4 Malaysian-Filipino Couples and Language Choice

*Heritage Language or International Language?*

*Francisco Perlas Dumanig and Maya Khemlani David*

**Introduction**

Malaysia is a multilingual and multicultural country where many people can speak two or more languages. Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the national and official language. However, English is widely spoken and used in various domains of communication by different ethnic groups. The educational system in Malaysia has considered the linguistic plurality of the people and introduced vernacular primary schools (David 2004b). At the secondary level, Bahasa Malaysia was the medium of instruction in all subjects in public or government schools until 2003, when English was introduced for the teaching of science and mathematics. With the increasing trend towards globalisation, the popularity of English has increased.

The Philippines is also a multilingual and multicultural country. Filipino is the national language, while English and Filipino are the official languages used in education, government and media. Although Filipino is widely spoken in different domains of communication, English has become a necessity for Filipinos who work overseas (Dumanig 2009). English can be considered the language for employment opportunities outside the Philippines. It is clear then that both Malaysia and the Philippines have similar linguistic scenarios, as both English and their respective national languages play an important role in everyday communication. This may have contributed to the language choice of the participants in this study.

Language choice plays a crucial role in interracial communication, specifically in mixed marriages, as both the husband and wife do not come from the same speech community. It is expected that a speaker's choice of language in an interaction can be influenced by his/her linguistic repertoire (see Holmes 2008). Moreover, language choice might be triggered by various factors such as the speaker's first language, the