

Ethnicity versus National Language: A Study in Malaysian Universities Setting

Persaingan di antara Etnisiti dan Bahasa Kebangsaan: Kajian dalam Persekitaran di Universiti Awam Malaysia

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Abstract: The national language is an assimilation instrument for fostering racial unity in a multi-ethnic society. Nonetheless, ethnocentrism always plays a crucial role in upholding the national language across ethnic groups in Malaysia. A study in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEI) was conducted on 407 undergraduate students from Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), and Multimedia University (MMU) using stratified random sampling to determine the differences in upholding the national language based on ethnic groups through three key dimensions, namely, i) fluency in speaking in the national language, ii) recognition of the importance of the national language, and iii) sophistication in the use of the national language. The results showed that there were significant differences in the upholding of the national language among the various ethnic groups. It was found that the Chinese students do not uphold the national language as much as the Malay and Indian students. This indicates that ethnicity plays a major role in determining the future of upholding the national language as the language of Malaysia. As Malaysian citizenship, ethnocentrism toward language should be managed to ensure assimilation of a multi-ethnic society through the most important medium, the Malay language as the national language of Malaysia.

Keywords: Malay language; multiethnic; nationalism; assimilation; ethnocentrism; higher education;

Abstrak: Bahasa kebangsaan merupakan instrumen asimilasi dalam memupuk perpaduan kaum dalam kalangan masyarakat multi etnik. Walau bagaimanapun, etnosentrisme menjadi faktor penting yang sering dimainkan dalam isu memartabatkan bahasa kebangsaan oleh kumpulan etnik di Malaysia. Satu kajian di institusi pendidikan tinggi (IPT) telah dilaksanakan ke atas 407 mahasiswa sarjana muda dari Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Selangor (UNISEL) dan Universiti Multimedia (MMU) menggunakan pensampelan rawak berstrata untuk menentukan perbezaan dalam pemartabatan bahasa kebangsaan berdasarkan kumpulan etnik melalui tiga dimensi utama, iaitu i) kefasihan dalam bertutur bahasa kebangsaan, ii) pengiktirafan berkenaan kepentingan bahasa kebangsaan, dan iii) kecanggihan dalam menggunakan bahasa kebangsaan. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang

signifikan dalam memartabatkan bahasa kebangsaan dalam kalangan etnik pelbagai. Dapatan mendapati bahawa mahasiswa Cina kurang memartabatkan bahasa kebangsaan berbanding mahasiswa Melayu dan India. Ini menunjukkan bahawa etnisiti memainkan peranan penting dalam menentukan masa depan pemartabatan bahasa kebangsaan sebagai bahasa yang menjadi tanda kesetiaan terhadap Malaysia. Sebagai warganegara Malaysia, etnosentrisme terhadap bahasa perlu dihindari bagi memastikan asimilasi masyarakat pelbagai etnik berlaku melalui medium paling penting, iaitu Bahasa Melayu selaku bahasa kebangsaan Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Melayu; multi etnik; nasionalisme; asimilasi; etnosentrisme; pendidikan tinggi;

Introduction

The issue of upholding the national language in Malaysia came to light ages ago and climaxed in the incident of the racial riots on May 13, 1969, about the dissatisfaction of the non-Bumiputra races towards the gazetting of Malay as the national language (Comber 2011). Furthermore, in 1982, the Malaysian government was tried in court for rejecting the establishment of Merdeka University, whereby the plaintiff wanted to use Mandarin as the language of instruction (Awang Sariyan, 2006). Later, the government bowed to demands of repealing Section 21(1B) of the Education Act 1961, authorizing the Minister of Education to shut down national-type schools that use Mandarin as the medium of instruction. Since then, the government has had to contend with one demand after another by the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) to elevate the use of Mandarin at national-type schools. Encompass of the urge to recognize the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) and reject to the proposed of Jawi learning in national schools. Thus, from a historical standpoint until now, it has been extremely challenging for the government to uphold the Malay language as the national language of the country. Furthermore, the national policy has changed to empower the English language in facing the challenges of globalization.

This significant study will enrich the previous studies with a vital new dimension in upholding the national language, fluency the national language and sophistication in language. Previous studies remain unknown on the discussion of sophistication in language when, in fact, it is one of the most important mechanisms that is used as a benchmark of excellence in the upholding of the aesthetic values of a language. The sophistication of language means that a good speaker of the language should not only be fluent in speaking the language well to be understood, but should also be able

to use rhymes, quatrains, imagery, idioms, proverbs, poetry, allusions, and new terms in his speech (Nik Safiah, 2013, 19 September). Reinforcement of attitudes toward a language through verbalization, expression, and speech needs to be more flowery, especially in a formal context, and become the norm and an element of pride among the speakers (A. Aziz Deraman, 2010). The aspect of language art has also been included in the Malay language learning syllabus at school to encourage students to learn and appreciate the beauty of Malay. (Bujang & Subet, 2021). In fact, in today's global world, languages are also undergoing a process of innovation in line with the human globalization process. As people and cultures become increasingly mixed, the origins and beauty of languages will be changed by being re-appropriated with new terms (Michiavelli in Landon, 2005), and human creative activity in a complex social organization will lead to the evolution of language (Chomsky, 2011). Language innovations refer to those that come from the intellectualization of people, coping with, and adjusting to the current phenomenon. Good speakers will have to adapt to the art and innovation of the language in their speeches.

This significant study also focuses on students at higher education levels, as they are the potential leaders of the nation who can determine the survival of the national language in the future. This generation can shape the social and political situation of the country, and living in the modern world may lead them to ignore the heritage associated with sophistication in language. In the beginning of the 19th century, studies on upholding the national language between the ethnic groups in Malaysia were widely done by scholars at the school level (Juriah Long, 2010; Ooi Chwee Hwa, Savitry Chelliah, and Norasmah Othman, 2022; Vijayaletchumy Subramaniam & Che Ibrahim Salleh, 2014). While studies at higher education institutions remain unknown, especially when there is rising confusion in society about the capability of Malay as a language of higher knowledge.

The researchers felt that a relevant study should be undertaken to determine the differences in the upholding of the national language, including the sophistication of language based on ethnicity in Malaysian universities' settings, and so that more deliberate action can be taken by the government to promote the language to a higher level in a diverse multi-ethnic society. Ethnocentricity among youths must be overcome to build a common identity in the future national mould. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the differences in the upholding of the national language based on ethnicity among undergraduate students in Malaysia. The upholding of the national language is measured in three key dimensions, namely, i) fluency in speaking in the national language, ii) recognition of the importance of the national language, and iii) sophistication in speaking the national language.

Language As a Primordial Account for Ethnicity

A person is not acting only as an individual but is highly correlated with their ethnic groups. There are arguments by the scholars that the commitment to changing interpersonal behavior to intergroup behavior was greatly impacted by similar emotions, sentiments, common origins, cultures, values, perceptions, and sense of belonging towards ethnic groups (Goby, 2004; Meahler, 2022; Ng, 2010). As such, ethnicity can be thought of as a sense of group identity derived from common bonds such as language (Banyanga, Ostman, Kurkiala, & Nyman-Kurkiala, 2018; Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007). Leading scholars also acknowledged that language acts as a primordial account of ethnicity, as language is a cultural vehicle (Kluckhohn, 1961), a complementary tool for the development of human epistemology (Gillett, 1988), and a vehicle of thought that is closely related to the formation of a universal worldview of society (Wittgenstein and Whorf in Kienpointner, 1996). Each ethnic group has its own epistemological culture and worldview that distinguishes it from other ethnic groups.

Thus, language appears to complement the cultural benefits of ethnic identity. Language as a symbol of ethnicity is becoming more confusing in the present scenario of modern society. Communities are no longer living isolated in their own ethnic groups but instead are existing in a social environment that is multicultural and multi-ethnic. For this reason alone, language has never been fixed as a primordial account for ethnicity but instead is socially constructed because there is a contestable link between language, ethnicity, and nationality.

National Language as a Primary Tool in The Development of Assimilation Among Multi-Ethnic Society in Malaysia

In the context of Malaysia, the prevailing ethnic diversity is acknowledged and has a place in this country based on its unique historical heritage. Nevertheless, ethnocentric issues are still standing in the way of the assimilation of a multi-ethnic society. The challenge of making Malay the national language has often been debated since its institution in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. In addition, rapid advancements in a borderless world have led to English being used as an international language, and this results in the national language being increasingly side lined by non-Bumiputra ethnic groups. In fact, even the Malays today are beginning to lose confidence in the role of the national language since the English language is regarded as the language of progress. This issues not just pertain to the national language but significantly reflect the development of assimilation in building national unity.

The forging of national unity out of parochial subunits is a problem common to every newly created national regime, but everywhere, language is a prime tool of integration (Friedgut, 1982). In fact, the use of language as a tool for nation-building has been discussed by previous leading scholars. As pointed out by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), language is the 'spiritual exhalation' of a nation (in Cowan, 1963), binds its members for complex nation-building that distinguishes them from other nations (Kohn, 1967), nationalism commonly elaborates upon language as one of its markers of symbolic unity and is able to contribute to the nation's growth and success (Fishman, 1968), and language is essential in the creation of "unified fields of exchange and communication" (Anderson, 1983).

The national language plays a vital role in moulding together the diverse ethnic groups into a Malaysian nation. By having a standard common language, the various ethnic groups in Malaysia will be able to communicate beautifully and harmoniously with each other across their ethnic groups. Not only that, what is most important is that the national language will be able to educate the citizens of Malaysia about representing themselves as Malaysians and upholding the supremacy of the Constitution.

From a historical perspective, the signing of a social contract that was agreed upon by all the ethnic groups had to do with the formation of a national identity based on the special privileges of the Bumiputras in return for the granting of rights of citizenship by *jus soli* to the non-Bumiputras. Malaysia has officially declared the Malay language to be the national language, as

mentioned in the provisions of Article 152(1) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia:

The national language shall be the Malay Language and shall be in such script as Parliament may by law provide (Federal Constitution of Malaysia)

The Malay language was chosen because it is part of the social contract and is a traditional element in the constitution of Malaysia, in view of efforts to strengthen the sense of belonging through historical elements. In fact, unity will be created when members of society coming from various races and languages can be integrated through the national language, which serves as a symbol of citizenship and an expression of a national identity and is a key factor in the development of civilization in Malaysia.

Racial assimilation is not entirely possible with the diversity of languages because interactions between the races are difficult using languages that are incomprehensible to each other. The main role of the national language in Malaysian language loyalty is to bridge the gap between the races and mould a national identity through the standardization of the national language.

Method of Study

A quantitative study was conducted involving 407 undergraduates who were randomly selected from four HEIs in the Klang Valley, namely, UPM and UM, to represent public HEIs, as well as UNISEL and MMU to represent private HEIs. The researchers used the stratified random sampling method for ethnicity based on the ratio of 60 (Bumiputras):30 (Chinese):10 (Indians) as per the ratio of the ethnic populations in Malaysia.

Klang Valley was chosen because it is an area where the majority of the HEIs in Malaysia are concentrated. The study can be rationalized in terms of what is happening throughout the country. In addition, the Klang Valley is rapidly developing, and it has the highest population in Malaysia because of the migration of residents from various ethnic backgrounds. Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, is in the Klang Valley. The ethnic composition of the population in the Klang Valley is a perfect representation of the actual ethnic composition of the population in Malaysia.

The researchers chose students from HEIs who mostly came from government secondary schools (83%, 338 of respondents from National Secondary School, 11.8%, 48 from National-type School and 5.2%, 21 from Islamic School) as the respondents for the study because

students at this age are more mature and have emerged from the government secondary education systems, where the principles of solidarity are applied through the national language. Therefore, it is important to see a continuing appreciation of these principles at the higher education level.

This study also showed that there were no significant differences in the scores of upholding the national language between public universities' undergraduates (mean: 2.90; S.D.:.49) and private universities' undergraduates (mean: 2.93; S.D.:.52); $t(405) = -.439$, $p = .66$. This result indicated that the type of university did not have a significant impact on this research's result.

The Instrument for Upholding the National Language was formed through a literature review and an interview with a well-known language scholar in Malaysia, namely, Prof. Emeritus Nik Safiah Abd Karim. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with the SPSS version 22 and AMOS version 20.0 software applications, were conducted to assess the construct validity.

Consequently, twelve items were successfully represented by this Instrument of Upholding the National Language, and these comprised three dimensions, namely, i) fluency, ii) recognition, and iii) sophistication in language. The fluency dimension was represented by five items that measured the fluency of an individual in speaking, reading, and writing in the Malay language, being able to converse fully in Malay, and speaking smoothly at formal occasions (A. Aziz Deraman, 2010; Juriah Long, 2010; Nik Safiah, 2013, 19 September; Norshimah, Nadzrah & Nor Hashimah, 2012; Ooi Chwee Hwa et al., 2014). The recognition dimension was represented by three items that measured the pride of the individual in speaking the national language and in not being ashamed to use the language (A. Aziz Deraman, 2010; Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007; Nik Safiah, 2013, 19 September). The dimension of language sophistication was represented by four items that measure the individual's ability to compose rhymes and poems, and to use new terms and idioms in his/her speech (A. Aziz Deraman, 2010; Nik Safiah, 2013, 19 September).

The instrument for Upholding the National Language applied a four-point measurement scale, where 1 represented 'strongly disagree', 2-represented 'disagree', 3-represented 'agree', and 4-represented 'strongly agree'. The researchers did not include a mid-point scale (undecided/less agree/neutral) because the responses were overshadowed by social or cultural value, desirable or indirect, and became prejudicial to the validity of the measurement, especially among Asians, who were more inclined to answer on the middle point scale (Tsang,

2012). Consequently, the mid-point scale no longer represents a neutral answer, which was the main purpose for which it was created.

Hence, the inferential analysis involving a one-way ANOVA with a post hoc comparison by Tukey HSD test was implemented to fulfil the objectives of the study. A descriptive analysis involving an analysis of the levels by means of the class interval method was also performed to support the inferential analysis findings.

Findings

Table 1 shows that there were significant differences with $p < .05$ in the scores of the fluency dimension for all three ethnic groups: $F(2,404) = 73.464, p = .000$. A post hoc comparison by a Tukey HSD test in Table 2 showed that the mean score for the Chinese (mean: 2.65, S.D: .51) differed significantly from the Malays (mean: 3.31; S.D: 0.50) and the Indians (mean: 3.28, S.D: .52). This showed that there were differences of fluency in the use of the national language between the ethnic groups. The Chinese students were found to be less fluent in the national language compared to the Malay and Indian students. This was also proven by the descriptive findings, which showed that the Malay and Indian students had a high level of fluency, while the Chinese students had a moderate level of fluency.

Table 1. One Way ANOVA Analysis on Ethnic Differences of Fluency in the Use of the National Language

| Ethnic | Mean | Standard Deviation | Level* | F | P |
|---------|------|--------------------|----------|--------|------|
| Malays | 3.31 | 0.50 | High | 73.464 | .000 |
| Chinese | 2.65 | 0.51 | Moderate | | |
| Indians | 3.28 | 0.52 | High | | |

*1.00 – 1.99 = low, 2.00 – 3.00 = moderate, 3.01 – 4.00 = high.

Table 2. Tukey HSD Analysis on Post-hoc Differences of Fluency in the Use of the National Language

| (I) Ethnic | (J) Ethnic | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | P |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Malays | Chinese | .66484* | .05597 | .000 |
| | Indians | .02702 | .08341 | .944 |
| Chinese | Malays | -.66484* | .05597 | .000 |
| | Indians | -.63782* | .08939 | .000 |
| Indians | Malays | -.02702 | .08341 | .944 |
| | Chinese | .63782* | .08939 | .000 |

Table 3 also shows that there were significant differences with $p < .05$ in the scores of the recognition dimension for all three ethnic groups: $F(2,404) = 33.515, p = .000$. A post hoc comparison through a Tukey HSD test in Table 4 shows that the mean score for the Chinese (mean: 2.89, S.D: .53) differed significantly from the Malays (mean: 3.34; S.D: 0.54) and the Indians (mean: 3.19, S.D: .50). This showed that there were differences in the recognition of the national language between the ethnic groups. It was found that the Chinese students gave less recognition to the national language compared to the Malay and Indian students. This was also proven by the descriptive findings, which showed that the Malay and Indian students were at a higher level of recognition of the national language compared to the Chinese students, who were only at a moderate level.

Table 3. One Way ANOVA Analysis on Ethnic Differences of Recognition of the National Language

| Ethnic | Mean | Standard Deviation | Level* | F | P |
|---------|------|--------------------|----------|--------|------|
| Malays | 3.34 | .54 | High | 33.515 | .000 |
| Chinese | 2.89 | .53 | Moderate | | |
| Indians | 3.19 | .50 | High | | |

*1.00 – 1.99 = low, 2.00 – 3.00 = moderate, 3.01 – 4.00 = high.

Table 4. Tukey HSD Analysis on Post-hoc Differences of Recognition of the National Language

| (I) Ethnic | (J) Ethnic | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | P |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Malays | Chinese | .48227* | .05891 | .000 |
| | Indians | .15142 | .08781 | .197 |
| Chinese | Malays | -.48227* | .05891 | .000 |
| | Indians | -.33086* | .09410 | .001 |
| Indians | Malays | -.15142 | .08781 | .197 |
| | Chinese | .33086* | .09410 | .001 |

Similar findings are shown in Table 5, where there were significant differences with $p < .05$ in the scores of the sophistication dimension for all three ethnic groups: $F(2,404) = 22.583, p = .000$. A post hoc comparison by a Tukey HSD test in Table 6 showed that the mean score for the Chinese (mean: 2.16, S.D: .57) differed significantly from the Malays (mean: 2.64; S.D: 0.67) and the Indians (mean: 2.45, S.D: .74). This showed that there were differences in sophistication in the use of the national language between the ethnic groups. It was found that the Chinese students were less sophisticated in their use of the national language compared to the Malay and Indian students. However, all three ethnic

groups had a moderate level of sophistication in the use of the national language.

Table 5. One Way ANOVA Analysis on Ethnic Differences of Sophistication in the Use of the National Language

| Ethnic | Mean | Standard Deviation | Level* | F | P |
|---------|------|--------------------|----------|--------|------|
| Malays | 2.64 | .67 | Moderate | 22.583 | .000 |
| Chinese | 2.16 | .57 | Moderate | | |
| Indians | 2.45 | .74 | Moderate | | |

*1.00 – 1.99 = low, 2.00 – 3.00 = moderate, 3.01 – 4.00 = high.

Table 6. Tukey HSD Analysis on Post-hoc Differences of Sophistication in the Use of the National Language

| (I) Ethnic | (J) Ethnic | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | P |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Malays | Chinese | .47759* | .07115 | .000 |
| | Indians | .19385 | .10604 | .162 |
| Chinese | Malays | -.47759* | .07115 | .000 |
| | Indians | -.28374* | .11364 | .034 |
| Indians | Malays | -.19385 | .10604 | .162 |
| | Chinese | .28374* | .11364 | .034 |

The results of the analysis of the differences in the upholding of the national language based on ethnicity in all three dimensions (fluency, recognition, sophistication) showed that there were significant differences with $p < .05$ in the scores for the upholding of the national language for all three ethnic groups: $F(2,404) = 65.116$, $p = .000$ (as shown in Table 7). A post-hoc comparison by a Tukey HSD test in Table 8 showed that the mean score for the Chinese (mean: 2.54, S.D: .42) differed significantly from the Malays (mean: 3.09; S.D: .44) and Indians (mean: 2.98, S.D: .50).

This showed that overall, there were differences in the upholding of the national language between the ethnic groups. It was found that the Chinese students were less inclined to uphold the national language in the aspects of fluency, recognition, and sophistication in the use of the national language compared to the Malay and Indian students. Nevertheless, the descriptive findings revealed that only the Malay students strongly upheld the national language, while the Indian and Chinese students moderately upheld the national language.

Table 7. One Way ANOVA Analysis on Ethnic Differences of Upholding the National Language

| Ethnic | Mean | Standard Deviation | Level* | F | P |
|---------|------|--------------------|----------|--------|------|
| Malays | 3.09 | 0.44 | High | 65.116 | .000 |
| Chinese | 2.54 | 0.42 | Moderate | | |
| Indians | 2.98 | 0.50 | Moderate | | |

*1.00 – 1.99 = low, 2.00 – 3.00 = moderate, 3.01 – 4.00 = high.

Table 8. Tukey HSD Analysis on Post-hoc Differences of Upholding the National Language

| (I) Ethnic | (J) Ethnic | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | P |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Malays | Chinese | -.55678* | .04899 | .000 |
| | Indians | .11373 | .07301 | .265 |
| Chinese | Malays | .55678* | .04899 | .000 |
| | Indians | -.44305* | .07824 | .000 |
| Indians | Malays | -.11373 | .07301 | .265 |
| | Chinese | .44305* | .07824 | .000 |

Discussion

This study highlights that ethnic groups play an important role in issues concerning the upholding of the national language in Malaysia. In accordance with the multiethnic society, this study enlightened the three major ethnic groups (i.e., Malay, Chinese, and Indian). The findings proved that the Chinese students were less interested in upholding the national language in all three critical dimensions compared to the other ethnic groups in Malaysia. The Indians were also less interested in upholding the national language, but there was no significant difference when a comparison was made between the ethnic groups. The results also proved that the Malays themselves are beginning to lose their sophistication in the use of the Malay language, even though it is their mother tongue. This study provides an important fact due to the current situation of emphasizing the ethnic factor in the formulation of government policies and planning, especially in matters of nation development among graduate students in Malaysia.

This research signals that the nation is experiencing a crisis of confidence towards the national language as a language of higher knowledge as a tool for the advancement of the people of Malaysia. With policies that do not fully support the upholding of national language in higher education, it is not impossible that

non-Bumiputras continue to degrade this language as a language of civilizational development. It cannot be denied that the spirit of language ethnocentricity among the Chinese is still strong, which makes it difficult to promote the national language among them. This finding has also been interpreted to mean that the ethnic identity factor can be looked at as the main agenda for upholding the national language as the national identity for the sake of uniting the multi-ethnic communities in Malaysia.

Proven that in this globalisation era, several studies in this country since a decade ago until now have also shown the same trend regards on the Chinese students are less keen on upholding the national language (Juriah Long, 2010), have a negative attitude towards the national language (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al., 2010), are moderately skilled at writing in Malay (Norshimah et al., 2012), the level of proficiency in the Malay Language among Chinese students is weak and unsatisfactory (Ooi Chwee Hwa et al., 2014), the acceptance of the national language among Chinese students in UPM is at a moderate level (Mohd Mahadee (2015), Chinese speakers who attend Mandarin-medium schools are less proficient in Malay pronunciation (Lim & Lim, 2018), the degree of proficiency in Malay language morphology among Chinese students is not up to par (Adon & Che Rodi, 2021).

Globally, the language ethnocentricity among Chinese remains the same. The current studies also found that Chinese immigrants still uphold their native language even though they are residing permanently in the USA (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009), and Chinese students tend to uphold their national language in different ways (Gu, 2011; Lai, 2011). It cannot be denied that ethnicity issues, especially those that involve ethnic Chinese across countries, can be related to the extent of their acceptance of the national language of the country in which they are residing.

Chinese in particular have a strong attachment to their ethnic identity, especially when it comes to language. In other words, those with high ethnolinguistic vitality will strongly identify with their group (i.e., ethnic group) and have strong group membership (Ying, Heng, & Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, 2015). The spirit of ethnocentricity in language among Chinese is believed to stem from the superior mentality of Chinese civilization and the teachings of Confucius, Buddhism, and Taoism, which stress bonding within ethnic groups. The Chinese strongly believe in the philosophy that language is an important key that symbolizes the Chinese race compared to other aspects of Chinese culture (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

There is the fact that, as a minority group, the Chinese believe that they must be consistent in

preserving the elements of their ethnic identity. Phinney asserted that minority groups are more inclined than majority groups to examine ethnicity and to experience their ethnic distinctiveness (Goby, 2004). In fact, many of the studies that were carried out on the vitality of minorities and regional languages gave emphasis to the vitality of language among the minority groups (Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007; Goby, 2004; Golan-Cook & Olshtain, 2011). This is because in a multi-ethnic country, especially in the sphere of the ethnic majority, there is bound to be a strong attachment among the minority groups to maintain their identity for fear that their ethnic identity will become extinct due to assimilation by the identity of the ethnic majority. Most of them hold fast to the principle that language is the product of a sense of belonging to a particular group (Golan-Cook & Olshtain, 2011) and the ethnic affiliation to that group (Liebkind, 2010).

This issue needs more attention, and prolonged efforts are required by all parties, especially the government. The importance of preserving the native languages of the various ethnic groups cannot be denied, but they should not be perceived as a threat to national solidarity. The implementation of government policies needs to be streamlined and improved to foster a love for the national language without neglecting the native languages for the sake of preserving racial harmony, as provided for in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. It must be realized that the Malay Language, which is the national language under the Constitution, is balanced by Article 152 of the Constitution of Malaysia under Clauses (1)(a) and (b), which state that the use, teaching, and learning of any other languages are not prohibited or prevented, except for official purposes. Therefore, there are no human rights issues regarding language in Malaysia because the importance of the languages of the minority groups is also preserved under the Constitution.

As citizens of Malaysia, the people should be aware that Malay was chosen as the national language as privileged in the Constitution to unite the multi-ethnic society with its' various languages. The Malay language was chosen not because it is the language spoken by the ethnic majority in Malaysia per se. Rather, the Malay language is comprised of traditional elements that are based on the history of the country. It is a chronology of the social contract that was drawn up with the approval of all the ethnic groups and woven through by the principle of *jus soli*, which grants citizenship to non-Bumiputras.

The possession of a national language should not be viewed as an asset to the Malays alone but as an asset that is jointly owned by all the ethnic groups in Malaysia. Every citizen should adopt the attitude that the Malay language is a language of cultural solidarity that

unites heterogeneous people to achieve developed national status.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that ethnic identity plays a huge role in determining how successful the upholding of the national language in Malaysia will be. It is respectfully submitted that the Chinese continue to be a factor that hinders the upholding of the national language. This issue should be dealt with wisely and immediately by policymakers, especially through the education system, because educational institutions are an important medium for the spread of national ideologies from an early age and continuing into adulthood. This is so that the multi-ethnic society will be aware of the need to have a sense of unity in ensuring the survival of Malaysia's civilization.

Language, being the most important tool for integrating a multi-ethnic society, must be assimilated into the cultural life of all citizens, particularly in the context of a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia. Every ethnic group should overcome the ethnocentric language barriers so that the strong spirit of a single nation can be built. It is also submitted that the continued determination and commitment of the government is the key to ensuring the survival of the national language within the framework of a multi-ethnic society and the challenges of globalization.

It is again stressed here that the position of Malay as the national language should not be regarded as a threat to the growth of other languages in Malaysia because the preservation of the other languages is also clearly guaranteed by provisions in the Constitution of Malaysia. Not only that, the position of the Malay language and the special rights of the Malays are not related in any way because the Malays do not receive any benefits or privileges whatsoever from the establishment of Malay as the national language of Malaysia (Awang Sariyan, 2006). Instead, the main agenda for making Malay the national language is to generate solidarity and a spirit of loyalty and patriotism for the country.

Hence, the Malaysian government itself must first and foremost be fully committed to upholding the national language, regardless of the need to strengthen the use of English as a global language. Efforts to uphold the national language should be given high priority without having to compete with other languages. Only then will we be able to bind the citizens of various ethnic groups to their national identity.

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