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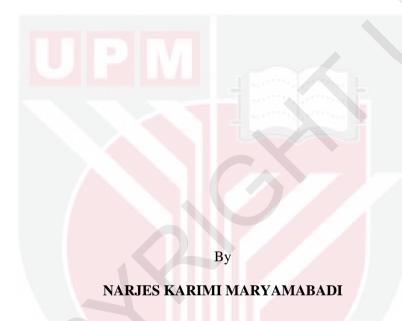
LANGUAGE CHOICE AND USE OF ENGLISH AND PERSIAN AMONG IRANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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FBMK 2014 37

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

December 2014

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The purpose of this study is to find out the attitudes of Iranian postgraduate students studying in UPM towards English and Persian language and, also to identify their language use and choice patterns in different domains. These domains include family, education, environment, media; reading and writing; each of these domains have 3 or 4 sub domains. The relationship between gender and language attitude and language choice is also examined as well as the relation between study discipline (science and social science) and language attitude and language choice. The study uses Fishman's (1972), "who speaks what language and to whom", model of domain analysis to determine their language choice and use.

Using self-administered questionnaires the data was gathered. The questionnaire was adopted from previous studies, but some changes were made to suit the objectives of this study. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 170 posts graduate students from different faculties of UPM. One hundred and fifty-one (151) questionnaires were returned. Using SPSS, the data was analyzed. Statistical procedures of analysis were used in accordance to their relevance with the current study's objectives. To provide descriptive information frequency analysis was used. Other techniques were t-test and Pearson correlation to find the difference and correlation between variables.

Results of this study indicate that language choice and use is domain specific. They use different languages in different domains. In the family domain, Persian is almost the only language they use, as family is an intimate domain. In formal domains such as education, English is the language which is used in most of the situations as medium of the instruction in the University is English. As for the media domain, writing and reading domains students use English and Persian in different situations.

The relationships of language choice, attitude, and gender and study discipline were also examined. In general, no significant difference was found between male and female in language choice and use. But male and female played out a significant difference in their attitude towards the English language. The effect study discipline on language choice showed some choice difference between students studying science and social science fields.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

PILIHAN BAHASA DAN PENGGUNAAN INGGERIS DAN PERSIAN DI KALANGAN PELAJAR PASCA SISWAZAH IRANIAN DI UNIVERSITI AWAM MALAYSIA

Oleh

NARJES KARIMI MARYAMABADI

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Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui sikap pelajar pasca siswazah Iran yang belajar di UPM terhadap bahasa Inggeris dan bahasa Farsi. Ia juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui tentang penggunaan bahasa dan corak pilihan mereka dalam domain (persekitaran) yang berbeza. Antara domain yang dikaji termasuklah; domain keluarga, pendidikan, alam sekitar, media; membaca dan menulis. Setiap domain ini mempunyai 3 atau 4 sub domain. Perbezaan antara lelaki dan perempuan dalam mempertimbangkan sikap terhadap bahasa dan pemilihan bahasa juga turut dikaji. Hubungan antara disiplin kajian (sains dan sains sosial) dan sikap bahasa dan pilihan bahasa juga disiasat. Fishman (1972) "siapa dan kepada siapa seseorang bercakap," model analisis domain telah digunakan untuk menentukan pilihan bahasa mereka. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan set soalan kaji selidik yang ditadbir sendiri. Soalan kaji selidik diambil daripada kajian lepas tetapi beberapa perubahan telah dibuat berdasarkan objektif kajian ini. Soal selidik diedarkan kepada 170 orang sampel pelajar dari fakulti yang berbeza di UPM. Hanya 151 soal selidik telah dikembalikan. Data yang dikumpulkan, dianalisis menggunakan aplikasi SPSS. Teknik statistik telah digunakan mengikut kaitannya dengan kajian semasa. Analisis kekerapan digunakan untuk menerangkan analisis deskriptif dalam kajian. Teknik lain ialah ujian-t dan ujian korelasi Pearson untuk mencari perbezaan dan hubungan antara pembolehubah.

Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pemilihan dan penggunaan bahasa bergantung kepada domain tertentu. Mereka menggunakan bahasa yang berbeza dalam domain yang berbeza. Dalam domain keluarga, bahasa Parsi adalah satu-satunya bahasa yang digunakan kerana ia adalah domain keintiman. Bagi domain formal seperti pendidikan, bahasa Inggeris adalah bahasa utama yang digunakan dalam hampir semua medium pengantaraan di universiti. Bagi domain media dan domain penulisan dan pembacaan, mereka menggunakan kedua bahasaInggeris dan Parsi bergantung kepada situasi. Perkaitan antara pilihan bahasa, sikap, jantina dan disiplin kajian juga turut dikaji. Tiada perbezaan yang signifikan di antara lelaki dan perempuan dalam pilihan dan penggunaan bahasa yang digunakan. Namun, kajian ini mendapati, terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dari aspek sikap mereka terhadap bahasa Inggeris. Kesan disiplin kajian ke atas penggunaan bahasa menunjukkan beberapa perbezaan antara pelajar aliran sains dan sains sosial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Professor Dr. Chan Swee Heng, for the continuous support of my master's study and research, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me at all times of the research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better supervisor and mentor for my master's study. Besides my supervisor, I would like to thank my other thesis committee member: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, for her encouragement, insightful comments, and hard questions.

Last but not the least; I would like to thank my family and friends who supported me during my time here. First and foremost I would like to thank my parents, Mr.Ahmad Karimi and Mrs. Zahra Abedinnejd for their love and financial support and also my brothers, Mahmoud and Mohammad for supporting me spiritually throughout my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The chapter presents the background of the study, linguistic situation in Malaysia, information on Iranians living in Malaysia, problem statement, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, research questions and significance of the study. A chapter summary is given at the end.

1.1 Background of the Study

Large communities of Iranians are living in Malaysia University Putra Malaysia (UPM) is one of the universities with a large number of Iranian students. According to SGS (School of Graduate Studies) about 1862 Iranian students are enrolled in different fields and programs (2013). They all have a background in English language learning. They attend English classes in UPM which complement some English courses taken at elementary and high school in their home country. These students have different English abilities; and UPM's English language requirement is that they must have at least an IELTS of 6 or TOEFL score of 550 (paper based) or TOEFL of 80 (internet based). Having any grade lower than the prerequisite would require the students to attend ELS or TEP (Tertiary English Programme) English classes in UPM. In addition, the students have to study *Bahasa Malaysia,* the national language of Malaysia.

For the Iranians, Persian, an Indo-European language is their mother tongue. It is the official and standard language of Iran. In some regions of Iran, people speak other languages and dialects such as Azeri, Kurdish and Mazandarani, Azeri or Azerbaijani belongs to the family of Altaic (Turkic) languages. About 24% of Iranians can speak Azeri, making it the second most common language spoken by Iranians. Kurdish is an Indo-European language which is a member of the Iranian language family and is spoken by 7-10% of the population. Kurdish is the third most common language. In the northern part of Iran People can speak Mazandarani. This language is also a member of the Iranian language family and 8% can speak this language (Jahani, 2004).

Many other languages are also spoken in Iran such as Balochi (Indo-European), Armenian (Indo-European), Turkmen (Turkic), Arabic (Semitic) and Assyrian (Semitic). 10% of the Iranian population can speak these languages (Jahani, 2004).

When they enroll as UPM post graduate students, they have to learn English if they do not meet the criterion grade for English. In addition they also have to learn *Bahasa Malaysia* (BM), resulting in a linguistic situation where they have to switch between languages. However, *Bahasa Malaysia* is not really a language that they need to master at a level similar to English. In addition they would have minimum contact with BM. In the context of this study, the language choice is most obvious between English and homeland languages (Persian, Turkish and Kurdish).

The study of language choice is a complex issue and so are the factors that affect language. There are issues that may concern multilingualism, language shift and maintenance, and use of language linked to ethnicity, gender, age and identity.

A large number of the people are multilingual; multilingualism is therefore an interesting phenomenon that can be studied from different perspectives. Multilingualism, language shift, language choice and use and bilingualism are situations where different varieties of language are used. In multilingual societies there is always a question of language choice, and domains play an important role in choosing the language in connection with domains.

Schmidt-Rohr was the first person who proposed the concept of "dominance configuration", which reveals the language choice status in different domains of behavior (Fishman, 1965). Living in Malaysia has led to the question of language choice among the Iranian students as they contend with the linguistic situation in the country.

1.2 Linguistic Situation in Malaysia

Historically, the Portuguese were the first European language to appear in Malaya (before the formation of Malaysia), followed by Dutch and English which also came to this country by way of colonization. It was at that time when Chinese and Indians also set foot in Malaysia and brought along the Chinese and Indian languages to this country. As a result, Malaysia became a multilingual and multicultural country (Rahman, 2007) .

During Malaysia's colonial days, English language learning began as a tool for socio-economic mobility and also to enhance educational opportunities (Nair-Venugopal, 2000). Nevertheless, after Malaysia gained its independence in 1957, the learning of English was downplayed but its role continued to grow not only as a means of international and socio-political communication but also as a global means to communicate and exchange knowledge. Against such a background, Malaysia can be categorized as diglossic or polygossic (Platt& Weber, 1980).

English has many variations and one such variation is Malaysian English (ME) which is emerged through the process of hybridization from parent norms (Whinnom, 1971), 'indigenization' (Moag & Moag., 1977)and 'nativization' (Kachru, 1983).Based on the National Language Act of 1963, Bahasa Melayu (BM) was confirmed as the national and official language in Malaysia and English became a subject that is taken alongside with other subjects. However, language education was impacted by remarkable changes by the mid-1990s. It was felt necessary to reemphasize the learning of English. Thus the government decided to use English as the medium of instruction for scientific and technological subjects (Ridge, 2004). Also in 2002 Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mohathir Mohamad declared that mathematics and sciences were to be taught in English in the first year of primary school. Then in 2013, the policy was reversed.

Malaysia did not become bilingual and multilingual overnight; rather this process took place through several phases and changes in language planning and

policy over time. The emphasis was for the Malays to become bilingual (being able to speak *Bahasa Melayu* and English) and for the non-Malay (Chinese and Indians) to become trilingual or multilingual (BM, English and their ethnic language).

1.3 Iranians Living in Malaysia

As was reported by Abbas Ghanbari (Peyc news, 2012), official statistics from the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology showed that Malaysia is the number one global destination for Iranian students. Evidence shows an upward trend of Iranian students uptake among the institutions, with about 15 to 20 thousand Iranians currently studying in universities Entrepreneurship centers, English institutions or international educational centers in the country. Together with the students there is about A 15 to 20 thousand Iranians who are here as dependents (e.g. wife, children or parents).

In terms of population distribution, many Iranian students are studying in Malaysian universities and colleges. The number of these students in some universities can be from 10 to 3000. In many universities and training centers in Malaysia, Iranian students are ranked as first or third along with Chinese and Indonesian students in terms of their presence. Some of these students who have graduated from Malaysian universities have also been employed by organizations located in Malaysia.

Only about 5,000 to 7,000 students studying in Malaysian university (one third of the Iranian population studying in Malaysian universities) are sponsored by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The rest (13 to 15 thousand students) are on their own. Thus Iranian students have a large presence in Malaysia and this has language implications as they form a speech community with their own language characteristics, including language choice. This new social and cultural phenomenon has motivated the researcher to make a formal investigation into the patterns of language choice in order to obtain insight in a language situation that is unique

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Its contribution will hopefully be that, by studying the language situation of an immigrant group (Iranians in Malaysia), which very few studies have previously focused upon, it will broaden our understanding and knowledge of language choice and language attitude specific for this minority group in Malaysia.

The findings of the study can help educators to know about the kind of strategies students use in their communication in a multilingual society. This study is important on several levels. It helps to develop a comprehensive approach to account for language choice. In addition this kind of research helps to identify language needs of foreigners, especially students who would be residing in Malaysia for a period of time.

Language choice as a social and cultural phenomenon cannot be studied without considering the social context in which the language occurs. In this study the focus is on language choice in a multitude of domains.

These domains can relate to interaction with peers, friends, family and etc. In addition, it would be of interest to identify the factors that influence their choice of language in a certain situation or with different interlocutors. Finding the reason for choosing a certain code in a particular domain and what makes them switch between codes is of relevance to the study.

Having these questions in mind, this research seeks to determine patterns of the language choice of Iranian students in UPM and their attitude towards the languages used.

This kind of research is also important since it helps to give insights in issues of ethnic group identity, which will contribute to the relationship between language and societal knowledge.

This study also helps the formulation of language requirements as a policy for immigrants and there could be new suggestions for language planning and policy.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

This study explores the choice of language among Iranian students in UPM in different domains such as at home, the classroom, university, with friends etc. and also their attitude towards the languages. It also examines factors that affect the choice and use of language such as gender, study discipline and language attitude.

1.6 Research Questions

The questions that drive the research are as follow:
1) What are the attitudes of Iranian students at UPM towards English and their homeland Persian languages?
2) What are the different domains in which Iranian students at UPM use English or homeland Persian languages?
3) What is the relationship between language attitude, language choice and gender?
4) What is the relationship between language attitude, language choice and study discipline?

1.7 Limitations

In this study only Iranian students studying at UPM (University Putra Malaysia) formed the sample population studied. There are a large number of Iranian students studying in other universities in Malaysia and there are also Iranians who work and live in Malaysia and they are not considered in this study.

Another limitation comes with the self-report questionnaire on individual's language choice and language attitude. There may be some validity problems as the respondents may not be totally honest. In addition, it was difficult to get the questionnaires to be returned sometimes participants do not want to provide the desired details which the researcher is interested in.

1.9   Summary

This chapter starts with a brief introduction of language choice and language use. Then a background is given to describe multilingualism and in particular the phenomenon in Malaysia. The chapter also touched on the very first European languages to come to Malaysia and the local languages spoken by people. In this part, the linguistic situation of pre and post-colonial of Malaysia is discussed as the background to the study. The chapter also gave an account of Iranians living in Malaysia, their population, life style and scientific achievements. The statement of problem clarifies the reason for conducting such a research. Theoretical framework which is based on Fishman's model of domain analysis (1965) and Claire Kramsch's work (1988) is also elaborated. Moreover research questions and objectives of the study are also mentioned. And finally the limitations of the study are stated. The next chapter deals with literature review that will give more information that is related to the thrust of the study.

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