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Abstracts

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# Sociolinguistics

# **Examining the Relationship between Family Language Policy and Language-Ethnicity Dimensions among Chinese Foochow Families in Sarawak, Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

Recent studies (e.g., Ting & Teng, 2021; Vollman & Soon, 2020; Ting & Ting, 2021) related to Chinese heritage languages in Malaysia have demonstrated a shift towards Mandarin as the common language to speak in many Chinese families (Carstens, 2018; Ong & Troyer, forthcoming). Such shift is motivated by the pull factors of standard languages, which pose greater instrumental values than heritage languages. For example, Albury (2021) found that many university students in Malaysia considered Mandarin as a necessary economic tool when compared to Malay, the sole national and official language of Malaysia. Ong and Ben Said (forthcoming) also found that mixed marriage between different Chinese dialectal groups has contributed to the shift to speak Mandarin due to no common heritage language between husband and wife. Nevertheless, many of these studies did not offer a comprehensive overview of the shift from the perspective of family domain. Hence, this is the gap that this study shall fill.

Narrowing down to the Foochow community in Sarawak, Malaysia, this study examines the relationship between family language policy and language-ethnicity dimensions to provide a holistic view of the shift from Chinese heritage languages (Foochow) to Mandarin. Specifically, it examines (a) family language practices, family language ideology in defining their characteristics of being a Foochow, and (c) family attitudes towards heritage language management. Semi-structured interview were conducted with nine Foochow families from urban Sarawak.

The findings demonstrate that Foochow was mainly spoken by grandparents while the children and grandchildren have shifted to use standard languages (Mandarin and/or English). All nine families held strong beliefs regarding their ethnic identity being inherited through birth and descent, which led to many of the grandchildren did not bother to learn Foochow. Still, some family members continued to practise Foochow customs and eat Foochow food, which indicates the phenomenological dimension of the language-ethnicity link. As Foochow was predicted to lose its role and status in the urban context, various language management strategies were suggested by the participants. The study concludes that the nine Foochow families' strong subscription to the paternity dimension of language-ethnicity relationship will eventually lead to the potential loss of Foochow in urban areas in Malaysia.

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