



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF FOOCHOW UNDERGRADUATES
TOWARDS ENGLISH, BAHASA MALAYSIA, MANDARIN AND THEIR
VERNACULAR**

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TOWARDS ENGLISH, BAHASA MALAYSIA, MANDARIN,
AND THEIR VERNACULAR**

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ABSTRACT

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF FOOCHOW UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS ENGLISH, BAHASA MALAYSIA, MANDARIN AND THEIR VERNACULAR

Teddy Nelson

This study investigated the attitudes of the Foochow undergraduates towards the four language varieties in their linguistic repertoire across the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of attitude. Their attitudes towards these varieties were then explained in terms of their integrative and instrumental orientation. A survey was conducted on 184 Foochow undergraduates in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak by using a questionnaire. The findings from the survey revealed that the respondents have different attitudes towards the four varieties. The Foochow undergraduates had consistent and positive attitudes towards English, Mandarin, Foochow and Bilingualism (Mandarin and Foochow). However, their attitude towards Bahasa Malaysia is positive only in the cognitive aspect but not affective and behavioral-wise. In the respondents' integrative orientation, Mandarin ranked the highest followed by Foochow, English and Bahasa Malaysia. In their instrumental orientation, English is the variety they perceived as having the highest instrumental value, followed by Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia, and Foochow. The study also found that the cognitive component of attitude is not analogous with instrumental orientation. On the other hand, the affective component of attitude is analogous with integrative orientation. This study revealed that the Foochow undergraduates retained positive attitude towards their vernacular but a pattern of shift to Mandarin was evident. Their negative attitude towards Bahasa Malaysia in the affective and behavioral aspect revealed their low emotional attachment with the national language. Meanwhile, their highly positive attitude towards varieties perceived as having high instrumental value like English and Mandarin indicated that they are active language pragmatists. This study is useful as it indicates the Foochow community's current thoughts, beliefs, desires and preferences for varieties around them, as well as to reveal the vitality status of their vernacular vis-à-vis standard varieties.

ABSTRAK

SIKAP BAHASA PARA MAHASISWA FOOCHOW TERHADAP BAHASA INGGERIS, BAHASA MALAYSIA, MANDARIN DAN BAHASA IBUNDA MEREKA

Teddy Nelson

Kajian ini mengkaji sikap para mahasiswa Foochow terhadap empat bahasa di dalam repertoire linguistik mereka dari segi kognitif, afektif dan tingkahlaku, yang merupakan komponen-komponen sikap. Sikap mereka terhadap bahasa-bahasa ini kemudiannya dijelaskan dengan orientasi integratif dan instrumental. Sebuah survei telah dijalankan ke atas 184 mahasiswa Universiti Malaysia Sarawak dengan menggunakan borang soalselidik. Dapatan daripada survei tersebut menunjukkan bahawa para responden mempunyai sikap yang berbeza terhadap empat bahasa tersebut. Mahasiswa Foochow memiliki sikap yang konsisten dan positif terhadap Bahasa Inggeris, Mandarin, Foochow dan juga bilingualisme (Mandarin dan Foochow). Sikap mereka terhadap Bahasa Malaysia pula hanya positif di dalam aspek kognitif tetapi bukan dalam aspek afektif dan tingkahlaku. Di dalam orientasi integratif para responden, Mandarin menduduki tempat teratas, diikuti oleh Foochow, Bahasa Inggeris dan Bahasa Malaysia. Di dalam orientasi instrumental mereka pula, bahasa Inggeris ialah bahasa yang mereka percaya memiliki nilai instrumental tertinggi diikuti oleh Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia dan Foochow. Kajian ini juga membuktikan bahawa komponen kognitif sikap tidak dapat disamakan dengan orientasi instrumental. Sebaliknya, komponen afektif sikap adalah selari dan boleh disamakan dengan orientasi integratif. Kajian ini menunjukkan mahasiswa Foochow masih memiliki sikap positif terhadap bahasa ibunda mereka tetapi satu corak peralihan ke Mandarin adalah terbukti. Sikap negatif mereka terhadap Bahasa Malaysia didalam aspek afektif dan tingkahlaku pula menunjukkan kelemahan ikatan emosi mereka terhadap bahasa kebangsaan itu. Pada masa yang sama, sikap positif mereka terhadap bahasa-bahasa yang mereka percaya memiliki nilai instrumental yang tinggi seperti Bahasa Inggeris dan Mandarin menunjukkan bahawa mereka ialah pragmatis bahasa yang aktif. Kajian ini berguna untuk menunjukkan pendapat, kepercayaan, keinginan dan pilihan semasa komuniti Foochow terhadap bahasa-bahasa di sekeliling mereka. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini menunjukkan status ketahanan bahasa ibunda mereka sehubungan dengan bahasa-bahasa standard.

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God be in my head, and in my thinking...

God be in my eyes, and in my looking...

God be in my mouth, and in my speaking...

Oh, God be in my heart, and in my understanding.

Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
MD	Mandarin
FC	Foochow
L	Low variety
H	High variety
L1	First language
L2	Second Language
GCD	Greek Cypriot Dialect
SMD	Standard Modern Greek
SD	Standard Deviation
TV	Television

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It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all necessary amendments of the project for acceptance:

Dr. Ting Su Hie

Date: _____

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the purpose of this study. It will discuss the background of the study, the aims and objectives of the study, research problems, research questions, the significance of the study, operational definitions of terms and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Attitudes are traditionally of great importance in sociolinguistics and the social psychology of language (Edwards, 1985). It is closely related to other fields in sociolinguistics such as multilingualism, language choice, language shift and language planning. Sociolinguists have tried to analyse the complex relationship between people's attitudes and their linguistic behaviour, but the conclusions are far from unanimous. Fasold (1984) noted that attitudes towards language varieties are often ambivalent. In a multilingual society, where the linguistic repertoire of a person consists of more than one language variety, attitude towards the language varieties varies. There are reasons for these attitudes, for example, one may like or is motivated to speak a language because of prestige, necessity or to show solidarity with other speakers of the language. One language variety may be more popular among speakers and deemed more useful than the other. According to Holmes (1992), some language varieties especially standard varieties enjoy overt prestige while vernaculars or non-standard varieties have covert prestige instead despite its value not being publicly recognized. The status and standing of language varieties is thus attributed to the attitudes of the speakers towards the languages.

Language attitude research had variously focused on attitudes towards a language variety, dialect and speech style, learning a new language, a specific minority language, language groups, communities and minorities, language lessons, the uses of specific language, attitude of parents to language learning, and attitude to language preference (Baker, 1992). Baker identified five particular deficiencies of studies on attitudes and language. Firstly, he points out that many sociolinguists in their study of language attitudes are not aware of the underlying general attitude theory. This is a regrettable shortfall as awareness and application of general attitude theory would provide solid theoretical foundation for the study of attitudes towards languages. Baker (1992) also noted that back then almost all studies did not pay any attention to attitude change which is unfortunate for attitude is a dynamic construct and is rarely static. The third deficiency is technical deficiencies in the measurement and subsequent analysis of attitudes, which often neglect reliability and multidimensionality. Fourth is the fact that most studies of language attitudes focus solely on attitudes to individual languages and not studying attitudes to bilingualism (or multilingualism). Lastly, Baker (1992) noted that most language attitudes studies are to explain second language attainment or performance only, which predicts proficiency based on attitudes towards the language variety.

Baker (1992) pointed that the two motivations towards language; instrumental and integrative, are originally, and has remained mostly, used in studies on second language learning. He noted that very few researchers had used these two orientations to explain the continuation of bilingual skill, the erosion of a language, or bilingualism. Baker even highlighted that the use of the concept of instrumental and integrative orientation in language attitude studies have a great potential of becoming helpful explanatory variables in language decay (or shift) where minority languages (usually vernaculars) are disparaged and declining. Both instrumental and integrative motivations can prove very useful in explaining how and why language varieties fare in multilingual speech communities. Baker (1992) draws attention to this potential by stating that the lack of integrative attitude towards the community of speakers of a language variety can explain

unfavourable attitudes towards the language variety. Similarly, the lack of instrumental value of a language variety could be a course of its decay. Baker also pointed out that these two orientations are not necessarily opposites or alternatives as both orientations can exist in an individual at the same time and a person can be motivated in different strengths by both orientations. It is possible to possess both instrumental and integrative attitudes, with different context and expectations affecting the balance of their relative power. This is demonstrated in various previous studies (Choi, 2003; Lai, 2005; Oliver & Purdie, 1998) where both orientations influence attitudes towards the language varieties examined.

Edwards (1985) stated that attitudes are indeed complicated in nature by arguing that a person may have negative attitudes towards a particular variety of speech, but still believe in the importance of speaking that variety. Due to this possible discord between belief and behavior, Ladegaard (2000) proposed that language attitude researches should conduct a more direct elicitation of the interrelationship between attitudinal and behavioural components of the speakers' attitudes. Ladegaard says that this would make us more perceptive about what language attitudes do, and not just what they are.

This study attempted to address some of these deficiencies described by Baker (1992), particularly studying the attitudes towards bilingualism and explaining the motivation behind the attitudes. This study would also take Ladegaard's suggestion and conduct a more direct elicitation of the interrelationship between all three components of attitudes i.e. belief, feelings and behavior.

1.2 Sociocultural and linguistic background of Foochows in Sarawak

Malaysia is federation of 13 states on the Malay Peninsula and Borneo island. Its multicultural and multilingual population is made up of 50% Malays, 35% Chinese, 10% Indians, 8% Sabah and Sarawak Bumiputras, and 4% others (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2006). The ethnic Chinese population is a significant minority group in Malaysia and they are a heterogeneous category of people, crosscut by religion and language. According to Tan (1997) all of them

identify themselves as "Chinese" or Huaren in Mandarin (Teng-lang in Hokkien, Tong-yen in Cantonese, etc.), but they also identify with their respective speech-groups such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hailam (Hainanese), Hokchiu, Kongsai, Henghua, Hockchia and others.

In the state of Sarawak on Borneo island, where the Chinese form 25.3% of the state population of 2,071,506, the Foochows are the largest speech group, totaling 178,261 surpassing the Hakkas, Cantonese, Hokkiens and other speech groups (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2006). The predominance of the Foochows in Sarawak as compared to other parts of Malaysia is rooted in the migration of Foochow settlers from Foochow city in Fujian Province, China. According to Chew (1990) the first settlers who are Foochow Methodists led by Wong Nai Siong, a Methodist minister, arrived in Sibu in 1990 at the invitation the Rajah Brooke of Sarawak. Chew noted that the pioneer immigrants encountered various setbacks but a common religion (Methodist) and clan ties became a unifying factor that made the Foochows close in on themselves as a community explaining their marked insularity and strong Chinese and Foochow identity. Chew also pointed out that the heartland of the Foochows in Sarawak is the lower Rejang region in the riverine towns of Sibu, Binatang and Sarikei but have they have spread out to other areas such as Kuching the state capital. They are an economically important group in Sarawak and Chew (1990) commented that the reasons for the Foochow's prosperity are their reputation for being hard-working, adaptable and economically aggressive.

Like most of the Malaysian-Chinese, the Foochows speak a number of languages; one or more Chinese varieties, Malay, as well as English. The typical linguistic repertoire of a Foochow undergraduate in public universities would consist of Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin and Foochow, their 'dialect' which will be termed 'vernacular' in this study. Characteristic of a multilingual setting, the four language varieties are in a diglossic relationship. The High (H) varieties are Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin while Foochow is a Low (L) variety. These four varieties will be discussed next.

1.2.1 Chinese varieties: Mandarin and ‘dialects’

The ethnic Chinese in Malaysia came from various speech groups originating mainly from the southern provinces of China. Hence, for most ethnic Chinese, their mother tongue i.e. the language spoken at home, would be these vernacular “dialects”, among them Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew and Foochow. Tan (1997) however observed that the Chinese in Malaysia see themselves as belonging to one ethnic group i.e. Chinese vis-à-vis the Malays and other ethnic groups in Malaysia. Hence, according to Tan, identities of Hokkien, Hakka, Foochow and so on are described as dialect groups. The Chinese generally determine their dialect group by identifying with their father’s speech group especially among offspring’s of marriages across Chinese speech groups. The identification with a speech-group however is not really a problematic issue as the Chinese is still a Chinese and they can choose not to emphasise their speech group identity which is considered as a sub-ethnic identity. Tan (1997) gives an example in which a Cantonese who grows up in the dominant Hokkien cultural environment of Penang may speak "Penang Hokkien" rather than Cantonese, for there is generally no pressure for a Chinese person to declare their speech-group identity. As such, there is no strong identification with the speech-group and speech-group identity is merely a marginal identity. For the Foochows however, their marked insularity and relative prosperity compared to other speech-groups in Sarawak could nurture a strong identification with the Foochow ‘dialect’ and distinct Foochow identity.

All the speech-group ‘dialects’ including Foochow are non-standard varieties, not taught in schools and is not written. The Chinese uses the “dialects” mostly in informal domains. Mandarin on the other hand is a northern Chinese language and very few Chinese in Malaysia originally have Mandarin as their vernacular. However, being the official language of China, it generally has high prestige among the Chinese and according to Carstens (2005), in Malaysia, Mandarin is the language of education and officialdom among the Chinese and is more preferred in formal occasions and is meant to be a uniting factor among the

Chinese of various speech groups. Mandarin is the medium of instruction in Chinese schools rather than speech-group dialects. De Bernadi (1991) stated that in Malaysia, the speakers of Hokkien and other “dialects” esteem Mandarin education highly. Mandarin to the Malaysian Chinese has the pragmatic value of providing the Chinese of various speech groups a shared language for communication. De Bernadi (1991) noted that even if a “dialect” such as Hokkien or Foochow is spoken widely, it has no particular value as a symbol of political unity. This is one of the reasons why the Chinese in Malaysia vehemently defended mandarin-medium education. Nyiri (1997) observes that the emergence of China as an economic, military and political power had encouraged a reorientation among the overseas Chinese communities especially in Southeast Asia causing the increased usage and learning of Mandarin.

The relationship between the Mandarin and the Chinese speech-group vernaculars or “dialects” is indeed a complex one especially with regards to the issue of identity. Despite the evident high prestige of Mandarin, Carstens (2005) reported that Mandarin is still somewhat viewed as a “foreign” language and speech-group vernaculars are still the varieties that Malaysian ethnic Chinese identify with the most. However, due to the influence of education in Mandarin-medium Chinese schools, the Chinese younger generation are gradually shifting to Mandarin similar to their Singapore counterparts (Carstens, 2005). With regards to Foochow, the studies of Ting and Sussex (2002) on the Foochow’s language choice, and Ting (2006) on the language use of the Foochow younger generation, revealed a similar pattern of language shift to Mandarin. Ting and Chang (2008) in their study of a communication in a Hakka family then suggested that the result of this trend is the emergence of a supra-Chinese identity which is a higher order and generic Chinese identity that is shared between different Chinese sub-groups, de-emphasising cultural and language distinctions of the speech-groups.

1.2. 2 English

English is the colonial language but even after independence, its position is still strong despite efforts by the government to promote the national language, Bahasa

Malaysia to take over from English. Ting (2003) mentioned that the switching of institutional support to Bahasa Malaysia raised its position and gradually diminishes the role of English in formal domains but this does not eliminate English thoroughly. Ting (2003) noted that English use is still prevalent and could not be restricted because Malaysians in general perceive English as a language that provides them access to the outside world and betterment of life.

The initial abolition of English as medium in education took a turn-about in the mid-1990s as the government gradually urged tertiary institutions to offer technical areas in English (Ridge, 2004). Abdullah and Chan (2003) pointed that this measure was either out of necessity or convenience as the government came to a realization that the alarming number of unemployed graduates are partly attributed to the poor English proficiency hence lack of competitiveness. The Prime Minister of Malaysia then asserted that Malaysians must be competent in the English language if they were to compete in the international market, thus the need for giving more attention to English in schools and universities (Abdullah & Chan, 2003). According to Ridge (2004), by early 2003, the government had also introduced the teaching of science and mathematics in junior primary and secondary classes via English medium. Ridge (2004) also noted that the decision to re-introduce English as medium in the education system met resistance by supporters of the national language. Hence the government had to allay fears that Bahasa Malaysia's position is threatened by English. The non-Malays however seem to be more accommodating towards English for it is seen as a neutral language that is not related to any ethnic groups in Malaysia. Tan (2000) noted that many urban Chinese prefer to speak English in the public sphere and that many 'English-educated' Malaysian-Chinese have remained politically prominent. The prevalence of English in pop music, advertising, film and so on provided wider exposure to English and will increase its speakers in Malaysia. (Ridge, 2004)

1.2.3 Bahasa Malaysia

Under the Federal Constitution, Bahasa Melayu is the national language of Malaysia and it is to be used for official purposes of the government and public authority (Abdullah & Chan, 2003). Upon independence from Britain, the Federal constitution elevated the status of Bahasa Melayu, defined the domains of its functions and explicitly provided support for it. It is meant to be the language for national unity and communication among the various ethnic groups but Omar (1985) noted that there is still an avoidance of the national language by non-Malays especially the Chinese. According to Omar, their avoidance is due to various factors such as lack of familiarity and the inherent sentiment that the national language belongs to the Malays and connotes a Malay identity. The government's effort to change the name of the national language from Bahasa Melayu (literally Malay Language) to Bahasa Malaysia (literally Malaysian language) is partly to allay fears of this connotation but it has not been entirely successful (*ibid.*). The Chinese desire to retain their linguistic and cultural identity and the fear of being imposed a Malay identity is great as Omar (1985) noted that two Chinese of different dialect groups who could not understand each others' dialect or Mandarin would rather communicate in English or break off contact altogether than speak in Malay which both can use. Due to the perception that the national language symbolizes Malay political dominance, its adoption was resisted by the Chinese (De Bernadi, 1991). Omar (1985) also noted that the inability to speak Malay more fluently, and the persistent identification of Bahasa Malaysia with Malay ethnicity are obstacles for the Chinese to use Bahasa Malaysia among themselves. However, the Chinese seem to have no problem with speaking Bahasa Malaysia to other non-Chinese Malaysians. Omar (1985) however suggested that the negative attitude towards Bahasa Malaysia among non-Malays might change as it is only through Bahasa Malaysia that they can communicate with the government.

The presence of these four varieties in the speech repertoire of the Foochow undergraduates brings attitudes and preference towards each variety. The vitality of their vernacular is dependant on their language loyalty and the pervasiveness of

the other major language varieties around them. After going through years of the Malaysian education system and national language planning, it is important to study how this particular group of young Foochows interpret their linguistic milieu and respond according to their best interest. This study would thus investigate how and why the Foochow undergraduates react to and perceive the language varieties around them.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of Foochow undergraduates in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia, towards main language varieties in their linguistic repertoire and the motivations behind the attitudes. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the Foochow undergraduates' language attitudes towards English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and their vernacular in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects;
- ii. Explain the Foochow undergraduates' language attitudes in terms of integrative and instrumental orientation towards English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and vernacular;
- iii. Identify the ranking of the four language varieties in terms of Foochow undergraduates' integrative and instrumental orientation;
- iv. Determine if the relationship between the cognitive component of attitude and instrumental orientation, and the affective component of attitude and integrative orientation is analogous.

The specific research questions devised for this study are:

- i. How strongly inclined are the respondents towards English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Foochow, and Bilingualism (MD & FC) in the cognitive aspect?
- ii. How strongly inclined are the respondents towards English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Foochow, and Bilingualism (MD & FC) in the affective aspect?