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## **Language Attitudes of Foochow Chinese Undergraduates towards Bahasa Melayu**

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### **Introduction**

After gaining independence from the British, the Malaysian government elevated the status of Bahasa Melayu to that of national and official language of Malaysia, defined the domains of its functions and explicitly provided support for its use. Bahasa Melayu is also promoted as a language for national unity and inter-ethnic communication but Asmah Haji Omar (1985) noted that there is still an avoidance of Bahasa Melayu among the non-Malays especially the Chinese. According to Omar, their avoidance is due to various factors such as the lack of familiarity and the inherent sentiment that the national language belongs to the Malays and connotes a Malay identity. However, two and a half decades after Asmah Haji Omar's observation and half a century after the independence of Malaysia, it is important to examine the attitudes of later generations of the younger Chinese towards Bahasa Melayu. Such a study would reveal the effects of the national language policy which required the use of Bahasa Melayu as the medium of education in school and the official language in government departments, and in subtitles in television programmes on government and commercial channels. The investigation is also timely because at this point in time, the Malaysian government is promoting the 1Malaysia concept, advocating unity in diversity rather than unity in uniformity. In referring to the 1Malaysia concept, Sri Rahayu Ismail, Haslinda Abdullah and Zaid Ahmad (2009) stated that “national integration is possible only when each ethnic group is bound together in the spirit of national unity” (p. 83). A fundamental point is the central place of national identity. Inherent in the discussion of national identity is the role of the national language in the life of Malaysians as it is an important symbol of the Malaysian identity. It is important to examine the attitudes of Malaysians, particularly those with immigrant origin, towards the national language.