

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The present study focused on language choice and use by members of Sino-Malay mixed-marriage families for selected domain analysis. The study also examined the perceptions of parents and their children of Sino-Malay mixed parentage towards the mother tongues and the English language. It also investigates whether the members of mixed marriage families maintain their mother tongues or are slowly shifting away towards other languages that they prefer.

In this chapter, each research question will be reviewed and the implications of the study's findings on language use of these Sino-Malay mixed marriage families will be presented. The chapter will conclude with possible recommendations for further research.

5.2 Research Questions Revisited

In this section, the three research questions will be reviewed and the major findings of this study will be discussed. The discussion will be presented based on the following research questions.

1. What is the language choice of Sino-Malay mixed marriage families in the selected domains?
2. What is the perception of the children of Sino-Malay parentage towards their parents' mother tongues?
3. Is there a language maintenance or shift among members of Sino-Malay mixed marriages?

5.2.1 Research Question One

“What is the language choice of Sino-Malay mixed marriage families in the selected domains?”

The findings reveal that English is the most favorable language that is spoken among members of Sino-Malay mixed marriages families. The findings show that “**F**” participants and “**M**” participants still use their mother tongues, that is, Malay or Chinese, respectively, with their own parents, siblings and relatives. However, the findings showed that more “**C**” participants or the children of these parents indicated that they use Malay with their parents, siblings and relatives of their fathers compared to the use of Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese/Hokkien).

Interestingly, it was notable in the findings that one family (**C9**) out of sixteen families uses Mandarin as their main language in communication. The reason being “**F**” participant has knowledge of Mandarin which is a mother tongue of the “**M**” participant; this family tends to maintain the usage of Mandarin language in their interaction. Hence, it is revealed that those parents who use Mandarin as their main language to communicate among the family members influenced the whole family to use Mandarin as a main language of the family. It is evident that the choice of language made by the family was influenced by the interlocutors (participants of interaction) and the proficiency of that particular language. Consequently, another assumption that can be made is that the “**F9**” participant might accommodate the partner’s (“**M9**” participant) language choice.

The findings also revealed that the members of Sino- Malay mixed marriage families use languages such as Malay, Mandarin or Chinese dialects and English depending on

their interlocutors. Consequently, the findings concluded that the interlocutors or the participants of interaction and their proficiency in the language(s) play a crucial role in influencing the language choice among the family.

Another important factor that influences the language choice among the members of Sino-Malay mixed marriage families is the setting. The findings show that the general pattern of language use with most interlocutors in the setting of school is English and Malay. This is expected since both languages are the language of instruction at school. Though, Malay is the national language of the nation and to be used as mainstream language in the academic domain, yet the use of English clearly increases among the interlocutors in the school setting.

With their social group, the majority of the “C” participants indicate that they prefer to use English and Malay with a sprinkling of Chinese in their daily communication with their mothers and siblings. On the other hand, friendship domain, “C” participants indicated that they use more Malay among close Malay friends but not necessarily Chinese dialects such as Cantonese or Hokkien used among close Chinese friends. The findings also show that the dominance of English can be seen among the close Chinese friends and schoolmates as well as to Malay schoolmates. Generally, their preferred code among both Chinese and Malay friends is English.

The same trend is found in the reading domain and language activities. English in the above domains is highly preferred by the members of Sino-Malay mixed marriage. Overall, members of Sino-Malay mixed marriage show a tendency to shift towards English language, in particular the children and the mothers.

The conclusion that can be done is that the interlocutors, setting and topics are the important factors that influence the choice of language among the members of Sino-Malay mixed marriage families.

5.2.2 Research Question Two

“What is the perception of the children of Sino-Malay parentage towards their parents’ mother tongues?”

The attitude towards languages is also another factor that influences language choice and shift among the children. Based on the survey, the findings revealed that the children do show that they have positive perceptions towards their parents’ mother tongues. Furthermore, this study was able to discover a very strong sentiment professed by the children towards Malay compared to Chinese language. The positive attitude towards the use and promotion of the Malay language among the children may also be due to the fact that it is a language encountered everyday at school. The fathers of these families have also played a role in that they uphold Malay as their mother tongue and display this through their daily interaction with their family members, and even with the spouses.

From the feedback given by the children, when queried about their most comfortable language, they identified English as the most favorable language. The findings from the questionnaire also point to the fact that English has been considered as the most important language to be used among them. They consider English as an important language because it helps them to get jobs. The conclusion that can be made is that these positive perceptions do not seem to show an action to maintain the mother tongues by the children.

5.2.3 Research Question Three

“Is there a language maintenance or shift among members of Sino-Malay mixed marriages?”

The results indicate a pattern in the Sino-Malay mixed marriage members that is shifting towards English by both parents and their children. In almost all selected domains, the language preferred by the members of Sino-Malay mixed marriage show that English is becoming a dominant language. English is found to be used more frequently compared to their mother tongues when the spouse converse with each other and also with their children. In turn, their teenage children use English to their friends and neighbours.

On the other hand, the domain of family and the friendship domain (same ethnic friends) apparently show that the level of mother tongues is maintained by the older members. The parents tend to maintain their mother tongue(s) either Malay or Chinese dialects respectively among the older generation. However, with the younger groups parents tend to use English more frequently, and this is followed by the use of Malay.

5.3 Implications

The findings of the study show that the Sino-Malay mixed marriage families have made English as their first choice of language in their communication. The mother tongues, Malay and Chinese do seem to be shifting gradually towards English among the Sino-Malay mixed marriage families. The implication is that the future of Mandarin and Malay will hinge upon with the dominance of English in Sino-Malay generations.

On the other hand, if the parents pool their efforts to maintain the use of their mother tongues in cultural and daily activities, their children will carry on using these languages in the future together with English. Using these languages will develop the environment of bilingualism or multilingualism among these Sino-Malay mixed marriages children and the next generation. However, if the parents do not promote this environment among the children this situation would impact them to be monolinguals who will actively use English only.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings of this study strongly suggest that the Sino-Malay mixed marriage families should take an immediate action to continue the use of their mother tongues in their families. Consequently, it is hoped the findings of this study be shared among other mixed-marriage families. It is hoped that the recommendations will benefit the next generation of Sino-Malay by highlighting to them the trend captured by the present study.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Parents

This study has some important recommendation for parents who hope to pass their mother tongues on to their children. First, it is essential that children be given equal opportunities to be exposed to all available languages. Therefore, parents need to make a conscious effort to use their mother tongues with their children from a very young age so that they can acquire the languages. English can co-exist with mother tongues and not necessarily have to replace them. Exposing children to cultural activities of both sides of the families is equally important as language and cultural activities help identify them with their heritage and ethnic identity.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Children

It is highly recommended that the children themselves should be aware of the importance of the mother tongues of their parents. They should be proud that they could converse in their mother tongues and realize that knowing more than one language will bring more advantage to them. The children should start to enjoy and take pride in being bilingual or multilingual. Hence, they should fully support the efforts of their parents to maintain the mother tongues. Technically speaking, the children should see the mother tongues as social resources. They should at least make an effort to ensure that they maintain the spoken form of the mother tongues, in the case of the Chinese dialects.

5.4.3 Recommendations for School Language Policies

It is highly recommended that mother tongues are valued and pupils be given the opportunity to acquire their mother tongues formally. Having Pupils Own Language classes is a positive move, beneficial to the students and to the larger society. Therefore, it is vital to recommend that educators make a sincere effort regarding the development of the mother tongues and cultures that the children of Sino-Malay mixed marriages bring to school.

5.5 Recommendation for Future Study

The language choice shift from mother tongue(s) to English has taken place among the Sino-Malay mixed marriage families. Although the shift from mother tongue(s) to English has been noted among these Sino-Malay mixed marriage families, the study would like to consider the maintenance of their identity in future studies. In the future, the study would like to collect data on Sino-Malay mixed marriage members' cultural beliefs and language ideologies through interviews and ethnographic observation among the parents and children. Such information will give in-depth insights into why language

shift is taking place among these Sino-Malay mixed marriage families. Furthermore, future studies should consider on a larger pool of participants of Sino-Malay mixed marriages from the whole Malaysia in order to determine the language choice, the maintenance or shift of the mother tongue(s). Future studies should also consider the efforts that have been taken by the parents in these families in maintaining their mother tongues.

5.6 Conclusion

The study was an attempt to bring to attention the existence of minority groups as a result of mixed marriages. This is a growing trend among the Malaysian population especially among members of Sino-Malay mixed marriages. This research has investigated the language choice and possibility of maintenance of their mother tongues or a shift to a different language. Sixteen families participated in the study and it was found that English is taking a dominant place in language use among them.

The findings also show that Malay language as mother tongue has more chance of survival compared to Chinese language since the Malay language is still being used as a language of communication among the younger members of some families. However, both Malay and Chinese can survive if awareness to promote the usage of these languages in other domains apart from school is carried out in schools, circle of family members and relatives which is supported by the language policy makers of this country. It is hoped that family members of Sino-Malay mixed marriages themselves will take it upon themselves to maintain their mother tongues by passing on these languages to their children through daily use and cultural activities since these languages form the foundation of their heritage.