Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing Chinese Parents' Choice of Language of Instruction for Their Children's Primary Education

Diana Lee Phooi Yan

Master of Arts
(Applied Linguistics)
2015
Sociolinguistic Factors Influencing Chinese Parents’ Choice of Language of Instruction for Their Children’s Primary Education

DIANA LEE PHOOI YAN

A thesis submitted
In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics

Centre for Language Studies
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2015
DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

This declaration is made on the 23rd day of October 2015.

Student's Declaration:

I DIANA LEE PHOOI YAN, 13020016, CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE STUDIES hereby declare that the work entitled SOCIO-LINGUISTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE PARENTS' CHOICE OF LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION is my original work. I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.

23/10/15  
DIANA LEE PHOOI YAN (13020016)

Supervisor's Declaration:

I ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR TING SU HIE hereby certifies that the work entitled SOCIO-LINGUISTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE PARENTS' CHOICE OF LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION was prepared by the above named student, and was submitted to the "FACULTY" as a partial/full fulfillment for the conferment of MASTER OF ARTS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS, and the aforementioned work, to the best of my knowledge, is the said student's work.

Received for examination by:  
Date: 22/10/15  
(ASSOC. PROF. DR. TING SU HIE)
I declare that Project/Thesis is classified as (Please tick (✓)):  

☐ CONFIDENTIAL (Contains confidential information under the Official Secret Act 1972)*  
✓ RESTRICTED (Contains restricted information as specified by the organisation where research was done)*  
☐ OPEN ACCESS

Validation of Project/Thesis

I therefore duly affirm with free consent and willingly declare that this said Project/Thesis shall be placed officially in the Centre for Academic Information Services with the abiding interest and rights as follows:

- This Project/Thesis is the sole legal property of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).
- The Centre for Academic Information Services has the lawful right to make copies for the purpose of academic and research only and not for other purpose.
- The Centre for Academic Information Services has the lawful right to digitalise the content for the Local Content Database.
- The Centre for Academic Information Services has the lawful right to make copies of the Project/Thesis for academic exchange between Higher Learning Institute.
- No dispute or any claim shall arise from the student itself neither third party on this Project/Thesis once it becomes the sole property of UNIMAS.
- This Project/Thesis or any material, data and information related to it shall not be distributed, published or disclosed to any party by the student except with UNIMAS permission.

Student signature: ____________________________  
(23/10/15)  

Supervisor signature: ____________________________  
(23/10/15)

Current Address: No 18, My Residence, Jalan Kung Phin, 93250, Kuching, Sarawak.

Notes: * If the Project/Thesis is CONFIDENTIAL or RESTRICTED, please attach together as annexure a letter from the organisation with the period and reasons of confidentiality and restriction.

[The instrument is duly prepared by The Centre for Academic Information Services]
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take the opportunity to express my sincerest and deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Ting Su Hie for her invaluable guidance, advice, understanding and motivation given to me throughout the two years of research in order to complete this thesis. She deserves my additional thanks for being tolerant during the writing of this thesis and also dealing so patiently to read and comment on the entire typescript. A countless Thank You to you, Dr. Ting.

I also would like to express my warm thanks to Associate Professor Dr Lo May Chiun and Dr Hiram Ting Huong Yiew from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak for their unconditional willingness to teach and guide me in the learning of statistical analysis (SPSS). I am sincerely grateful to them for sharing their knowledge and spending invaluable time to help me.

Apart from that, I would like to express my appreciation to my family. A special thanks to my father Lee Kam Sin and husband Chai Teck Jung, as well as my dearest siblings for the encouragement, motivation and support along the process of completing this thesis. Not forgetting the love from my three children Adalene, Chloe and Ivan has always inspired and motivated me to keep going.

A heart-felt thanks to my colleagues and friends who encouraged me to strive towards my goal. In addition, many thanks to the primary school headmasters and teachers who have assisted
me during the data collection as well as parents who participated in this study. To all of you I would like to say, “Your cooperation enabled me to fulfil my study requirements”.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank everyone who has been involved directly and indirectly in helping me to complete this thesis. Thank you all.
ABSTRACT

SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE PARENTS’ CHOICE OF LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S PRIMARY EDUCATION

Parents’ choice of school language of instruction is influenced by individual, group and societal factors. The study examined the sociolinguistic factors that affect the Chinese parents’ choice of language of instruction for their children’s primary education using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) compare the parents’ attitude towards school language of instruction for Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools; (2) compare the influence of subjective norm on the choice of Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools; (3) compare the parents’ perceived behavioural control on the choice of Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools; (4) compare the strength of ethnic identity of Chinese parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools and its effect on their choice of language of instruction for their children’s primary education; and (5) determine the relative importance of factors influencing parents’ choice of language of instruction for their children’s primary education. A questionnaire survey of 400 Chinese parents with children in Primary One was conducted in Kuching, Sarawak. The survey involved 200 parents with children in Malay-medium primary schools and 200 parents with children in Mandarin-medium primary schools. The questionnaire had sections on: demographic details, Ethnic Identity Scale, Familial Ethnic Socialisation Measure, Self-esteem Scale, attitudes towards school, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control and parents’ intention to send their children to Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools. The results for the two groups of parents were compared using means and t-
tests. A comparison of the parents’ attitude towards school language of instruction showed that the parents who sent their children to Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools perceived that the school of their choice equipped their children with good academic qualifications, future prospects and also desirable personal characteristics (diligence, racial tolerance and open-mindedness). In addition to these, the Mandarin-medium school parents perceived that Mandarin-medium primary schools provided their children with more exposure towards Chinese language and culture than Malay-medium primary schools. Next, a comparison of the influence of subjective norm (or the social network) on the choice of Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools showed that the Malay-medium school parents referred to their spouse when choosing the primary school for their children whereas the Mandarin-medium school parents were influenced by their social network. In regards to the perceived behavioural control, both groups of parents have control over their choice (i.e., they would send their children to the school that they preferred) with the former having better control than the latter on fees and choice of school in a convenient location. Subsequently, a comparison of the strength of ethnic identity between the two groups of Chinese parents showed that they have positive identification with their Chinese identity, but Mandarin-medium school parents have a stronger Chinese identity than the Malay-medium school parents. Finally, by using the Theory of Planned Behaviour and regression analysis, the relative importance of sociolinguistic factors influencing choice of school language of instruction were determined. The results revealed that attitude towards school language of instruction and the perceived behavioural control were the main factors influencing the decision of both groups of parents. In addition to these two factors, subjective norm also influenced the Malay-medium school parents’ choice of school language of instruction. The parents’ strength of Chinese identity was found to have low predictive power in relation to other factors in
determining choice of school language of instruction for both groups of parents. The results show that the factors with high predictive power were those directly related to the choice of the school, whether it is Mandarin or Malay as the language of instruction. These findings have implications on strategies that schools may use to increase student enrolment. In terms of theoretical contribution, the study has shown that with the use of the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a theoretical framework, the relative importance of factors influencing choice of school language of instruction can be established, leading to a better understanding of parental school choice.
ABSTRAK

SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINESE PARENTS’ CHOICE OF LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S PRIMARY EDUCATION

Pilihan ibu bapa dalam bahasa pengantar sekolah dipengaruhi oleh individu, kumpulan dan faktor-faktor sosial. Kajian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor sosiolinguistik yang mempengaruhi pemilihan bahasa pengantar oleh ibu bapa Cina bagi pendidikan sekolah rendah anak-anak mereka dengan menggunakan Theory of Planned Behaviour. Objektif khusus kajian ini ialah (1) untuk membandingkan sikap terhadap bahasa pengantar sekolah yang ditunjukkan oleh ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu; (2) untuk membandingkan pengaruh norma subjektif terhadap ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu; (3) untuk membandingkan kawalan tingkah laku terhadap pemilihan bahasa pengantar oleh ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu; (4) untuk membandingkan kekuatan identiti etnik ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu, dan kesan pemilihan bahasa pengantar mereka terhadap pendidikan rendah anak-anak mereka; dan (5) untuk mengenalpasti kepentingan relatif faktor-faktor peramal utama dalam pemilihan bahasa pengantar sekolah oleh ibu bapa untuk pendidikan rendah anak-anak mereka. Tinjauan soal selidik ini yang terdiri daripada 400 ibu bapa Cina yang mempunyai anak Darjah Satu telah dijalankan di Kuching, Sarawak. Tinjauan ini melibatkan 200 ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Melayu dan 200 lagi ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Cina. Soal selidik ini mempunyai beberapa bahagian iaitu: maklumat demografi, Skala Identiti Etnik, Pengukuran Sosialisasi Etnik Kekeluargaan,
Skala Harga Diri, sikap terhadap sekolah, norma subjektif, kawalan tingkahlaku dan niat ibu bapa untuk menghantarkan anak ke sekolah pilihan mereka. Keputusan kedua-dua kumpulan ibu bapa diperoleh melalui perbandingan *means* dan *t-test*. Perbandingan sikap ibu bapa terhadap bahasa pengantar sekolah menunjukkan ibu bapa yang menghantarkan anak-anak mereka ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu berpendapat bahawa sekolah pilihan mereka akan melengkapkan anak-anak mereka dengan kelayakan akademik yang baik, prospek masa depan yang cerah dan juga ciri-ciri peribadi (usaha, toleransi kaum dan berfikiran terbuka) yang diingini. Di samping itu, ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Cina melihat bahawa sekolah rendah Cina memberi lebih banyak pendedahan kepada anak-anak mereka dari segi bahasa dan budaya Cina berbanding dengan sekolah rendah Melayu. Seterusnya, perbandingan pengaruh norma subjektif (atau rangkaian sosial) terhadap pilihan sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu menunjukkan bahawa ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Melayu akan merujuk kepada pasangan mereka apabila memilih bahasa pengantar sekolah rendah untuk anak-anak mereka, manakala ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Cina dipengaruhi oleh rangkaian sosial mereka. Untuk faktor kawalan tingkah laku, kedua-dua kumpulan ibu bapa yang menghantarkan anak-anak mereka ke sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu mempunyai kawalan ke atas pilihan mereka (iaitu, mereka akan menghantarkan anak-anak mereka ke sekolah yang mereka lebih suka), dan ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Cina mempunyai kawalan yang lebih baik berbanding dengan ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Melayu iaitu dari segi pembayaran yuran dan pilihan sekolah di lokasi yang sesuai. Selepas itu, perbandingan kekuatan identiti etnik antara kedua-dua kumpulan ibu bapa Cina menunjukkan bahawa mereka mempunyai pandangan positif terhadap identiti Cina mereka, tetapi ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Cina mempunyai identiti Cina yang lebih kuat berbanding dengan ibu bapa yang memilih sekolah rendah Melayu. Akhir sekali, dengan menggunakan Theory of
*Planned Behaviour* dan analisis regresi, kepentingan relatif untuk faktor sosiolinguistik yang mempengaruhi pilihan bahasa pengantar sekolah dapat ditentukan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa sikap terhadap bahasa pengantar sekolah dan kawalan tingkah laku merupakan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi ibu bapa dalam pemilihan sekolah rendah Cina dan Melayu untuk anak-anak mereka. Selain kedua-dua faktor tersebut, norma subjektif juga didapati mempengaruhi pemilihan bahasa pengantar oleh ibu bapa yang menghantar anak-anak ke sekolah rendah Melayu. Dalam pemilihan bahasa pengantar bagi kedua-dua kumpulan ibu bapa, kekuatan identiti ibu bapa Cina didapati mempunyai kuasa ramalan yang rendah apabila dihubungkaitkan dengan faktor-faktor lain. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa faktor-faktor dengan kuasa ramalan yang tinggi ialah faktor-faktor yang berkaitan secara langsung dengan pemilihan sekolah, tidak kira sama ada sekolah yang menggunakan bahasa Mandarin atau bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa pengantar. Penemuan ini mempunyai implikasi terhadap strategi yang boleh digunakan oleh sekolah untuk meningkatkan pendaftaran pelajar. Dari segi sumbangan teori, kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa dengan penggunaan Theory of Planned Behaviour sebagai rangka kerja teori, kepentingan relatif faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemilihan bahasa pengantar sekolah dapat dikenalpasti dan ini akan membawa kepada pemahaman yang lebih baik terhadap pemilihan sekolah oleh ibu bapa.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECLARATION</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study........................................................................................................... 1
1.2 Historical developments on language policy in Malaysia.................................................. 7
1.3 Research problem..................................................................................................................... 13
1.4 Aim and objectives of study.................................................................................................... 14
1.5 Operational definitions

1.5.1 Sociolinguistic factors......................................................................................................... 15
1.5.2 Language of instruction....................................................................................................... 15
1.5.3 Mandarin-medium primary school....................................................................................... 15
1.5.4 Malay-medium primary school............................................................................................ 16
1.5.5 Strength of ethnic identity................................................................................................ 16
1.5.6 Attitude towards school...................................................................................................... 16
CHAPTER 2  REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical framework of study................................................................. 20
   2.1.1 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)..................................................... 21
   2.1.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).................................................. 24

2.2 Previous studies on choice of school.......................................................... 29
   2.2.1 Factors influencing choice of school.................................................. 29
   2.2.2 Factors influencing choice of school language of instruction............... 32

2.3 Sociolinguistic factors influencing school choice........................................... 35
   2.3.1 Social network................................................................................... 35
   2.3.2 Perceived behavioural control.......................................................... 37
   2.3.3 Attitude towards school..................................................................... 39
   2.3.4 Ethnic composition of school............................................................ 40

2.4 Ethnic identity and its correlates................................................................. 42
   2.4.1 Ethnic Identity.................................................................................... 42
   2.4.2 Ethnic identity and self-esteem.......................................................... 47
   2.4.3 Ethnic identity and familial ethnic socialisation................................... 47
2.4.4 Ethnic identity and language choice................................. 50
2.4.5 Ethnic identity and language attitudes............................. 53
2.5 Summary.............................................................................. 57

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants........................................................................... 63
3.2 Instruments............................................................................ 64
   3.2.1 Ethnic Identity Scale..................................................... 65
   3.2.2 Familial Ethnic Socialisation Measure............................ 67
   3.2.3 Self-esteem Scale......................................................... 68
   3.2.4 Parents’ choice of school language of instruction.............. 69
      3.2.4.1 Attitude towards behaviour.................................. 70
      3.2.4.2 Subjective norm.................................................. 73
      3.2.4.3 Perceived behavioural control............................... 74
      3.2.4.4 Intention............................................................. 75
3.3 The conceptual framework of study...................................... 78
3.4 Data collection procedures.................................................. 80
3.5 Data analysis procedures...................................................... 83
   3.5.1 Factor analysis.......................................................... 83
      3.5.1.1 Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS)..................................... 87
      3.5.1.2 Familial Ethnic Socialisation Measure (FESM)........... 88
      3.5.1.3 Self-esteem Scale................................................. 89
3.5.1.4 Parents’ Chinese beliefs .......................................................... 89
3.5.2 Descriptive analysis of data .......................................................... 90
3.5.3 Inferential analysis of data ........................................................... 90
3.5.3.1 Correlation between variables ................................................. 90
3.5.3.2 Multiple regression analysis .................................................... 90
3.6 Limitations of the study ................................................................... 91

CHAPTER 4  RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Parents’ attitude towards Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools .... 93
4.2 Subjective norm ............................................................................ 99
4.3 Perceived behavioural control ....................................................... 102
4.4 The parents’ strength of ethnic identity ........................................... 105
    4.4.1 Ethnic Identity Scale ................................................................ 105
    4.4.2 Self-esteem Scale ................................................................... 110
    4.4.3 Familial Ethnic Socialisation Measure ....................................... 113
    4.4.4 Parents’ Chinese beliefs ......................................................... 117
    4.4.5 Factor analysis to identify underlying factors affecting parental
        choice of school language ......................................................... 120
4.5 Predictive power of factors influencing parental choice of school language
    of instruction .............................................................................. 125
    4.5.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs and the parents’ strength of
        ethnic identity ........................................................................ 125
4.5.2 Underlying components for factors influencing parental choice of language of instruction.......................................................... 132

4.6 General discussion.............................................................................................................................................. 141

CHAPTER 5  SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of findings.............................................................................................................................................. 147

5.2 Implications of findings........................................................................................................................................ 152

5.3 Direction for future research............................................................................................................................ 155

5.4 Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................................... 157

REFERENCES 159

APPENDICES 186

PUBLICATIONS 200
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Demographic characteristics of participants with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The items used to examine parents’ intention to send their children to Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>KMO and Bartlett's Test</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comparison of reliability value of components of Theory of Planned Behaviour after the deletion of items</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reliability of Ethnic Identity Scale sub-scales</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Parents’ attitude towards choice of school language of instruction: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Subjective norms for parents with children in Mandarin-medium and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Perceived behavioural control of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ethnic Identity Scale: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Self-esteem: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11 Familial ethnic socialisation: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools

12 Attitude of parents towards Chinese beliefs: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools

13 Correlation of factors influencing choice of school language of instruction: Comparison of parents with children in Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools

14 Regression analysis of four independent variables and intention on choice of school language of instruction

15 Regression coefficients of four examined factors: Attitude towards school, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control and strength of ethnic identity
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The revised Theory of Planned Behaviour model incorporating the</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>measurement of parents’ strength of ethnic identity as an independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>variable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A four-step process of data collection</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Correlation of factors influencing Mandarin-medium school parents’</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>choice of school language of instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Correlation of factors influencing Malay-medium school parents’</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>choice of school language of instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factors influencing Mandarin-medium school parents’ intention to</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>send their children to Mandarin-medium primary schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Factors influencing Malay-medium school parents’ intention to send</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their children to Malay-medium primary schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background of the study which includes information on the differences between Mandarin- and Malay-medium primary schools. This is followed by a description of the research problem which leads to the gap for the study on the choice of school language of instruction in the Malaysian context. Next the aim and objectives of the study are stated. The operational definitions for the terms used in the study are also included. This chapter ends with the significance and scope of the study.

1.1 Background to the study

Sociolinguistics is the study of the connection between language and society which aids understanding of how language functions in different social contexts, and also the development of one’s social identity through language (Holmes, 2013). In other words, language may be used differently depending on social factors such as the relationship of the people in a given situation, and the feeling of an individual towards the person addressed (Holmes, 2013). According to Coulmas (2013), speakers adjust their speech behaviour based on the social circumstances and how they are spoken to. For example, the choice of language used by a teenage boy is different when he converses with his mother at home, teachers at school, and friends in different settings.

In general, the sociolinguistic factors influencing or affecting the use of language in a society are varied, for example, language attitude, social class, social identity, social network,
gender, region and age (Holmes, 2013; Romaine, 2000). In the area of language choice, Coulmas (2013) pointed out that social relationship, social stratification, politeness, speakers’ age or generation, gender, education and media exposure are among the factors that influence one’s language choice. Romaine (2000) stated that social network, language competency, social class, gender, age and standardisation of language influence the choice of language. Studies have been conducted to identify the sociolinguistic factors that influence the choice of language. For example, in the choice of German and Hungarian, Gal (1978) has examined habitual role-relationship, gender, age and social network and found that the habitual role-relationship between the participants has the most influential value. In other studies on choice of Chinese dialects (i.e., Foochow and Hokkien) and Mandarin, the language attitudes of the speakers influence their choice (Puah & Ting, 2015) but the choice between indigenous and standard languages is influenced by their ethnic identity, locality and socio-economic status of the speakers (Ting & Ling, 2012). In the context of education, language choice is involved when more than one language of instruction is available especially in multilingual settings. The sociolinguistic factors affecting the choice of school language are varied, for example, Benson (2008) has pointed out that linguistic habitus (i.e., the disposition related to one’s thinking, value and use of languages) and linguistic market (i.e., the setting where interaction takes place) are the factors that influence one’s choice of school language. Other studies which were conducted in multilingual countries with more than one medium of instruction such as Africa showed that age, language attitude and language status (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014); language attitude, prestige and social stratification (Babaci-Wilhite, 2010) were among the factors that influenced the parents’ choice of school language of instruction for their children’s education. The review shows that different factors affect choice of language of instruction in different settings. Given that Malaysia is a multilingual
country with different sociocultural, economic and political contexts, the sociolinguistic factors influencing parents’ choice of school language may differ from those in other settings. Therefore, studies need to be conducted on parental choice of school language of instruction in the Malaysian setting to identify the factors that influence the choice. The present study examined attitudes, social network, strength of ethnic identity and perceived behavioural control as the sociolinguistic factors influencing the choice of primary school language of instruction among the Chinese parents (Details on the focus of the study are described in Chapter 2).

The Chinese is one of the many ethnic groups in Malaysia, accounting for 23.0% (i.e., 606.6 Chinese) of the population in Sarawak and 21.8% (i.e., 6584.7 Chinese) of the population in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015). Here, the Chinese identified themselves as “Huaren” instead of “Huaqiao” which means overseas Chinese (Tan, 2005). The Chinese comprises different dialect groups, for example, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, Hing Hua, Min Dong people (known as Hokchew or Foochow), Hakka and Cantonese (World Huaren Federation, 2014). In the Sarawak state, Foochow is the largest dialect group, accounting for 34.5% of the Chinese population in Sarawak and they are mainly found in Sibu, Sarikei and Bintangor (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015). In Kuching, the largest Chinese dialect group is the Hokkien accounting for 37.7% of the Chinese population in Kuching, followed by Hakka which makes up 20.4% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015; World Huaren Federation, 2014). These Chinese dialect groups speak their respective dialects and are usually able to speak Mandarin, a common language which is learnt either as a subject in school or as the medium of instruction in Malaysia (Tan, 2005). The older generation of Chinese and some of the younger generation of Chinese are usually able to read aloud the Mandarin characters in their
respective Chinese dialects. For example, the word “book” is read as /shu/ in Mandarin, /jih/ in Foochow, /tʃeh/ in Hokkien and /su/ in Hakka. As Chinese dialect is not taught as a subject in school, thus, Chinese from a particular dialect group may only acquire another Chinese dialect from speakers of that particular Chinese dialect through close contact with them. In other words, a Hokkien speaker has the ability to speak Hakka only if he or she learns the Chinese dialect from Hakka speakers. Besides learning from other Chinese dialect speakers, media also plays a role in expanding the Chinese’s linguistic repertoire. However, this is applicable specifically to the Cantonese dialect due to the popularity of Hong Kong movies and dramas (Sim, 2012; Tan, 2005). The Chinese parents nowadays are more concerned about their children learning Mandarin rather than the Chinese dialects (Puah & Ting, 2015; Ting & Mahadhir, 2009). The Malaysian Chinese emphasises the Mandarin literacy whereby most parents would send their children to Mandarin-medium primary school to build their foundation in Mandarin before their children continue with secondary education in Malay-medium schools (Tan, 2005). This is because Chinese perceive that Mandarin has higher prestige and is more important in both formal and informal domains (Puah & Ting, 2015), while Malay-medium secondary education is important to obtain a government recognised qualification to enter Malaysian universities (Tan, 2005). Therefore, the Chinese in Malaysia are multilingual with the ability to speak not only the standard Chinese language (i.e., Mandarin) and dialects (e.g., Hakka, Cantonese, Hokkien), but also Malay (the national language) and English. Besides these languages, the Chinese in East Malaysia also have wider linguistic repertoire than the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia whereby some Chinese in Sarawak have the ability to understand and speak dominant indigenous languages such as Iban and regional Malay dialect.