

Kelantan Peranakan Chinese Language and Marker of Group Identity

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ABSTRACT

Although the status of the national language of Malaysia has been consolidated in the Constitution, the Malay language remains commonly associated with a specific segment of Malaysian society, i.e., the Malays. The language is often seen as a distinct marker for Malayness whereas the non-Malay ethnic groups, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia, are not widely associated with the language. The Chinese as the largest minority ethnic group in the Peninsular, are often stereotypically depicted as relatively less fluent or knowledgeable in Malay language, at times not beyond the colloquial '*bahasa pasar*'. Such a scenario suggests that language-wise, Malaysian society remains divided along ethnic lines. This paper seeks to highlight Malay language use among Peranakan Chinese youth in Kelantan. While their higher level of Malay language proficiency vis-à-vis mainstream Chinese is readily acknowledged, findings from content analyses of qualitative data collected in a focus group discussion also suggest that such proficiency in Malay language is achieved due to it being pivotal to the continuity of their identity as both Kelantan Peranakan Chinese and Kelantanese. In short, the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community is a good example that proficiency in Malay language as national language can exist in tandem with the group's mother tongue language, and thus should be celebrated and supported towards building a common identity as part of nation-building in Malaysia.

Keywords: Malay language; Chinese stereotype; Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth; communicative competence; group identity

INTRODUCTION

The government of Malaysia set up the National Language Act 1963 in continuation with its practice particularly in Malaya, which, upon independence from Britain, accorded the Malay language as the sole national language in its Federal Constitution. As a newly formed country with linguistically diverse and racially divided population, Malaysia needed a common language to ensure that its citizens could communicate in a mutually intelligible language with one another, as well as to instil the spirit of unity and integration as a nation. The act (revised in 1971) consolidated Malay language's position as the national language; it is used for official purposes throughout the country, be it in verbal or written form. The implementation of the act has affected the Malaysian population from all walks of life in

almost all social aspects: from the day they were born (birth certificate), within national education system¹, interacting with government agencies, et cetera. Consensus drawn from contemporary public and academic discourses suggests Malay language remains associated with a segment of Malaysian society, i.e., the Malays. Indeed, the language is seen as a distinctive marker for Malayness, which together with professing Islam and adhering to Malay customs, are the three attributes of a Malay as clearly defined in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution. Malay language is seen as ‘language of the Malays’ despite the fact that it has been an important language internationally since pre-colonial times (Collins, 1999). The Malays’ adherence to the Malay language today is steadfast and narrow to the point that it seemingly affects their perception and command of other languages such as English and Mandarin despite their importance as the knowledge and economic languages of the day (Rajadurai, 2010). Take English for example; it is not uncommon for the Malays to be reprimanded for their seemingly subpar command of the language in comparison to other ethnic groups (Amerrudin & Sarimah, 2012; see also Ridwan & Zahariah, 2017). Ironically, it is also not uncommon to read about instances of Malays getting scorned at by their own community, for opting to converse in English instead of Malay language (Tan, 2017; Rajadurai, 2010).

Meanwhile, non-Malay ethnic groups continue to be disassociated with the language (How, Chan & Ain, 2015; Vollmann & Tek, 2018). This is apparent with the Chinese who comprise the largest minority ethnic group *vis-à-vis* other non-Malay ethnic groups (Ting, 2013). Numerous studies conducted on Chinese students find that they possessed weaker command and knowledge of the Malay language in terms of usage of idioms (Kalthum, 2013), proper grammar (Abdul Rasid et al., 2017), and correct pronunciation (Chew & Lee, 2009). Among other issues, the problem of learning the Malay language experienced by Chinese students has resulted from the limited exposure and usage of Malay language in daily life (Chew, 2016), particularly at early age (How, Chan & Ain, 2015). It is also not uncommon to hear stories about some of them not able to speak in the national language beyond the colloquial ‘*bahasa pasar*’. In fact, lesser command of Malay language has become a part of stereotypical image of ‘Chineseness’ in Malaysia. The image is further reinforced through depictions of Chinese characters in popular culture, from the classic P. Ramlee films to other contemporary media products including animation (Wong, Pillai & Ong, 2018; Nur Salawati & Hanita, 2013).

The scenario suggests that, language-wise, Malaysian society remains divided along the ethnic lines. In reality, it is not uncommon for non-Malays to converse, and even be fluent in Malay language. There are non-Malay ethnic groups such as the various Peranakan communities including Baba and Nyonya, Chetti Melaka and Kristang, who are known for their fluency in Malay language (Pue, 2016) despite their continuous identification with the non-Malay ethnic categories (Chinese, Indian and Others) in the rigid four-ethnic categorization system embedded in the country’s governance – a relic inherited from the colonial era (Hirschman, 1986).

With regards to language and communication, each Peranakan community’s degree of use and patterns of the Malay language varies from one another. For example, the Baba-Nyonya community in Melaka fully converse in their own version of Malay language, viz. Baba Malay, while the Kelantan’s Cina Kampung maintains a localized Hokkien dialect as their mother tongue while remaining fluent in Kelantan Malay, among other languages. Presently, general consensus suggests that the high command of Malay language by Kelantan Peranakan Chinese is on the decline especially among younger generation due to ‘resinification’, i.e., dilution of local elements in Peranakan culture in the move to ‘re-align’

¹ As the national language, the Malay language is also taught in vernacular schools that use non-Malay language as medium of instruction in Malaysia, such as the National-type Chinese and Tamil schools.

themselves with non-Peranakan Chinese who are the de facto group of the Chinese mainstream. Although researchers generally believed that the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese young generation's command of Malay language has deteriorated to a point that they are no longer different from non-Peranakan Chinese, there has not been any recent research or publication done on the issue. The present paper seeks to address this gaps by highlighting and examining the Malay language use among non-Malay speakers with focus on the youth in Peranakan Chinese community in Kelantan.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communication is a type of social behaviour integral for any living being to convey and exchange meanings between individuals through common vocal and nonvocal symbols (Gordon, 2018). Language in its spoken or written form, consists of “arbitrary, learned associations between words and the things for which they stand” (Kottak, 2015, p. 254). As a primary means of human communication, language is integrated in socialization process at early stage of life by immediate caregivers; this particular language often subsequently becomes one's mother tongue. The shared understanding and usage of a language by members of the same social group has rendered it to be a marker of group identity, irrespective of the level of the group, from micro (family), meso (community or neighbourhood) or macro (nation-state). While mother tongue often becomes the de facto identity marker at micro and meso-level, it becomes more complicated when it comes to macro-level where the status of national language becomes intertwined with the notions of national identity, sovereignty and political ideology rather than merely the linguistic demography of its society as part of nation-building processes. It is not uncommon for multi-ethnic states in Asia including Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia to adopt a single national language approach (Simpson, 2007). However, unlike its neighbouring countries that opted for nation-building based on a narrow assimilationist approach that aggressively pushes for a singular national identity that blanketed the society's diversity, Malaysia, since its independence and inception as Malaya in 1957, chose an integrationist approach. It was a result of bargaining and negotiation between the various ethnic groups that enabled the newly sovereign country to move forward towards unity, but remain culturally diverse (Asmah, 2007). It acknowledges and safeguards the right of using, preserving and sustaining any community's cultural practices while upholding national identity – including Malay language as the national language – through the Federal Constitution and other relevant legislations, such as the National Language Act. Nevertheless, some old communities in Malaysia including the Peranakans, already went through assimilation processes with local ethnic groups for an extended period of time prior to the relatively modern phenomenon of state formation. As a result, they possess an evolved set of ethnic identity markers that distinguish them from the newcomers, including language.

With regards to group identity particularly that of ethnicity, Fishman (1977) believes language is the symbol par excellence. Language is not only an instrument for communication; it is also a vessel and a conveyor of the essence of the group's ethnicity transcending time and space. Furthermore, language also functions as a medium in coping with other ethnic experiences both at individual or communal level. In a bilingual or multilingual society, the group's ethnic mother tongue is considered to be the most vital marker and visible expression of their ethnic identity (Appel & Musyken, 1987). Due to its significance in the organization of social difference and as ethnic identity marker, language also serves as ‘an important boundary device’, demarcating ‘us’ and ‘others’ in any social interaction (Hymes, 1972a; Barth, 1972). The boundary can be represented by how a language is used, especially in verbal communication. Taking the point into consideration,

this study utilized the theory of communicative competence by Dell H. Hymes (1964, 1972a, 1972b, 1974, 1986). Hymes (1972b, p. 2) posited that language does not exist in vacuum, thus must be investigated ‘in context of situations’. In particular, he stressed on the importance of skills required for a native speaker to use language in various social settings. Bell (2014, p. 2), candidly explains using second language learner as example: “...even if you can speak totally grammatically, unless you also know the right ways to use those grammatical sentences, you will sound nothing like a native speaker. Worse, you may offend or insult those who are native speakers.” For native speakers, such skills are often acquired and accumulated through socialization process since newborn. Due to time-consuming and challenging nature, non-native speakers who move across the ethnic boundary reported the presence of emotional significance when they succeeded in achieving communicative competence. According to Rydell (2018), based on her study among a group of adult migrants in Sweden, she found that the achievement of becoming ‘a competent language user’ also signifies them as being accepted in their new host society, hence a newfound sense of belonging. This is in line with Hymes’ argument that any individuals who share similar level of communicative competence may belong in the same ‘speech community’, i.e., “a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety” (Hymes, 1986, p. 54).

Hymes’ theory stresses on the concept of ‘communicative competence’ which is “dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use*” (Hymes, 1972b, p. 282, emphasis in original). He further clarifies, “[c]ertainly it may be the case that individuals differ with regard to ability to use knowledge ... the specification of *ability for use* as part of competence allows for the role of noncognitive factors, such as motivation, as partly determining competence. In speaking of competence, it is especially important not to separate cognitive from affective and volitive...” (Hymes, 1972b, p. 283). In simpler words, communicative competence consists of three components: knowledge, performance, and motivation in using the language in question for the communication to be effective.

METHOD OF STUDY

The qualitative data used in this study were collected from a focus group discussion (FGD) with Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youths on 7th February 2017 in Kampung Pasir Parit, Pasir Mas, as part of a larger two-year research. Questions posed included language and communication, self-reported markers of Peranakan identity and their personal experiences as members of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community. We enlisted the help of one of the key informants to recruit potential participants for the FGD. Twelve Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youths aged between 21-34 years old from Pasir Mas, Kota Bharu, Machang and Kuala Krai districts participated in the FGD.

The FGD was conducted in a mixed language medium, mostly local Hokkien dialect interspersed with other languages mainly Malay, both Kelantan Malay and standard Malay. English, Mandarin and Siamese were sparingly used by our participants. The mixture of languages used was due to two reasons. Firstly, language barrier: despite the fact that three researchers who conducted the FGD were Chinese and could speak Hokkien, each individual speaks a different variant of Hokkien due to their different origins: Melaka, Pahang and Kelantan respectively. Secondly, while formal questions and answers were conveyed in the Malay language, there were also some light-hearted moments and exchanges either between the researchers and participants, or among the participants themselves. In such instances, Kelantan Malay or Hokkien were used.

The three-hour discussion during the FGD was recorded with the participants’ consent; and the audio file was subsequently transcribed and translated into English language

manually by the lead researcher who is a Kelantan Peranakan Chinese native. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative data gathered from the FGD were analysed against Hymes' (1986) concept of 'communicative competence' through 'ethnic lens' approach that portrays individuals as having only one homogenous ethnic identity, including language. The analysis was guided by the following research questions that reflect the three components of communicative competence set out by Hymes:

1. how deep is their knowledge about Malay language?
2. how do Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth use Malay language in their communication?
3. what does Malay language mean to Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth?

In this regard, content analysis on the FGD transcript was conducted by breaking down the text such as words or phrases into thematic codes. These were subsequently examined using both conceptual and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis revolved around quantifying and tallying selected codes in order to gauge the degree of presence and intensity; for example, the number of participants who declared that language is an important identity marker. Relational analysis, also known as semantic analysis, involved taking one step further by looking for semantic or meaningful relationships among the codes. For example, higher number of frequency in using Malay words or phrases while speaking in Hokkien dialect denotes higher competence of Malay language by the participant. Similarly, 'deep knowledge' was determined based on the presence of Kelantan Malay patois in a participant's conversation, including grammar and rich local terminologies.²

THE SETTING: PERANAKAN CHINESE IN KELANTAN

Kelantan is a state located at the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, bordering with Thailand on the north. Historically it had been in close relation with the Malay Sultanate of Patani and was a vessel of the Kingdom of Siam before it was taken over by the British in 1909 following the Bangkok Treaty (Shahril, 1995). As a result, the state grew to have its own peculiarities when compared to other states in the Peninsular. Firstly, Kelantan is synonymous with the image of a society that is socioculturally dominated by Malay and has been a stronghold of conservative Islam teachings in everyday life and governance by the end of 18th century³. But in actuality, Kelantan is also a stronghold to Thai version of Theravada Buddhism outside of Thailand (Mohamed, 2010). The religion is widely practiced by non-Malay minority ethnic groups in Kelantan, notably among the Siamese⁴ and also common among the Chinese. Secondly, Kelantan is well-known for its regionalism, or regional-based solidarity with strong insider/outsider differentiation in interaction and meaning.

It was in such settings that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community, or more known locally as Cina Kampung, came into being. The formation of the community stemmed from assimilation processes that was catalysed through interethnic marriage, between the Chinese forefathers who travelled to the Malay Peninsula from Fujian in southern region of China as early as 13th century for better economic opportunities, with local women particularly from Siamese community (Pue, 2018). The interethnic marriage that was practiced *en masse* significantly contributed to the permanent settling down of the Chinese in Kelantan, with traditional settlements of the community commonly found along or near Kelantan River banks in every district of the state except Gua Musang and Jeli (Map 1). The population size

² For example, see Abdul Jalil et al. (2016).

³ Kelantan was known as 'Serambi Mekah' or Annex of Mecca by mid-19th century.

⁴ Other than the Malays, the Siamese is one of local ethnic groups who are native of Kelantan.

of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community was optimistically estimated to be around 20,000 or slightly over 1% of the whole Kelantan population of 1,797,200 in 2017.

The intense assimilation process during the formative period was not only influenced by domestic arrangement as a result of intermarriage. Other various external factors such as small population size of Chinese in Kelantan, disconnection with other Chinese groups elsewhere, choice of location for agriculture, dominance of Malay-Muslim in social landscape as well as compatibility with local Siamese community through religion and other sociocultural activities, subsequently shaped the dynamics of Chinese ethnicity among their local born descents. As a result, a distinct localized Chinese identity which later known by scholars as Peranakan Chinese culture, gradually emerged. Aside from phenotypical traits that shared more similarities with the local ethnic groups (the Malays and the Siamese) than mainstream Chinese⁵, other distinct Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity markers are clothes, food and foodways, residential design, leisure and entertainment, customs and beliefs, as well as language and communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON KELANTAN PERANAKAN CHINESE COMMUNICATION

Scholarly writings published from 1970's until 1990's on Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community were often written by anthropologists who studied the community from the interethnic relations point of view, i.e., their interaction with other local ethnic groups: Kelantanese Malay and Siamese (Kershaw, 1981; Winzeler, 1974; Hanapi, 1986; Teo, 2003). General consensus among the scholars is that as with other aspects of their ethnicity, the community is uniquely localized in their communication and linguistic practices. Overall, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese are bilingual in Chinese (Hokkien) and Malay (Kelantanese Malay). Some are also fluent in local Thai dialect known as '*Siam kampung*', the same language spoken by Siamese community in Kelantan. Local Hokkien dialect is considered as the community's mother tongue as a whole although some may choose to speak Kelantanese Malay or local Thai dialect over Hokkien, depending on which geographical region they reside in (Teo, 2003). The Hokkien dialect spoken by Kelantan Peranakan Chinese is distinctly different from that spoken by Hokkien speakers elsewhere due to acculturation as part of the assimilation processes with both local languages to the point that it is difficult for speakers of Hokkien from other states in the country to understand it (Tan, 1982; Hanapi, 1986; Kershaw, 1981). The dialect described by Kershaw (1981, p. 82) as a 'creolized version of Hokkien', contains "Thai and Malay loan words ... to syntactical convergence and adoption of Thai and Malay phonemes, or even tonal simplification" (Kershaw, 1981, p. 86). Kelantan Peranakan Chinese localized Hokkien dialect was often seen as inferior or less pure than that of mainstream Chinese (Tan, 1982). Teo Kok Seong, through his PhD thesis in sociolinguistics written in 1993⁶ was the first to study the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language and communication extensively. He found that the community's speech in Hokkien is sufficiently different from that of mainstream Chinese to the point that they feel inferior for not being able to speak or understand mainstream Hokkien: "Not only are they ignorant of the lexicon, morphology and syntax of standard or mainstream Hokkien, but also their articulation of Hokkien words and phrases is different. It reflects a Malay and/or Thai manner of speaking" (Teo, 2003, p. 74).

Moreover, their verbal command of the local Hokkien dialect does not come with the ability to read and write in Chinese characters. The reason behind this condition can be attributed to the lack of opportunities for them to learn the skill. The forefathers of the

⁵ In comparison to a typical stereotype of 'Chinese' image, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese in general have darker skin tone, 'wider' eyes with double eyelids, and wavy and finer hair.

⁶ The thesis was subsequently published in 2003.

community who migrated from China, were often illiterate peasants. During their children's generation, those who were lucky enough to get formal education were often sent to Malay-medium schools. As a result, Malay was used as medium in writing (Hanapi, 1983, p. 310). This was done in Jawi script (based on Arabic) and gradually converted to Latin script in 1960s.

The significance of Malay language in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese communication is not limited to writing medium only; it also permeates other aspects of the community's culture. For example, they may opt to converse in Kelantan Malay among themselves instead of Hokkien (Teo, 2003). Malay names are incorporated into their Chinese names, such as Tan Awang Besar, whereas Malay nicknames are commonly used in daily life. Terminology of kinship which is based on Hokkien terms, also incorporated several Malay loan words such as '*menantu ca po*' (son-in-law) and *cucu* (grandchild) (Pue, 2018). By adopting Goffman's analogies of 'backstage' and 'frontstage' in impression management, Teo (2003) argued that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese adopted 'Malay behaviour' as their frontstage which includes appreciating and adopting Malay cultural performances (*dikir barat*, *wayang kulit*, *Mak Yong*), involuntary responses due to startling (*latah*), greeting, swearing and cursing in Kelantanese Malay among themselves, and other forms of body language. In essence, Teo's findings in these aspects resonate with that of Winzeler (1974). In addition, Winzeler also noted that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese, whom he interchangeably called 'village Chinese' or 'rural Chinese', to "observe rural Malay visiting patterns, give and receive invitations to certain feasts and participate with Malays in neighbourhood activities" (Winzeler, 1974, p. 49). However, this aspect is beyond the scope of this paper and thus not discussed in detail here.

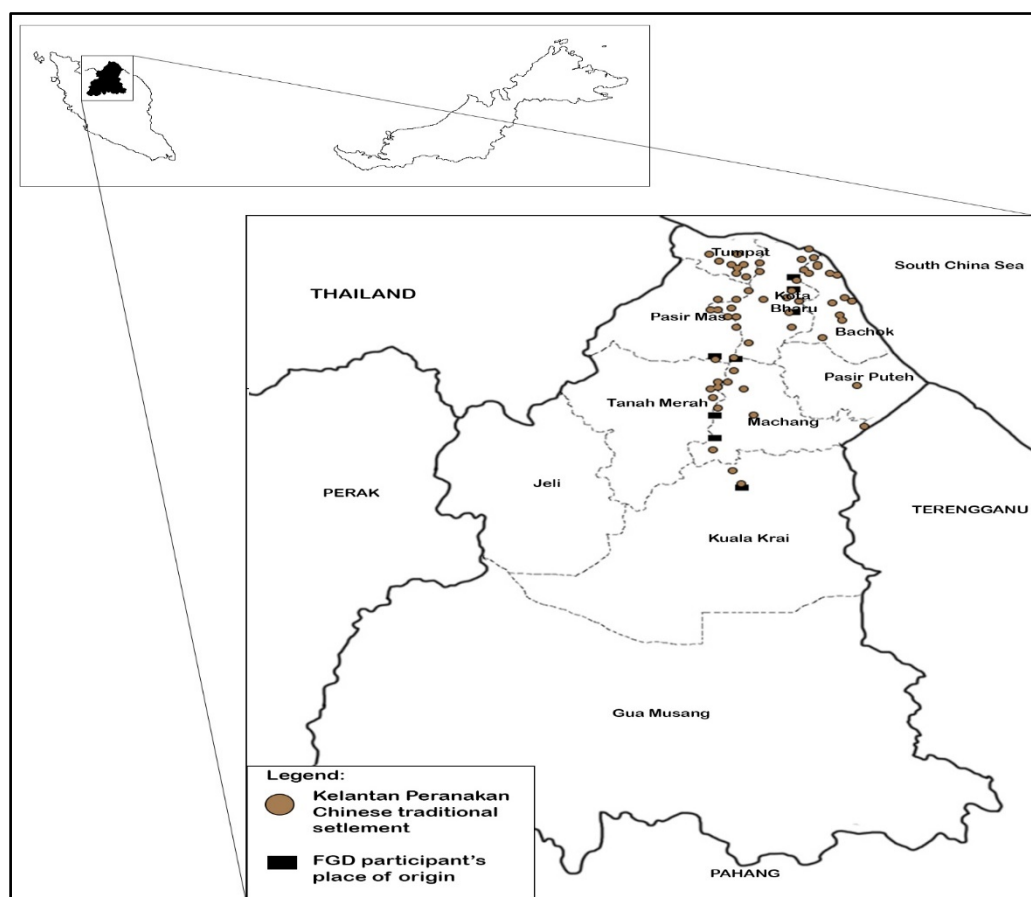
One comment often found in writings on Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's communication is their command of Kelantan Malay language which is acknowledged as at par with the Kelantan Malays in almost every aspect. This has been described as "...their speech is similar to that of Kelantanese Malay, either in terms of pronunciation or speech styles used..." by Hanapi (1983, p. 310, our translation). The findings resonate that of Teo (2003) who argues that, "The Peranakan Chinese are aware that they speak the local Malay dialect more fluently than the mainstream Chinese or the other non-Malay ethnic groups in the state. Their native or near-native local Malay accent coupled with their Malay-like appearance and dark complexion, as well as their Kelantanese Malay speech styles, often make it almost impossible to tell them apart from a native Kelantan Malay" (Teo, 2003, p. 74). Among aspects of Kelantanese Malay speech styles detected among Kelantan Peranakan Chinese by Teo was lexical borrowing particularly vocabulary which is most easily recognized by laymen, but also what he refers to as 'grammatical assimilation', i.e., "the incorporation of foreign rules into a language" (Teo, 2003, p. 75). In addition, Malay manners and etiquettes (cf. Zainal, 1950) were also found incorporated and transmitted in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language (Teo, 2012).

After the 1990s, there has been less research and fewer publications on the contemporary Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community done by scholars, particularly with regard to their patterns of communication (Pue, 2017). Kang (2001) in his Masters dissertation found that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language used by the community in Tanah Merah district incorporates code-mixing more than code-switching with other languages found in the locality, i.e., Kelantan Malay and Siamese dialects as well as Mandarin and English languages. Among the four languages, components from Kelantan Malay and Siamese dialects were the dominant and significant language components found in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language, both in formal and informal contexts. The absence of new, in-depth researches on Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language have created a void in the discourse and knowledge of the current trend. More often than not, the topic is touched upon

and discussed at a glance, based on casual comparisons between the researchers' observation in contemporary times with descriptions in past literatures. As a result, the present-day Kelantan Peranakan Chinese is believed to exhibit less influence from the local languages, i.e., Kelantan Malay and local Thai dialect, in their communication with a notable increase in using Mandarin. This paper aims to address the existing lacuna by providing recent insights into Kelantan Peranakan Chinese language and communication particularly among the youth.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section begins with a description of FGD participants' profiles to facilitate readers' understanding of their backgrounds and current scenario of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community. The participants consisted of five women and seven men, aged between 21 to 34 years old. Due to the snowballing effect in identifying participants of the FGD through the invitation of our key informant who was a resident of Kampung Pasir Parit in Pasir Mas district, half of the participants were from the same kampong. The rest hailed from three other districts namely Kota Bharu, Machang and Kuala Krai (Map 1). Interestingly, all participants' places of origin were located outside of city areas. This supports the well-established fact that the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese is predominantly a rural phenomenon. Yet unlike community members in the past whose mobility and interaction with society were often grounded to their immediate locality due to the limitation in the transportation and telecommunication systems, all participants of the FGD had experienced living outside of Kelantan while pursuing their studies at tertiary levels. All seven participants who had graduated, resided in Kelantan with five of them were full-time workers.



MAP 1. Kelantan

The participants' primary and secondary education background have shown a new pattern whereby the majority of the them attended Chinese-medium primary school before subsequently shifted to national school in secondary level. Only two participants studied in Chinese-medium schools for both primary and secondary; whereas only one participant went to national school in primary as well as secondary level. Their education background subsequently influenced the participants' language skills whereby all but one participant able to converse in Mandarin at least at the average level. Also, they were able to understand and speak English at varying degrees. Despite mastering additional languages, all twelve participants self-reported as fluent in both localized Hokkien and Kelantan Malay dialect. Nevertheless their command of the Thai language, whether local Thai dialect or standard Thai (also known as 'Bangkok Siamese' language), was poorest with all but two to three persons able to grasp the language at average level.⁷

From the FGD participants profile itself, an interesting new picture of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity among the youth emerges particularly in three aspects. First, in comparison to the community profile in the past that was often associated with today's older generation, it is common for Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth today to receive their formal education at least to the bachelor degree level, thus they are more equipped for white collar employment instead of being tied to traditional jobs that require manual labour such as farming and other odd jobs in the community (*kerja kampung*). Second, Malay-medium primary school is no longer a preferred option for formal education, at least in the context of the FGD participants. Instead, the majority of them were enrolled in Chinese-medium school at least for primary level before continuing their secondary level at national secondary schools. The trend is particularly apparent among participants who were from Kampung Pasir Parit. Unlike other Kelantan Peranakan Chinese traditional residential areas, the community in Kampung Pasir Parit enjoys an easy access to Chinese vernacular school at least for primary level at SJKC Poy Hwa which is located within the kampung itself. It is also common for Kelantan Peranakan Chinese to be enrolled in Chinese-medium for both levels. Instead, it is harder to find a community member who studied in national school for both primary and secondary levels. As a result, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth no longer shy away from Mandarin. Third and perhaps most importantly, although Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youths continue to be fluent in localized Hokkien and Kelantan Malay, they are also fluent in standard Malay and able to converse in Mandarin on the average level (similar to the level of their command of English). Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth in the context of this FDG however, have a poor command of the Thai language unlike their parents' generation particularly for those who live in Pasir Mas district (see Winzeler, 1974). As a result, the influence of Thai language in their communication is declining.

KNOWLEDGE OF MALAY LANGUAGE

The command of Malay language by the participants was noticeably fluent with some variation among them. Two of the researchers, who originated from Melaka and Pahang respectively, had trouble fully understanding the conversation when the participants spoke in Kelantan Malay or localized Hokkien although they could generally guess what the participants had meant. Similar comments were mentioned by the participants based on their interactions with non-Kelantanese acquaintances – Malay and Chinese alike - at their respective universities as illustrated below:

⁷ Although the Thai language remains noticeable in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese communication as a whole, discussion of the Thai language is beyond the scope of this paper.

Some Malay friends often ask, saying, “how come you speak Hokkien language, what language does the other person speak then?” Take for example, Cantonese. “He speaks as if he wants to fight!” So, even the Malays have such perception lah. At times [when] compare with our Kelantan [Hokkien], they say Kelantan Hokkien language is similar with their language, maybe, [they will comment like] “are you speaking Malay?” Although we are speaking Hokkien language lah.

(Participant M7, 34-year-old male)

Because of our language, it is quite unique. It mixes with everything. Afterwards, er, just like, [when] we go outside [of Kelantan], we meet with Malays, suddenly we speak in.. er, Kelantan [Malay] language comes out, [so] they're surprised (laughed)...

(Participant F1, 25-year-old female)

From the comments above, we can deduce the depth of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's knowledge about Malay language through how similar Kelantan localized Hokkien dialect and Kelantan Malay sound. This can be seen from how their Malay acquaintance's reaction; although they did not understand Hokkien dialect, they could still detect and understand some of the Malay words used in the conversation. They could even notice the difference in how Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's intonation is different than that of other mainstream Chinese which was described 'as if (they) want to fight'. In this aspect, we find the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth remains fluent in Malay language to the point that it's still an important part of their mother tongue, i.e., localized Hokkien, unlike the consensus from the existing literature.

For other participants, they were often mistaken as Malays especially by strangers just by listening to them speaking in Malay. As such, there are incidents when they were inadvertently invited to go for Friday prayer together, or greeted with the Arabic salutation 'may peace be upon you' by Malay acquaintances, as illustrated by the following comments:

From my experience of living in KL for three and a half years, er, most of the Malays, er, greet me with salam, “Assalamualaikum”...

(Participant M2, 24-year-old male)

However, such mistaken identity by Malays to Kelantan Peranakan Chinese may not be due only to their high command of the Malay language but also other Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's identity markers which are often associated with 'Malayness', such as eating with hands, use of Malay nicknames, and even the darker complexion:

The usual, physical appearance. If at USM, sometimes there were people who invited me to go for a prayer at the mosque, and eat with hands, usually [with] Malay names, but now Malay names are quite rare eh. There were a lot then.

(Participant M4, 23-year-old male)

Concomitantly, some participants shared what their Malay friends thought of them. For the Malay friends, they felt more comfortable and compatible with Kelantan Peranakan Chinese as friends or even roommates, despite having different religious beliefs and practices:

But from the perspective of non-Kelantanese Malay, their opinion towards Chinese. They can accept us more. [They] can accept Kelantan Chinese than mainstream Chinese ... Yes. They themselves said this things [to me]. They said, “you guys are more friendly, your way of speaking.. the Malays would say ‘masuk gu’ [compatible] ... they are more comfortable with us lah.

(Participant M2, 24-year-old male)

Besides the others' perceptions, the depth of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese knowledge about Malay language itself is reflected through the choice of Malay words used in their communication. More often than not, Malay words used by Kelantan Peranakan Chinese are relatively 'thick' (Malay: *pekat*) or figuratively rich compared to mainstream Chinese. Several of such words detected in the FGD session are listed in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1. Examples of Malay Word Used

Malay word	Sentence	Translated sentence
<i>ceruk</i>	<i>...duduk dale kapung ceruk mano pun, dio tok tahu jugok...</i>	...whichever corner one lives in the village, he still does not know..
<i>rumoh ibu</i>	<i>Base structure ee uu rumoh ibu, kak lek dapur...</i>	Base structure consists of main building , and a kitchen...
<i>syahdu</i>	<i>Lan uu lan e intonasi, er, syahdu lan.</i>	We have our own intonation, er, our own ' soft rhythm '
<i>lenggok</i>	<i>...ee khua tv siam gak ee bempek leh, lan khua gak terlenggok yah...</i>	...she watches Thai TV channel she understands, [if] we watch [we'll] just look over ...

One of the reasons that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth have such a deep knowledge about the Malay language was due to early exposures in life with the language. As part of the socialization process, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese children often accompanied their parents during outings such as visiting friends and neighbours. It was by listening to the grown-up's conversation that they learnt the Malay language. Interethnic relations with Malay friends also helped the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese to obtain a deeper grasp of the language, as illustrated by the following comments:

I listened to how my parents speak since young, [whenever] they went out, they brought me along [and because] they spoke Kelantan, [so] I listened, listened, and listened... er, the Kelantan Malay [language].

(Participant M5, 28-year-old male)

PERFORMANCE: HOW DO KELANTAN PERANAKAN CHINESE YOUTH USE THE MALAY LANGUAGE IN THEIR COMMUNICATION?

From the FGD session, we found that the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth use the Malay language in their communication extensively when they speak, whether as part of localized Hokkien dialect, or fully Kelantan Malay or standard Malay. On the one hand, they were able to converse both in Kelantan Malay and standard Malay fluently without any Hokkien elements. On the other hand, elements from the Malay language particularly that of Kelantan Malay dialect was indispensable in their Hokkien dialect. This occurred both intra-sententially (as previously shown in Table 1) as well as inter-sententially. Sociolinguistically, the behaviour is known as code-switching which is central to societal bilingualism. According to Appel and Muysken (1987), there are six functions of code-switching: referential, directive, expressive, phatic, metalinguistic and poetic.⁸ During the FGD, not only both code-mixing and code-switching were detected in the participants' communication in the form of Malay vocabulary, we also noticed the influence of Malay language in their communication was displayed by speaking localized Hokkien in rhythmical style, not unlike

⁸ Code-switching with referential function occurs in order to fill in the missing terms that may be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the base language. Directive function is used to determine inclusivity and exclusivity of participants in the conversation; it is also can be used to signifies solidarity among speakers. Expressive function of code-switching is used when speakers wish to emphasize the 'mixedness' in their identity which contributed to their bilingualism. Code-switching with phatic function serves to highlight important part of a conversation akin to a punch line delivered by stand-up comedians. Metalinguistic function is commonly applied when the speaker comments on the language itself. Finally, poetic function in code-switching is deployed to signal light moments in conversation, such as jokes (Appel & Muysken, 1987).

Malay language stress and intonation. Another Malay language influence in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese Hokkien is in its grammar. In the localized Hokkien dialect, the main word such as noun, adjective or adverb, comes first. This occurs regardless the presence of Malay word in the sentence such as *'kalu boik'* (Malay: kalau mahu) or not, as in *'lang gua'* (Malay: orang luar), for example. In standard Hokkien, main word comes last (*'nasi boik'* and *'gua lang'* respectively). The functions of code-switching detected in the FGD participants' communication are as follows:

1. To express expertise or authority

This can be seen in the situation where they are expected to comment officially on some issues which is characteristic of the metalinguistic function of code-switching. For example, during the FGD session, the participants were asked by a researcher in localized Hokkien dialect, to describe markers of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity. A participant, M2, instead, chose to reply in standard Malay, as illustrated in the dialogue below:

Researcher 1: Ok, (M2's name), ancuah?

(Ok, [M2's name], how [about you?])

M2: Merujuk kepada soalan tadi, bagaimana kita nak terangkan kepada orang, ataupun diri kita sendiri, tentang Cina Kelantan ni, ataupun Cina Peranakan Kelantan ni. Yang pertama dari pandangan saya, yang pertama kita kena jelas tentang keturunan kita...

(Referring to the previous question, how do we explain to others or to ourselves about Kelantan Chinese, or Kelantan Peranakan Chinese. Firstly from my point of view, first of all we have to be clear about our descendance...)

2. To stress on Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity

The expressive function of code-switching was utilized when the participants wished to stress on their unique Peranakan identity. This was done by incorporating rich Kelantan Malay patois that mainstream Chinese, including the non-Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan, rarely use. Some of the words are already listed in Table 1 previously. In addition, Malay grammar was used when conversing in localized Hokkien dialect as illustrated, by the word order in the phrases of Table 2.

TABLE 2. Examples of Malay Grammar in Localized Hokkien Dialect

Localized Hokkien	Mainstream Hokkien	Meaning
<i>lang Kelantan</i>	<i>Kelantan lang</i>	Kelantanese
<i>chu kapong</i>	<i>kamkong chu</i>	traditional house
<i>uu jugok</i>	<i>masi uu</i>	also have
<i>sedak ciak</i>	<i>ho ciak</i>	delicious

3. To express with clarity/explain in detail

Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth believe that they could express themselves with explicit clarity in localized Hokkien only by adding Malay language in their conversation, i.e., the referential function of code-switching. This may be related to the limited Hokkien

vocabularies that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese possesses as previously discussed by Kershaw (1981). A participant illustrated the point clearly in the following comment:

[I]f [we] want to speak, want to explain something, [we] must use Hokkien language mixed [with] Malay. Cannot [use] Hokkien alone, it doesn't work. It must have some Malay [language] only then it works. Only then can know [what] we want to say, only [then] can understand.

(Participant M2, 24-year-old male)

4. To display closeness/familiarity with Malay culture

The directive function of code-switching occurred on other instances where Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth wish to display closeness or familiarity with Malay culture. In this context, Arabic words which is synonymous to Malay identity in Malaysia, tend to be used, such as 'Assalamualaikum', 'syahdu', and 'munafik':

[T]o be Peranakan Chinese we must be Buddhist. Because, Christianity and Islam religions are not relevant with our culture and life style. Yes. Perhaps there's ..er, concept of munafik and others lah.

(Participant M2, 24-year-old male)

5. As a written medium

The inability of Kelantan Peranakan Chinese to speak or write in Chinese (Mandarin) was well-documented among older generation in the past literature. They relied on Malay language to preserve their communication in writing; first in Arabic (Jawi) script, and then later in Latin script (rumi). During the FGD session, we were expecting that the youth had gained some Chinese writing skill as the majority of them were able to converse in Mandarin and went to Chinese-medium primary school. On the contrary, we found that although most of the participants spoke conversational Mandarin with relative ease, many self-reported that they were unable to write in Chinese script well, including some of the participants who enrolled in Chinese-medium school up to secondary level. So with the exception of a few participants who were fluent in English, Malay language remains the medium for writing for Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth as illustrated in the following comment:

For me, for me lah, in my opinion, if want to write it down, the preferred language is Malay.

(Participant M2, 24-year-old male)

MOTIVATION: WHAT DOES THE MALAY LANGUAGE MEAN TO KELANTAN PERANAKAN CHINESE YOUTH?

So what does Malay language mean to Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth? The answer to the question is reflected from the various aspects of the community's ethnicity that were voted as identity markers. Participants in the FGD were requested to come up with the top five markers which they think best describe Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity. Overall, the participants came up with nine items from language to traditional games and even history of the formation of the community. Interestingly, there was no participant who voted for clothes such as *kebaya*, sarong and *kain pelikat* that are often deemed iconic to Peranakan identity in popular culture, because this style of clothing does not represent their generation's attire. Table 3 shows the top five markers suggested by the participants.

TABLE 3. Top Five Kelantan Peranakan Chinese Identity Markers

No.	Marker	Description	No. of Votes Received	Percentage
1.	Language	Localized Hokkien and Kelantan Malay	9	75.0
2.	Physical appearance	Native-like, particularly darker skin tone	7	58.3
3.	Food & foodways	The ability to appreciate and consume local food that transcends ethnic lines including budu ⁹ and ulam ¹⁰ , eating with hands, and have the community's signature food (<i>bak hong</i> ¹¹ , <i>cha chai bokyi</i> ¹² , and <i>tau pau</i> ¹³)	6	50.0
4.	Building design	Particularly traditional residential house which is uniquely Kelantan Peranakan Chinese, different than both other local ethnic groups and mainstream Chinese	6	50.0
5.	Religion	Theravada Buddhism	4	33.3

Table 3 shows 75 per cent of the FGD participants specifically voted for language. The other 25 per cent (3 participants) did not vote for language per se, but instead language aspect was included within what they had described as 'mixed culture' or 'rojak 4-in-1'. As a result, consensus of the FGD suggests that being bilingual with localized Hokkien and Kelantan Malay, is one of the significant markers for Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity. When asked, participants reasoned that it was the ability to speak fluent Kelantan Malay that distinguishes them from non-Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan as well as other Chinese elsewhere:

Yes, Kelantan Malay. The ability to speak Kelantan dialect [is] what we're good at. Even at school [university] when met with Kelantanese, outsiders listen 'eh, you can speak Kelantan?' Can lah. Chinese but can speak Kelantan language, it's a bit out of the ordinary lah. Our uniqueness is that we can speak Malay language. Kelantan Malay. Like outsiders, er, like outsiders' ah pek¹⁴, they can't speak [it].

(Participant F3, 26-year-old female)

Another participant provided the reason that motivates him to be fluent in Kelantan Malay. According to him, the ethnonym or label used to identify their community is associated with Kelantan, i.e., Kelantan Chinese ('Cina Kelantan'). For him, this identity as Kelantanese eclipses his identity as Chinese in Kelantan. As such it is only natural for him and the community members to have the ability to speak Kelantan Malay dialect fluently:

[As for] myself, if anybody asks who I am, [I] say firstly as Kelantan. Kelantan first, and then only Chinese. No matter how people asks, I say [I am] Kelantanese first. Because identity as Kelantanese is stronger than identity as Chinese. ... The way they see us a little bit different compared to, er, typical [mainstream] Chinese lah.

(Participant M5, 28-year-old male)

Interestingly, there was no participant who thought that the language marker for Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity should be limited to a single language, i.e., localized Hokkien. This is due to the fact that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese's localized Hokkien

⁹ Local condiment made from fermentation process of anchovies or small fishes.

¹⁰ Local vegetable that are consumed raw (fresh) or blanched.

¹¹ Literally means 'fragrant meat'.

¹² Vegetable and black fungus stir-fry.

¹³ A type of *kueh* made from glutinous rice flour and green mung beans.

¹⁴ Depending on the intonation used, 'ah pek' is a term that may be used to refer to mainstream Chinese men in pejorative sense in Kelantan Peranakan Chinese patois. In a neutral way, the term is a Hokkien word to refer to father's older brother.

contains a high degree of influence from Kelantan Malay. This point has been discussed further in the earlier part of the paper. Nevertheless, the importance of localized Hokkien to the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese identity is recognized through conscious planning for future generation as illustrated in the following comment:

*[For schooling, my kids] will go to Chinese school. [This is] because of the culture of Chinese education. I want them **learn Chinese education culture**. Not because... Now I clearly see [that] national school, Chinese-medium school, their education [systems] are not the same. Er, [it's] very.. [there is] wide gap between the two. So if possible, they **go to Chinese school, but at home, if possible we do the way we do lah... Speak Hokkien language, Kelantan [Hokkien] lah.***

(Participant M5, 28-year-old male)

For Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth who are in a relationship and planning to have children someday, they consciously have decided to expose and encourage their children to speak in local Hokkien although they want to send their children to Chinese vernacular school. The reason given is that while the decision to send the kids to Chinese school is due to its education system, local Hokkien is still an important marker for their identity as Peranakan Chinese Kelantan. This virtually echoes Kershaw's observation that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese consciously choose to speak Hokkien to their children to instill attachment of the language and identity as Chinese in them, other than the more pragmatic reason: "If we don't speak Chinese to them, where else will they ever learn it in Kelantan?" (Kershaw, 1981, p. 86).

CONCLUSION

Proverbs such as 'it takes a whole village to raise a child' and 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree' highlight the importance of the role of socialization in shaping many aspects of individuals as social beings, including communication. By utilizing Hymes' theory of communicative competence on qualitative data collected from an FGD session, we found that Malay language prowess among Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth does not comply with the typical Malaysian Chinese's 'lesser-command-of-Malay-language' stereotype. They too, remain distinctly competent in terms of knowledge, performance and motivation in using Malay language as an integral part of their communication than the non-Peranakan Chinese in Kelantan.

The complexity of the community whose ethnicity is heavily infused with local Malay and Siamese influences, was reflected from the participants' backgrounds and narratives about their personal experience of being Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth. This is apparent in many aspects of their ethnic identity markers, including language and communication. The findings of this study showed that while Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth saw the localized Hokkien dialect as their mother tongue, they recognized the twofold importance of the Malay language, particularly the Kelantan Malay dialect, in the community's communication: as an indispensable part within their Hokkien dialect, and as a mutual language of all Kelantanese native transcends ethnic lines. In a way, it also serves as a timeless vessel and reminder of the essence of the group's ethnicity that has its roots in the long-term solidarity with other local ethnic groups, i.e., the Kelantanese Malay and Siamese. Due to the socialization process from their parents, family and friends since the early age, the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth's deep knowledge and skilful command of Malay language shown during the FGD were found to be at par with the Kelantan Malays. Sociolinguistically speaking, the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese and the Kelantan Malays are members of the same speech community who share rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech of at least one linguistic variety (Hymes,

1986, p. 54). This finding is supported by how the Malays interact with Kelantan Peranakan Chinese in a friendlier, warmer and trusting ways than with non-Peranakan Chinese (see Teo, 2003). Concomitantly, Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth were found to be fluent speaker of standard Malay language viz., the national language of Malaysia.

In short, the typical stereotype of Chinese as having a lesser command of Malay language, is unfounded. In fact, a small number of scholars have long argued that Malay language does not exist exclusively within the Malays as it may seem (see Collins, 1999, 2011; Wong, 2012; Ding, 2013). Instead, it is not uncommon for the Malay language to be spoken as the first language by communities that are not ‘ethnically Malay’ in Malaysia, such as the Chetti and the Baba-Nyonya in Melaka, and numerous Orang Asli groups in the Peninsular Malaysia as well as native communities of Sabah and Sarawak. Furthermore, despite the relatively recent acquisition of Mandarin among them as a result from receiving formal education in Chinese-medium schools at least for primary level, the study shows that Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth remain fluent in Malay language, unlike the general consensus in the existing literature. This can be explained from ethnicity and ethnic identity perspective: the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese youth’s communicative competence in the Malay language is achieved due to it being pivotal and indispensable not only as a medium of communication but also as part of their identity as both Kelantan Peranakan Chinese and as Kelantanese. To conclude, the Kelantan Peranakan Chinese community is a good example that proficiency in the Malay language can exist in tandem with their mother tongue language. It is the mutual competence that should be celebrated and supported by the government towards building a common identity that is rooted in the region’s history as part of nation-building in Malaysia, instead of continue to measure the popularity and effectiveness of the Malay language among non-Malay speakers with the standard Malay (Collins, 1999).

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