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What Determines the Choice of Language with Friends and Neighbors?

The Case of Malaysian University Undergraduates

A. R. M. Mostafizar Rahman, M.A. (ELT) and M.A. (Applied Ling.)

Chan Swee Heng, Ph.D.

Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, MA (Ling.)

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**A. R. M Mostafizar Rahman, M.A. (ELT), M.A. (Applied Ling.)
Chan Swee Heng, Ph.D.
Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, M.A.**

Abstract

Bi-/multilingual people exercise choices of language among the languages of their linguistic repertoire for different purposes in different domains. The choice is determined by various factors such as ethnicity, proficiency, attitudes, socio-cultural background, language policy, and in particular, the domain itself.

Malaysia being a multilingual country, what languages are chosen with friends and relatives, and what determines the choice constitute the main objectives of this paper.

Data for this paper was collected through a questionnaire survey administered to a sample of university undergraduates and analyzed those using SPSS. The findings show that respondents from the major ethnic groups preferred their respective ethnic languages with friends and neighbours of the same ethnic backgrounds but choice of Bahasa Malaysia (BM) among the non-Malays and choice for English among respondents irrespective of ethnicity increase while the interlocutors belong to other ethnic backgrounds. Ethnicity, proficiency and domain of use were found to be contributing factors of language choice with friends and neighbours in Malaysia.

Introduction

The issue of language choice is a very important sociolinguistic phenomenon of bi-/multilingual societies. As the linguistic repertoire of the people of bi-/multilingual societies comprises more than one language, they exercise choice of languages for different purposes in different domains. But what constrains the choice of language? A host of variables come into play an important role in determining choice, which may vary from one context to another. It may be difficult to make a complete list of the variables, however, some of them are ethnicity, proficiency, attitudes, socio-cultural background, language policy, and in particular, the domain itself.

Malaysia is a multilingual country. It is expected that people in Malaysia choose different languages in different domains for different purposes. What languages are chosen with friends and neighbours and what are the factors that determine such choices constitute the main objectives of this paper.

Defining Domain

Domain, an important determinant of language choice, refers to the context of language use, for instance, that of family, friendship, neighbourhood, education, and transaction.

With reference to domain distribution of language use, Wallwork (1981:57) says that in some domains there may be contact with other people with whom there is a potential choice of two or even three languages. The choice may be made depending on either the role of the two speakers vis-à-vis each other, or possibly on the topic of the conversation.

Coulmas (2005) also perceives domain in the same line who says,

Domain is a theoretical concept. It refers to an aggregate of locales of communication-public vs. private; role relationships between participants-family members, officials/clients; and kinds of interaction-formal vs. informal (p.138).

Effects of Domain on Language Choice

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of domain on language choice. One of the pioneering studies was Greenfield (1972) which reports that in the bilingual Puerto Rican community in New York, Spanish, the low language, is favored in intimate domains such as family, and friendship, while English, the high language, is chosen for employment and education.

Another well-cited study by Parasher (1980) shows that people in India use the mother tongue and another language in the family domain whereas English dominates high domains such as education, government and employment and even some low domains, for instance, friendship and neighborhood.

Hohenthal (2003) also reported similar findings. She studied the role of English in India and found that different languages are definitely being allocated different roles in India; languages are used differently according to the domain in question.

Criticism of Domain Analysis

The concept of domain and domain analysis, however, has been criticized. Some of the studies reported partial effect of domain on language choice whereas others reported even no effect at all.

Pascasio and Hidalgo (1979) examined how role-relationships, domains, and speech situations affect language use among bilinguals in Philippines. They found that language use varies significantly with domain as a whole though not always. The effects of role-relationship of the interlocutors are also reported with variance. The speech situations, however, do not seem to have much effect on language used.

Gal (1979), however, strongly disagreed with the influence of domain on language choice. Gal opined that whatever the social situations, only the identity of the participants determines language choice.

The other situational factors such as audience, setting, occasion, and purpose have been found to influence the choice of language in other communities but these factors were found irrelevant to the Oberwart case in Austria.

However, in spite of the criticisms, the basic philosophy of domain allocation of languages is widely realized and accepted.

The Role of Proficiency

Proficiency as a constraint of language choice has also been recognized in a number of studies.

David (1999) reports that lack of proficiency in the ethnic language can account for a shift (language shift, switch, mix and maintenance are the ways through which language choice manifests). David also recognizes that code switching reflects a speaker's higher/lower proficiency and greater/less eases with a particular language. She further admits that whether English or Malay is used as the lingua franca depends on whether the speakers are proficient in English or Malay.

A similar notion is expressed in the words of Wallwork (ibid) who says that it is necessary to look at the question of an individual's language proficiency in relation to the situations in which language is used.

Hakuta (1991) investigated the relationships of language choice, proficiency and attitude in a Puerto Rican bilingual education programme in New Haven, Connecticut. She reported that language shift in the Hispanic communities in the United States is usually characterized by a combination of processes related to proficiency, choice and attitude.

The Role of Ethnicity

Ethnicity is also recognized as a major constraint that influences people to make specific choice of language. Several studies reported the effect of ethnicity on language choice.

One of the studies that advocate strongly that identity determines language choice is that of Gal's (1979). Gal found in the Oberwart case in Austria that only the identity of the participants can account for their language choice and use.

Ferrer and Sankoff (2003) found an equally strong relationship between ethnicity and language choice in their study in Valencia, Spain. The study reports that ethnic identity is most closely related to the motivation for language choice.

Another study, Burhanudeen (2003), in Malaysia where the present study is located, also reports that the ethnicity of the participants is a contributing factor to the Malays' language choice.

The Role of Gender

Gender is also found to influence language choice.

Lu (1988) reports that differences in age, education, gender and residence area result in different attitudes towards maintenance and legitimate status for the native languages and the difference in attitude lead people to choose different languages.

Chan (1994), however, finds no significant gender difference in Minnanren's language use (cited in Yeh *et al.*, 2004). This study presupposes that domain, proficiency, ethnicity and gender are important constraints of language choice with friends and neighbours in Malaysia.

Methodology

This is a descriptive and non-experimental study. The data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to a sample of three hundred University Putra Malaysia (UPM) undergraduates selected through "multistage cluster sampling".

The questionnaire comprised three parts: part I obtained the demographic profile of the respondents; part II elicited their level of proficiency in languages; and part III obtained their patterns of language choice with friends and neighbours.

The questionnaire was prepared adapting items from Yeh *et al.*, 2004 and Hohenthal, 2003.

A pilot survey was conducted to study the feasibility of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.74 (Part II) and 0.84 (Part III) were obtained (Cronbach Alpha). The overall reliability of the instrument was 0.79.

Upon the completion of data collection, these were analyzed using SPSS. Seventy two questionnaires were found to be incomplete and therefore these were excluded from the final analysis. The patterns of language choice were identified computing the frequency of choice and correlations among the variables were measured through Chi-square tests. Strength of correlation was, however, determined with reference to Guilford's rule of thumb.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondents were categorized as per gender (male and female) and ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others. **Others** refer to minor ethnic groups other than Malay, Chinese and Indians). Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents as per ethnicity and gender. This table shows that the majority of respondents were Malay (60.7%) followed by Chinese (29.5%), Indian (8%), and Others (1.8%). Of the total respondents, the gender distribution (M=male and F=female) is as follows (see Table 1). As can be seen from the table, the percentage of males was comparatively higher than that of females among the Malays and the Others whereas the percentage of females was comparatively higher than males among the Chinese and Indians.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents as per ethnicity and gender

Ethnicity	Total Respondents	%	Male	%	Female	%
Malay	136	60.7	30	69.7	106	58.6
Chinese	66	29.5	10	23.3	56	30.9
Indian	18	8.0	2	4.7	16	8.8
Others	4	1.8	1	2.3	3	1.7
Total	224	100	43	100	181	100

Linguistic Background of the Respondents

Respondents' proficiency in languages is an important independent variable of this study.

The study examined the relationship between respondents' patterns of language choice with friends and neighbours and their proficiency in languages. Information on the respondents' proficiency in languages were obtained using a five-point Likert scale with 5= very fluent, 4= fluent, 3= satisfactory, 2= unsatisfactory, and 1= cannot use.

According to this scale, a respondent could obtain a maximum of 20 points and a minimum of 4 points in each language (Total scores in the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing). The respondents were then categorized as low, mid and high proficient. Those who obtained 1-6.7 points were considered as low proficient followed by 6.71-13.4 points as mid proficient and 13.41-20 points as high proficient.

Respondents' levels of proficiency in languages with regard to ethnicity are presented in Table 2. The table shows that respondents irrespective of ethnicity claimed to have gained high proficiency in BM in line with the national aspiration and objectives of establishing a national and official language. The Malays reported themselves 100% highly proficient in BM which is natural and was to be expected in fact since it is their ethnic language. Among the non-Malays, the Indians reported themselves as 100% highly proficient in BM whereas the Chinese fell into 72.7% and Others fell into 75%.

Attainment of such a percentage of high proficiency in BM among the non-Malays could be attributed not only to their instrumental attitude towards this language as Ridge (2004) pointed out that entrance to government secondary schools and appointment to all government jobs depended on competence in BM but also to their integrative attitude towards this language in order to integrate themselves with the Malays, the *bumiputera* people and to consolidate the society and the nation. It suggests that the language planning and policy in Malaysia had managed to create a positive attitude towards BM among the Malays and the non-Malays as far as proficiency in BM is concerned.

It is shown in the table that in the case of the Chinese languages, no Indian or Others reported themselves to have high proficiency. Though some Malay respondents reported to have high proficiency in the Chinese languages, the percentage was only 1.5 which was very negligible (2 respondents out of 136 respondents). It was only the Chinese (93.9%) who were highly proficient in these languages which was to be expected. But among the Malays, Indians and Others, quite a good number (Malays 11.8%, Indians 22.2% and Others 25%) of respondents reported to have mid level proficiency. Moreover, the Malays reported having the highest percentage (86.7) of low proficiency in these languages. The data in Table 2 indicates that the Chinese languages were found to be liked to some extents by the Indians and Others among the non-Chinese ethnic respondents.

When reporting on the Indian languages, only the Indians reported themselves as highly proficient in these languages. Mid level proficiency in the Indian languages was also negligible among the Malays (2.2%) and the Chinese (3%). The majority of the respondents (Malay 97.8%, Chinese 97%, and Others 100%) reported themselves as being low proficient in the Indian languages. It can be seen from the data in Table 2 that the Indian languages were not favoured by the non-Indian respondents.

As far as the Chinese and Indians are concerned, they were found to be highly proficient in their respective ethnic languages. This indicates that they are very much concerned about their ethnic identity and preservation of this identity. They perhaps think it necessary to maintain the national as well as ethnic identity through linguistic behavior.

As for the English language, it is shown in Table 2 that the Malay and Chinese respondents reported to have the same level of proficiency (high 40% and mid 60%) whereas the Indians were seen to have the highest percentage (94.4) of the high proficiency level. Among the Indians, the percentage of the mid proficient group was also very low (5.6). The data show that the Indians reported themselves equally proficient in English and the Indian languages (in each language 94.4% as high and 5.6% as mid proficient). The instrumental value of English in communication might be the driving force in gaining competence in this language.

The multilingual Malaysians' linguistic repertoire mainly consisted of their respective ethnic languages, the national language and English. Some gained proficiency in other languages also. The development of multilingualism in Malaysia which was motivated by historical and political reasons has now become a natural phenomenon.

Table 2. Respondents' level of proficiency in languages as per ethnicity (%)

Language	Level of Proficiency	Ethnicity			
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others
BM	High	100	72.7	100	75
	Mid	-	27.3	-	25
	Low	-	-	-	-
Chinese	High	1.5	93.9	-	-
	Mid	11.8	6.1	22.2	25
	Low	86.7	-	77.8	75

Indian	High	-	-	94.4	-
	Mid	2.2	3	5.6	-
	Low	97.8	97	-	100
English	High	40.4	40.9	94.4	50
	Mid	59.6	59.1	5.6	50
	Low	-	-	-	-

Analysis and Discussion

Patterns of language choice with friends

Respondents' language choice with friends was investigated through investigating their choice of languages in three sub-domains which are mentioned in Table 3. The descriptions of the patterns of language choice in these sub-domains follow Table 3.

Table 3. Sub-domains of friendship

Domain	Sub-domains
Friendship	(a) Converse with friends
	(b) Introduce friends to others
	(c) Write letters to friends

(a) Converse with friends

The patterns of language choice of the respondents when they converse with friends are presented in Table 4. It can be seen from this table that the Malays, Chinese and Indians were reported to choose their respective ethnic languages whereas Others were reported to choose English more when conversing with friends. The case of Others that they did not report of choosing their ethnic languages might be linked to the fact that their ethnic languages were not included in the list of choice. The choice of BM was also reported for this purpose among the non-Malays.

At this point it can be said that since BM is the national language of Malaysia it can function as a medium of interethnic communication among different ethnic groups. English was reported to be chosen as well by the respondents irrespective of ethnicity but the non-Malays showed a stronger preference for this language when compared to the Malays.

It can be inferred that the choice of ethnic languages was high when conversing with friends of the same ethnic background whereas English and BM were chosen when the friends probably belonged to other ethnic groups. Choice of the Chinese languages by the Malays and Indians when conversing with friends could be attributed to the fact that they gained proficiency in these languages to some levels and it might also be assumed that they chose these languages when they conversed with Chinese friends. However, nil choice of the Indian languages by the Malays, Chinese and Others may be attributed to their lack or no proficiency in these languages.

Table 4. Patterns of language choice in conversing with friends (%)

<i>f</i>	BM	Chinese	Indian	English
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	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
F	97	21.2	16.7	50	4.4	80.3	5.6	0	0	0	66.6	0	4.4	16.7	55.6	50
S	3	28.8	44.4	25	.7	7.6	0	0	0	0	16.7	0	46.3	53	38.8	50
R	0	19.7	16.7	0	2.2	1.5	0	0	.7	0	11.1	0	23.5	21.2	5.6	0
N	0	30.3	22.2	25	92.7	10.6	94.4	100	99.3	100	5.6	100	25.8	9.1	0	0

Note: *f* = Frequency, M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others, F = Frequently, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never

(b) Introduce friends to others

The patterns of language choice of the respondents when they introduce friends to others are presented in Table 5. The table shows that the Malays and Chinese were found to choose their ethnic languages whereas the Indians and Others showed their preference for the choice of English when introducing friends to others.

Though the Indians were reported to choose the Indian languages with considerably high frequency, they ranked the highest as the frequent users of English among the respondents in this sub-domain of friendship. Increase in the choice of English language in this sub-domain could be linked to the fact that to whom the friends were introduced; there is chance that the person might belong to different ethnic groups. The choice of BM was also reported for this purpose among the non-Malays.

Here, it can be said that since BM is the national language of Malaysia it can function as a medium of interethnic communication. Choice of the Chinese languages by the Malays and Indians when conversing with friends could be attributed to the fact that they gained proficiency in these languages to some levels and it might also be assumed that they chose these languages when they conversed with Chinese friends. However, nil choice of the Indian languages by the Malays, Chinese and Others may be attributed to their lack or no proficiency in these languages.

Table 5. Patterns of language choice in introducing friends to others (%)

<i>f</i>	BM				Chinese				Indian				English			
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
F	96.3	15.2	16.7	50	4.4	80.3	5.6	0	0	0	72.2	0	4.4	12.2	83.3	75
S	3.7	33.3	22.2	25	1.5	7.6	0	0	0	0	11.1	0	39.7	53	11.1	25
R	0	19.7	44.4	0	.7	1.5	0	0	.7	0	11.1	0	19.9	21.2	5.6	0
N	0	31.8	16.7	25	93.4	10.6	94.4	100	99.3	100	5.6	100	36	13.6	0	0

Note: *f* = Frequency, M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others, F = Frequently, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never

(c) Write letters to friends

The patterns of language choice of the respondents when they write letters to friends are presented in Table 6. It can be seen in this table that the Malays showed their strong preferences for BM when writing letters to friends. The Chinese also reported to choose their ethnic

languages but they reported a fair choice for BM and English as well. The Indians and Others, however, favoured English when writing letters to friends. The case of Others might be again linked to the fact that their ethnic languages were not included in the list of choice.

Another important pattern is that the Malays did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages, the Chinese did not choose the Indian languages, the Indians did not choose the Chinese languages and Others did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages when writing letters to friends.

This could be linked to the domain allocation of language choice, i.e. this particular sub-domain in friendship does not allow the respondents to choose those languages since this sub-domain is considered more personal and intimate. An important factor is that this sub-domain involves the written form of a language. Users have to be schooled formally in order to learn the written form. Therefore, the reason has to be the users no proficiency in the written form of the languages. With reference to the choice of the Indian languages especially, it can be said that the Malays, Chinese and Others did not choose these language because they had either low proficiency or no proficiency.

Table 6. Patterns of language choice in writing letters to friends (%)

<i>f</i>	BM				Chinese				Indian				English			
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
F	96.3	16.7	5.6	50	0	69.7	0	0	0	0	33.3	0	7.3	16.7	77.7	75
S	2.2	10.6	27.8	25	0	6.1	0	0	0	0	16.7	0	38.2	43.9	11.1	25
R	0	18.2	33.3	0	0	1.5	0	0	0	0	5.6	0	21.4	16.7	5.6	0
N	1.5	54.5	33.3	25	100	22.7	100	100	100	100	44.4	100	33.1	22.7	5.6	0

Note: *f* = Frequency, M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others, F = Frequently, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never

Effect of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with friends

The effects of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with friends are presented in Table 7. It is apparent from the table that gender was not found to be correlated with choice of the languages under study. Ethnicity of the respondents was found to correlate with choice of BM, Chinese, English and the Indian languages. The correlations between ethnicity of respondents and choice of BM, Chinese, English and the Indian languages in all the sub-domains of friendship were observed to be moderate ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.40-0.70$).

Proficiency was also found to be correlated with choice of all the four languages in the friendship domain. The correlations between proficiency and choice of BM were identified to be low ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.20-0.40$). The choice of the Chinese languages and English was found to be moderately correlated with proficiency in all the sub-domains of friendship ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.40-0.70$). However, such a correlation between proficiency and choice of the Indian languages in conversing with friends and introducing friends to others was found to be high ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.70-0.90$) but this correlation was moderate when respondents write letters to friends ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.602$).

Table 7. Effect of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with friends

Language	Context	Gender				Ethnicity				Proficiency			
		χ^2	df	Sig.	C	χ^2	df	Sig.	C	χ^2	df	Sig.	C
BM	a	NR				145.792	9	0.000	0.628	26.995	3	0.000	0.328
	b					171.426	9	0.000	0.658	26.397	3	0.000	0.325
	c					170.792	9	0.000	0.658	28.508	3	0.000	0.336
Chinese	a	NR				155.107	9	0.000	0.640	148.420	6	0.000	0.631
	b					196.186	9	0.000	0.683	172.042	6	0.000	0.659
	c					158.083	9	0.000	0.643	142.743	6	0.000	0.624
Indian	a	NR				201.702	9	0.000	0.688	249.344	6	0.000	0.726
	b					210.534	6	0.000	0.696	224.000	4	0.000	0.707
	c					119.792	9	0.000	0.590	127.455	6	0.000	0.602
English	a	NR				53.079	9	0.000	0.438	50.870	3	0.000	0.430
	b					39.468	9	0.000	0.387	38.464	3	0.000	0.383
	c					68.355	9	0.000	0.484	51.993	3	0.000	0.434

Note: a = Converse with friends, b = Introduce friends to others, c = Write letters to friends, C = Contingency coefficient, NR = No relation found

Patterns of language choice with neighbours

Respondents' choices of language with neighbours were investigated through investigating their choice of languages in two sub-domains which are mentioned in Table 8. The descriptions of patterns of language choice in these sub-domains of neighbourhood follow Table 8.

Table 8. Sub-domains of neighbourhood

Domain	Sub-domains
Neighbourhood	(a) Talk to neighbours whose mother tongues are the same as mine (b) Talk to neighbours whose mother tongues are different from mine

(a) Talk to neighbours whose mother tongues are the same as mine

The patterns of language choice of the respondents when talking to neighbours of the same mother tongue are presented in Table 9. The table shows that the respondents from the major ethnic groups preferred their respective ethnic languages, whereas Others reported a balanced choice between BM and English when talking to neighbours of the same mother tongue. The case of Others might be again linked to the fact that their ethnic languages were not included in the list of choice. The frequency of choice of BM was also satisfactory among Others and the Chinese. English was, however, preferred more by the Indians compared to others.

The patterns that the Malays did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages, the Chinese did not choose the Indian languages, the Indians did not choose the Chinese languages and Others did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages when talking to neighbours of the same mother tongue may be explained by the notion of the domain distribution of language choice. However, nil choice of the Indian languages by the Malays, Chinese and Others may be attributed to their lack or no proficiency in these languages. Ethnicity seemed to play a very important role here.

As the participants belonged to the same ethnic groups, it was expected that respective ethnic languages would be chosen and preferred.

Table 9. Patterns of language choice in talking to neighbours whose mother tongues are the same as mine (%)

<i>f</i>	BM				Chinese				Indian				English			
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
F	97.8	18.2	5.6	25	0	92.5	0	0	0	0	88.8	0	2.2	3	44.5	25
S	1.5	3	11.1	50	0	4.5	0	0	0	0	5.6	0	15.4	16.7	33.3	50
R	0	6.1	38.9	0	0	1.5	0	25	0.7	0	5.6	0	16.9	22.7	11.1	0
N	0.7	72.7	44.4	25	100	1.5	100	75	99.3	100	0	100	65.5	57.6	11.1	25

Note: *f* = Frequency, M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others, F = Frequently, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never

(b) Talk to a neighbours whose mother tongues are different from mine

Respondents' patterns of language choice when talking to neighbours of different mother tongues are presented in Table 10. It can be seen from this table that BM was the default choice for the Malays. The choice of BM was also found to be favoured by the Indians, Chinese and Others. This could be attributed to the fact that BM being the national language plays an important role in interethnic communication. Though the choice of English was found to increase among the respondents irrespective of ethnicity, the Indians stood out as the most frequent users of English.

Increasing choice of English could also be explained with reference to the importance of English as a medium of interethnic communication. Almost negligible choice of the Chinese and Indian languages among the non-Chinese and non-Indians respectively may be explained with regard to domain configuration of language choice and their lack or no proficiency in these languages as well as the influence of ethnicity of the respondents

Table 10. Patterns of language choice in talking to neighbours whose mother tongues are different from mine (%)

<i>f</i>	BM				Chinese				Indian				English			
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O
F	84.6	34.8	61.1	25	0	31.8	0	0	0	0	22.2	0	11.8	16.7	72.2	25
S	9.5	39.5	16.7	50	2.2	22.7	0	0	0	1.5	0	0	33.1	47	16.6	75
R	2.2	4.5	5.5	0	0	9.1	0	25	.7	0	5.6	0	14.7	16.7	5.6	0
N	3.7	21.2	16.7	25	98.8	36.4	100	75	99.3	98.5	72.2	100	40.4	19.6	5.6	0

Note: *f* = Frequency, M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indians, O = Others, F = Frequently, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never

Effects of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with neighbours

The effects of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with neighbours are presented in Table 11. It can be seen from this table that gender was not found to be correlated with choice of any language under study. Ethnicity and proficiency were identified to have correlations with choice of all the four languages. The correlation between ethnicity and choice of BM was found to be high when it involves talking to neighbours of the same mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.708$) whereas the correlation was found to be moderate when it involves talking to neighbours of different mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.447$).

Similarly, a high correlation was found between ethnicity and choice of the Chinese and Indian languages when talking to neighbours of the same mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.70-0.90$) but the correlation was moderate when talking to neighbours of different mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.40-0.70$).

Ethnicity was moderately correlated with choice of English in both the sub-domains of neighbourhood ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.40-0.70$). The correlations between proficiency and choice of BM and English were found to be low ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.20-0.40$). Such correlation was found to be strengthened when choosing the Chinese and Indian languages.

A high correlation was noticed between proficiency and choice of the Indian languages when talking to neighbours of the same mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.720$) but this correlation was moderate when talking to neighbours of different mother tongues ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.445$). The correlation between proficiency and choice of the Chinese languages in both the sub-domains, was, however, found to be moderate ($p = 0.000$, $C = 0.40-0.70$).

Table 11. Effect of gender, ethnicity and proficiency on the choice of languages with neighbours

Language	Context	Gender				Ethnicity				Proficiency			
		χ^2	df	Sig.	C	χ^2	df	Sig.	C	χ^2	df	Sig.	C
BM	a	NR				224.647	9	0.000	0.708	23.858	3	0.000	0.320
	b					55.979	9	0.000	0.447	26.795	3	0.000	0.346
Chinese	a	NR				244.450	9	0.000	0.722	209.936	6	0.000	0.696
	b					116.120	9	0.000	0.584	108.187	6	0.000	0.571
Indian	a	NR				217.517	9	0.000	0.702	241.226	6	0.000	0.720
	b					54.449	9	0.000	0.442	55.279	6	0.000	0.445
English	a	NR				65.130	9	0.000	0.475	19.854	3	0.000	0.285
	b					51.435	9	0.000	0.432	38.352	3	0.000	0.382

Note: a = Talk to neighbours whose mother tongues are the same as mine, b = Talk to neighbours whose mother tongues are different from mine, C = Contingency coefficient, NR = No relation found

Conclusion

With reference to the choice of languages with friends it is apparent from the data in Tables 4, 5 and 6 that the Malays and Chinese preferred their respective ethnic languages whereas the Indians and Others preferred English. Patterns of language choice with neighbours however give a slightly different picture.

It can be seen from Tables 9 and 10 that the Malays, Chinese and Indians preferred their respective ethnic languages more, while Others showed a balanced choice between BM and English. The case of Others that they did not report of choosing their ethnic languages might be linked to the fact that their ethnic languages were not included in the list of choice. BM was found to be chosen by non-Malays but among them, Others chose BM more compared to the Chinese and Indians in all the sub-domains of friendship and neighbourhood except for one when it involves talking to neighbours of different mother tongues. In this case the Chinese and Indians chose BM more than Others. Even the frequency of BM was higher than the frequency of choice of their ethnic languages.

This could be attributed to the fact that since BM is the national language; everyone in Malaysia is expected to be proficient in this language. The claim can be supported by the fact that the respondents irrespective of ethnicity were found to be highly proficient in BM in the analysis of the proficiency in languages earlier. English was found to be chosen by all but it was favoured by Indians and Others compared to the Malays and Chinese.

What is noteworthy is that in introducing friends to others, in writing letters to friends and in talking to neighbours of the different mother tongues, Indians chose English more than their own ethnic languages. Though the Chinese languages were found to be chosen by the Indians and Malays, the frequency of choice was very negligible.

Mostly it was found that the Malays did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages, the Chinese did not choose the Indian languages, the Indians did not choose the Chinese languages and Others did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages.

Analysis of the patterns of language choice reveals that respondents' language choice was not influenced by gender. Ethnicity and proficiency were, however, found to be contributing factors to language choice. Domain was also found to play important role on language choice with friends and neighbours among the Malaysian undergraduates.

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A R M Mostafizar Rahman, M.A. (ELT), M.A. (Applied Ling.)

Corresponding Author

English Discipline

Khulna University

Khulna-9208

Bangladesh

Email: mostafiz123@yahoo.com

Chan Swee Heng, PhD

Department of English
University Putra Malaysia
43400-UPM
Malaysia
Email: shchan@fbmk.upm.edu.my

Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, MA (Ling.)
Department of English
University Putra Malaysia
43400-UPM
Malaysia
Email: ain@fbmk.upm.edu.my
ain@putra.upm.edu.my