



The Role of Human Agents for Language Maintenance of a Chinese Community in Malaysia

 Teresa Wai See Ong,¹

¹School of Humanities,
Languages and Social Science,
Griffith University, *Australia*

Corresponding Author: Teresa Wai See Ong

Phone: +60124962236
e-mail: ongtesa@gmail.com

Article citation: Ong, T. W. S. (2019). The role of human agents for language maintenance of a Chinese community in Malaysia, *Applied Linguistics Research Journal*, 3(5): 1–18.

Received Date: August 21, 2019

Accepted Date: October 9, 2019

Online Date: November 5, 2019

Publisher: Kare Publishing

© 2018 Applied Linguistics Research Journal

E-ISSN: 2651-2629

ABSTRACT

Language planning and policy plays a vital role in language maintenance and language shift studies. In this study, the purpose was to examine the role of human agents in Chinese community language maintenance in Malaysia, specifically in Penang, due to its long history of being a Chinese settlement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 46 participants from three groups. Haugen's (1972) 10 ecological questions were employed to assist in data analysis. The findings showed that at the macro level, the Penang Government, the official actors did not play an important role in maintaining Chinese community languages in Penang, while at the meso and micro levels, the Chinese community in Penang and individual parents, the community-based and grassroots actors put in many efforts to ensure that the younger generation continues to learn and speak Chinese community languages. This study contributes to a deep understanding of the roles played and efforts made by three groups of human agents, macro, meso, and micro, in Chinese community language maintenance at three levels of organisation in Penang and that they differ due to socioeconomic pressure.

Keywords: Language maintenance; Language planning and policy; Human agents; Chinese community languages; Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Different communities speak different languages in everyday life as a way of maintaining their culture and ethnic identity. Loss of language symbolises not only loss of humanity but also intellectual sovereignty and the 'soul'. UNESCO (2010) estimates that 43% of the world's 6000 languages are currently endangered. This situation happens because many children from smaller communities are increasingly shifting to speak languages of wider communication and less of their community languages. It is an alarming situation and thus, there is a need to maintain and protect such languages from disappearing.

Malaysia is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural country situated in Southeast Asia. It has a population of 32.6 million (Department of Statistics, 2019a), which is made up of three main ethnic groups—Malays (69.3%), Chinese (22.8%), and Indians (6.9%)—and other smaller ethnic groups (1%). As far as linguistic repertoire is concerned, approximately 134 languages are in use and two are extinct (Simons & Fennig, 2018). As

instituted in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Bahasa Melayu is the country's sole national and official language and used as the language of administration, education, and the law courts, while English, the former colonial language, acts as the unofficial language and is taught in schools and extensively used in many commercial sectors. The Federal Constitution also provides language rights for the non-Malay ethnic groups and thus, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil are taught in schools; the former is regarded as ethnic language for the Chinese community while the latter is for the Indian community. In addition, both the Chinese and Indian communities retain their community languages for social interactions. The Chinese speak Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Hainan, and Teochew, while the Indians use Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, and Punjabi.

Within the Chinese community in Malaysia, many at present are shifting from speaking their community languages to the language of wider communication, Mandarin Chinese, due to influences of globalisation, job opportunities, and the rise of China in the economic world (Ting, 2006; Wang, 2016). In addition, the Malaysian government explicitly encourages for the use of Mandarin Chinese as the language of instruction in Chinese-medium primary schools and offers it as a subject in secondary schools, due to the international value it offers. As a result, there is a decline of Chinese community language use in many Malaysian-Chinese families, which leads to the questioning of the role and survival of Chinese community languages¹ within the Malaysian-Chinese society. This situation calls for an investigation to examine the role of human agents in Chinese community language maintenance in Malaysia.

This paper begins with a review of the literature of language planning and policy, which provides the framework to this study, followed by a description of the sociolinguistic context of the Chinese community in Penang where the study took place. The research question and methodology used are then discussed. The findings, which discuss the roles played and efforts made by three groups of human agents, macro, meso, and micro, involved in maintaining Chinese community languages in Penang, are categorised according to three levels of organisation. The final section summarises the findings and provides a conclusion to this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language planning and policy

Language planning and policy plays an important role in language maintenance and language shift studies because language maintenance activities usually involve planning efforts and policies. Language planning and policy scholars have long faced the question of how human agents interact at different levels of social structures and how their interaction leads to the reproduction of new social structures (Tollefson, 1991, 2006). In addressing such challenges, there are significant changes witnessed by language planning and policy in its definition and conceptual framework (Tollefson, 2013). The development of language planning and policy definitions will first be discussed followed by the changes in its conceptual framework.

The term 'language planning' dated back to Einar Haugen's (1959) seminal study on language standardisation, in which he defined it as a linguistic activity for "the guidance of writers and speakers in a non-homogenous speech community" (p. 8). Over the years, the scope and definition of language planning and policy have evolved. Raised by Cooper (1989) the matrix question of whether the concept of language planning is achievable, he argues that language planning should focus on studying "what actors attempt to influence what behaviours, of which people, for what ends, under what conditions, by what means, through what decision-making process, with what effect" (p. 98). Following Cooper's argument, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997, p. 3) further develop the definition of language planning into "an attempt by someone to modify the linguistic behaviour of

1 In this paper, 'Chinese community languages' refers to traditional community languages, such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainan, and Teochew, which were brought by the Chinese when they first arrived in Malaysia. While not initially a traditional community language, Mandarin Chinese was introduced later as the medium of instruction in Chinese-medium schools. In the findings section, the participants from the macro level refer to 'Chinese community languages' as Mandarin Chinese and traditional community languages, while the participants from the meso and micro levels refer to them as traditional community languages only.

some community for some reason”.

Shohamy (2006, p. 49) distinguishes between language planning and language policy; language planning refers to “intervention and control of language behaviour” while language policy is “a set of principles regarding language behaviour”. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996, p. 434) states that language policy is “a broad, overarching term for decisions on rights and access to languages and on the roles and functions of particular languages and varieties of language in a given polity”. Spolsky (2007, p. 2) considers language policy as “a social phenomenon, dependent on the consensual behaviours and beliefs of individual members of a speech community”. Based on Fishman’s concept of domain as a social space, Spolsky (2007) proposes a three-component framework for language policy: (1) language practices, (2) language ideologies or beliefs, and (3) language management. Language practice refers to the ecology of language in which language choices are selected based on the rules set in a speech community; language ideologies or beliefs refer to the beliefs about language and language use; and language management refers to the efforts made to manipulate language practice.

As reviewed above, there are many definitions of language planning and language policy. However, Fettes (1997) states that language planning is heavily influenced by language policy development and implementation. Thus, McCarty (2011, pp. 7-8) concludes that language planning and language policy are “not ... separable acts but [are] mutually constitutive, interdependent, and co-occurring sociocultural process[es]”. As a result, all forms of language planning and policy (i.e., Cooper, 1989; Fishman, 1974; Haugen, 1983; Hornberger, 1994; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), including status planning, corpus planning, prestige planning, and acquisition planning, are studied together.

Baldauf (1982) states that when conducting language planning and policy research, it is important to consider the role of human agents. Mirvahedi (2019) explains that in neo-classical research, scholars used to study language planning and policy activities as affairs of states where the focus lied on achieving its stated goals. When such activities took place, Tollefson (1991) comments that the fairness and equity of language planning and policy activities and their influences could be measured. Such approach would be useful for examining the macro form of agency but failed to describe how other levels of agency, such as meso and micro, might undermine or alter language planning and policy activities. Ball et al. (2012, p. 2) criticise such approach for neglecting all the “jumbled, messy, contested creative, and mundane social interactions” of language planning and policy activities. Therefore, when addressing issue of human agents in language planning and policy research, it is important to integrate “multiple levels of analysis” (Tollefson, 2015, p. 145). Mirvahedi (2019, p. 310) further describes that conducting multiple levels of analysis when studying language planning and policy activities will ensure a balance between “human life experiences and the societal structures”.

In postmodern scholarship, scholars, such as Hult (2010, 2015, 2017a, 2017b), recognise that when studying language planning and policy activities across levels and scales, many human agents are involved. This view aligns with Ricento and Hornberger’s (1996) argument that language planning and policy activities should be considered as a layered process because in the past, scholars have focused much on studying language planning agents at the macro level and often neglected the happenings at the micro level. Thus, Kaplan and Baldauf (2003, p. 201) state that fundamental work of language planning takes place at the macro level but micro level language planning is also important because “the impact of language planning and policy depends heavily on meso and micro level involvement and support”. Spolsky (2004) classifies the agents involved at the macro level as the nation-state, while micro level as various institutions such as local government, workplaces, religious organisations, schools, and families.

According to Liddicoat and Baldauf (2008), micro level agents usually carry out their own language planning activities such as promoting language use at their own initiatives. These activities, however, is separated from those at the macro level, which usually involves drafting and planning strategies. Thus, Baldauf (1993/1994) states that both levels should be considered in language planning and policy activities as they coexist and interact with one another. Liddicoat and Baldauf (2008) claim that the interactions that take place between macro and micro levels language planning can be complex, and at times, they may overlap. Therefore, meso level language

planning should be considered as it acts as a bridge channel in bridging the two levels. Hornberger and Johnson (2007) sum up that language planning and policy activities are similar to an onion; each layer represents different agents from macro to micro levels and they are interconnected and engage with one another.

Therefore, in what follows, I argue that language planning and policy plays a vital role in language maintenance and language shift studies. In particular, when examining language maintenance efforts of the Chinese community in Malaysian society, the efforts should be studied from a multidimensional perspective that involves macro, meso, and micro human agents. It is crucial to accommodate all level agents because their interactions are complex and thus, reflect the richness of language planning and policy activities.

2.2. The sociolinguistic context of the Chinese community in Penang

Penang is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural state situated in northern Peninsular Malaysia (Ben Said & Ong, forthcoming). With a population of 1.77 million (Department of Statistics, 2019), the Chinese remains one of the most important ethnic group due to its long-established history as a Chinese settlement since the 17th century. The Chinese came to Penang from Fujian province, China to trade with the Europeans (Ben Said & Ong, forthcoming). As the trading business flourished, more Chinese merchants came and set up shops in Penang. In addition, the tin mining industry in Taiping, Perak also attracted Chinese from other provinces in China to come and work as labourers. Later, they moved to bigger cities like Penang to seek better opportunities. Consequently, these Chinese established families and continued to stay in Penang until present day.

As the Chinese merchants and labourers originated from different provinces in China, their ability to speak different Chinese community languages including languages of wider communication uniquely contributes to the multilingual mosaic of Penang. Among the Chinese community, the Hokkiens is the largest ethnolinguistic group, contributing 63.9% of Penang's Chinese population (Department of Statistics, 2012). Thus, the majority of the Chinese community in Penang speak Penang Hokkien as their lingua franca (Guo, 2003). The Penang Hokkien Language Association encourages the Chinese in Penang to learn and speak Penang Hokkien in order to keep the language alive. Besides Penang Hokkien, other Chinese community languages, such as Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew, and Hainan, play a significant role in the linguistic scenery of Penang as they are commonly used in informal conversations. The only Chinese language taught officially in schools is Mandarin Chinese, which is now becoming the language of communication in many Chinese families in Penang (Wang, 2017). In addition to Chinese languages, Bahasa Melayu and English are widely spoken across different ethnic groups and used in government and private sectors. In summary, the linguistic scenery of the Chinese community in Penang is vibrant yet complex.

2.2.1. Penang state legislative assembly

It is important to briefly understand Penang state legislative assembly because the findings will include the roles played and efforts made by the Penang Government. Since Malaysia's independence in 1957, the Chief Minister of Penang (the head of government) has always been chosen from the Chinese ethnic group (Cahoon, 2019). Penang was previously ruled by the National Front Party but, since the 12th Malaysian General Election in 2008, Penang has been controlled by the Alliance of Hope ruling coalition. The current Malaysian Federal Government is also under the control of the Alliance of Hope ruling coalition. At present, the Penang state legislative assembly comprises of 40 elected policymakers: 37 seats by the Alliance of Hope ruling coalition, two seats by the National Front Party, and one seat by the Islamic Party of Malaysia. The Alliance of Hope ruling coalition is made up of the Democratic Action Party (19 seats), the People's Justice Party (14 seats), the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (2 seats), and the National Trust Party (2 seats).

3. Method

3.1. Research questions

With this diverse and complex linguistic scenery, the Chinese community in Penang serves as an excellent case to investigate the role of human agents in maintaining Chinese community languages in Malaysian-Chinese society. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the roles played by each group of participants to maintain Chinese community languages in Penang?
- (2) What language maintenance efforts are made by them?

3.2. Procedure

This study is part of a larger project on Chinese community language maintenance, which took place between August to September 2016 in Penang. The procedure for conducting the fieldwork is described below:

(i) Recruiting participants

The participants were recruited based on two criteria: (1) they must be able to speak one of the Chinese community languages—Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, or Hainan—in everyday life, and (2) they must be aged 30 and above. Because the focus of this study was on investigating the current Chinese community language situation of Penang, the younger generation was not considered as they rarely engage with Chinese community languages. A survey in the literature (see, for example, Ding, 2016; Wang, 2016) shows that the younger generation have begun using more Mandarin Chinese in their everyday conversations. The recruitment process went smoothly due to my position as an insider researcher who was part of the Chinese community in Penang and my connections with them. In total, 46 participants were recruited for this study.

(ii) Categorising participants

The recruited participants were categorised into three groups: (1) *official actors*—as policymakers or researchers from government think-tanks, they play a role in representing Penang and managing legislation, (2) *community-based actors*—as representatives from Chinese clan associations and language promoters, they play a role in channelling support and spreading beliefs to the community, and (3) *grassroots actors*—as individuals in the Chinese community in Penang, they play a role in interpreting the laws enforced by the government and putting them into action. Because the concept of domain plays an important role in language maintenance (Fishman, 1972), the recruited individuals were further categorised into five domains, adopted from Fishman, Cooper, and Ma's (1971) study: family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. All three categories of participants' profiles were listed in Appendix 1 (refer Tables 1, 2, and 3 respectively).

(iii) Interviewing participants

Semi-structured interviews were used as data source because it allows a researcher to find out what is going on in the mind of the participants and discover things that cannot be observed directly (Arksey & Knight, 1999). An interview guide was prepared in English and its focus was on participants' use of Chinese community languages in everyday life and their efforts to maintain them. The interviews were conducted in English to align with the language used for relevant publications. There were some participants who were not fluent in English, so their interviews were conducted in Penang Hokkien, Mandarin Chinese, or Cantonese. Because the participants trusted me as part of the Penang Chinese community, they were willing to engage in deep conversations. Their friendliness provided me with an advantage in terms of a willingness to share insights that an outsider researcher may not have been able to access. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour.

(iv) Processing data

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and apart from several changes for the sake of intelligibility, the morphosyntax was not corrected to retain its authenticity. All participants'

names were removed to protect their confidentiality and they were given pseudonyms for identification purposes. There were several interviews that were conducted in Chinese community languages and Mandarin Chinese because the participants were not fluent in English. These interview recordings were translated to English to align with the rest of the transcripts. When the transcripts were ready, they were brought back to the participants to check for accuracy. Content analysis was performed through thematic analysis in order to discover the deeper meaning of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007), in this case the efforts made by human agents to maintain Chinese community languages in Penang. Haugen's (1972) 10 ecological questions were used as a scaffolding device for the analysis. The questions are provided in Appendix 2.

4. Results and Discussion

The results from the analysis are presented according to three levels of organisation in Penang: (1) the macro level (the Penang Government), (2) the meso level (the Chinese community in Penang), and (3) the micro level (individual parents).

4.1. The macro level: The Penang government

This section presents the findings about the happenings at the macro level, which is the Penang Government. The discussion begins with the role played and efforts made by the official actors group in relation to Chinese community language maintenance in Penang, followed by the opinions from the community-based and grassroots actors about those official actors' role and efforts. Notably, the official actors group interpreted Chinese community languages as Mandarin Chinese together with traditional community languages, while the community-based and grassroots actors groups interpreted them as traditional community languages only.

According to the voices of the official actors group, Michael stated that the Penang Government's policy supports the diversity of cultures from all ethnic groups in Penang, which was evidenced in his statement:

Our policy comes from the perspective of celebrating diversity rather than homogenisation of cultures. We believe in freedom of choice. You can have unity and diversity, you can have four or five national languages, different regions speaking different languages and you can learn them all, it's not hard.

Consequently, the Penang Government encourages the growth of community language education, in which they meant by Mandarin Chinese and Tamil medium education for the Chinese and Indian communities respectively, and they believe in providing freedom to the people of Penang to choose the most suitable education for their children. Michael said that the Penang Government employs an approach that celebrates diversity so that every ethnic group can integrate and stay united. Toby further explained that celebrating diversity means that the Penang's society provides all languages, including community languages, with a space to grow so that they will not disappear in the near future. In regard to community language education, Timmy mentioned that in addition to the funds provided by the Malaysian Federal Government (as education lies within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government), the Penang Government also provides annual funds to Chinese- and Tamil-medium schools, as well as religious schools for upgrading purposes. This was an effort by the Penang Government to support the maintenance of community language education despite the fact that there were no Hokkien- or Cantonese-medium schools. Thus, they supported the learning of Mandarin Chinese and Tamil, which are considered the mainstream languages for community language education. These funds also acted as an effort for the Penang Government to showcase their policy of celebrating diversity and supporting the use of a wide variety of languages.

In celebrating diversity, Michael added that the Penang Government is always willing to provide funds for cultural events that are organised by cultural experts and assist in promoting the events. He urged the society not to be shy to approach them with proposals on such events because maintaining community languages, in particular Penang Hokkien, means maintaining Penang's culture, heritage, and identity. In addition to funding assistance, Felicia stated that

tourism brochures are distributed in different languages, which signifies one of the efforts made by the Penang Government in supporting multilingualism through the promotion of a wide variety of languages. Alicia concluded that with the policy, funds, and promotion, the Penang Government plays an important role in encouraging the Penang's society to use their community languages more often in everyday life.

Despite the positive responses provided by the official actors group regarding their efforts and role in maintaining Chinese community languages in Penang, the community-based and grassroots actors had fairly negative responses. Regarding the Penang Government's policy, Jonathan mentioned:

"I don't think there are policies by the [Penang] Government in promoting Chinese community languages."

Jonathan could not see the government taking actions to maintain and protect community languages, including Chinese community languages. To him, the responsibility to ensure that these languages continue to be spoken in Penang's society should lie within the hands of the Penang Government. Instead, he observed no written policy about the maintenance of Chinese community languages because these languages lack of economic value as compared to dominant languages such as Mandarin Chinese and English. He felt there were hardly any spaces for these community languages to grow even though the Government emphasised that community languages should be used in everyday life and that the cultural values of these languages are important for heritage preservation.

Regarding the education funds, even though the Penang Government provided annual funds to school, those in the education domain complained that the funds were distributed unfairly to the Chinese-medium schools. Joseph explained:

The [Penang] Government considers per capital growth, meaning they will give the funds to you according to the number of students in schools. One student is for how much, then the bigger schools get more funds and the smaller schools definitely have a shortage of funds.

Because smaller schools struggled to survive due to lack of funding, Joseph suggested that the Penang Government should look more closely into the issue of funds and change their strategy in assisting the schools. For the cultural event funds, Gareth did not think that the Penang Government was sincere to help. His organisation, which focuses on encouraging the society to speak Penang Hokkien, approached the Penang Government with a proposal to revert the current language situation from Mandarin Chinese to Penang Hokkien because Penang Hokkien is considered as a cultural asset of Penang. The proposal adopted the example based on Hong Kong's language situation where Cantonese remains the lingua franca despite English and Mandarin Chinese are used officially. However, the proposal was turned down because the Penang Government did not have similar view with them. The only positive feedback from the community-based and grassroots actors was that the tourism brochures were distributed in different languages and they benefited those who are not fluent in Bahasa Melayu or English. However, they claimed that these publications were for communication purposes and not part of language maintenance efforts.

In summary, at the macro level, the community-based and grassroots actors did not have parallel views with the official actors about Chinese community language maintenance in Penang. Although the official actors explained their policy, funds, and promotional efforts in relation to celebrating diversity and maintaining community languages, in particular Chinese community languages, the community-based and grassroots actors felt that the roles played by the official actors were not big and the efforts made were insincere as they were mainly for communication purposes. The different views across the three groups of participants happened may be due to lack of effective public education provided to the society in Penang.

4.2. The meso level: The Chinese community of Penang

This section presents the findings related to the happenings at the meso level, which is the Chinese community of Penang. First, the official actors' views on the government education policy

is discussed, followed by the various language maintenance efforts made by various language promoters and Chinese clan associations in Penang and their roles in this issue.

Representing the official actors group, Timmy explained that efforts to learn Chinese community languages should come from the Chinese community and individuals outside the formal schooling sector. He provided his reasons:

The reason is that not everybody can master all the languages. If you can do that, it means you don't learn about technology, engineering, maths. So, there is a capacity, constraint of a student. You cannot fit in too many languages, you cannot fit too many languages and overload them. Then they don't have interest in maths and sciences. So from a practical view, the [Federal] Government divides people based on the needs of the country. Language is important but you cannot have a broad, too broad spectrum and train in five languages, it's impossible!

Because some students perform better in science subjects while others excel in humanities, the government's education policy employs a holistic approach and not only focuses on languages. Therefore, at the meso level, the Chinese community would play a crucial role in maintaining Chinese community languages in Penang.

According to the opinions by the community-based actors group, there were many Chinese clan associations that conducted weekly Chinese community language classes for the public so that they could learn these community languages and speak to friends and family. These classes were also catered for employees in hospitals and Government departments who were transferred from other states. As Penang Hokkien differs from other Hokkiens and is an important language of communication in Penang especially for the older generation, it is important for those employees to learn basic phrases so that they could conduct basic conversations with the older generation. Some clan associations also published language books and CDs as resources so that children can learn the community languages. Suzy mentioned that she made a wordlist for Penang Hokkien and distributed to friends who were interested to learn the language. Eventually, her wordlist turned into a dictionary as she kept adding vocabulary. She also illustrated each vocabulary with sample sentences. Besides Suzy's Penang Hokkien dictionary, there was another bilingual Penang Hokkien dictionary published in 2016 and is available in all major bookstores in Malaysia. When the fieldwork was conducted, Jackson informed that he was working on a Penang Hokkien proverb book and his intention was that the proverb book could help document the language for the younger generation. Frank added that there were children's poems, ditties, and rhymes published in Penang Hokkien and are available in bookstores. In addition to efforts associated with literacy, some clan associations also organised cultural events such as open houses where they invited the society to participate without charge. During these events, there would be singing competition in Chinese community languages and making cultural handicrafts. Such events would promote the use of Chinese community languages as well as maintaining their cultures.

For entertainment, several community-based actors explained that in 2017, they assisted in producing a Penang Hokkien movie entitled *Hai Kinn Sin Loo* (translated as 'you mean the world to me') and was released in cinemas throughout Malaysia. The Teochew Opera Museum also conducted opera performances in Teochew. According to Mary, appreciation of art should be based on a different perspective and not purely focused on language:

I think that the understanding is not a problem because we don't understand Italian but we still enjoy Italian opera shows. I think besides understanding the art, we can still appreciate it from different perspectives and the feelings in it.

She emphasised that maintaining a language is similar to maintaining its culture. Emily from the family domain shared a similar view that she was fond of watching Cantonese opera performances and hoped that the younger generation could learn to appreciate these performances. In addition, she always serves Cantonese cuisine during festivals as part of her way of maintaining the Cantonese culture. According to several representatives from the various Chinese clan associations, they mentioned that their associations would also serve traditional cuisine according to their respective ethnolinguistic group during festivals.

In addition to using Chinese community languages for entertainment purposes, Chinese community languages were used in religious context. In the Buddhist temples, there were chanting sessions in Penang Hokkien. Henry explained that as a monk, he conducts regular dharma talks in Penang Hokkien and Teochew for the older generation as they are not familiar with Mandarin Chinese. Similarly, in the Christian churches, Aiden, a pastor, also conducts weekly sermon service in Penang Hokkien for the older generation while for the youth group, the service would be held in Mandarin Chinese and English.

All in all, the Chinese clan associations and language promoters spread this awareness of maintaining Chinese community languages through social media such as Facebook. William said:

We promote mostly in Facebook. Through Facebook, the younger generation knows our website. As we know, Facebook is mostly used by the younger generation, so they tend to learn Penang Hokkien through our online resources.

Suzy concluded that the Chinese community in Penang should start to value Chinese community languages and not feel ashamed of speaking these languages in the streets. Despite the spread, many grassroots actors claimed that they were unaware of such promotions and that there should be more public awareness for them.

In summary, at the meso level, the official actors did not play any role in maintaining Chinese community languages. All the language maintenance efforts made were by various Chinese clan associations and language promoters. Although they did not have the power to implement laws like policymakers, they acted as a bridge to connect between the three groups of participants. Despite the Chinese clan associations encouraging the society to participate in the respective language maintenance events, many grassroots actors were not keen about them. This may be caused by the current shift in focusing on learning and speaking languages of wider communication only. Thus, the Chinese community languages should be revalued so that the society could see the significant value of these languages.

4.3. The micro level: Individual parents

This section presents the findings on the happenings at the micro level, individual parents. First, the opinions provided by the official actors in relation to children's education are discussed, followed by the role played and efforts made by individual parents, which are represented by community-based and grassroots actors.

As education has an influence on the growth of children (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011), Chinese parents in Malaysia are keen in making sure their children attend reputable schools and excel in public examinations. They also send their children for extra private lessons after school hours in hope that the children will achieve good grades and secure a place in the public universities or scholarships from overseas institutions. Representing the opinions of official actors group, Alicia commented that this situation has influenced many parents to focus on mainstream languages, such as Bahasa Melayu, English, and Mandarin Chinese, which led to their lack of appreciation for the values of Chinese community languages. Timmy explained that nowadays, many Chinese parents, including some from the non-Chinese background, send their children to Chinese-medium schools to learn Mandarin Chinese because Mandarin Chinese is predicted to become the most important language in the future due to China's influence in the world's economy. Consequently, the rate of enrolment for Chinese-medium schools in Penang has increased tremendously in recent years.

Due to such situation, many parents have abandoned the speaking of Chinese community languages at home as they shifted to focus on speaking mainstream languages such as English and Mandarin Chinese to their children. Suzy, from the community-based actors group, blamed parents for abandoning the responsibility to pass on Chinese community languages:

At home, that's the parents' fault. It's all to do with parents, if parents do not insist on speaking Penang Hokkien at home or Cantonese, then children are never going to learn them. That's all due to parents. Parents would blame the education system all the time but actually the real blame end with them because the education system for Chinese-medium schools is Mandarin Chinese for many years. But parents still insist

that their children speak Penang Hokkien with their family and it's their fault for not doing that anymore.

Gareth, also from the community-based actors group, claimed that propaganda such as 'Speak Mandarin' campaign has influenced many parents to refrain from speaking Chinese community languages to their children. Despite the negative responses from official and community-based actors, there were still some parents who realised that their community languages should be passed on to their children. Lucy from the family domain mentioned that occasionally, she speaks Cantonese to her children. Even though her children are young, they could still reply her using 'broken' Cantonese and she hoped that they would improve their fluency over time. Liam, also from the family domain, assured that he always tried to speak Hokkien to his son when there are opportunities, for example, during the weekends, as he believes that his son will one day pick up the language. Michael from the official actors group noted that children living in rural areas would have more opportunity to learn Chinese community languages than those living in urban areas because the older generation in rural areas do not know much Mandarin Chinese or English, and thus, forced the children to communicate in Chinese community languages.

In summary, at the micro level, the official actors did not play any role in maintaining Chinese community languages. There were no written policies to be implemented in home domain. While education is the main focus for parents in Malaysia, including the Chinese in Penang, many are currently sending their children to Chinese-medium schools to pick up mainstream languages including Mandarin Chinese. This situation has caused them unable to step back to appreciate Chinese community languages. Moreover, they were influenced by propaganda, which encourages parents to speak mainstream languages to children. Nevertheless, there were some parents from the grassroots actors group who played their role in making an effort to speak Chinese community languages to their children as they believed that the children would pick up those languages one day.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the roles played and the efforts made by three groups of participants in maintaining Chinese community languages in Penang. As Liddicoat and Baldauf (2008) claim, the micro level human agents are usually involved in carrying out language plans that are set up by the macro level human agents and thus, the interactions between both levels are complex and need careful consideration when conducting language planning and policy activities. The meso level human agents also play a role in bridging the interactions between the macro and the micro level human agents and therefore, they need to be included in language planning and policy activities. Hence, in this paper, the three groups of participants recruited, which represent the human agents as stated by Liddicoat and Baldauf (2008), were official actors, community-based actors, and grassroots actors.

As the findings showed, the three levels of organisations in Penang (macro, meso, and micro) demonstrated different degree of efforts and roles played by three groups of human agents in supporting the maintenance of Chinese community languages. At the macro level, there was a lack of effort made by the official actors, mainly due to the government policies supporting only languages of wider communication. Consequently, the community-based and grassroots actors claimed that those efforts were insincere. At the meso level, various Chinese clan associations and language promoters have put in many efforts to maintain the community languages. At the micro level, some individual parents have started to realise their lack of efforts to ensure the languages are continued to be spoken by their children and thus, they started speaking the languages to their children. Given such findings, my conclusion is that there is a gap between the three groups of participants due to different aspirations and goals to maintain Chinese community languages in Penang. This gap indicates that there is lack of a comprehensive strategy to link the government policies and language related activities at the macro, meso, and micro levels. There needs to be a strategy to encourage for the use of Chinese community languages within the Chinese community in Penang and to re-evaluate the values of Chinese community languages. It is through such

strategy that the role and survival of Chinese community languages can be prolonged and that these languages can be passed on to future generations.

Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the Griffith University International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (GUIPRS) and the Griffith University Postgraduate Research Scholarship (GUPRS), project number GU Ref No: 2016/409.

References

- Arskey, H., & Knight, P. T. (1999). *Interviewing for social scientists: An introductory resource with examples*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baldauf, R. B. Jr. (1982). The language situation in American Samoa: Planners, plans and planning. *Language Planning Newsletter*, 8(1), 1-6.
- Baldauf, R. B. Jr. (1993/1994). "Unplanned" language policy and planning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 14, 82-89.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500002828>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., Hoskins, K., & Perryman, J. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. London: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203153185>
- Ben Said, S., & Ong, T. W. S. (forthcoming). Tracing linguistic changes on shop signs in Malaysia: A diachronic examination of George Town, Penang. *Socjolingwistyka Yearbook*, 33.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cahoon, B. (2019). *Malay States*. Retrieved from https://www.worldstatesmen.org/Malay_states.htm#Penang on 18 June 2019.
- Cooper, R. L. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2012). *Statistics year book Malaysia 2011*. Retrieved from http://www.statistics.gov.my/portal/download_Buku_Tahunan/files/BKKP/2011/Buku_Tahunan_Perangkaan_Malaysia_2011%5BLaporan_Lengkap%5D.pdf on 15 June 2019.
- Department of Statistics. (2019a). *Current population estimates, Malaysia, 2018-2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.dosm.gov.my/> on 15 June 2019.
- Department of Statistics. (2019b). *Population quick info*. Retrieved from <http://pqi.stats.gov.my/searchBI.php> on 15 June 2019.
- Ding, S. L. (2016). The role of parents in heritage language maintenance in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies*, 5(1), 15-27.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fettes, M. (1997). Language planning and education. In R. Wodak & D. Corson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education, Volume 1: Language policy and political issues in education* (pp. 13-22). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Fishman, J. A. (1972). Language maintenance and language shift as a field of inquiry: Revisited (1968). In Anwar S. D. (Ed.), *Language in sociocultural change: Essays by Joshua A. Fishman* (pp. 76-134). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fishman, J. A. (1974). Language planning and language planning research: The state of the art. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in language planning* (pp. 15-33). The Hague: Mouton.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111583600>
- Fishman, J. A., Cooper, R. L., & Ma, R. (1971). *Bilingualism in the Barrio*. Bloomington, IN: Research Centre for the Language Sciences, Indiana University.
- Guo, X. (2003). Malaixiya Bincheng huaren shehui de yuyan shenghuo [Language situation among the Chinese community in Penang, Malaysia]. *Journal of Chinese Sociolinguistics*, 1, 125-134.
- Haugen, E. (1959). Planning for a standard language in modern Norway. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 1(3), 8-21.
- Haugen, E. (1972). The ecology of language. In E. Haugen (Ed.), *The ecology of language. Essays by Einar Haugen (Selected and introduced by Anwar S. Dil)* (pp. 325-339). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Haugen, E. (1983). The implementation of corpus planning: Theory and practice. In J. Cobarrubias & J. A. Fishman (Eds.), *Progress in language planning: International perspectives* (pp. 269-289). Berlin: Mouton.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1994). Literacy and language planning. *Language and Education*, 8(1-2), 75-86.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789409541380>

- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2007). Slicing the onion ethnographically: Layers and spaces in multilingual language education policy and practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(3), 509–532.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00083.x>
- Hult, F. M. (2010). Analysis of language policy discourses across the scales of space and time. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 202, 7–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2010.011>
- Hult, F. M. (2015). Making policy connections across scales using nexus analysis. In F. M. Hult, & D. C. Johnson (Eds.), *Research methods in language policy and planning: A practical guide* (pp. 217–231). Malden, MA: Wiley.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118340349.ch19>
- Hult, F. M. (2017a). Nexus analysis as scalar ethnography for educational linguistics. In M. Martin-Jones & D. Martin (Eds.), *Researching multilingualism: Critical and ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 89–104). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hult, F. M. (2017b). Discursive approaches to policy. In S. Wortham, D. Kim, & S. May (Eds.), *Discourse and education* (3rd ed.) (pp. 111–121). New York, NY: Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02243-7_22
- Kaplan, R. B., & Baldauf, R. B. Jr. (1997). *Language planning: From practice to theory*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Kaplan, R. B., & Baldauf, R. B. Jr. (2003). *Language and language-in-education planning in the Pacific Basin*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-0145-7>
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Baldauf, R. B. Jr. (2008). Language planning in local contexts: Agents, contexts and interactions. In A. J. Liddicoat & R. B. Jr. Baldauf (Eds.), *Language planning and policy: Language planning in local contexts* (pp. 3–17). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847690647>
- McCarty, T. L. (2011). Entry into conversation: Introducing ethnography and language policy. In T. L. McCarty (Ed.), *Ethnography and language policy* (pp. 1–28). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mirvahedi, S. H. (2019). Sociological realism and language policy analysis: A way forward. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 20(3), 309–330.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2018.1520472>
- Phillips, D. A., & Lowenstein, A. E. (2011). Early care, education, and child development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 483–500.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.031809.130707>
- Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1996). English only worldwide or language ecology? *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(3), 429–452.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3587692>
- Ricento, T., & Hornberger, N. H. (1996). Unpeeling the onion: Language planning and policy and the ELT professional. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(3), 401–427.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3587691>
- Shohamy, E. G. (2006). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches*. New York, NY: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203387962>
- Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2018). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world* (21st ed.). Dallas, TX: SIL International. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnologue.com> on 15 June 2019.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spolsky, B. (2007). Towards a theory of language policy. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 22(1), 1–14.
- Ting, S. H. (2006). A case study of language use with the younger generation in Foochow families. In *Proceedings of 8th Biennial Conference of the Borneo Research Council*. Kuching: Borneo Research Council.
- Tollefson, J. W. (1991). *Planning language, planning inequality: Language policy in the community*. London: Longman.
- Tollefson, J. W. (2006). Critical theory in language policy. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 42–59). New York, NY: Blackwell.

- Tollefson, J. W. (2013). Language policy in a time of crisis and transformation. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Language policies in education: Critical issues* (pp. 11-34). New York, NY: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203813119>
- Tollefson, J. W. (2015). Historical-structural analysis. In F. M. Hult & D. C. Johnson (Eds.), *Research methods in language policy and planning* (pp. 140–151). Malden, MA: Wiley.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118340349.ch13>
- UNESCO. (2010). UNESCO Atlas of the world's languages in danger. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/en/statistics.html> on 7 October 2019.
- Wang, X. M. (2016). The Chinese language in the Asian diaspora: A Malaysian experience. In G. Leiner, A. Hashim & H. G. Wolf (Eds.), *Communicating with Asia: The future of English as a global language* (pp. 205-215). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, X. M. (2017). Family language policy by Hakkas in Balik Pulau, Penang. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language: Special Issue on Language Planning and Multilingual Malaysia*, 224, 87-118.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2016-0058>

Appendix 1

Table 1. List of participants for official actors group

Name	Gender	Languages Spoken	Origin
Timmy	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Cantonese
Michael	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien	Malay
Bob	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Teochew	Teochew
Steven	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hokkien
Richard	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Alicia	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
Toby	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Teochew	Hokkien
Robbie	M	Malay, English, Tamil	Indian
Gary	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
Keith	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Charles	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Cantonese
Daniel	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
Felicia	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Thai, Swedish	Hokkien

Table 2. List of participants for community-based actors group

Name	Gender	Languages Spoken	Origin
Frank	M	Malay, English, Penang Hokkien	Hokkien
Gareth	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Suzy	F	English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien	New Zealander
William	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hokkien
Jackson	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Hokkien
Rob	M	English, Penang Hokkien	Hokkien
Alice	F	Malay, English, Penang Hokkien	Hokkien
Craig	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
Nicholas	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainan, Taishan	Cantonese
Jonathan	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainan, Korean, French	Hainan
Peter	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Benjamin	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainan	Hainan
Mary	F	Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Hokkien

Table 3. List of participants for grassroots actors group

Name	Gender	Languages Spoken	Origin
<i>Family domain</i>			
Lucy	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hokkien
Mark	M	Malay, English, Penang Hokkien, Hainan	Hainan
Liam	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Taishan	Cantonese
Emily	F	Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Cantonese
<i>Friendship domain</i>			
Ethan	M	Malay, English, Penang Hokkien	Hokkien
Alex	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hokkien
Jacob	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Teochew	Teochew
Matthew	M	English, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese	Cantonese
<i>Religion domain</i>			
Belle	F	Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Cantonese
Henry	M	Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainan	Hainan
Aiden	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hokkien
Catherine	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Hokkien
<i>Education domain</i>			
Helen	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Samuel	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Hainan
Joseph	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew	Hokkien
Anthony	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
<i>Employment domain</i>			
Heather	F	Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka	Hakka
Janice	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese	Taishan
Issac	M	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew	Teochew
Hannah	F	Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, Penang Hokkien, Hainan	Hainan

Appendix 2

Haugen's (1972, pp. 336-337) 10 ecological questions:

- What is its classification in relation to other languages?
- Who are its users?
- What are its domains of use?

- What concurrent languages are employed by its users?
- What internal varieties does the language show?
- What is the nature of its written traditions?
- To what degree has its written form been standardised; that is, unified and codified?
- What kind of institutional support has it won, either in government, education, or private organisations, either to regulate its form or propagate it?
- What are the attitudes of its users towards the language, in terms of intimacy and status, leading to personal identification?
- Where does the language stand and where it is going in comparison with other languages of the world?