

Language Shift in Chinese-Indonesian Community

David Werhoru¹, Alex Jhon¹

¹ Language Center, English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480

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Abstract: The article explored the language shift within the Chinese-Indonesians community in Indonesia. For this study, three main respondents were acquired who are all Chinese-Indonesian females, aged 19-22 years old. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire to value their preferences regarding the language usage as well as the history of the respondents' language acquisition and proficiency specifically on the Mandarin language which is considered as the respondents' supposedly heritage language. Besides the questionnaire, the respondents were also interviewed which then transcribed and analyzed thoroughly to examine the significance of the language shift in each of the participants' language domains; family, institutional and social domains. The results of this study has proven that there are several inducing language shift factors explicitly occurred in Indonesia, mostly the Capital of Indonesia, Jakarta, such the lack of culture exposure, learning obligation, and language domain, the confusion over own ethnolinguistics identity, the socially and politically indigenous oppression, and finally the traumatic events that was experienced by the present nor past generations of Chinese-Indonesians.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia diverse history, there has been a controversial stigma that reflects the minorities such as the Chinese descendants in Indonesia to be the second-rate citizens albeit the contribution they have been making for the country throughout history. According to Xu and Ingketrina (2016), these Chinese-Indonesians were said to experience inappropriate and unfair treatment from the late 16th century until the late 1990s. This led to the present conditions where some Chinese-Indonesians have a very low to absolutely no competency in using their own supposedly heritage language, which is Mandarin (or Putonghua), and instead, only assume the ethnolinguistic identity as being a native Indonesian and occasionally an English language speaker. This is called a language shift. Jendra defined language shift as a form of full amount language change; this concept refers to a situation where a speech community begins to use a new language entirely, or in other words, discontinues the use of their former language for their communication needs (Jendra, 2012). Meanwhile, Kandler, Unger and Steele stated that language shift is the process, whereby members of a community in which more than one language is spoken, abandon their original vernacular language in

favor of another (Kandler, Unger, & Steele, 2010). From the above descriptions given, language shift can be simply put as a process by which a community more or less gradually abandons its original language and via an intermediate stage of bilingualism, adopts another. Need to be noted that, a shift from one language to another cannot be stimulated without any intervening period of bilingualism in the 'shifting' community. Many language shifts involve more than one minority language, whose positions are weakened not only by the dominant language but also by each other—this is what makes language shift occur.

Holmes stated that when language shift occurs, it usually shifts towards the language of dominant powerful group—this dominant group has (possible) difficulties in adopting the language of a minority (Holmes, 2013). In short, it is safe to say that the language shift mostly occurs when the user or community selects new language to replace the previous language. This language shift transpires because the specific language switches to another either dominant or prestigious language, which then being used in the domains. However, it needs to be noted that there's a possibility of language retention in community languages still conceivably uses the languages collectively in the domains of traditional usage. In relevance, it is believed that, when

minorities value their own native or heritage language and has certain degree of respect for it, language shift will not occur. On the contrary, if the minorities does not give enough valorization to own heritage language, language shift will most likely occur. In general, the identity of minority is defined as a group of people whose physical or cultural characteristics are singled-out as the others within the society they live for (most of the time) differential/unequal treatment. In addition, it is also well-recorded throughout the common sense and history that generally these minorities have always been the objects of discrimination and are usually excluded from full participation in the life of the society. In this research, the Chinese-Indonesians community fits perfectly as a case of being a minority of Indonesia. In relevance, there have been evidences about forced assimilation and anti-Chinese movements confirmed within the papers by Hoon (2011) and Setijadi (2006) within the historical spectrum of Indonesia that supported the clarification of oppression by fear in Mandarin language or even admitting a Chinese ethnic identity.

Numbers of speakers of a language do have its distinction on effective language maintenance; it seems apparent enough that the smaller the size of a community, the stronger the threat of language shift and death. If the language is used less frequently, either in constitutional or social contexts (especially in the home domain), then it would be a prevailing indication of a latent language shift, and in further possibility, language loss. In the Chinese-Indonesians case, the full range of language domains is well-known to be limited due to prejudicial and social factors. Moreover, in more general sense Holmes defined the most obvious factors for this phenomenon such as; losing the value for learning or using the language, social, economic, as well as political implications (Holmes, 2013). Nevertheless, there is no single factor of language shift that can stand alone. It means that not all of the factors listed above are included in every case, there are also other factors that may contribute to why Chinese-Indonesians shifted their ethnolinguistics identity. In addition, Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert and Leap, (2009) also stated that the cause of language shift is generally multiple and interrelated. By looking at these variables, the researcher is interested in the fact that many Chinese-Indonesians are beginning to lose the competence to fully use Mandarin as the supposedly one of many Chinese ethnic distinctions.

For this study, the researcher is mainly interested with the notion that there are several possible inducing specific language shift factors explicitly

transpired in Indonesia. One of these possible historical factors is said to have been initiated during the Dutch colony when the Chinese were accorded with special privileges as the middle class right below the Dutch (along with the Arabs and Indians) meanwhile the indigenous people of Indonesia were placed as the lower class (Davis, 2009). This is one of the possible aspects that started the whole Chinese-Indonesian racial jealousy by the indigenous people, called as '*pribumi*' and then sporadically became an act of revenge for generations by the act of racial discriminations towards the Chinese ethnicity. By utilizing ethnolinguistics perspective in analyzing the data, the researcher, aside from Holmes' theory on the factors of language shift, is interested with the other prominent factors that are predominantly occurred in Indonesia. These prominent factors are investigated by gathering data from the questionnaire and personal interviews regarding the language background, language preference as well as valuing own identity from the context of language and culture.

2 METHOD

The research instruments in this research consist of two types, a questionnaire, and a recorded interview. The first one, the questionnaire elicits each respondent's individual background, ranging from: education level, cultural background, age, family and social networks and language learning experience. The last one is doing a recorded interview approximately 20 minutes where each participant must answer several questions in the Indonesian language regarding language background, and preference of why they are less proficient or unable to speak or use Mandarin any longer. For the recorded interview, the researcher transcribes the recordings and then translates them into English. There are three female participants (AD, EN, and HL) who are all Chinese-Indonesians, aged 19-22 years old. Based on the questionnaire results, their first language is Indonesia and assume English to be as fluent as their Indonesian proficiency level. All of them have learned Mandarin from the educational institution but consider not to be a fluent Mandarin speaker.

The data collected from these two instruments are then reviewed and assessed to see the validity of the assumed language shift factors of the Chinese-Indonesians community in Indonesia. The questionnaire data are the basis of the background check for each participant, each section (language background, language proficiency, and language usage) are put into tables by using a Likert-scale

ranging from 1 to 5, 1 means NOT GOOD and 5 means EXTREMELY GOOD. For the interviews, the transcribed data are analyzed, essentially cropped and adjusted accordingly to the need of research objective which is to answer why do these \ Chinese ethnic descendants in Indonesia are incapable of speaking fluently or even having no skill in their own supposedly heritage language, Mandarin.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire is divided into three sections which inquire about the participant's language background, language proficiency, and finally language usage (along with its domain).

Table 1. Language background Questionnaire.

<i>LBQ</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>EN</i>	<i>HL</i>
1. Age	19	22	21
2. 1 ST L	INDO	INDO	INDO
3. 1 ST L from	Family	Family	Parents
4. 2 ND L	ENGL	ENGL	ENGL
5. 2 ND L from	School	Family	Parents & School
6. 3 ^{RDL}	MDRN	MDRN	MDRN
7. 3 ^{RDL} from	School	Family & school	School

All of the participants acknowledged that all of them speak Indonesian as their first language and they are all acquired from the family domain. HL specifically said she got it from her parents. All three respondents also claim English as the second language but have the different origin of acquisition, the AD said she got it from school, EN acquired English from family first and finally HL claimed both family and education domain that transpire her English skill. For the third language, interestingly all of them said to be Mandarin. This questionnaire is an open-ended question type so there was no request to fill in specific answers (see *Table 1*) from the respondents. All of the respondents said that they learned Mandarin from school, with an addition that EN also acquired it from her grandmother specifically.

Table 2. Language Proficiency Questionnaire

<i>LPQ</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>EN</i>	<i>HL</i>
Indonesian	4	4	5
English	4	4	3
Mandarin	1	1	1
Another language	French	N/A	1

In the assessment on their own languages proficiency, as can be seen from the *Table 2*, AD and EN valued their Indonesian skill to be nearly perfect by the scale of 4 and HL confidently stated that she has an extremely good Indonesian skill. AD and EN also have the similar answer with valuing their English proficiency by the scale of 4 meanwhile HL scored 3. HL may show modesty since later on in the interview she said that she has a friend in London whom she usually chats within English and she loves using English as well. Finally, all three respondent interestingly stated that their Mandarin skill is 'Not Good'. This shows that all of them have indeed valued Mandarin to be their least proficient language skill. In addition, AD added French as another language by the scale of 1, later in the interview, it was revealed that she is currently taking a French course for her study major.

Table 3. Language Usage Questionnaire

<i>LUQ</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>EN</i>	<i>HL</i>
IND	5 - everywhere	5	5
ENG	4 - Social media & university	5	5
MDR	2- To a relative	1	1
Others	French - 4 University lecturer	N/A	N/A

For this section (see *Table 3*), all three respondents said that they always use Indonesian everywhere and every day. For English, the AD said to use it often meanwhile EN and HL valued that they also use English all the time. For Mandarin, the AD said she rarely uses Mandarin, meanwhile, EN and HL stated they never use Mandarin. This is interesting because, from the interview, both EN and HL said that they are able to understand Mandarin (albeit passively). EN said that her family once a Khonghucu and still celebrate Chinese culture and with that, the usage of Mandarin language, meanwhile HL said Mandarin may still be of use only for Chinese New Year celebration or just watching the Mandarin-speaking news passively.

Meanwhile, from the recorded data, the detachment with own heritage identity, namely culture, and language can be explicitly seen within the nuclear family but not from the extended family. All three respondents said they still celebrate Chinese New Year or do some Chinese culture related traditions, but most of these are conducted in Indonesian and not Mandarin. Specifically, EN and

HL said that they're nuclear rarely conduct Chinese culture-related activities.

"Itu sih kalau di keluarga saya palingan kalau tiap Imlek aja, dari sisi mama saya karena masih idup.Karena dari sisi mama saya masih beragama Buddha jadi masih banyak yang pasang hio. Masih cengbeng juga, ziarah ke makam kungkung saya.Tapi kalau keluarga inti sih ga terlalu." (HL, 17 November 2017, original interview)

"Well, in my family, from my mother's side, we celebrate Chinese New Year.But my nuclear family, not so much, only during the gathering." (HL, November 17, 2017, our translation)

"Attachment... not really (thinking) Oh... once we did the money burning thing, we once celebrated Chinese New Year. Back then we were Khonghucu but now, not anymore. Rarely. But for my nuclear family. No more." (EN, November 17, 2017, our translation)

What can be inferred from HL and EN statements are that both of their extended family seems to still keep the Chinese ethnicity tradition however if it's within the nuclear family, it is considered to be seldom. When trying to investigate the possibility of language acquisition at home, as the supposedly first and main domain, it was discovered that lack of own family obligation to learn heritage language caused all respondents to have a very low Mandarin proficiency. During the interview, it was also discovered that there is a lack of domain of heritage language mostly in the family. All three respondents said that school or Mandarin courses are mostly why they have to speak Mandarin.

"Well, actually if I meet my grandmother, I am usually told to speak in English. No one forces me to learn Mandarin." (AD, November 17, 2017, our translation)

"My nuclear family doesn't oblige me to learn Mandarin (laughs). Because both of parents are coming from different tribes, they don't know official Mandarin. My extended family also the same. Socially, since I was born in Jakarta, so I don't use regional dialect nor Mandarin." (HL, November 17, 2017, our translation)

According to Xu & Ingkretia (2016), the Chinese Indonesians are facing conflict within their own identity, which occurred possibly due to avoid situations which would likely increase tension between them and the indigenous people. This can be

evidently stated in AD's statement when she said there's a mockery from the indigenous people or 'pribumi' when she speaks Mandarin with her friend on the street. The AD also said explicitly 99% meaning there is a 1% possibility of doubt.

"Sometimes being mocked by the indigenous people. I mean... we are Indonesian but on the road, those people called us, "Cici... cici..." if we are using the Chinese language. Being mocked... annoying." (AD, November 17, 2017, our translation)

In addition, HL gave evidence of conflict when she tried to explain about why she feels uncomfortable when someone asking her Chinese ethnicity, she was afraid to acknowledged here ethnicity because she remembered, or taught the dark history of 1998 tragedy which happened as the case of racial discrimination.

"... I understand about the 1998 phobias. My mother wouldn't let me go home by myself after school. Always... terrifying. Chinese people are afraid, especially those who are the living eyewitnesses of the 1998 tragedy. So yes, how to say it, if someone asked me, "Are you Chinese?" I may immediately feel afraid, will answer YES but still a bit terrified. Such as (thinking) a thought to take care of myself, for precaution if someone means ill." (HL, November 17, 2017, our translation)

HL's statement seems strongly describes external oppressive behaviors from the indigenous people manifested as a trauma caused by past tragedy passed down by her family who is the living witness of the 1998 tragedy. Her precautionary behaviors define one case to prove possible prejudice against the indigenous people of Indonesia created from generation to generation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on all of the findings and discussions, the researcher is interested in the fact that there are several inducing language shift factors explicitly occurred in Indonesia, mostly the Capital of Indonesia, Jakarta. These factors are such the lack of cultural exposure, learning obligation, and language domain, the confusion over own ethnolinguistics identity, the socially and politically indigenous oppression, and finally the traumatic events that were experienced by the present nor past generations of Chinese-Indonesians. Based on the three participants'

interviews, the results are as follows (the factors affecting language shift and the participants who are affected by (1) Culture exposure (AD, EN, HL), (2) Learning obligation (AD, EN, HL), (3) Language domain (AD, EN, HL), (4) Ethnolinguistics identity (AD, HL), (5) Indigenous oppression (AD), and finally (6) Traumatic experience (HL).

It would seem that the discrimination from the indigenous people of Indonesia and the traumatic events lore that have been passed down through generation may induce fear amongst the newer generations. This fear may lead to less valorization to own heritage language, especially within this oppressive acts from the indigenous people. In order to survive, the Chinese-Indonesian family may subdue to the reality and try to survive by focusing only on Indonesian language skills. Although nowadays, the Mandarin language is now being taught at school, this does not hinder the fact that the domains of language are still scarce except for educational institution. Family, as the basis of all language acquisition also plays an important part, however, based on the data, it was obvious that the nuclear family of each participant has not put any obligation to learn Mandarin, except EN's father. In addition, most of the nuclear families of Chinese-Indonesians tend to rarely celebrate or do things that are culturally related with Chinese ethnicity except if in a bigger community such as the extended family.

Although it seems that there has been a certain degree of language shift within the Chinese-Indonesians community in Indonesia, there is actually a focal domain to either start or impede the language shift process to progress any further the family domain. It is very crucial for the Chinese-Indonesian parents to display the right attitudes when discussing with their children regarding their native or heritage language. If the parents want to keep and continue to use his/her heritage language, a good family would need strong ties and must pass on their heritage language in the future if not, there will be language loss.

How to prevent language loss from a minority group such as the Chinese ethnicity of Indonesia? One way is by stressing out one's heritage language and culture to the next generation, valorizing them to a certain extent where it is still being used in certain domains. Moreover, parents sometimes do not pass down good remarks on being a Chinese ethnic to their children. For instance, in the case of HL, she was told by her mother that being a Chinese in Indonesia is considered to be unsafe such as riding a public transportation and worse, reminding the dark history of racial discrimination by the indigenous people, e.g.

May 1998 tragedy. These actions may cause the tendency to negatively fearing her own Chinese ethnolinguistic features, namely using the Mandarin language. In addition, Chinese-Indonesian parents, especially in a big city like Jakarta usually prefer to utilize and teach children nowadays the dominant language of either unified Indonesian or the lingua franca English rather than their native Chinese (and all varieties) language. A case like what EN experienced when her grandmother valorizes English more rather than the family heritage language has caused EN to consider herself to be more capable in English rather than the Mandarin language.

On a further note, if children from early age received only negative remarks about the usage of the heritage/native language, of course, there would be a possibility that these children would develop some discomfort or negative attitudes towards the Chinese language. This occurred in the case of the AD where she and her friends received negative remarks or bullying for using Mandarin in public by the indigenous people of Indonesia. This led her towards an attitude of fearing to use or even learn more Mandarin language outside her limited domains. In conclusion, as suggested by Noels (2014), diverse psychological approaches to ethnic identity, within different perspectives might give different kinds of relations between identity and language variation. Finally, it is essential to valorize the heritage or native language as equally important and to be used in many aspects such as social and cultural domains without the dominant society oppression. But is it possible in Indonesia where racism and bigotry still exist?

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