

## LANGUAGE SHIFT ACROSS THREE GENERATIONS: THE CASE OF HUBEI IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*There is currently a small community of 3,000 Hubei Chinese who are descendants of Hubei migrants to Malaya (now Malaysia) in the 1900s. The Hubei migrants spoke the Tianmen/Hubei dialect for cultural identity. However, widespread multilingualism in Malaysian society has impacted the maintenance of the heritage language (Hubei) hence by the millennium Hubei is no longer used for communication in the community. This paper reports on the language shift process of Hubei across three generations in the Hubei families in Malaysia. Data from 45 respondents to a questionnaire and interviews with members of the community reveal a shift in the use of Hubei to other languages in the home and socio-cultural domains. This language shift of Hubei is brought about by the language use behaviour of members of the community. Due to the impact of top-down and bottom-up multilingualism in the country, the study concludes that as is often the case with minority languages in multilingual societies, the language shift of Hubei did not begin and end with a dominant language replacing the heritage language but rather it begins and ends with a mixed code of the variety of languages spoken in Malaysia.*

**Key terms:** *Hubei, heritage language, domains, language shift, Malaysia*

### INTRODUCTION

Zhuang and Wang (2010) state that Chinese migrants from the western and central provinces of China like Hunan, Sichuan, and Hubei were involved in the wave of migration to Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century. According to Zhang (2013), over time the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia found their occupational niches as skilled and unskilled labourers which were often linked to their various sub-ethnic groups, for example, the Cantonese were carpenters, the Hakkas were shoemakers, those from Shandong were silk traders while the Hubei community worked as dentists or ‘teeth setters’. Hubei (Chinese: 湖; pinyin: Húběi) is a province of the People's Republic of China, located in the easternmost part of Central China (Figure 1; see next page).

Figure 1 Map of China



Figure 2 Map of Hubei



The ancestors of the Hubei families in this study originally came from the town of Mawan which is under the administration of the sub-prefecture-level city of Tianmen (Figure 2 above).

Zhang (2015) mentions that the dialect spoken in Wuhan, Tianmen and surrounding areas in Hubei is the Wuhan or Hankou dialect, which is a branch of Southwestern Mandarin. The Hubei community in Malaysia speaks the Tianmen/Hubei dialect; linguistically, Hubei has a good degree of mutual intelligibility with Mandarin. Table 1 provides some examples of the lexical similarities and differences between Mandarin and Hubei. As indicated in Table 1, while the differences are clearly due to a different lexical item being used, a point worth noting is within the similar lexicons group, there is still a phonological difference that differentiates the similar words used in Mandarin and Hubei.

Table 1 Lexical similarities and differences between Mandarin and Hubei

English	Mandarin	Hubei	English	Mandarin	Hubei
<b>Similarities</b>			<b>Differences</b>		
Verbs					
to sleep	<i>shuì</i>	<i>sui</i>	to fall down	<i>shuāi dǎo</i>	<i>dá dao</i>
to run	<i>pǎo</i>	<i>pāo</i>	to drink	<i>hē</i>	<i>hō</i>
to look	<i>kàn</i>	<i>kān</i>	to dream	<i>zuò mèng</i>	<i>fā mǐng</i>
Body Parts					
hair	<i>tóufǎ</i>	<i>tōufǎ</i>	ears	<i>ěr duo</i>	<i>gē dūng</i>
face	<i>liǎn</i>	<i>liān</i>	nose	<i>bízi</i>	<i>pí gūng</i>
eyes	<i>yǎn jing</i>	<i>yān jing</i>	thighs	<i>tuǐ</i>	<i>dā kwā zē</i>

The Hubei migrants who were the ancestors of the principal researcher were mostly monolinguals and used their heritage language (also called Hubei) within their community as a source of cultural identity. However, within a century the Hubei descendants in Malaysia are multilingual and have become increasingly alienated from the Hubei language. This paper reports on the choice of languages used in the home and sociocultural domains and the resultant language shift across three generations in the Hubei families.

Language shift usually refers to “the gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of the community members” manifested as loss in the number of speakers, level of proficiency, or range of functional use of the language (Hornberger, 2012, p. 412). Language shift on the continuum of language endangerment is highly likely to lead to language death if the language is not ‘saved’ especially via revitalisation.

The purpose of UNESCO programmes such as The Red Book of Endangered Languages are to strengthen research, collect information, encourage publication of materials and results of studies on endangered languages and to work with the communities towards language maintenance and revitalisation. Research conducted on the maintenance/shift/loss of minority languages (such as this study) are services rendered by linguists and sociolinguists to raise awareness of the status of the language to the community concerned and secondly, to assist the ethnolinguistic communities to design and manage the revitalization of their endangered language and prevent its demise in future.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)**

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explains how inter-personal adjustments are influenced by broader social group memberships as well as group identifications and intergroup dynamics (Harwood et al., 2006). These conditions influence the degree of accommodation among the speakers. Consequently, CAT illustrates how speakers converge or diverge in communication (Giles, 1973). Convergence takes place when a preferred or dominant language used by one of the speakers is adopted; divergence occurs when another completely alien language is adopted. Convergence is reflective of the speakers' needs for social integration and approval from the other interlocutor to forge a better relationship between them. In exogamous marriages, convergence occurs when the language of either the husband or the wife is adopted as the lingua franca in the family.

When speakers diverge, they accentuate their linguistic differences to emphasize differences in group membership and to create distance between themselves (Giles & Ogay, 2007). In exogamous marriages (a mix marriage where the spouses are not from the same clan or community), a completely different language may be adopted in the family language policy that is alien to the husband and wife. This divergence ultimately leads to a loss of both heritage languages in the family.

Harwood et al. (2006) explain the various strategies in family communication: approximation strategies, interpretability strategies, discourse management strategies and interpersonal control. These strategies affect the way in which accommodation takes place. Approximation strategy demonstrates the speaker's productive performance and focuses on the speech styles the speaker is exposed to. Interpretability strategies involve accommodating to the other members' perceived interpretive abilities, which refer to the ability to understand. Discourse management strategies focus on the speaker's conversational needs and are often discussed in terms of topic selection and face management. Interpersonal control strategies attempt to guide the course of a particular conversation or more generally a relationship through strategies such as interruption or even assertion of direct power. These accommodation strategies contribute to the language choice of speakers; the crucial factor is that the speakers share at least one common language in selecting the most appropriate strategies.

In this study, CAT is applied to demonstrate the extent of convergence or divergence that has occurred in the Hubei families over the three generations. The strategies – approximation, interpretability, discourse management and interpersonal control – are applied to analyse the accommodation strategies used by the Hubei family members in their domains of language use.

### **Domains of Language Use**

Domain refers to the environment where the general activities related to that particular environment affect the choice of languages used. According to Fishman (1972), domains are

defined in terms of institutional contexts or socio-ecological co-occurrences. These domains aim to categorise the major areas of interaction that occur in multilingual settings, for example, education, family, employment, religion, and friendship. Domains enable us to understand that language choice is related to widespread socio-cultural norms and expectations. In this paper, two domains of language use – home and socio-cultural activities – are analysed to determine language preference. These two domains of language use are chosen because the probability of using the heritage language should be higher in these environments since it would involve more community interactions.

### **The Home Domain**

Spolsky (2007) states that the language beliefs and practices of the participants in the home and their attempts to influence the practices and beliefs of other members of the home speech community are critical. The home language ecology is susceptible to influences from other domains if a language shift away from the home language is permitted. Once the children are exposed to the language practices of their peers in the neighbourhood or in school, a new conflict is established. Thus, even the family, the simplest and most basic domain for its effects on natural intergenerational language transmission, is open to the influence of other domains.

Closely related to the home domain is the family language policy. Family language policy can be defined as the explicit (Shohamy, 2006) and overt (Schiffman, 1996) planning of language use in the home among family members. The family plays a vital role in the maintenance and preservation of heritage languages. In multilingual families, especially where the parents are of exogamous marriage, language choice becomes a complex process because of the availability of other languages within the speakers' linguistic repertoire. Firstly, if the parents come from different linguistic backgrounds, there is a need to decide on a common language(s) to be used for communication within the home domain. Choosing the appropriate language(s) as the family lingua franca is based on practice and ideology, taking into consideration the following factors: (1) the level of the parents' proficiency in the language, (2) the degree of accessibility to the language, (3) the frequency of using the language as L1 and (4) the prestige of the language in the society (Spolsky, 2004). Thus, the family needs to agree upon a common language(s) that members in the family are proficient in to be the lingua franca and this common language(s) may not be the mother tongue of either parent.

Fishman (1991), Spolsky (2004) and Schwartz (2008) also affirmed that the frequent use of the mother tongue in the home domain is crucial in maintaining the language. If there is a lack of intergenerational transmission of the heritage language (L1) by the older generations to the younger generations, the proficiency of L1 will inevitably diminish. Ultimately, language loss occurs when the later generation are neither able to speak nor understand the heritage language due to the use of another language becoming the L1 in the home. Spolsky (2012) also highlights parents, grandparents (including helpers) and children as the key participants in language maintenance in the family domain. In the family language policy, family members hold different roles at different times in different situations, with parents being the decision makers, but not always in absolute control. As children grow and interact with their surroundings, eventually, the family language policy has to be adapted to varying degrees and in different ways.

### **The Socio-cultural Domain**

In a multilingual setting, Fishman (1965) states that in within-group (intragroup) multilingualism, members of a speech community may use two (or more) separate codes for internal communicative purposes as compared with between-group (intergroup) multilingualism where the dominant language may be preferred. In the domain of socio-cultural activities, or intragroup multilingualism, the language choice is dependent on the members in

the speech community; accommodation in terms of discourse management strategies is applied to determine the language choice that is best suited to the speakers. If members of the community use two or more codes for intragroup communication in the socio-cultural domain and disregard the mother tongue as a crucial operative variable and use other available languages it does not bode well for the maintenance of the heritage language.

### **The Context of Multilingualism in Malaysia**

Malaysia is a multiethnic and multilingual country with a population of 28.3 million. Bumiputeras<sup>1</sup> (Malays and other indigenous groups) comprise 70.1%, Chinese 22.6%, Indians 6.6%, Others 0.7% (Population Census, 2023). With such racial, religious, and linguistic diversity, there is an array of languages and language varieties (Low et al., 2015) used for intra and interethnic communication in Malaysia.

The plurality of the Malaysian society is also reflected in the Malaysian education system. During British rule, English-medium schools were set up by the British administration and Christian missionaries. Chinese community schools offered Mandarin as the medium of instruction. After the Independence of Malaya in 1957, the Chinese-medium secondary schools incorporated more English and Malay medium of instruction to their teaching. In the 1970s, in accordance with the national language policy, English-medium primary and secondary national-type schools were gradually changed into Malay-medium national schools. The change into Malay as the main language of instruction was completed by the end of 1982 (Raman & Tan, 2015). By the twenty-first century, a large number of Malaysian Chinese having received Mandarin as a medium of instruction, began using Mandarin as their lingua franca.

### **The Chinese Communities in Malaysia**

In addition to Mandarin, there were also other Chinese varieties or dialects spoken by the different groups of Chinese migrants. The majority of the Chinese migrants originated from southern China, particularly the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan (Yen, 2000). Accordingly, various Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, to name a few, were imported into the country. Kinship ties, cultural identity, migration patterns, and ease of communication were some of the reasons contributing to the usage of Chinese dialects among the different Chinese linguistic groups (Sim, 2012).

Table 2 shows that Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese are the top three Chinese dialect groups in Malaysia. Hubei is not mentioned at all signifying how small this minority group is. The Hubei Association of Malaysia confirms that there are currently only about 3000 Hubei Chinese living in the states of Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kelantan, and Terengganu.

**Table 2. Composition of the Chinese communities in Malaysia**

Chinese groups	variety	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Hokkien		2,020,914	37.66%
Hakka		1,092,835	20.36%
Cantonese		1,068,008	19.90%
Teochew		497,280	9.27%
Foochow		251,553	4.69%
Hainanese		141,045	2.63%
Others		294,716	5.49%
Total		5,366,211	100%

**Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2023)**

<sup>1</sup> For more details on the categorisation of *Bumiputra*, refer Omar (2007: 337).

## **Multilingualism, Language Choice and Language Shift**

According to Fishman (1985, p. 88), ethnicity consists of ‘the sensing and expressing of links to one’s own kind...’ and consists of three components – being, knowing and doing - and language is the selected tool to reflect each of these dimensions. Language serves as an indicator of and becomes symbolic of the culture in which it dwells. Since ethnicity is an indicator of culture, language is used as an indicator of ethnicity. Monolingualism in Hubei for the early Hubei migrants helped them to preserve their (ethnic) identity in the host society.

Due to its bilingual educational policy and inter communal interactions between the different races in the country, an average Malaysian family is often capable of speaking two or more languages. Ellis (2002) affirms that multilingualism occurs when three or more languages are used within a family, and this phenomenon is common in Malaysian families. Within such multilingual families, language choice becomes a complex phenomenon because of the availability of other languages in the speakers’ linguistic repertoire. Language choices in multilingual families are determined by various factors (Dumanig et al., 2013) such as the speakers’ proficiency in the heritage language, age, education, role-relationships, dominant language, and the social status of the language.

Multilingual family members, particularly the parents who come from different speech communities who accommodate and use different languages, influence the choice of language at home. Increased reliance on other languages and decreased use of the heritage language for communication in the home domain led to non-intergenerational transmission of the heritage language. This may lead to a complete language shift as the status of the first language declines and is replaced by other ‘major’ languages.

Pauwels (2016) defines language shift as the gradual disappearance of a language, which is replaced by other language(s) in the speech community, without the necessary total disappearance or death of the former language. Mesthrie et. al. (2001) define language shift as ‘the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication and socialisation within a community’. Fasold (1987) sees language shift as the surrender of one language in favour of another, while Fishman (1991) views the phenomenon of language shift as a threat to native languages due to the reduced number of users. As the numerical strength of the speakers begins to reduce due to language shift, the likelihood of language death becomes greater.

## **Research on the Chinese dialects in Malaysia**

There has been a number of research on the vitality and shift of the different dialects of the various Chinese groups in Malaysia namely by Ting & Sussex (2002), Ting & Ting (2020), Ting & Ting (2021) on *Foochow*; Ting (2018), Ting & Hoo (2022), Ong & Ting (2023), Vollman & Soon (2018), Vollman & Soon (2021), Wang (2016b), Wang (2017) on *Hakka*; Teh & Lim (2014), Ong & Selim (2022) on *Penang Hokkien*; Fu (2008), Han (2012), Lee et al. (2014) on *Hainanese*; Wang & Chong (2011), Sim (2012), Tan (2015), Casten (2018), Vollman & Soon (2018), Ong (2020) on the use of the heritage languages in Malaysia, Malaysian Chinese multilingualism, identity and the concern of community languages being displaced. So far, to date, the only study conducted on *Hubei* in Malaysia is by Low (2019).

## **THE STUDY**

The study is part of a Master’s dissertation investigating on language choice, shift and attitude towards *Hubei*. This paper reports on the language choices and the language shift of Hubei across three generations in the Hubei families. Therefore, the research questions (RQ) are: RQ 1. What languages are used by the three generations in the home and sociocultural domains? RQ 2. What are the reasons for the language shift by the Hubei speakers across the three generations?

## The Research Participants

Considering how small the Hubei community in Malaysia is, the research participants are the principal researcher's relatives from extended families. The Hubei participants reside in different parts of Malaysia and come from endogamous (marrying within one's own ethnic group) and exogamous (marrying outside one's clan or community) marriages. The total number of participants in the study comprised 45 individuals (20 males and 25 females) and are categorised into three generations: G1 (aged 75 years and above), G2 (aged 45 – 74 years), G3 (aged 16 – 44 years).

## Research Tools: Questionnaire and Interviews

A survey questionnaire and interviews were the two research tools used to investigate the language choices in the home and sociocultural domains. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was adapted from Coluzzi, Riget and Wang (2013) and orally translated to Hubei for G1 members and to other Chinese varieties for G2 and G3 members who are not proficient in English. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section 1 and Section 2. Section 1 elicited information on the background of the respondents; Section 2 focused on the languages used in the two domains: the home and sociocultural domains. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were conducted with eight participants (two participants from G1, three from G2 and three from G3) to elicit information and views on their language choices and the use (or disuse) of Hubei.

## Data Collection

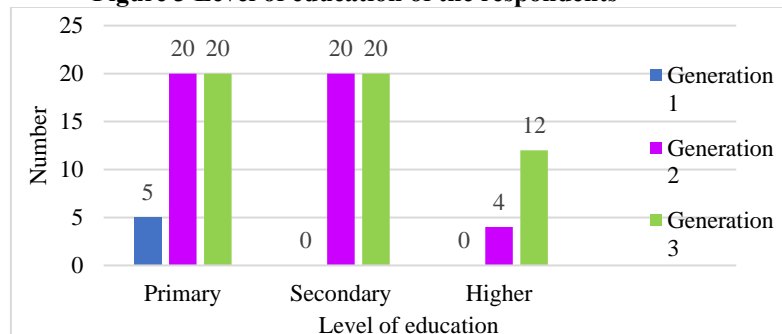
The survey questionnaires were distributed by the principal researcher to the 45 participants who reside in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, and the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. Responses to the questionnaires were then grouped thematically and analysed accordingly while the interviews were transcribed for analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Responses to Section 1 of the Questionnaire

With reference to Figure 3, all (100%) Generation 1 (G1) attended primary school, but none obtained any secondary school education. In contrast, all G2 and G3 participants attended secondary school.

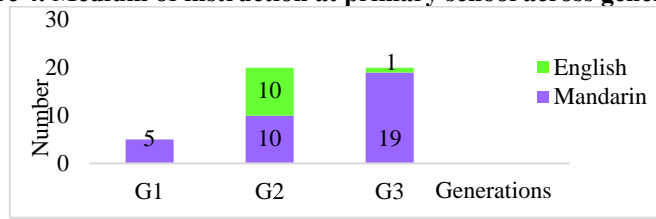
Figure 3 Level of education of the respondents



The number of participants who have higher education is significantly lower: only four (20%) of G2 and twelve (60%) of G3 have tertiary education.

As shown in Figure 4, all (100%) G1 received Mandarin as the medium of instruction when they attended Chinese primary schools.

**Figure 4. Medium of instruction at primary school across generations**



Following Independence, as part of nation building in the 1960s the national education system introduced English and Malay as mediums of instruction. Thus, G2 and G3 were enrolled in either Chinese or English medium primary schools to be proficient in the language. Fluency in Mandarin ensures that their Chinese cultural identity is maintained in a plural society while fluency in English is for economic progress.

Of particular significance, as indicated in Figure 4, is the outstanding increase in the number of G3 who studied in Mandarin increased from 10 (50%) among the G2 to 19 (95%) among the G3. In the early 1980s, about 90% of Chinese parents, including the Hubei families enrolled their children in the Chinese primary schools (The Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1980). This trend contributed to fluency in Mandarin and the choice and use of Mandarin as the family language in the Hubei families.

As Figure 5 illustrates, exogamy is practiced by 93% of the G2 and G3 Hubei participants while only 7% (the G1) observed endogamy through arranged marriages. Exogamous marriages impact on the language choices and language use practices in the family.

**Figure 5. Marriage practices across three generations**

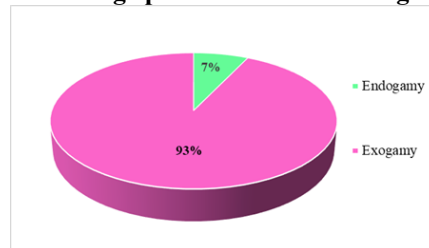
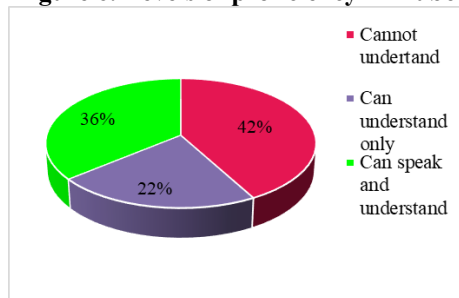


Figure 6 indicates that 36% of the respondents (all G1 and some G2) can speak and understand the language to conduct a conversation in Hubei. 22% of the respondents (some G2 and some G3) can only understand the gist of what is spoken in Hubei. The majority (42%) of the respondents (G3) are unable to understand Hubei. When Hubei is spoken, the language is completely alien to the G3 group.

**Figure 6. Levels of proficiency in Hubei**



Overall, the pie chart shows that the number of respondents who cannot understand Hubei (42%) exceeds the number who can understand (22%) and the number who speak and



understand the heritage language (36%). Thus, the majority (mostly G3) cannot understand Hubei.

## Responses to Section 2 of the Survey Questionnaire

### Language Choice in the Home Domain

As shown in Table 3, the majority (80%) of G1 claim to use Hubei in the home. With G2 participants, the majority (40%) use Mandarin. Mandarin is used by a huge majority (85%) of G3 while Hubei is not used at all.

**Table 3 Languages used in the Hubei homes**

Languages	Generation 1 (G1) Age ≥ 75 N (5)		Generation 2 (G2) Ages 45-74 N (20)		Generation 3 (G3) Ages 16-44 N (20)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hubei	4	80%	2	10%	0	0%
Mandarin	0	0%	8	40%	17	85%
English	0	0%	5	25%	1	5%
Other Chinese varieties (OCV)	1	20%	5	25%	2	10%

The decline of Hubei in the home domain from 80% (G1) to 10% (G2) and to 0% (G3) and the increased use of Mandarin from 0% (G1) to 40% (G2) and 85% (G3) clearly indicate that over a duration of three generations the Hubei families have shifted from Hubei to Mandarin as the lingua franca in the home/family domain.

With reference to Table 4, all (100%) G1 respondents use Hubei with their parents. Interestingly, when communicating with their siblings, despite being proficient in Hubei, all G1(100%) did not use Hubei but a combination of ‘Hubei and other Chinese varieties’ (mainly Hokkien and Cantonese). Likewise, although most of G1 were from arranged, endogamous marriages and are speakers of Hubei, they did not choose to use Hubei to communicate with their Hubei spouses, instead, the majority (60%) of them used other Chinese varieties.

**Table 4 Languages G1 use with family members**

Languages	Parents		Siblings (G1)		Spouse (G1)		Children (G2)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hubei	5	100%			1	20%	2	40
Mandarin								
Other Chinese varieties (Hokkien & Cantonese)					3	60%		
Hubei & Mandarin								
Hubei & OCV			5	100%	1	20%	3	60%
Total	5		5		5		5	

To communicate with their children (the G2), most (60%) of G1 use Hubei and other Chinese varieties while 40% of them maintain Hubei in their family language policy. If this is really the case, we can say that there are some attempts by 40% of G1 to expose their children to Hubei and transmit the heritage language to G2. Nevertheless, since the majority (60%) of G1 prefer to use Hubei and other Chinese varieties (instead of just Hubei) to communicate with their children (the G2), most of the linguistic input of Hubei to G2 is not wholly in Hubei but

a mixture of Hubei and other Chinese varieties. With such varied and mixed language input, it is unlikely that G2 would be as fluent in Hubei.

Table 5 shows that the repertoire of languages used by G2 to communicate with family members is more varied. Hubei as a language on its own is not used at all by G2; this is most likely due to the linguistic input and their lack of fluency in Hubei as analysed earlier. To communicate with their grandparents, all (100%) G2 respondents confessed using Hubei and other Chinese varieties. With parents, most (75%) G2 use other Chinese varieties, with siblings and spouses the majority (90%) also use other Chinese varieties.

**Table 5 Languages G2 use with family members**

Languages	Grandparents		Parents		Siblings		Spouse		Children	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hubei										
Mandarin									5	25%
English					2	10%			1	5%
Other Chinese varieties (OCV)			15	75%	18	90%	18	90%	10	50%
Hubei & Mandarin										
Hubei & English										
Hubei & OCV	20	100%	5	25%					1	5%
Mandarin & English									1	5%
Mandarin & OCV									1	5%
English & OCV							2	10%	1	5%
TOTAL	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%

The range of languages used widens when communicating with their children (G3). Using Mandarin only and code-switching between Mandarin and English, Mandarin and other Chinese varieties, English and other Chinese varieties now appear in the repertoire of languages used. A point worth noting is, while half (50%) of G2 use other Chinese varieties to communicate with their children (G3), usage of only Mandarin has increased from zero to 25%. Mandarin is also code-switched with English or with other Chinese varieties as a means of communication. This reflects the increased use of Mandarin to communicate with the children (G3).

According to Table 6, Hubei by itself is also not used by G3 for communication with family members.

**Table 6 Languages G3 use with family members**

Languages	Grandparents		Parents		Siblings		Spouse		Children	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hubei										
Mandarin									10	100%
English			1	5%						
Other Chinese varieties (OCV)	14	70%	15	75%						
Hubei & Mandarin			2	10%						
Hubei & English										
Hubei & OCV	3	15%								
Mandarin & English			2	10%	5	25%				
Mandarin & OCV	3	15%			15	75%	10	100%		
English & OCV										
TOTAL	20	100%	20	100%	20	100%	10	100%	10	100%

\*Only 10 married couples

With grandparents, most (70%) of G3 reported using other Chinese varieties, when communicating with their parents, the majority (75%) of G3 also used other Chinese varieties. It appears that for communication with grandparents and parents, Other Chinese varieties is a strong preference here. For the next three categories G3 are using more Mandarin, when communicating with their siblings, most (75%) use Mandarin & other Chinese varieties; with their spouses all (100%) of the married couples use Mandarin and other Chinese varieties. When communicating with their children, all of them (100%) switch to Mandarin.

This language choice of using only Mandarin with their children is likely due to pragmatic reasons. Their children are mostly Mandarin-educated and are fluent in this language and not as proficient in Chinese dialects. Mandarin has a functional and economic value in society as it is the language for business in the Chinese world; Mandarin is also the main language for intergroup communication with other Chinese communities as well as the unifying language for the (Han) Chinese identity.

### Language Choice in the Socio-cultural Domain

The Hubei community, though small in numbers, meets regularly for socio-cultural events which can be informal or formal family functions. The informal socio-cultural events are usually casual gatherings over a meal without any form of celebratory ambience while formal events encompass gatherings of a grander scale such as weddings, birthday celebrations, funerals, Lunar New Year reunions.

As indicated in Table 7, all (100%) of G1 and half (50%) of G2 report using Hubei and other Chinese varieties at these communal gatherings. While G1 and G2 maintain some Hubei in their communication at these socio-cultural events perhaps for ethnic identity, no Hubei is used at all by G3 since a great majority (95%) of G3 report using Mandarin and other Chinese varieties.

**Table 7 Languages used at socio-cultural events**

Languages	Generation 1 Ages ≥ 75 N (5)		Generation 2 Ages 45-74 N (20)		Generation 3 Ages 16-44 N (20)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hubei						
Mandarin						
English					1	5%
Other Chinese varieties (OCV)						
Hubei & Mandarin						
Hubei & English						
Hubei & OCV	5	100%	10	50%		
Mandarin & English						
Mandarin & OCV			5	25%	19	95%
English & OCV			5	25%		
TOTAL	5	100%	20	100%	20	100%

### **Analysis of Responses in the Interview**

The interview provided respondents an opportunity to share their qualitative views on the maintenance/shift of Hubei and the context of their language choice. Data from the interviews reveal four factors responsible for the linguistic situation and the diminishing use of the heritage language in the Hubei families: the wide/varied linguistic repertoires among the family members, exogamous marriage practices (among the younger generations), diverging family language policy and the low language status of the Hubei language in Malaysia.

### Family Multilingualism

Extracts A, B and C show the constant use of more than one language among family members in the home.

#### Extract A

*G1 - S1: ...when my first wife was alive, even though she spoke Hubei with the children, she insisted that the brother and sister used English at home between them. She wanted them to improve their English proficiency.*

#### Extract B

*G2 - S4: Honestly ... we never speak Hubei. We speak Mandarin and English with the daughters; I speak Hokkien with my wife. So, there are three languages used in the family.*

#### Extract C

*G3 - S6: ... at home we usually speak Mandarin and English with my sister and with my parents. Ya ...but my parents speak Hokkien between them...*

The above examples illustrate that multilingualism in Malaysia is not only a common practice at societal level but also takes place in the home. Alongside the use of other Chinese varieties, mastering more prestigious languages such as Mandarin and English reap economic and social benefits.

### Exogamy

Extracts D, E and F show the impact of exogamous marriages on the linguistic vitality of the heritage language.

#### Extract D

*G1 - S2: All throughout my younger days, my family – my siblings and my parents – all used Hubei in the home. ... I got married in my early 20's and my wife was of Hokkien origin. So, my wife and I spoke Hokkien all the while and my children all speak Hokkien...*

#### Extract E

*G2 - S5: Generally, we use Mandarin ... err ...Hokkien with my mum because she's Hokkien. All along we had been using Hokkien in the home; my maternal grandma and my aunts all lived near us and so we mingled more with the maternal family members. We usually communicate in Hokkien, Foochow and Mandarin.*

#### Extract F

*G2 - S3: ... My wife is a Hokkien but we speak Cantonese. Her father is Hokkien and her mother is Hainanese but they speak Cantonese.*

The above examples provide concrete evidence that language choice in exogamous marriages often involves choosing a different Chinese variety for communication in the home domain leading to non-intergenerational transmission of Hubei in the family domain.

### Family Language Policy

Extracts G, H and I illustrate the role of family language policy on the maintenance and shift of Hubei in Malaysia.

Extract G

G3 – S8: *...She (My mother) speaks the language (Hubei) well. She had to learn the language when she married my father and she stayed with my grandparents. I remembered my grandmother only used Hubei with my mother.*

Extract H

G1 – S2: *My children...I did not speak Hubei with them at all; my wife can't speak Hubei. But my mother, their grandmother, used Hubei and Hokkien when she spoke to my children.*

Extract I

G2 – S3: *My children ... sometimes I use Cantonese and sometimes I speak English ... they don't really know how to speak Hubei; nobody ever taught them since they were young.*

Language maintenance or language loss stems from the family language policy that is implemented in the homes. Clearly, a combination of the surrounding multilingual environment and exogamous marriages resulted in a family language policy which is detrimental to the maintenance of Hubei.

Language Status

Extracts J, K and L demonstrate that the maintenance of a language is dependent on its functions and status in society.

Extract J

G1 – S1: *They study Mandarin and Malay at school, and we use Hubei at home, so between them they need to improve their English. With a better command of English, it will be beneficial for them when they go out to work.*

Extract K

G3 – S7: *...I know our mother tongue is rare in Malaysia and only very few of us can speak it. It will not last long because nobody else speaks the language ... only some of us. ...Anyway, the language is not used outside our family ... only among us... Even at family functions with other relatives ...I hear the young people speak more Mandarin and Cantonese...*

Extract L

G3 – S8: *... I can speak Hubei, yes ... but it is not used anywhere else. And now, less and less people are speaking the language. So, we will not be able to use it for long. Even though I try to teach my children to speak some Hubei, it is not successful. My children only know limited vocabulary in Hubei; they do not have anyone to speak the language with...*

According to the interviewees, the Hubei heritage language has no economic function as it is spoken only by the community. With the demise of the elders, it is difficult to keep

speaking Hubei compared to the other Chinese varieties which have acquired a higher communicative function and status in the wider Malaysian Chinese society.

The above discussions of language choice in the home and socio-cultural domains confirm a decreasing use of Hubei in the home and sociocultural domains. Despite their proficiency in Hubei, G1 use Hubei mainly for communication with their parents; when communicating with other family members (siblings, spouse, children) the majority of G1 accommodated and used Hubei in combination with other Chinese varieties. With a linguistic input of Hubei as a mixed code, G2 is not as fluent in Hubei and favour using other Chinese varieties as the main means of communication with Mandarin being added to their repertoire of languages for communication with the children. There is no trace of Hubei in all communication by G3. G3 use other Chinese varieties with the older generation (grandparents and parents), a mix code of Mandarin and other Chinese varieties with siblings and spouse and, solely Mandarin with their children. These patterns of language choice validate data presented in Table 3 whereby the use of Hubei has declined from 80% (G1) to 10% (G2) to 0% (G3) while the use of Mandarin has risen from 0% (G1) to 40% (G2) to 85% (G3).

Language choice in the socio-cultural domain equally confirms a shift away from Hubei as a language for communication since Hubei and other Chinese varieties remains the majority choice for G1 and G2 while G3 prefers to communicate in Mandarin and other Chinese varieties.

Responses in the interviews provided the context of the language shift in the Hubei community and validated reported data in the questionnaire. It is a sociolinguistic reality that most Malaysians possess a wide linguistic repertoire and throughout the study, there is evidence of a variety of languages being used by members of the Hubei families such as the use of other Chinese varieties (Hokkien, Cantonese, Foochow) and standard/global languages namely, English and Mandarin. Family multilingualism in the Hubei home is a microcosm of societal multilingualism in Malaysia. Obviously, these multilingual practices presuppose fluency in the variety of languages used. Proficiency in English and Mandarin is the result of the medium of instruction in schools (cf. Figure 4) while fluency in the Chinese varieties/dialects is brought about through interaction with other Chinese groups in the country as well as via exogamy (cf. Figure 5). Exogamous practices in the community also influence family language policies that inevitably exclude the use of the heritage language as the interlocutors search for a 'common language(s)' as a lingua franca. The choice of standard languages such as English and Mandarin over Hubei is catalysed by the economic value of these global languages and the lack of a functional value of Hubei.

In sum, the findings obtained from the questionnaire and interviews indicate that the intergenerational language shift of Hubei, that is, of a change in linguistic proficiency and language use patterns from G1 to their children and grandchildren, provide convergent evidence of the mother-tongue erosion from the adult generation to that of their grandchildren. This language shift across the three generations is most evident with G3 practically illiterate in their heritage language. As the language shift of Hubei is realised, inevitably there is diminishing proficiency in Hubei and a diminishing number of Hubei speakers across the three generations in the community.

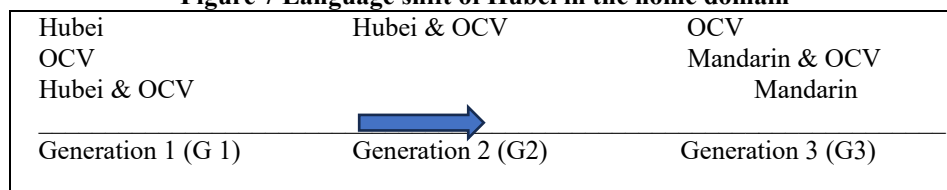
## CONCLUSION

The study investigated how and why the language shift of Hubei occurs across three generations in the Hubei families. How does the language shift of Hubei take place? The language shift process of Hubei is brought about by the language choice and language use behaviour of members of the Hubei community in the home and socio-cultural domains. Why is the language shift of Hubei taking place? As discussed in the preceding section, it is the concomitant of a combination of factors: the practice of exogamy, widespread multilingualism

in the country and community, family language policy and, the small language (insignificant) status of Hubei in comparison with other Chinese varieties used in the local Chinese society.

The effects of top-down and bottom-up multilingualism on the non-maintenance of heritage languages such as Hubei in Malaysia cannot be underestimated. In Lee’s (2004) doctoral study of Papia Kristang (PK), a heritage language in the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca, she found that PK is not replaced by another language but by a number of languages spoken in Malaysia. In her article on linguistic diversity and language endangerment in Malaysia, Lee (2016) expounded how the ecology of languages surrounding and influencing the use of PK at the Portuguese Settlement, Malacca, contributes to the endangerment of the creole. In multilingual societies, language shift in minority communities seldom begins or ends with monolingualism but rather begins with bilingualism in the mother tongue and other languages and ends with bilingualism in other languages (Lee, 2012). Like Kristang, Hubei is not replaced by another dominant language but by the variety of languages the community chooses to use.

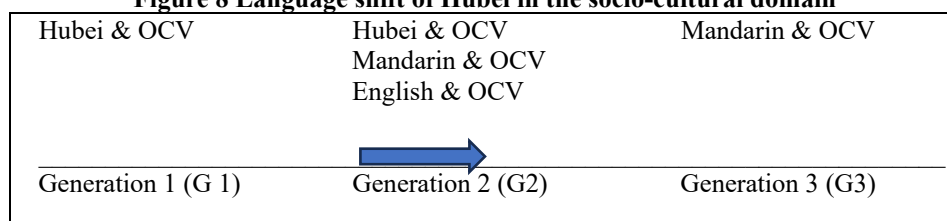
**Figure 7 Language shift of Hubei in the home domain**



Key: OCV (Other Chinese varieties)

The language shift of Hubei in the home (Figure 7) is initiated by G1 when they accommodated in their language choice to incorporate OCV (Other Chinese Varieties) instead of using only Hubei. G2 then dispensed with Hubei as a language and started using a mixed code of ‘Hubei & OCV’. By the third generation, there is no trace of Hubei as communication is carried out using OCV, Mandarin & OCV and, Mandarin.

**Figure 8 Language shift of Hubei in the socio-cultural domain**



Key: OCV (Other Chinese varieties)

The language shift of Hubei in the socio-cultural domain (Figure 8) begins with a mixed code of ‘Hubei & OCV’ with G1. G2 then added more mixed codes using Mandarin and English alongside OCV. The language shift then progresses to again no Hubei at all with G3 since they use ‘Mandarin & OCV’.

To conclude, patterns of reported language choice and language use in the study indicate that Hubei is definitely shifting across the three generations and the shift is in the direction of Other Chinese Varieties and/or Mandarin.

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## APPENDIX A

Survey Questionnaire (Adapted from Coluzzi et al., 2013)

SECTION 1		
	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	<b>Age:</b>	<b>Sex:</b>
<b>Circle your responses</b>		
1.	<b>Education:</b> None          Primary          Secondary          Higher	
2.	<b>Medium of instruction: (state)</b> Primary          Secondary          Tertiary	
3.	<b>Marital status:</b> Married          Single	
4.	<b>My spouse is:</b> Hubei          Non-Hubei	
5.	<b>With regards to Hubei:</b> You cannot even understand it You can understand it only. You can speak and understand it. NA	
<b>SECTION 2</b>		
6.	<b>Which language(s) do/did you normally use with your grandparents?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
7.	<b>Which language(s) do/did you normally use with your parents?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
8.	<b>Which language(s) do you normally use with your siblings?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
9.	<b>Which language(s) do you normally use with your spouse?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
10.	<b>Which language(s) do you normally use with your children?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
11.	<b>Which language(s) do you normally use at <i>informal</i> family social gatherings?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	
12.	<b>Which language(s) do you normally use at <i>formal</i> family social gatherings?</b> Hubei          Mandarin          English          Other          NA	

## APPENDIX B:

### Semi-structured open-ended interview questions

- 1          What are your reactions/opinions about using the Hubei language?
- 2          Which languages do you use more frequently at home and on social occasions? Why?
- 3          Will/Did you educate your children to use the Hubei language? Why/Why not?
- 4          What do you think is the future of the Hubei language in Malaysia?