UC Journal, e-ISSN 2774-9401, Vol. 6, No. 2, November 2025, pp. 116-129

UC Journal: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/UC
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

CHINESE COMMUNITY LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: PERCEPTIONS OF AND EFFORTS MADE BY YOUNG MALAYSIANS IN PENANG

Teresa Wai See Ong*
Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore
ongtesa@gmail.com
*correspondence: ongtesa@gmail.com
https://doi.org/10.24071/uc.v6i2.13205
received 21 July 2025; accepted 9 December 2025

Abstract
In the present era, minority/less dominant languages are spoken lesser and lesser due to language shift that is taking place. This situation is worrying because these languages are facing endangerment. Hence, it urges for a call to examine people's perceptions of speaking them and efforts to maintain them. Using the Chinese community in Penang, Malaysia as a case study, this study investigates the stated issues. Data collection took place in 2016 with 22 young Malaysians aged 20-40 years old. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants and the transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the participants are keen about the continuation of speaking Chinese community languages due to three main reasons: (i) Chinese community languages are a representation of history and family roots, (ii) speaking to them represents possessing multiple identities and (iii) they act as a living culture. They reported that many efforts were made to maintain the continuous usage of Chinese community languages. This study concludes that youth need to be engaged with those efforts to ensure that the Chinese community languages do not disappear in the future. This can be done by including the use of digital technology in those efforts.

Keywords: Chinese community language, language maintenance effort, Malaysia, perceptions, use of technology

Introduction

In today's globalised world, majority/dominant languages, such as English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Arabic and Hindi, are widely spoken by young and older generations due to the perceived values these languages have for education and economy sectors. The less-dominant languages, particularly community languages, are being spoken lesser and lesser. This situation is worrisome because in the long run, the less-dominant languages including community languages will be lost and there will only be carbon copies of the young generation speaking majority/dominant languages. In other words, we are abandoning our unique characteristic of bi-/multilingualism and turning blocks of the world into monolingual societies.

This work is licensed under CC BY-SA.
Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Taking the case of a multilingual country in South-East Asia, Malaysia is a country with 34.1million people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025). It consists of three main ethnic communities – Bumiputras (58.1%), Chinese (22.4%) and Indians (6.5%) – and other small ethnic communities (13%). According to the Federal Constitution, Islam has a special religious status in the country but other religious denominations, such as Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity, are practised. Eberhard et al. (2024) report that there are currently 111 living indigenous languages in the country while two indigenous languages are now extinct.

Modern Malaysia is regarded as "ethnolinguistically dynamic" (Albury & Aye 2016, p. 71) due to its lively melting pot of ethnicities who practice multilingualism and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, it faced many challenges in the process of nation-building prior to independence in 1957. When the British colonised Malaya (previous name for Malaysia), they regarded the Malays as unskilled and unable to develop the colonial economy. As a result, they brought in Chinese and Indian migrants to work as labourers. These migrants brought along their community languages so that they were able to communicate and stay close to help one another. Each ethnic community was allocated a specific work domain, which resulted in an economic system that was structured according to ethnic groups and professions. Schools for the locals' and migrants' children were also divided according to different languages of instruction. In short, the colonial government did nothing to integrate the nation or establish a national identity—the migrants were living in their own enclaves "without the feeling of being part of a nation in the new land which [was] their host country" (Daud & Majid, 2019, p. 35). As Chai (1977, p. 5) asserts, the situation "provided no natural basis for national integration", which led to the "fragmentation of Malaysian society along ethnic and socioeconomic lines" (Albury, 2021, p. 2).

Following independence in 1957, the Malaysian government continued to face challenges in the process of nation-building as reflected in its policies. Daud and Majid (2019, p. 36) explain, "each ethnic [community] continues to maintain their own interests and identities without nurturing common shared values and national identity". At present day, Malaysia has developed into a contemporary nation. Some of the traits mentioned earlier have attenuated because each ethnic community has generally accepted one another. With the influence of local and global economic, social, and political forces, the boundaries between ethnic communities have become more fluid/porous, allowing for cross-cultural integration and acculturation (Mansor, 2000). Nevertheless, various ethnic communities are keen on cultivating their unique identity and maintaining their cultural heritage and traditions. As such, while Malaysia is branded as a unified and cohesive multicultural nation, smaller communities aim for more visibility and cultural recognition.

Influenced by economic and political pressure, as well as an exam-oriented education system, children in Malaysia can speak a minimum of two languages – Standard Malay (the country's sole official and national language) and English (the country's language of interethnic communication, and local and international trade) – due to the country's education system. Those children from smaller communities who undergo the Chinese or Tamil education system at primary level are able to speak an additional language, Mandarin Chinese or Tamil. Children living in East Malaysia also have the opportunity to learn indigenous languages in school. Despite

being bi-/multilingual, many children nowadays rarely speak community languages, which are regarded as languages spoken and passed down by their ancestors. For example, past studies conducted in various states in Malaysia, such as Ding (2016), Ong and Ben Said (2020), Ong and Ting (2023), Ong and Troyer (2024), Ting and Puah (2010) and Wang (2010, 2016, 2017), have demonstrated that many Chinese descendant children are no longer speaking Chinese community languages, such as Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Teochew, Cantonese and Foochow, and shifted to using dominant languages, such as English and/or Mandarin Chinese. In most cases, Ong (2021) and Ong and Ting (2023) demonstrated that it is these children who exercise their power in deciding the family language for communication rather than their parents/grandparents. Likewise, studies have also shown that many Malay children are not speaking Malay community languages, while Indian children are not learning Telugu, Gujarati, Punjabi and Malayalam (Ting & Mahadhir, 2009). In East Malaysia, many indigenous languages are facing endangerment of extinction due to the younger generation not wanting to learn and speak those languages (Kayad & Ting, 2021; Norahim, 2010; Riget & Wang, 2016; Ting et al., 2025).

Such alarming situation raises questions regarding the survival of community languages in Malaysia. Hence, it urges for the need to understand the perceptions of young Malaysians regarding speaking community languages because they stand in between the older ones who usually speak community languages and the younger ones who do not speak to them. This study addresses the issue by using the Chinese community as an exemplary case study and finds out whether are there efforts made to maintain those languages. The next section discusses the methodology issue, followed by a report of the findings. The study ends by providing some recommendations for language maintenance using digital technology.

Method

As part of a larger study, data collection took place in 2016 in Penang, Malaysia. Penang was chosen as the research site due to its long-established history of the Chinese community. In the 17th century during the Manchu invasion of the Fujian province in China, the Chinese were looking for a place to escape when they found a port in George Town, the capital of Penang. Established by the British, the port attracted many merchants from different countries in Asia to trade. The Chinese traded with the Europeans and redistributed the goods back to China. Gradually, they set up shops in George Town to expand their businesses. When the tin mining industry in Perak halted, many Chinese migrants moved to George Town to look for work opportunities. All in all, the Chinese married and settled in Penang and built families. When they came from China, they brought along their community languages and continued to speak in Penang. Over time, Hokkien, the most widely spoken Chinese community language there, is better known as Penang Hokkien due to its distinctive lexis, intonation and syntax that have incorporated lexis from Malay and other Chinese community languages (Ong & Ben Said 2020). Despite it being a popular community language, it is not taught in schools (Ong, 2018).

A total of 22 young Malaysians from the Chinese community in Penang, aged 20-40, were recruited via a purposeful sampling strategy (see Appendix 1 for participants' profile). This age group was chosen because it represents the working class. The inclusion criteria for the participants were that they must be able to speak

at least one of the Chinese community languages listed above. As past studies, such as Albury (2017) and Wang (2017) have demonstrated, the younger generation including those still schooling, is shifting towards speaking Mandarin Chinese. Thus, they were not recruited as they would not provide information needed in this study. To understand the perceptions of the recruited participants, a qualitative methodology was employed, which allows the researcher to understand the investigated issue through the eyes of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) in their local contexts (Flick, 2014). A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants, either at their homes or conducive places chosen by the participants. Lasting approximately 40 minutes, the interviews were conducted in English to align with the publications of this study. After completion, all interview data were transcribed verbatim and the morphosyntax was not corrected to retain authenticity. Participants were labelled with a unique code to maintain confidentiality. Content analysis in the form of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was conducted with the transcribed data.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are reported in two sections: (i) perceptions of speaking Chinese community languages and (ii) efforts made to maintain them.

Perceptions of speaking Chinese community languages

The findings of this section are reported in three themes, as shown in Figure 1:

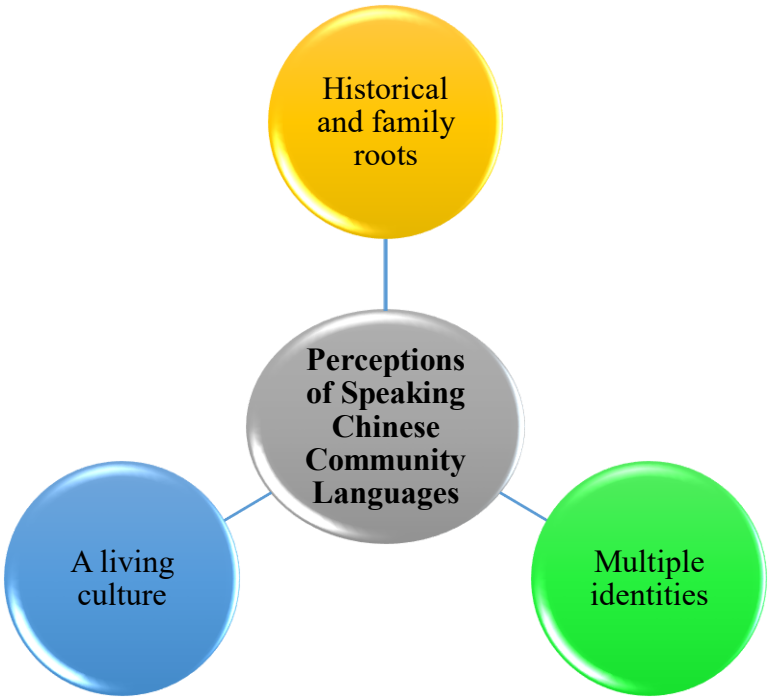


Figure 1. Perceptions of speaking Chinese community languages

The first theme is related to understanding community's culture, history, place of origin, kinship, and patrimony because language and ethnicity are connected (Fishman, 1999). When community languages are used continuously, the

community's mental and physical wellbeing will be improved because the older members of the community do not feel lost as they can continue to express themselves comfortably while the young members are able to learn and understand their heritage. In other words, the uninterrupted use of community languages continues to evoke a sense of belonging to the community, reflect the community's identity and contribute to the language longevity.

Participant 1 explained, "When you speak your own community language, that is your root. You must be able to speak your own community language so that your root is not being cut off. If you are Teochew, you speak Teochew. If you are Hokkien, you speak Hokkien. These are not new founded languages but from years of great-great-grandfathers coming down." What participant 1 meant is that when one continues to speak their community languages, one is showing appreciation to their ancestors because knowing family roots including surnames, language groups and origin of ancestors is an essential aspect in the Chinese society. Ong (2020) likens such community language use metaphorically as a family's cultural umbilical cord.

Adding on, participant 11 stated, "Speaking all these Chinese community languages is important because it's the soul, it represents who we are, our ancestors, the history and everything. At the Hokkien association, I was launching my book and talking about this. Today, people don't know their lineage. Parents don't tell you your district, you are Hainan or Hokkien. Of course, we Khoo and Cheah associations are not scared because we have educational grants to go to the descendants. Every time they come and submit the application form they must fill in which Hokkien group and what is their lineage because they are 13 lineages." In the olden days, Chinese families used to have many children but nowadays, they have only one or two children. Such situation is shrinking the size of the Chinese population in Malaysia. Moreover, modernisation and globalisation are causing the diminishing practice of Chinese cultures and languages. Therefore, to prevent them from disappearing in the near future, participant 11 urged the young generation to learn about their family lineage and historical roots so that such information can be passed down to the next generation.

The second theme is associated with the establishment of various identities when speaking community languages alongside majority/dominant languages, which is beneficial in playing a role for the development of one's personality and appreciation for the community. Participant 4 stated, "There is a self-identity. I'm a Hokkien, I think speaking of Chinese community languages enriches us. In a sense, it is not only about your traditional historical roots but also who you are at this present point. So, I'm not just a Malaysian, I'm not just a Chinese, I'm not just a Christian or a politician or a father but I'm also a Hokkien. It enriches the person itself and that sense of community you have among Hokkiens, it gives you more." What participant 4 meant is that identity can be considered as a "multiconcentrated" concept—meaning that one can have several identities, such as being a Malaysian, a Chinese, a Christian, a politician, a father and a Hokkien.

Providing further explanation, participant 2 said, "With these community languages, they really reflect your locality. Penang Hokkien is being Penang Hokkien. It sounds very different from other Hokkiens because it's very colloquial and fusion. And I think that's why I like it because it really gives you an identity as a Penangite. You know only Penang people speak like that. So, I think that's great."

What participant 2 meant is that when one speaks community languages, one does not only represent their identity of a parent, sibling or wider family members but also reveal their hometown or place of growing up. In participant 2's example, speaking Penang Hokkien signifies a local identity due to its unique accent that differs from Hokkien in other states of Malaysia or countries. Therefore, participant 4's and participant 2's words align with Hall's (1997) and King and Ganuza's (2005) argument that identity is regarded as fluid, negotiated, contextually embedded and constructed through interactions.

Participant 5 summarised, "I think language plays so much a role in helping people to define themselves an identity. So, the loss of a language will ultimately, will most definitely be the loss of cultural practices as well." Participant 5's summary suggests that when languages are lost, the culture and identity of the community will be lost too. Thus, having different identities helps in promoting the value of respecting oneself and others in the community. On the broader level, these identities represent who we are in today's globalised world.

The third theme is associated with the continuation of a living culture when speaking community languages. Fishman (1989) states that cultural change and language shift between ethnic groups is natural and on-going due to power differentials. Despite these changes, speaking community languages evokes a sense of ethnic continuity because community languages have symbolic values and are essential in contributing to the establishment of an ethnic community's social class and status in any society.

Speaking community languages plays a significant role in the continuation of Malaysia's establishment as a multilingual and multicultural country. As participant 8 mentioned, "A living heritage is about the people. We practise multiculturalism and that is about everyone. So, we don't promote any single one, we promote everyone. For me, heritage is about universal interest by humanities. We don't just focus on a single ethnic group." Participant 22 added, "I regard Penang Hokkien as the intangible heritage and cultural asset of Penang that is distinct from Hokkien spoken elsewhere. Singapore Hokkien may be regarded as a community language, but it bears greater resemblance to Taiwanese Hokkien than Penang Hokkien. It is important to preserve and continue developing Penang Hokkien as a language unique to the northern part of Malaysia for our own cultural identity."

In today's modernised era, more and more traditions are no longer being practised due to the advancement of technology that has standardised our daily activities. Many young community members also feel that practising traditions takes up a lot of time and effort. Hence, only the continuous speaking of community languages such as Penang Hokkien, as exemplified by participant 22, is able to keep one's culture alive and retain a sense of ethnicity.

Efforts made for Chinese community language maintenance

As shown above, the participants regarded speaking of Chinese community languages is vital in ensuring of the survival of these languages. Various efforts have been made to maintain them, as summarised in Figure 2:

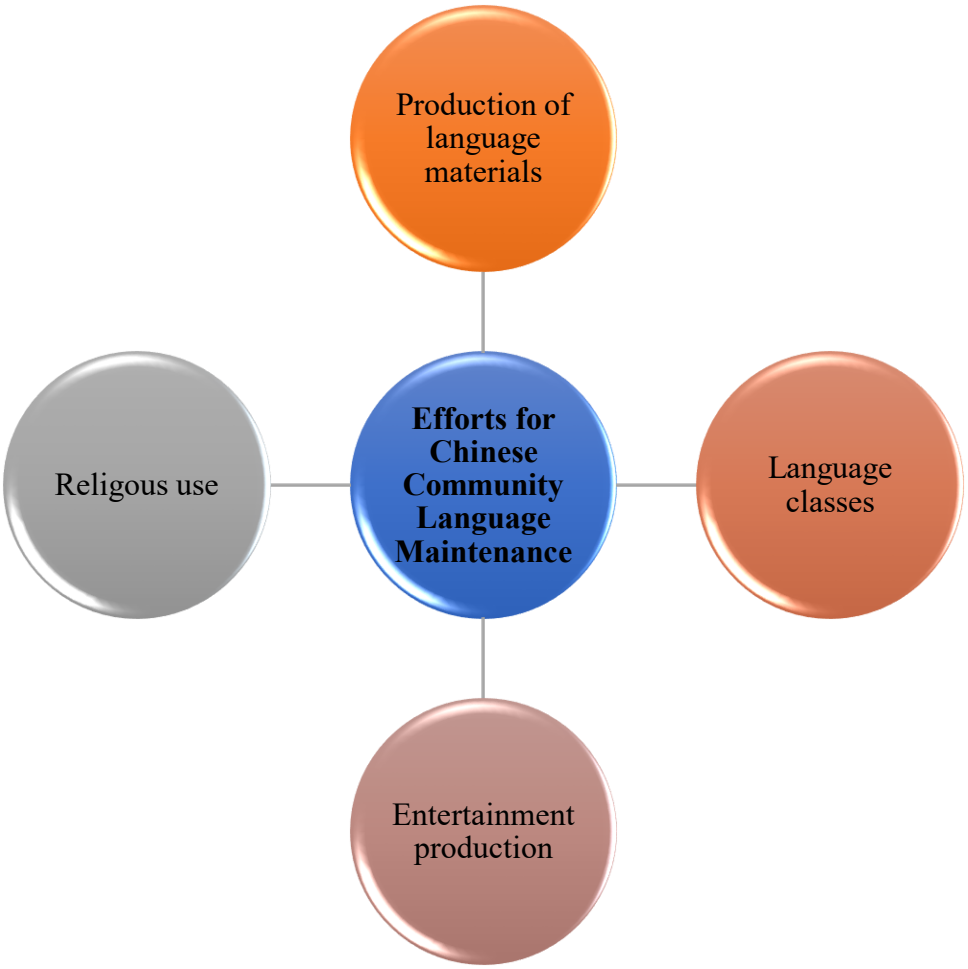
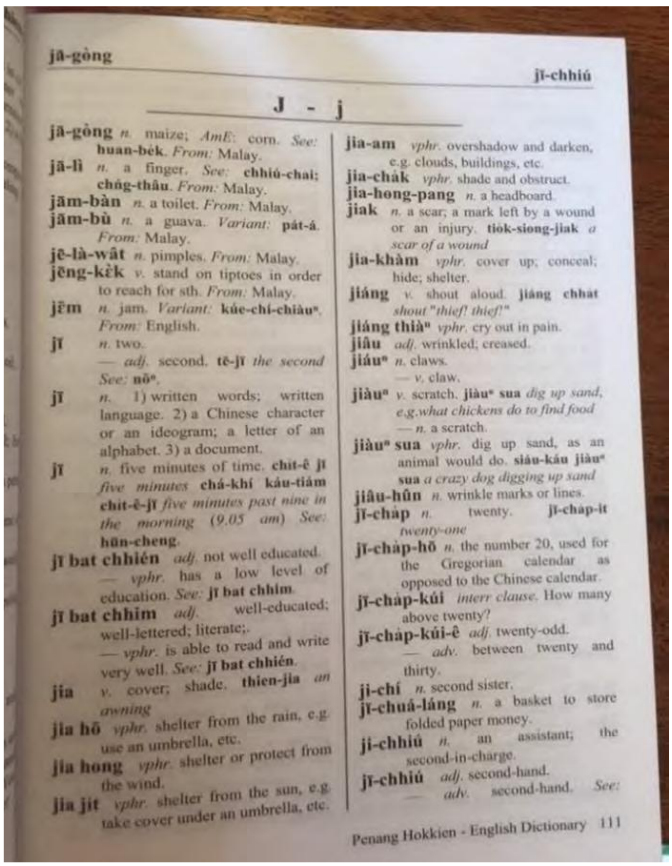


Figure 2. Efforts made to maintain Chinese community languages in Penang

The first effort is about producing language materials. During the time of interview, various Chinese community language associations in Penang were found actively producing language materials that could be used in language classes or for self-study support. For Hakka, participant 20 explained, "A professor from Jiaying University in Guangdong province, China has written a [Hakka] book and did some recordings. So [the Hakka association] is going to launch and publish the book next year. It's written using Chinese characters but there's a disc in Hakka. She speaks and records it so that we can publish and introduce it, hopefully throughout Malaysia to other associations too." For Hainan, participant 12 revealed: "[My Hainan] association produces CDs to learn Hainan. A disc costs RM5." For Hokkien, a Penang Hokkien-English dictionary was published in 2016 by Tan Siew Imm, a lecturer from a private college in Malaysia, to help those interested in learning Penang Hokkien (see Figure 3). This dictionary is available in most bookstores in Malaysia.



jā-gòng jī-chhiú

J - j

jā-gòng *n.* maize; *AmE:* corn. *See:* **huan-bék**. *From:* Malay.
jā-lì *n.* a finger. *See:* **chhiú-chai; chág-thâu**. *From:* Malay.
jām-bàn *n.* a toilet. *From:* Malay.
jām-bù *n.* a guava. *Variant:* **pát-á**. *From:* Malay.
jē-là-wât *n.* pimples. *From:* Malay.
jēng-kèk *v.* stand on tiptoes in order to reach for sth. *From:* Malay.
jēm *n.* jam. *Variant:* **kúe-chí-chiàu^{u}**. *From:* English.
jī *n.* two.
— *adj.* second. **tē-jī** *the second*. *See:* **nō^{o}**.
jī *n.* 1) written words; written language. 2) a Chinese character or an ideogram; a letter of an alphabet. 3) a document.
jī *n.* five minutes of time. **chit-ê jī** *five minutes* **chá-khí káu-tiám chit-ê-jī** *five minutes past nine in the morning (9.05 am)*. *See:* **hūn-cheng**.
jī bat chhián *adj.* not well educated.
— *vphr.* has a low level of education. *See:* **jī bat chhim**.
jī bat chhim *adj.* well-educated; well-lettered; literate;.
— *vphr.* is able to read and write very well. *See:* **jī bat chhián**.
jia *v.* cover; shade. **thien-jia** *an awning*
jia hō *vphr.* shelter from the rain, e.g. use an umbrella, etc.
jia hong *vphr.* shelter or protect from the wind.
jia jit *vphr.* shelter from the sun, e.g. take cover under an umbrella, etc.
jia-am *vphr.* overshadow and darken, e.g. clouds, buildings, etc.
jia-chàk *vphr.* shade and obstruct.
jia-hong-pang *n.* a headboard.
jiak *n.* a scar; a mark left by a wound or an injury. **tiók-siong-jiak** *a scar of a wound*
jia-khàm *vphr.* cover up; conceal; hide; shelter.
jiáng *v.* shout aloud. **jiáng chhát** *shout "thief! thief!"*
jiáng thià^{u} *vphr.* cry out in pain.
jiâu *adj.* wrinkled; creased.
jiáu^{u} *n.* claws.
— *v.* claw.
jiàu^{u} *v.* scratch. **jiàu^{u} sua** *dig up sand, e.g.what chickens do to find food*
— *n.* a scratch.
jiàu^{u} sua *vphr.* dig up sand, as an animal would do. **siāu-káu jiàu^{u} sua** *a crazy dog digging up sand*
jiâu-hûn *n.* wrinkle marks or lines.
jī-chāp *n.* twenty. **jī-chāp-it** *twenty-one*
jī-chāp-hō *n.* the number 20, used for the Gregorian calendar as opposed to the Chinese calendar.
jī-chāp-kúi *interr clause.* How many above twenty?
jī-chāp-kúi-ê *adj.* twenty-odd.
— *adv.* between twenty and thirty.
ji-chí *n.* second sister.
jī-chuá-láng *n.* a basket to store folded paper money.
ji-chhiú *n.* an assistant; the second-in-charge.
jī-chhiú *adj.* second-hand.
— *adv.* second-hand. *See:*

Penang Hokkien - English Dictionary 111

Figure 3. A page example of the Penang Hokkien-English dictionary

These efforts to produce language materials align with Batibo's (2009, p. 196) claim that "language documentation is expected to be lasting as it is not only meant for immediate use, but also for the use of future generations". As participant 14 wrapped up, "The track of losing the language, I think documentation is very important. If you are able to document a language, you do not need to feel worried that you could lose it. Intangible culture heritage including language is something very organic. Organic means you stand tall, you expand, you fall down, you might die. But between you are dead and you are born again, there's a gap of documentation. Once you are able to document the steps and more important the information there, you'll be able to revive that cultural heritage if the community wants it."

The second effort is associated with language classes. As participant 11 informed, "There are Penang Hokkien classes [in the Hokkien clan association] catering for doctors and nurses who were transferred from other states and the Government department and council. They have it at 4pm, after office hours for the Malay staffs at the service counter in Komtar [name of the Penang Government building], then at the police station, they will teach Penang Hokkien to all the policemen and even make a Penang Hokkien play. The private classes are mostly for doctors and professionals from other states who come to work in Penang." For Teochew, participant 9 added, "Last year, our president collaborated with several organisations to conduct Teochew language classes, encourage younger generation to learn Teochew and invite a Teochew celebrity for a radio broadcast interview to encourage children to speak Teochew. This was what we started doing since last

July and the responses were quite good. So, we decide to organise Teochew karaoke and singing competition through this broadcast with the hope that there will be more people coming in to learn the Teochew language and culture. We also have Teochew language classes weekly so that children can learn them." Such efforts correspond with Pauwels (2008, p. 732) who states that community language classes are acting as "an important tool for language maintenance".

The third effort discusses about entertainment production. Studies, such as Leuner (2007) and Moriaty (2009), have demonstrated that mass media has an indirect effect on language practices, particularly for those communities living in abroad. The reason behind is that mass media holds the power in penetrating a culture more deeply into the community than any other technology (Alia, 2010). Moreover, it allows the community to strengthen valuable kinship affiliations with their homeland (Forde et al., 2009).

For similar reasons, a Penang Hokkien movie entitled *Hai Kinn Sin Loo* (translated as 'You Mean the World to Me', see Figure 4) was produced by a Penang-born filmmaker. Filmed in well-known locations in Penang, it was the first Malaysian movie produced entirely in Penang Hokkien and was released in cinemas across Malaysia in 2017. The filmmaker stated that when auditing for a child actor to be included in the movie, he found that only half of the hundred children auditioned could speak fluent Penang Hokkien, which raises question regarding its survival in the near future (Tan, 2017). Nevertheless, the production encourages filmmakers to rethink of the values of creating movies using Chinese community languages.



Figure 4. Penang Hokkien movie poster (Source: Astro Shaw)

For Teochew, participant 13 highlighted, "There are Penang Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese operas but we perform Teochew opera only. We use Teochew in our performances. The performances in Chinese temples usually have no subtitles because subtitles need more equipment to put up. Due to their financial

status, they usually can't afford subtitles. When we perform in theatre or bigger places, we will have subtitles. 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. We also have workshops to teach this opera and the number of people who attended were quite a lot." Participant 11's statement sheds light to the importance of appreciating such form of art not purely by focusing on language and hoped that the tradition of Chinese opera could be passed down to future generations.

The fourth effort discusses the use of Chinese community languages in religious setting. Gal (1979) and Wiley (1998) state that religion acts as a facilitating factor for community language maintenance. This statement aligns with Wang's (2016) study, which found that even though Mandarin Chinese is the main language of community in a Catholic church in Penang, the older generation parishioners are still using Hakka for prayer sessions and Bible reading.

For Buddhism, participant 17 described some efforts made, "In this temple, the older generation usually use Penang Hokkien for chanting. The chanting script is written using English alphabet. When I speak to the devotees, I will use my own community languages. Like to the Teochew devotees, I will use Teochew to explain about Buddhism. At Penang Buddhist Association, the monks speak in Penang Hokkien and in Ipoh [another city in Perak, Malaysia], they speak in Cantonese to the devotees." For Christianity, participant 18 highlighted, "If I go to Kuala Lumpur or Hong Kong, I preach in Cantonese. And when I go to Medan [a city in Indonesia], there are a lot of Chinese people and they speak in Hokkien. I speak in Penang Hokkien to them because they understand Penang Hokkien. When it's the youth, I will preach in English, simple English. I see the needs of the church. If it's a Penang Hokkien church, I will definitely preach in Penang Hokkien. For Chinese church, I preach in Chinese and English church, I preach in English." These efforts demonstrate the determination of monks and pastors in Penang to continue using Chinese community languages for religious purposes despite the younger generation's preference of using Mandarin Chinese and/or English.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In concluding this study, by understanding the perceptions of speaking Chinese community languages by young Malaysians living in Penang, we definitely know that community languages are still valued and therefore, we need to play a vital role in encouraging the youth to speak to them in everyday life. As efforts to maintain them have been made, a more conducive community language speaking environment should be created to encourage its usage. This is definitely easier said than done because majority/dominant languages are penetrating most domains and subsequently allowing fewer opportunities to use community languages. Nevertheless, the youth should continue to connect with their languages, cultures and traditions to have a sense of belonging to their ethnic community.

In this digital era where youth are always engaged with their smartphones and other digital gadgets, efforts to maintain community languages should adopt digital technology to make relevant to them so that they are not left behind. For example, in Singapore, the Chin Kang Huay Kuan (Chin Kang clan association) has recently developed a mobile app that allows users to watch videos using Hokkien, access to

a Hokkien audio dictionary and play games involving Hokkien idioms (Chin, 2025). Additionally, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan (SHHK) has also digitalised more than 5000 news articles, literacy works, records and stories regarding the association and the Hokkien community (Chin, 2025). The reason behind such efforts is to bridge the gap between the older and younger generations and ensure that resources are made accessible to everyone to have the opportunity to engage with their cultural legacy (Chin, 2025). By doing so, everyone in the society is playing their part in ensuring community languages and cultures continue to live and flourish. Remember that the seeds of community languages need to be planted from young

Acknowledgments

This work 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

Albury, N. J. (2017). Mother tongues and languaging in Malaysia: Critical linguistics under critical examination. *Language in Society, 46*(4), 567-589. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000239

Albury, N. J. (2021). Language policy, ideological clarification and theory of mind. *Language Policy, 20,* 193-214. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-020-09547-z

Albury, N. J., & Aye, K.K. (2016). Malaysia's national language policy in international theoretical context. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS), 1*(1), 71-84. https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol1iss1pp71-84

Alia, V. (2010). *The new media nation: Indigenous peoples and global communication.* New York: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781845454203

Batibo, H. M. (2009). Language documentation as a strategy for the empowerment of the minority languages of Africa. In M. Matondo, F. M. Laughlin, & E. Potsdam (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference on African Linguistics* (pp. 193-203). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chai, H. C. (1977). *Education & nation building in plural societies: The West Malaysia experience.* Canberra: The Australian National University Press.

Chin, H. S. (2025, February 15). Archives of Singapore Hokkien clan association made more accessible with new database. *The Straits Times.* Retrieved from https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/archives-of-singapore-hokkien-clan-association-made-more-accessible-with-new-database

Daud, S., & Majid, N. A. (2019). Challenges of nation-building and the formation of Bangsa Malaysia. *Southeast Asian Social Science Review, 4*(1), 30-47. https://doi.org/10.29945/SEASSR.201905_4(1).0002

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2025). *Demographic statistics, fourth quarter 2024.* Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Ding, S. L. (2016). The role of parents in heritage language maintenance in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies, 5*(1), 15-27.

Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.) (2024). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world* (27th ed.). Dallas: SIL International.

Fishman, J. A. (1999). Concluding comments. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 444-454). New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2003.13.2.239

Fishman, J. A. (Ed.). (1989). *Language and ethnicity in minority sociolinguistic perspective.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). London:Sage.

Forde, S., Foxwell, K., & Meadows, M. (2009). *Developing dialogues: Indigenous and ethnic community broadcasting in Australia.* Bristol, UK: Intellect Books.

Gal, S. (1979). *Language shift: Social determinants of linguistic change in bilingual Australia.* New York: Academic Press.

Hall, S. (1997). Old and new ethnicities. In A. D. King (Ed.), *Culture, globalisation and the world system* (pp. 41-68). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kayad, F. G., & Ting, S. H. (2021, November 24-25). Perceptions of Bidayuh on importance of the Bidayuh language. *Proceeding of the 2nd Auckland International Conference on Social Sciences, Education, Entrepreneurship and Technology 2021* (pp. 35-48). Auckland, New Zealand.

King, K. A., & Ganuza, N. (2005). Language, identity, education and transmigration: Chilean adolescents in Sweden. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, 4*(3), 179-199. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0403_1

Leuner, B. (2007). *Migration, multiculturalism and language maintenance in Australia: Polish migration to Melbourne in the 1980s.* Bristol: Peter Lang.

Mansor, M. N. (2000). Crossing ethnic borders in Malaysia: Measuring the fluidity of ethnic identity and group formation. *Akademika, 55*(July), 61-82.

Moriaty, M. (2009). Normalising language through television: The case of the Irish language television channel, TG4. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 4*(2), 137-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447140902741288

Norahim, N. (2010). *Language choice of Bidayuh graduates in Kuching-Samarahan division* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya, Malaysia).

Ong, T. W. S. (2018). *Language maintenance in Malaysia: A case study of the Chinese community in Penang* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia).

Ong, T. W. S. (2020). Why bother maintaining languages? A discussion based on diminishing Chinese dialects in Malaysia. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies, 14*(1), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.202001171301

Ong, T. W. S. (2021). Family language policy, language maintenance and language shift: Perspectives from ethnic Chinese single mothers in Malaysia. *Issues in Language Studies, 10*(1), 59-75. https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.3075.2021

Ong, T. W. S., & Ben Said, S. (2020). Selective language maintenance in multilingual Malaysia. In T. Okamura & M. Kai (Eds.), *Indigenous language acquisition, maintenance, and loss and current language policies* (pp. 207-228). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Ong, T. W. S., & Ting, S. H. (2023). Children deciding the family language in Chinese families in multiethnic Malaysia. *NOTION: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture, 5*(1), 32-46. https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v5i1.6833

Ong, T. W. S., & Troyer, R. A. (2024). Language shift among middle-age and older Chinese descendants in Penang, Malaysia: A bitter sweet tale. *UC: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal, 5*(2), 64-83. https://doi.org/10.24071/uc.v5i2.8628

Pauwels, A. (2008). Language maintenance. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *The handbook of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 719-737). Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470757000

Riget, P. N., & Wang, X. M. (2016). English for the indigenous people of Sarawak: Focus on the Bidayuhs. In T. Yamaguchi & D. Deterding (Eds.), *English in Malaysia: Current use and status* (pp. 102-122). Brill Publisher.

Shaw, A. (2017). Reproduced with permission from Astro Shaw Sdn. Bhd., www.astraoshaw.com.my © 2017, Astro Shaw.

Tan, J. (2017, May 5). Forget about it: An interview with Saw Teong Hin. *Esquire.* Retrieved from https://www.esquire.my/culture/saw-teong-hin-interview-you-mean-the-world-to-me

Ting, S. H., & Mahadhir, M. (2009). Towards homogeneity in home languages: Malay, Chinese Foochow and Indian Tamil families in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 32*(2), 11.1-11.22. https://doi.org/10.2104/aral0911

Ting, S. H., & Puah, Y. Y. (2010). Language attitudes of Hokkien speakers towards Hokkien and Mandarin. *Proceedings of the Borneo International Conference on Language and Literature: Unity in Diversity*. University Publication Centre.

Ting, S. H., Ong, T. W. S., & Kayad, F. G. (2025). The Bidayuh language of Sarawak, Malaysia: Language use and proficiency. In N. S. Dash, S. Arulmozi & N. Ramesh (Eds.), *Handbook on endangered South Asian and Southeast Asian languages* (pp. 365-381). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80752-7_16

Wang, X. M. (2010). The sociolinguistic realignment in the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur: Past, present and future. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 31(*5), 479-489. https://doi.og/10.1080/01434632.2010.505656

Wang, X. M. (2016). Language maintenance or language shift? The role of religion in a Hakka Catholic community in Malaysia. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 10*(4), 273-288. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2016.1192850

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

Wiley, T. G. (1998). *The imposition of World War I era English-only policies and the fate of German in North America.* In T. Ricento & B. Burnaby (Eds.), *Language and politics in the United States and Canada* (pp. 211-241). New Jersey, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Appendix

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Participants' unique code	Gender	Occupation	Community language group
1	M	State assemblyman	Cantonese
2	M	Member of parliament	Malay
3	M	Member of parliament	Teochew
4	M	Member of parliament	Hokkien
5	F	State assemblywoman	Hakka
6	M	Member of parliament	Teochew
7	M	Research fellow	Hakka
8	F	Research fellow	Hokkien
9	M	Translator	Teochew
10	F	Lecturer	New Zealander
11	M	Banking associate	Hokkien
12	M	Manager	Hainan
13	F	Director	Hokkien
14	F	Finance manager	Hokkien
15	M	Manager	Cantonese
16	M	Manager	Hokkien
17	M	Chief monk	Hainan
18	M	Pastor	Hokkien
19	M	Teacher	Hokkien
20	F	Doctor	Hakka
21	F	Principal	Taishan
22	M	Engineer	Teochew