples do not need to learn another language for them to communicate.

In addition, accommodation occurs when a spouse uses the language of his or her partner. Such accommodation is evident when Filipino spouses said *“We prefer English because my husband does not speak Filipino”* and *“We prefer English because it is easy to understand and my husband does not understand Filipino.”* Such responses show that Filipino spouses accommodated their Malaysian spouses through the use of English as the medium of communication at home. Another Filipino spouse said *“We prefer English because it is easy to understand and my husband does not understand Filipino.”* It shows that using English for interracial couples is a form of accommodation.

Other couples are influenced by the language spoken by their in-laws. Couples who are staying with the in-laws tend to accommodate their in-laws. One spouse said *“I prefer English because my in-laws can understand it.”* In-laws could be influential to their son-in-law or daughter-in-law’s language choice.

In the interviews conducted, the participants said:-

*“FCIB: Because my mother-in-law does not speak English so we sometimes use Chinese”*

*“FCMB: I talk to my in-laws in Bahasa Malaysia but most of the time I speak English”*

*“FCIB: Right now, my mother- in-law is with us. So most of the time when she is around, we speak English”*

*“FCMB: I was motivated to learn and speak Bahasa Malaysia because of my in-laws”*

*FCIB, FCMB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

Filipino-Malaysian couples switch from English to Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino, and Chinese to accommodate each other. Filipino spouses may use Bahasa Malaysia or Chinese because their in-laws do not speak English. As a result, couples end up using different languages. A Filipino spouse who married a Malaysian Chinese said *“Because my mother-in-law does not speak English so we sometimes use Chinese.”*

Another Filipino spouse married to a Malay had a similar reason and said, *“I was motivated to learn and speak Bahasa Malaysia because of my in-laws.”* This shows that family including the in-laws is important and could have motivated Filipino spouses to learn their Malaysian spouses’ languages with different interlocutors. Consequently, they

learn the language fast and eventually use it in their interactions with their Malaysian spouses. Some Filipino spouses said:-

*“FCCB: I think my mother tongue becomes Hokkien (laugh)”*

*“FCMB: Yes, I can speak Malay fluently now”*

*“FCMB: I speak Malay and English. Pag di ko ma express in Malay, nag English ako. (If I can’t express in Malay, I use English)”*

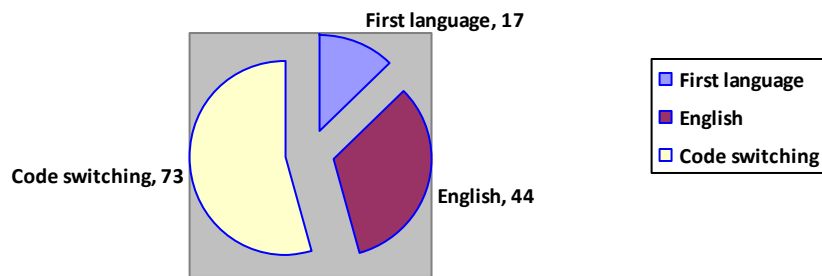
*FCCB, FCMB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

It can be said that one reason for Filipino-Malaysian couples’ language choice is to accommodate their spouses and their in-laws.

### 6.2.2 To Maintain Language Loyalty

Speakers choose a language because they want to maintain their loyalty. The findings of the study show that English is the preferred language and dominates in interactions (see Chapter 5).

The survey shows that spouses indicated that they sometimes use their first language when communicating in the home domain.



**Figure 6.1 Language Choice of Couples**

Figure 6.1 shows that 17 spouses choose their first language, 44 spouses choose English and 36 spouses choose to code switch between English and Bahasa Malaysia, 27 spouses prefer to code switch between English and Filipino and 10 spouses prefer to code switch between English and Chinese. The preference of the first language can perhaps be attributed to the spouses' loyalty to their mother tongue.

In the interviews conducted couples mentioned that aside from English they also use their first language at home. Below are some of the extracts taken from the interviews.

*“FCMB: I choose the Filipino language because it is my mother tongue”*

*“FCIB: I prefer the Tagalog because I'm a Filipino and I feel more comfortable using it”*

*“FCMA: We prefer Bahasa Malaysia at home”*

*“FCMB: I and my husband speak Malay at home”*

*FCMA: Malay spouse; FCMB, FCIB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

The interviews reveal that Filipino-Malaysian couples use other languages at home apart from English as medium of communication. Their preference of their first language when they switch is perhaps motivated by their language loyalty. Filipino spouses for example said *“I choose the Filipino language because it is my mother tongue”* and *“I prefer Tagalog because I'm a Filipino and I feel more comfortable using it.”* The Filipino language is seen to be the most favored language by Filipino spouses. It is expected because the Filipino language serves as their identity marker. As a result, they develop loyalty towards the Filipino language.

In another interview conducted, language loyalty is expressed explicitly by a Filipino wife:-

**R- Researcher**

**E (FCCB) - Filipino wife married to Malaysian Chinese**

**R: So proficient pa rin kayo sa Waray** (*So you are still proficient in Waray*)

**E:** Yes.

**R: Kahit na matagal na kayo dito?** (*Even if you have stayed here longer?*)

**E:** Yes, Waray is my past. **Hindi pwede makalimutan yan.** (*It cannot be forgotten*)

**R: Merong iba kasi pag nawala sila for a few years medyo** (pause).(*There are other people when they left their place for a few years, it seems*).

**E:** Yeah. **Umalis ako ng Leyte mga 15 years. Mga 15 years nag spend ako ng Manila hanggang pumunta ako dito.** (*I left Leyte 15 years ago. I spent 15 years in Manila until I reached here*)

**R:** For fifteen years and how many years here?

**E:** 16 years.

**R: So hindi nyo pa rin nakakalimutan?** (*So you haven't forgotten your language*)

**E: Hindi** (*no*)

**R: Pero hindi na kau nagsasalita ng Waray dito?**(*But you don't speak Waray here*)

**E: Paminsan minsan sa pinsan ko at asawa.** (*Sometimes with my cousin and husband*).

The interview extract provides a clearer illustration that language loyalty exists. For the Filipino spouse in particular using her own language matters a lot. Although she has been away from her place she has not forgotten the language and she still uses it from time to time with her cousin and husband. Such use of the first language (Waray) indicates that the Filipino spouse is loyal to her ethnic language.

In similar interviews conducted to Filipino-Malay couples they said:- “*We prefer Bahasa Malaysia at home*” and “*I and my husband speak Malay at home*” which indicate the speakers’ language loyalty to Bahasa Malaysia. Using Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of communication at home encourages the family members to use the same language. The

language loyalty of a speaker is evident when he or she puts priority on still uses his or her ethnic language.

### 6.2.3 To Show Emotions

Emotions may sometimes be revealed through words or actions. When emotion is expressed through words, the speaker's choice of word will manifest what he or she feels. The interviews with Filipino-Malaysian couples show that Filipino spouses display their emotions through language choice. Some Filipino spouses said:-

*"FCCB: If I'm mad I speak in Tagalog"*

*"FCMB: He will assume that if I speak in Tagalog I am already angry"*

*"FCIB: I use English to express my anger so my partner can understand"*

*"FCMB: We use English but if we argue to really express my feelings I use both English and Cebuano"*

*"FCCB: **Pero pagnagalit ako nagmumura ako in Filipino pero naintindihan na ng asawa ko yun** (But when I'm mad I curse in Filipino but my husband understands it)"*

*FCCB, FCIB, FCMB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

The data show that some couples have different language preferences when expressing their emotions. Some prefer Tagalog to express their anger while others prefer English. In fact, in many instances a spouse starts switching from one language to another language during an argument and this signals his or her anger. This is evident with Filipino spouses as when they become angry they switch to Filipino to express their anger. A Filipino spouse

said, *“If I’m mad I speak in Tagalog”* and another spouse said *“He will assume that if I speak in Tagalog I am already angry.”*

#### **6.2.4 To Speak Conveniently with the Spouse**

One reason for language choice of Filipino-Malaysian couples is for convenience. Most multilingual speakers may choose the language they are proficient in because it would be more convenient for them to communicate.

In the interviews conducted, couples said that they prefer English as their medium of communication at home for convenience.

*“FCCA: English is easy to communicate and easy to learn”*

*“FCCB: English is easy and it is tiring to learn new languages”*

*“FCIB: We choose English because it is the language that both of us speak”*

*“FCCB: We prefer English because at home that’s the language that we speak very often and my husband was educated in an English medium school”*

*FCCA: Malaysian Chinese spouse; FCCB, FCIB: Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

The choice of English is highly preferred by Filipino-Malaysian couples because it is easy to communicate in a common language that they both know. Although English is not the first language of Filipino-Malaysian couples they chose English because it is the language that they both understand. English empowers the couples to express themselves freely. A spouse said *“English is easy and it is tiring to learn new languages.”* Couples may not be



eager to learn new languages and they would probably choose the language that they already know.

Another spouse said *“English is easy to communicate and easy to learn.”* From the perspective of second language speakers of English, learning English can be easy and simple. For instance, Filipino and Malaysian spouses are exposed to English language because English is included in their school curriculum. Using English becomes easy especially for those who were educated in an English medium school. A spouse mentioned that English has been their choice because her husband was educated in an English medium school. Another spouse also said *“We prefer English because at home that’s the language that we speak very often and my husband was educated in an English medium school.”*

### **6.2.5 To Expand the Speaker’s Social Network**

Choosing a language can be of help in expanding a speaker’s social network. Couples believe that their choice of a particular language as their medium of communication at home will help them later to expand their network. This is the reason why couples prefer English because of its international status and use. When couples were asked their reasons for choosing English as their medium of communication at home, they said:-

*“FCCA: We choose English because it is a universal language and there is no need for us to adjust each other.”*

*“FCMB: English is easy to use and it is the only language that we can use to speak with some of the locals”*

*“FCIB: English is an international language and it is used the language in business”*

*FCCA: Malaysian Chinese spouse; FCMB, FCIB Filipino spouses (See Appendix A)*

This shows that couples choose English because of its international status. English is the language that is widely used and spoken in various parts of the world. The use of English might help the speakers to elevate their status in society. Since couples are familiar and proficient in English they have not encountered problems in communication. One participant said, *“We choose English because it is a universal language and there is no need for us to adjust each other.”*

The choice of English helps couples to develop their English language proficiency and eventually expand their social network locally and internationally. A spouse said *“English is easy to use and it is the only language that we can use to speak with some of the locals.”* It can be said that couples’ language choice is influenced by their intention to expand their social network. They choose the language not just for themselves to use but for them to interact with other people outside their homes particularly in the community they live in.

#### **6.2.6 To Expose the Offspring to Various Languages**

The preference for English, Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino and Chinese was also to expose their children to different languages. Although couples prefer English, they also use other languages like Bahasa Malaysia, Filipino, and Chinese. Such a choice was not just for themselves but for their children as well. In the interviews conducted, most couples said:-

*“FCCB: We prefer English so that our children will learn English language”*

*“FCCA: We choose English but we also speak other languages because we encourage our children to speak in Tagalog”*

*“FCMA: I want my children to be fluent in English and also be able to communicate in Bahasa because these are as far as Malaysia is concerned these are the two languages that will bring them to where they should be.”*

*“FCCB: I’m trying to teach them (children and husband) with my mother tongue. My first language is Ilokano but I’ve never forgotten that and I’m proud of my mother tongue.”*

*FCCA: Malaysian Chinese spouse; FCMA: Malay spouse; FCCB: Filipino spouse (See Appendix A)*

Couples choose a particular language to teach their children with the English language. For instance, the use of English at home serves as an avenue for children to learn English. When spouses communicate in English their children imitate them. Another couple said *“We prefer English so that our children will learn English language.”*

The choice is not only limited to English as couples switch from one language to another. Switching from one language to another is also motivated by the aim of exposing children to other languages. The use of the Filipino language encourages children to learn Filipino. Other couples switch from English to Filipino for the purpose of showing to the children the importance of learning the Filipino language. A spouse mentioned *“We choose English but we also speak other languages because we encourage our children to speak in Tagalog.”*

### 6.3 Summary of Reasons for Language Choice

From the interviews and survey conducted, the reasons for language choice of Filipino-Malaysian couples can be summarized as follows.

**Table 6.1 Summary of Reasons for Filipino-Malaysian Couples' Language Choice**

1.	To accommodate the spouse and other family members;
2.	To maintain language loyalty;
3.	To express emotions;
4.	To speak conveniently with the spouse;
5.	To expand the speakers' social network;
6.	To expose the offspring to various languages.

Table 6.2 provides a summary of the reasons for Filipino-Malaysian couples' language choice. This shows that couples choose a language for various reasons.

### 6.4 Conclusion

The chapter provides a detailed discussion and analysis on the reasons for Filipino-Malaysian couples' language choice. The findings reveal that couples' language preference is influenced by their communicative intent. Couples are motivated to choose a language that benefits them and their children. Generally, Filipino-Malaysian couples choose different languages to accommodate, to maintain language loyalty, to show emotions, to expand the speakers' social network and to expose their offspring in different languages.

Accommodating other speakers has been a common reason for couples' language choice. Couples may accommodate their spouses by employing certain strategies. These accommodation strategies are discussed in Chapter Seven.