Patterns of Language Choice in the Domain of Office Among the Malaysian University Undergraduates

A. R. M. Mostafizar Rahman, M.A.

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Abstract

The choice of a code in a multilingual context, that is, 'who speaks what language to whom, when, where and even why?' is a complex task and it depends upon different variables such as language user's social background, linguistic profile, profession, educational background, attitudes and social domains.

This study investigated the patterns of language choice in the domain of office among University Putra Malaysia (UPM) undergraduates and examined the relationship between their patterns of language choice, and language proficiency, gender and ethnicity. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and analyzed them quantitatively using SPSS.

The findings show that the respondents especially non-Malays are inclined to the use of English in the domain of office where Bahasa Melayu holds a constitutionally designated legitimate status as official language of Malaysia and the choice is influenced by language proficiency and ethnicity of the respondents.

Background of the Study

Language choice is a sociolinguistic phenomenon, which refers to selecting languages for different purposes in different contexts. Multilingual societies inevitably face conflict over language choice. What makes this language choice an obvious issue and concern in a multilingual society? Is the choice natural or forced? What are the intentions of an individual when making a choice? What are the factors that influence the specific choice? These are some of the issues that encouraged investigating the choice of languages in the offices among the university undergraduates in the multilingual setting of Malaysia.

Linguistic Situation in Malaysia

Historically, the first European language that came to Malaysia was Portuguese, and Dutch and then English followed this, with the British colonization. During this period, Chinese and Indian languages also set foot with the migration of Chinese and Indians to Malaysia. This, in fact,

contributed in no small measure to Malaysia's growth as a multilingual country. As a British colony, the use of English occupied several formal and informal domains; it was the official language and used in court and education to a large extent. The use of English spread rapidly moulding an elite group of local users among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. As English was the language of the 'ruler', people with knowledge of English were given privileges. This helped increase the number of English speakers leading to an increase in the corresponding number of English medium schools in Malaysia. This increase of English medium schools was linked likely to the increasing popularity of the language. English became so influential and conquered so many domains of use that it remained the official language even after ten years from gaining independence in 1957 (Ain Nadzimah and Chan, 2003). However, after independence, the English language diminished in importance as the language of education since the medium of instruction was changed to Bahasa Melayu (BM).

With its independence, Malaysia experienced a lot of changes that affected language choice and use. Like any other newly born state, Malaysia (Malaya then) strongly felt the need to have a unique national and official language in order to get a national identity; to forget the linguistic influences of the past colonial periods and to unite different races through the use of a common language for the development of the country. Accordingly in 1963, BM was declared the national and official language of Malaysia with the passing of the National Language Act. To declare BM as the national and official language of Malaysia was a deliberate effort when the state had Malays (about half of the total population), Chinese (just over a third of the total population) and Indians (10% of the total population) (Gill, 2005). BM was chosen over other languages on several grounds but one of the most important was that-

> To the Malays and *bumiputera* people, that the choice fell on Malay was
> the most natural thing. It is the language of the soil. Of all the *bumiputera*
> or indigenous languages, Malay is the most advanced in terms of its
> function as language of administration, high culture, literary knowledge
> and religion (Asmah, 1987:65).

In order to achieve the goal of the declaration of BM as the national and official language, BM was made the only medium of instruction to be used in national schools and an exclusively BM medium first public university called National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) was established in 1970. By 1983, all subjects irrespective of disciplines were taught and learnt through BM.

The implementation of the BM policy was accelerated through declaring that all government appointees must have competence in the national language, BM, and that entrance to government secondary schools also depended on competence in BM (Ridge, 2004). However, other minority and indigenous languages continued to be used obviating issues of language conflict.

The Chinese and Tamil vernacular primary schools were constitutionally allowed to continue with the respective ethnic languages as the medium of instruction. Amidst these changes, the status of English decreased to such a level that it became simply a subject of study like other subjects such as history, geography, and physics. The consequence of such a policy promoted bilingualism especially among the non-Malay children in independent Malaysia.

By the mid 1990s, tremendous changes impacted education. The government of Malaysia felt it necessary to give new emphasis on the learning of English which was and still is increasingly seen as crucial in the advancement of trade and commerce as well as giving the country a competitive edge. A milestone change is the green light given by the government to start teaching scientific and technical subjects in English at tertiary education (Ridge, 2004). In addition, the then Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mohathir Mohamad made it public in 2002 that mathematics and sciences will henceforth be taught in English from the first year of primary school. This unexpected announcement brought a drastic change in attitude among the people towards languages and the linguistic situation in Malaysia.

The preceding discussion reveals that bilingualism and multilingualism in Malaysia did not happen overnight. Rather it took place through several phases with the changes of language planning and policy in the passage of time. Generally, it set the direction towards a greater emphasis on Malays becoming bilingual (with BM and English) and non-Malays to be trilingual or multilingual (with BM, English and their respective ethnic language or languages).

With Malaysia being a multilingual nation, it is expected that people in Malaysia use different languages in different contexts. It is this issue as to what influences the language choice of people and how they pattern their choice and use of languages in the domain of office that constitute the focus of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The choice of language in a multilingual context is a complex task and it might be constrained by several factors such as language users' social background, educational and linguistic profile, language policy, attitudes and domains of language use. A number of studies (e.g. Fishman, 1972; Gal, 1979; Parasher, 1980; David, 1999; Hohenthal, 2003 and Yeh *et al.*, 2004) found that people use language as per status of the domains. The unique linguistic situation in Malaysia may present evidence to the contrary. Thus, this study sought to obtain information about Malaysian undergraduates' patterns of language choice in the offices and to examine the relationship between the patterns of language choice, and the factors that constrain the choice such as language proficiency, ethnicity, and gender. This group of people is considered an important source of human capital in the nation's development. As such, it was of relevance to profile their language ability and language choice.

Objectives of the Study

This study examined UPM undergraduates' patterns of language choice in the domain of office. It also investigated the relationship between the patterns of language choice in offices, and gender, ethnicity and proficiency in languages among the respondents.

Literature Review

The choice of languages might be conscious or unconscious but it does not happen in a vacuum, rather, language operates in a context, which is situated in a speech community. This speech community may be diglossic, bilingual or multilingual where languages have functional and contextual allocations. For instance, the classical or standard or high variety (H) of Arabic is used for literacy, formal, public and official uses whereas the vernacular, local or low variety (L) is used for informal purposes. Chatterjee (1986) showed that the allocation of the two varieties of Bengali to different functional domains is very strict, with no overlapping. Ridiculous or sometimes comical will be the effect if the norms of situational selection between the two are violated (cited in Coulmas, 2005:126). It means that language choice is domain specific.

Several studies recognized the domain distribution of language use. 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 favoured 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. Nercissians (2001), Arua and Magocha (2002), Goebel (2002), Hohenthal (2003) and Yeh *et al.* (2004) also reported similar findings.

The concept of domain allocation of language use, however, has been criticized. Pascasio and Hidalgo (1979) and Scotton (1979) found partial effects of domain on language choice. Gal (1979) and Lu (1988), however, strongly disagreed with the effect of domain on language choice. Gal reported that whatever the social situations, only the identity of the participants determined the language choice in the Oberwart case of Austria.

Besides domain, some other factors were found to influence language choice. Among them, ethnicity, proficiency and gender are important. Wallwork (1981) says that it is necessary to look at the question of individual's language proficiency in relation to the situations in which language is used. David (1999) also recognizes that code switching reflects speaker's higher/lower proficiency and greater/less eases with a particular language. The influence of proficiency is also reported by Hakuta (1991), Yeh *et al.* (2004) and Coulmas (2005).

Similar to proficiency, ethnicity was also found to influence language choice. Gal (1979) found in the Oberwart case in Austria that only the identity of the participants can account for their language choice. Ferrer and Sankoff (2003), Burhanudeen (2003), and Sayahi (2005) also reported consistent finding with reference to the effect of ethnicity on language choice. Gender as a constraint of language choice was also recognized by a number of studies. Lu (1988) reports that difference 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 leads people to choose different languages. Chan (1994), however, finds no significant gender difference in Minnanrens' language use (cited in Yeh *et al.*, 2004).

Methodology

This study is descriptive and non-experimental. The data of the study were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to a sample of three hundred UPM undergraduates selected through "multistage cluster sampling". The questionnaire comprised three parts: Part I-the demographic profile of the respondents; Part II-level of proficiency in languages; and Part III-patterns of language choice in the offices. The questionnaire was prepared adapting items from instruments of previous studies (e.g. Yeh *et al.,* 2004 and Hohenthal, 2003). The items were modified to suit the objectives of this study. 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. This is deemed an acceptable figure for the research instrument.

Upon the completion of the data collection, these were coded and tabulated for computation and analysis. Seventy two questionnaires were found to be incomplete and therefore these were excluded from the final analysis. The analysis was carried out using SPSS to obtain percentage values, frequencies and correlations among the variables.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondents were categorized as per gender (male and female) and ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others). 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).

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

As can be seen from the table, the percentage of males was comparatively higher than that of females among the Malays and the Others ethnic groups whereas the percentage of females was comparatively higher than males among the Chinese and Indians.

Respondents' Level of Proficiency in Languages

Respondents' proficiency in languages is an important independent variable of this study. The study examined the relationship between respondents' patterns of language choice in the domain of office 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 noteworthy 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 ethnic respondents 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 Indians and Others among the non-Chinese ethnic respondents liked the Chinese languages to some extent.

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 non-Indian respondents did not favor Indian languages.

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	-	-	-	-

Patterns of Language Choice in the domain of Office

Language choice in the domain of office is the dependent variable of this study. Respondents' choice of languages in the offices were obtained through a five point Likert scale with 5= frequently (F), 4= sometimes (S), 3= not applicable (NA), 2= rarely (R) and 1= never use (NU). In the reporting of data, the figures are presented as percentage values accompanied by these indicators (F, S, NA, R, NU). For example, 50% F means that 50% of the respondents frequently used a particular language. The respondents marked their choice of languages in relation to identified sub-domains or contexts in the domain of office. Their patterns of language choice were determined through descriptive statistics and correlations between variables were identified through Chi-square (χ^2) tests.

The correlations were measured at 0.05 level of significance (p = 0.05). However, the strength of relationship (if any) was measured using Contingency Coefficient (C) and the coefficient correlation was interpreted with reference to Guilford's rule of thumb (C < 0.20 indicates almost negligible correlation; 0.20-0.40 indicates low correlation; 0.40-0.70 indicates moderate correlation, 0.70-0.90 indicates high correlation, and 0.90-1 indicates very high correlation). The results are presented below.

Language choice of the respondents in the office domain 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 of office follow Table 3.

Table 3: Sub-domains of Office

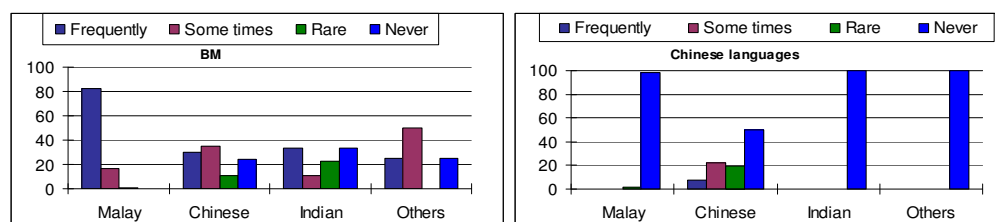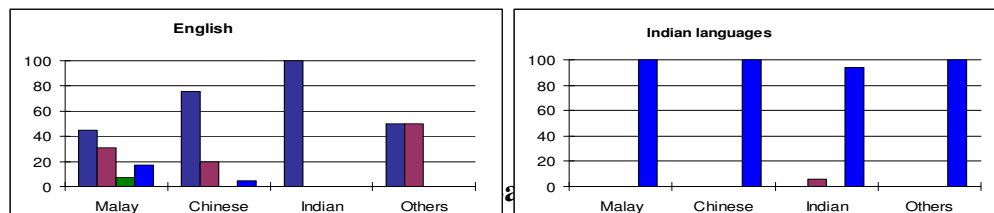| *Domain*	**Sub-domains**
Office	(a) Write official letters
	(b) Talk to government and university officials whose mother tongues are the same as mine
	(c) Talk to government and university officials whose mother tongues are different from mine

(a) Write Official Letters

Respondents' patterns of language choice when writing official letters are presented in Figure 1. The figure shows, the Malays chose BM most frequently (82.4% F, 16.9% S). They reported a substantial choice for English too (44.8% F, 30.9% S) but they did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages at all when writing official letters. The Chinese chose English more frequently (75.8% F, 19.7% S) followed by BM 30.3% F, 34.8% S. They reported a very negligible choice of the Chinese languages (7.6% F, 22.7% S) but they did not choose the Indian languages in writing official letters. The Indians however reported that they always chose English (100% F). They also reported quite a substantial choice for BM (33.3% F, 11.1% S) followed by a very negligible choice of the Indian languages (5.6% S). They did not choose the Chinese languages at all when writing official letters. The respondents from the Others ethnic group chose English more frequently (50% F, 50% S) followed by BM 25% F, 50% S. They never chose the Chinese and Indian languages when writing official letters.

It can be seen from the data in Figure 1 that the Malays preferred BM whereas the non-Malays showed their strong preferences for English when writing official letters. Non-Malays BM chose BM, but the frequencies were low. The Chinese and Indian languages were found to be chosen very negligibly by the respective ethnic respondents, whereas nil frequency of choice was reported among the other ethnic groups.

Very negligible or nil choice for the Chinese and Indian languages in writing official letters indicates that languages are chosen as per domain of use (Greenfield, 1972; Parasher, 1980; Nercissians, 2001; Arua and Magocha, 2002; Goebel, 2002; Hohenthal, 2003 and Yeh *et al.,* 2004). High frequency of the choice of BM in writing official letters was expected since BM is constitutionally designated official language in Malaysia. But high frequency of the choice of English, which was also found to be observed in this sub-domain, could be attributed to the assumption that people in Malaysia may be inclined to the use of English for official purposes.

This finding is found to be consistent with the previous studies especially Ting (2003) who reported that people in Sarawak, Malaysia would still like English to perform the functions officially designated for BM. Recognition of the instrumental value of English in this era of globalization among the respondents could be attributed to address the question why are they motivated and inclined towards English (Mostafizar Rahman, 2008).

(b) Talk to Government and University Officials whose Mother Tongues are the Same as Mine

Respondents' patterns of language choice when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue are presented in Figure 2. The figure shows, the Malays chose BM more frequently (87.5% F, 10.3% S) followed by a fair choice of English (25.7% F, 42.6% S). They were reported not to choose the Chinese and Indian languages at all when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue. The Chinese chose English more frequently (50% F, 42.6% S) compared to BM 27.3% F, 24.2% S and their own ethnic languages, the Chinese languages 36.4% F, 22.7% S. They did not, however, choose the Indian languages when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue.

The Indians chose English most frequently (88.9% F, 11.1% S). They reported a fair choice of BM (27.8% F, 16.7% S) and Indian languages (22.2% F, 22.2% S) also but they did not choose the Chinese languages when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue. The respondents from the Others ethnic group chose English more frequently (50% F, 50% S) compared to the choice of BM 25% F, 50% S. They did not choose the Chinese and Indian languages at all when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue.

As can be seen from the data in Figure 2, the Malays reported their preference for BM whereas the non-Malays showed their preference for English when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue. The non-Malays reported to choose BM and their respective ethnic languages, though the frequencies were of varying degrees. Naturally BM was expected to be chosen by the respondents irrespective of ethnicity when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue because it is the official use of language.

Preference for English by non-Malays in talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue could be attributed to the assumption that people in Malaysia may be inclined to the use of English for official purposes. Less preference for ethnic languages among the non-Malays when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue reveals that ethnicity did not influence language choice much; otherwise it was natural to use ethnic languages when the interlocutors belonged to the same ethnic background. Rather domain

allocation of language use and language attitudes were seemed to play important role in choosing languages when talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue as it was found in writing official letters also.
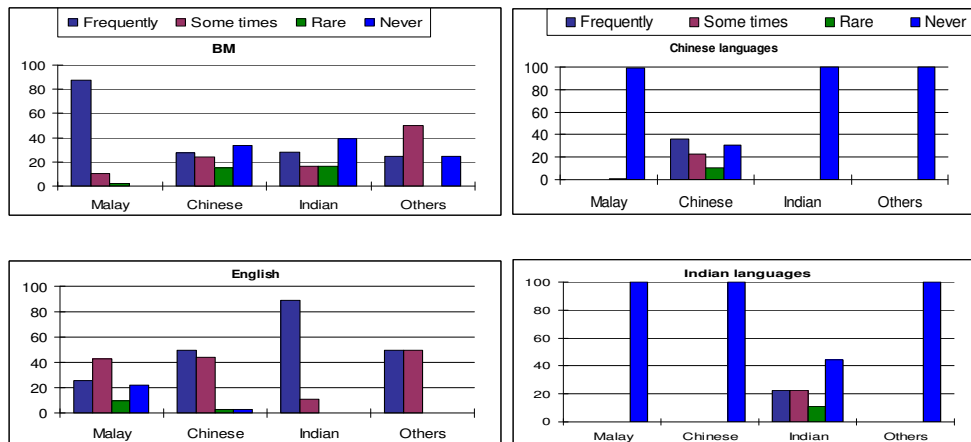

Figure 2: Respondents' Choice of Languages in Talking to Government and University Officials whose Mother Tongues are the Same as Mine

(c) Talk to Government and University Officials whose Mother Tongues are Different from Mine

Respondents' patterns of language choice when talking to government and university officials whose mother tongues are different are presented in Figure 3. The figure shows, the Malays chose BM more frequently (66.9% F, 19.1% S) followed by a substantial choice of English (41.2% F, 33.8% S). They were reported to choose the Chinese languages also but the frequency was very negligible (1.5% S). They did not, however, choose the Indian languages when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues.

The Chinese chose English more frequently (60.6% F, 36.4% S). They reported quite a high choice of BM (53% F, 31.8% S) and a very negligible choice of the Chinese languages (1.5% F, 9.1% S) but they never chose the Indian languages when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues. The Indians also chose mostly English (94.4% F, 5.6% S). They reported quite a substantial choice of BM (38.9% F, 27.8% S) and a very negligible choice of the Indian languages (5.6% S). They did not choose the Chinese languages at all when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues.

The respondents from the Others ethnic group chose English more frequently (50% F, 50% S) than they chose BM 25% F, 50% S. They did not resort to the choice of the Chinese and Indian languages at all when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues.

It can be seen from the data in Figure 3 that the Malays preferred choosing BM besides resorting to a substantial choice of English, whereas the non-Malays showed their strong preferences for English besides showing a fair choice for BM. Similar to the case of writing official letters, nil choice of the Chinese and Indian languages when communicating with the government and university officials of different mother tongues indicates that languages are chosen as per domain of use. Like other two sub-domains of office, BM was expected to be chosen by respondents irrespective of ethnicity when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues as it is official use of language but reported preference for English by non-Malays could be attributed to the assumption that people in Malaysia may be inclined to the use of English for official purposes.
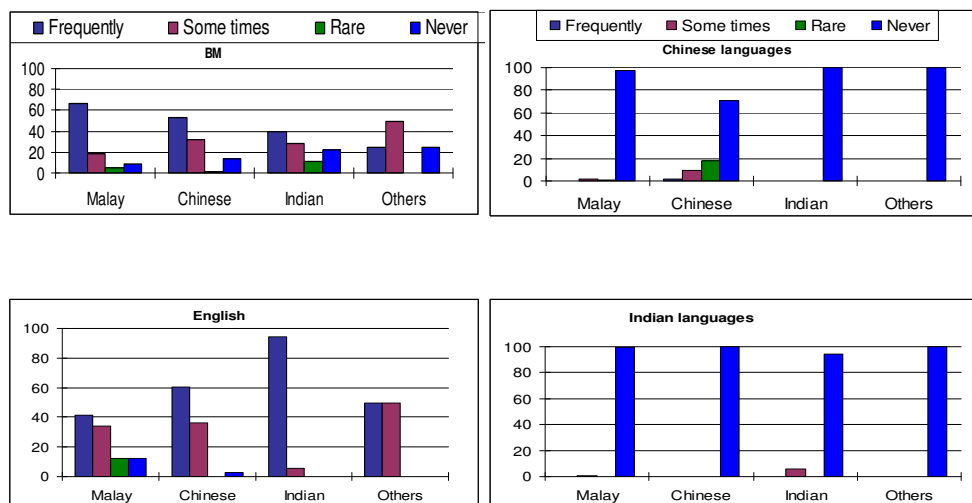

Figure 3: Respondents' Choice of Languages in Talking to Government and University Officials whose Mother Tongues are Different from Mine

Relationship between Patterns of Language Choice in the Offices, and Gender, Ethnicity, and Proficiency in Languages

The relationship between patterns of language choice in offices, and gender, ethnicity and proficiency are presented in Table 4. The data in the table illustrates that gender was not found to be correlated with the choice of any language under study. This finding is found to be consistent with the previous studies (e.g. Chan, 1994; Mostafizar Rahman, 2008). The reason might be that respondents, irrespective of gender, have to choose BM as it constitutionally designated official language in Malaysia.

Ethnicity was found to correlate with the choice of all the four languages though with varying strengths. The relationships between ethnicity and choice of BM when writing official letters and talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue were found to be moderate (p = 0.000, C = 0.40-0.70) but no relationship was found between ethnicity and choice of BM when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues (p > 0.05). The correlations between ethnicity and choice of the Chinese languages in writing official letters and talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue were found to be moderate (p = 0.000, C = 0.40-0.70) but the relationships were identified as low when it involves talking to the government and university officials of different mother tongues (p = 0.000, C = 0.385).

With reference to the relationships between ethnicity and choice of the Indian languages, ethnicity was found to correlate moderately when talking to the government and university officials of the same mother tongue (p = 0.000, C = 0.590) and a low correlation was noticed when writing official letters (p = 0.009, C = 0.221). The correlation was, however, identified as nil when talking to government and university officials of different mother tongues (p > 0.05). In case of the choice of English, ethnicity was found to correlate moderately when it involves talking to the government and university officials of the same mother tongue (p = 0.000, C = 0.403). This relationship between ethnicity and the choice of English when writing official letters and talking to government and university officials whose mother tongues were different from the respondents were identified to be low (p = 0.000, C = 0.20-0.40).

Proficiency was found to correlate with the choice of all the languages under study.

The relationships between proficiency and choice of the Chinese languages when writing official letters and talking to government and university officials of the same mother tongue were found to be moderate (p = 0.000, C = 0.40-0.70) but the relationship between proficiency and choice of the Chinese languages when talking to the government and university officials of the different mother tongues was found to be low (p = 0.000, C = 0.391).

The correlations between proficiency and choice of BM and English were identified low (p < 0.05, C = 0.20-0.40) in all the three contexts. With reference to the relationships between proficiency and choice of the Indian languages, a moderate correlation was found when talking to the government and university officials of the same mother tongue (p = 0.000, C = 0.559) and the relationship between proficiency and choice of the Indian languages when writing official letters was observed to be low (p = 0.002, C = 0.228) but there was no relationship between proficiency and choice of the Indian languages when talking to the government and university officials of different mother tongues.

Table 4: Relationship and Strength of Relationship between Patterns of Language Choice and Use in Office, and Gender, Ethnicity, and Proficiency

Language	Context	Gender				Ethnicity				Proficiency			
		χ^2	df	Sig.	C	χ^2	df	Sig.	C	X^2	df	Sig.	C
BM	a	NR				87.118	9	0.000	0.529	18.208	3	0.000	0.274
	b					99.096	9	0.000	0.554	9.665	3	0.022	0.203
	c							NR				NR	
Chinese	a	NR				84.665	9	0.000	0.524	82.847	6	0.000	0.520
	b					134.460	9	0.000	0.612	125.236	6	0.000	0.599
	c					38.954	9	0.000	0.385	40.475	6	0.000	0.391
Indian	a	NR				11.496	3	0.009	0.221	12.231	2	0.002	0.228
	b					119.792	9	0.000	0.590	125.361	6	0.000	0.559
	c							NR				NR	
English	a	NR				36.164	9	0.000	0.373	21.517	3	0.000	0.296
	b					43.557	9	0.000	0.403	21.029	3	0.000	0.293
	c					32.884	9	0.000	0.358	31.454	3	0.000	0.351

Note: a = Write official letters b = Talk to government and university officials whose mother tongues are the same as mine, c = Talk to government and university officials whose mother tongues are different from mine, C = Contingency Coefficient, NR = No Relation Found

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis and interpretation, some salient observations were made. With reference to the linguistic profile of the respondents, the findings of the study indicate that the young educated generation in Malaysia is multilingual, though not balanced multilingual. Their linguistic repertoire comprises respective ethnic language, national and official language, English and some other languages as well.

Respondents were found to be highly proficient in the national and official language, BM. It can be claimed that the national and official language policy in Malaysia have attained is objectives as far as proficiency in BM is concerned. With their multilingual status, respondents are believed to exercise language choice in different domains. As there is constitutionally designated official language in Malaysia, respondents irrespective of ethnicity were expected to choose BM for all official purposes. But what is found with reference to language choice and use in office is that BM was the unanimous choice for the Malays whereas non-Malays strongly preferred English. This finding is consistent with Ting's (2003). Ting reported that

in Sarawak, the full impact of language planning which is for BM to completely take over the role of English for official purposes of communication has yet to be reflected in the language attitude of the participants. While they were already embracing BM as official language, they still held on to the previous role of English as an official language. Where wider communication was concerned, the usefulness of English as a common language was clear but other languages were also important. The participants' favourable attitudes to the sharing of language function between BM and English indicate that they would still like English to perform the functions officially designated for BM (P. 207-08).

The findings of this study suggest that respondents were found to be motivated with the instrumental value of English since they showed their inclination to the use of English in the domain where BM holds a legitimate status. Preference for English could be explained with reference to attitude towards this language, proficiency in this language and constrains of domain and ethnicity to some extent. At this juncture, it may be said that though the objective of the national and official language policy has been realized to a great extent, it has not been attained completely. This study thus recommends that a study of this nature could be conducted for further investigation so that some special measures could be taken to ensure that linguistic advantage could be increased in this era of globalization in this multi-lingual setting of Malaysia.

Colophon:

This paper is a part of my MA Applied Linguistics thesis. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international conference MICOLLAC 2007, University Putra Malaysia, 22-24 May 2007, Holiday Villa Subang, Selangor, Malaysia.

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A. R. M. Mostafizar Rahman, M.A
Department of English Discipline
Khulna University
Khulna-9208
Bangladesh
mostafiz123@yahoo.com