A hierarchical model for language maintenance and language shift: focus on the Malaysian Chinese community

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A hierarchical model for language maintenance and language shift: focus on the Malaysian Chinese community

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Social factors involved in language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) have been the focus of LMLS studies. Previous studies provide fundamental support for the theoretical development of this research branch. However, there is no discussion regarding the hierarchical order of these social factors, i.e. the degree of importance of various social factors in the process of LMLS in a specific multilingual society. This article aims to illustrate the hierarchy of population factor, settlement mode factor, and status and institutional support factor in the process of LMLS across various dialect groups in the Malaysian Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur. Based on the analysis of the decline of language proficiency, discontinuation of intergenerational transmission and decline of language use in public settings, a hierarchical model of LMLS is constructed.

Keywords: language maintenance; language shift; Malaysian Chinese community; dialect group; ethnolinguistic vitality

Introduction

Previous studies on language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) have explored this issue from different perspectives (Appel and Muysken 1987; Coulmas 2005; Fishman 1964; Giles et al. 1977; Hoffmann 1991; Holmes 2001). According to Gafaranga (2010), the social factors influencing LMLS that have been studied are the size of population, status, institutional support, similarity between languages and cultures, inter-group marriage, language attitude, religion, language policy, immigration, industrialisation, urbanisation, and so on (Appel and Muysken 1987; Coulmas 2005; Hoffmann 1991; Holmes 2001; Li et al. 1997; among others). In the ethnolinguistic vitality theory, Giles et al. (1977) combined objective and subjective factors to account for the vitality of immigrant groups which may influence the extent of LMLS. Although the existing literature provides a long list of social factors, few of them discuss the relations between these factors with the following exceptions: (1) there is variation across different communities (Hoffmann 1991); (2) the social factors are interrelated (Appel and Muysken 1987); (3) it is impossible to predict LMLS (Appel and Muysken 1987). The concern in this article is how these social factors are interrelated given the fact that they are related to each

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other and only effective in a specific context. In this study, we hypothesise that certain factors have more predictive weight than others and these social factors play their roles in a hierarchical order in the process of LMLS. This study aims to test this hypothesis using LMLS of various Chinese dialect groups in Kuala Lumpur as its empirical base.

In current LMLS literature, social factors are normally reviewed separately and independently when a certain community is under discussion. Traditionally, the researcher introduces the sociocultural, economic and political background of the community under discussion and then explains its language shift from these perspectives quantitatively or qualitatively. Very few studies integrate social factors into the process of language shift. In the proposed hierarchical model of LMLS, we will link social factors with different layers of language shift and define the order of these factors in the hierarchical structure.

In addition, a large number of LMLS studies focus on immigrant communities which have been found to be the most significant group of people undergoing language shift. For instance, Clyne (1991) and Clyne and Kipp (1997) compared three groups of immigrants (Greek, Turkish and Dutch) in Australia in terms of their extent of language shift. However, very few studies have been carried out on non-migrant or stable migrant communities. Filling these research gaps provides a better theoretical understanding on this topic. In fact, empirical studies carried out across the world not only describe the specific situation in different contexts but also provide fundamental support for the theoretical development of this research branch. This study aims to present the ongoing process of language shift among various dialect groups in the Malaysian Chinese community and address it from a theoretical perspective.

This article is organised in the following way: we start with an introduction to the Chinese community and various dialect groups in Kuala Lumpur (KL); then we proceed to introduce the methodology of this study followed by the description of LMLS in various dialect groups, which is presented in three parts: (1) decline in language proficiency; (2) discontinuation in intergenerational transmission; and (3) decline of language use in public settings; in the subsequent section, some explanations of social factors are discussed. Finally a hierarchical model for LMLS is proposed, which is followed by the conclusion of this study.

The Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur

According to Yen (2000), the earliest settlement of Chinese in Malaysia was during the time of the Malacca Sultanate (fifteenth century) in the state of Malacca. Most of the Chinese there were Hokkien. Gradually, more and more Chinese came and settled in Peninsular Malaya. During the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, most Chinese immigrants to Malaya came from southern China, particularly the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. They first settled in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) as traders. They were later encouraged by the British to work in the tin mines of Perak and Selangor. The settlement pattern showed that the Chinese settled mainly on the west coast of Peninsular Malaya.

Three patterns of Chinese settlement can be observed: the urban port settlement, the mining settlement and the rural agricultural settlement (Yen 2000). It was the mining settlement that led to the development of Kuala Lumpur. Chinese
immigrants in the nineteenth century opened up tin mines in Lukut and Sungei Ujung in Negeri Sembilan, Larut in Perak and Kuala Lumpur. According to tin mining history records, throughout the nineteenth century, the capital and the labour of the tin mining industry were provided mainly by the Chinese. With the prosperity of the mining industry, the Chinese population increased rapidly. The Census data show that the number of Chinese increased from 2,667,452 in 1957 to 6,390,900 in 2010, making up 24.6% of the total population in Malaysia. Table 1 shows the distribution of the Chinese population in West Malaysia indicating that KL is one of the areas with a high density of Chinese.

Traditionally, the Chinese community is organised mainly along dialect and kinship lines (Ramsey 1987). In Malaysia, the governmental census classifies the Chinese population according to their dialects, such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew, Hokchiu, etc. Table 2 indicates the weight of the various dialect groups in the Chinese population.

Among the various dialect groups, Hokkien (Southern Min group) is the largest one comprising 37.66% of total Chinese population. Hakka and Cantonese are almost similar in population size, representing 20.36% and 19.90%, respectively, of total Chinese population. The rest of the dialect groups are relatively small in terms of population. However, they may dominate in certain regions, such as the Hokchiu in Sarawak. The map on the left (Figure 1) indicates the distribution of major dialects in China. The region in blue is Min area which includes Southern Min sub-group (Hokkien, Hainanese, Teochew), Eastern Min sub-group (Hokchiu), and Northern Min sub-group. The region in orange is the Hakka area and the purple region is the Yue dialect (Cantonese). In contrast, the distribution of these dialects in Malaysia is scattered rather than concentrated although some major dialects tend to be dominant in some areas like Cantonese in KL and Ipoh, and Hokkien in Penang. Figure 1 (right) illustrates the distribution of Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Hokchiu, Cantonese, and Khek [Hakka]) in Perak, a state to the north of KL.

Table 1. Distribution of Chinese population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Chinese population</th>
<th>Regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28% or above in total population</td>
<td>States: Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40% or above in total population</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur: Kepong, Cheras, Bukit Bintang, Old Klang Road, Sri Petaling, Pudu, Segambut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selangor: Subang Jaya/USJ, Puchong, SS2, Petaling Jaya, Damansara Jaya/Utama, Bandar Utama, Serdang, Port Klang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics (2010).

Table 2. Weight of dialect groups in Chinese population.a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hokkien</th>
<th>Hakka</th>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Teochew</th>
<th>Hokchiu</th>
<th>Hainanese</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,020,868</td>
<td>1,092,754</td>
<td>1,067,994</td>
<td>497,280</td>
<td>251,554</td>
<td>141,045</td>
<td>294,716</td>
<td>5,366,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.66%</td>
<td>20.36%</td>
<td>19.90%</td>
<td>9.27%</td>
<td>4.69%</td>
<td>2.63%</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aMore information is available in Asmah (2004).
Source: Department of Statistics (2001). The detailed information on sub-ethnic population for Census 2010 is not published yet, so we adopted the data from Census 2000.
In KL, where the present study was carried out, the distribution of the Chinese population is slightly different from that at the national level as shown in Table 3. In the capital city, Hokkien is the largest dialect group (34.47%), followed by Cantonese (34.07%) and Hakka (18.43%). The rest of the dialect groups are not demographically significant.

Although various dialect groups are defined by their respective dialects, an increasing number of the younger generation seem to have lost their command of these dialects and have shifted to either Mandarin or a more prestigious dialect or even English (Chong and Wang 2009). The aim of the present study is to find out the difference in the extent of language shift of these dialect groups and identify the hierarchical factors in this process.

The study

The context

The current study was carried out in the context of the Malaysian Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur, which is regarded as an immigrant language island.

Table 3. Weight of dialect groups in KL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hokkien</td>
<td>34.47%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>34.07%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hokchiu</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hainanese</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Department of Statistics, 2001.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of Chinese dialects in China and Perak, Malaysia. Source: © Editions Didier Millet. Map taken from *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia Volume 9, Languages and Literature*, with permission.

Source: left photo, Wikimedia Commons, the original map was created by Wyunhe under the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC-BY).
by Fishman (1989) due to its large proportion in total population (26% in Census 2000). Such a context is by nature different from that of small immigrant communities, such as the Chinese in the UK or the Germans in Australia. Therefore, it is of theoretical importance to look into LMLS of a large established immigrant community.

As introduced in the previous section, the Malaysian Chinese community is not a homogeneous entity but a heterogeneous one. In the current study, six dialect groups were chosen as the focus groups, namely, Hokkien group ($N = 216, 30.1\%$), Hakka group ($N = 214, 29.8\%$), Cantonese group ($N = 168, 23.4\%$), Teochew group ($N = 50, 7.0\%$), Hainan group ($N = 31, 4.3\%$), and Hokchiu group ($N = 11, 1.5\%$). The weight of various dialect groups in our sample is almost similar to that in KL (see Table 3). These dialect groups share a similar immigrant background and history. However, it is observed that they are undergoing different extents of LMLS (Chong and Wang 2009). This study aims to reveal the differences and identify the factors which lead to such differences and rank them according to their importance in this process. In light of this, the research questions are:

1. What are the differences between the six dialect groups in terms of language maintenance?
2. What are the social factors leading to such differences?
3. Is there a hierarchy among these social factors?

**Method**

Questionnaire survey is the main research method in the current study. Stratified sampling was applied when the survey was conducted in the national schools in KL. The target subjects are Form 4 students with relatively stable language use. The procedure is as follows:

1. Schools were selected based on whether Chinese classes were offered to the students. According to the records of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, there are altogether 95 national schools in KL. Sixty-three of them offer Chinese classes.
2. Form 4 students (78% of them aged 16 years) who have relatively stable language use are the target subjects. The criterion for selection of schools was whether Chinese classes were offered for Form 4 students in that school. As a result, 24 out of the 63 national schools were chosen as the target schools. Finally, we received permission for the questionnaire survey from 16 schools.
3. In each school, we drew one class as our sample. In these 16 schools, the student population in Form 4 Chinese classes varied from 32 to 297.

Table 4 shows the detailed information of the subjects.

The survey was carried out by the research team in November 2008. The questionnaires were distributed to the 16 schools by research assistants. In total, 762 questionnaires were returned out of which 45 invalid questionnaires were excluded. The total number of valid questionnaires is 717. These questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS 15.0.

Since this study focuses on the Form 4 Chinese students in KL, the following two categories of students were not included in the study:
Chinese students who did not register for Chinese classes in national schools.

Chinese students from Chinese Independent Schools where Mandarin is used as the medium of instruction.

The questionnaire is composed of four sections: (1) personal information; (2) language proficiency; (3) language use; and (4) language attitude. In this study, three aspects will be focused on with respect to LMLS, namely, (1) language proficiency in mother tongue, (2) language use by different generations in family domain, and (3) language use in various public settings.

Language maintenance among various dialect groups

In this section, various dialect groups will be compared in terms of their language proficiency in their respective dialects, inter-generational language use by family members, and language use in public settings. For each parameter, a ranking of the six dialect groups will be performed, which is an important reference for the overall extent of LMLS.

Decline in language proficiency

Language proficiency is a strong indicator for LMLS. If a group shows a low proficiency level in their mother tongue, this implies a high extent of language shift. In contrast, if language proficiency is maintained at a high level, it indicates that the language is maintained relatively well. In the current study, the subjects were asked to evaluate their proficiency in various dialects. A six-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire: (1) no proficiency; (2) very weak; (3) weak; (4) ordinary; (5) good; and (6) very good. Scale 1 scores as zero while scale 2–6 score as 1–5. Table 5 shows the results of the Mean and Standard Deviation of the subjects’ self-reported proficiency by subjects from various dialect groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hokkien</th>
<th>Hakka</th>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Teochew</th>
<th>Hokchiu</th>
<th>Hainanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.539</td>
<td>1.725</td>
<td>1.129</td>
<td>1.615</td>
<td>1.414</td>
<td>1.376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There are more female subjects than male subjects in this study because there are a few girl schools in KL. One reviewer of this article suggested gender difference as a variable in this study. We do find gender difference in their most fluent language ($\chi^2 = 38.5, p = 0.000$), preferred language ($\chi^2 = 26.3, p = 0.000$), and first language ($\chi^2 = 11.8, p = 0.04$). Female students tend to be more fluent in Mandarin and less fluent in dialects. However, we focused on dialect groups as a whole in this article. Therefore gender difference across dialect groups is not discussed.

(1) Chinese students who did not register for Chinese classes in national schools.

(2) Chinese students from Chinese Independent Schools where Mandarin is used as the medium of instruction.

Table 4. Age and gender of the subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Mean and SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>$M = 16.15$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>SD = 0.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are more female subjects than male subjects in this study because there are a few girl schools in KL.
language proficiency in their own dialects. The results show that Cantonese subjects scored the highest and Hainanese subjects the lowest. Cantonese subjects maintained their dialect at a good level (scale 5) while both Hokkien and Hainanese subjects claimed that their proficiency in their own dialect was very weak (scale 2). Both Hokkien and Hakka groups maintained their dialects below the ordinary level (scales 3 and 4). One-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests were computed to check the between-groups differences in language proficiency. The results indicated that these dialect groups had significant differences in the proficiency in these dialects. For instance, Hokkien group was significantly different from Hakka, Cantonese, and Hainanese in terms of proficiency in the Hokkien dialect ($F_{27.3} = 27.3, \ p = 0.000$). However, no significant difference was found between groups in terms of the proficiency in both Hainanese and Hokchiu dialects. This is because all dialect groups were almost equally weak in these two dialects. In contrast, for proficiency in Cantonese, almost all groups performed equally well except for the Hokkien group which was significantly different from the Cantonese group. This result shows that Cantonese has been an additional language for these dialect groups in KL. The reason will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Based on the self-reported language proficiency, a ranking among the six dialect groups was generated according to the extent of language maintenance. This is shown below.

(1) Cantonese > Hakka, Hokkien > Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese

The Cantonese group shows the highest extent of language maintenance, followed by the Hakka and Hokkien groups. The Teochew, Hokchiu and Hainanese groups show the lowest extent of language maintenance among the six dialect groups.

**Discontinuation in intergenerational transmission**

The home domain is the last domain for language maintenance (Appel and Muysken 1987; Coumas 2005; Fasold 1984). If a language is not spoken at home, it is almost impossible to maintain it or reverse language shift. In this sense, intergenerational transmission is very important for language maintenance (Edwards 1985; Fishman 1991). It is regarded as one of the nine factors for language vitality by UNESCO (Batibo 2005). By looking into the language use across generations in the home domain, we may learn about the current situation of LMLS and predict its future development. In the survey, the students were asked to report their first language and their language choice with other family members. The results are presented in Table 6.

Seven interlocutors from three generations were given in the questionnaire: grandparents, father, mother, elder brother, elder sister, younger brother and younger sister. The percentage reported in Table 6 is the proportion of the usage of the dialect. For instance, 48.2% of Cantonese subjects reported that Cantonese was spoken as their first language. 75.9% of Cantonese subjects spoke Cantonese with their grandparents; 59.3% with their father and 50.6% with their mother; 61.3% with their elder brother and 62.5% with their elder sister; 44.1% with their younger brother and 39.2% with their younger sister. For the Teochew, Hainanese, and Hokchiu groups, it is observed that nobody spoke their dialect to their siblings or even to their parents (Hokchiu group). These three dialects were only maintained for communication with their grandparents but the percentage was not high either (below 32%). In fact, Teochew dialect was not spoken as the first language any more. Hokkien and Hakka
subjects showed a similar tendency in their language use with different generations. The highest percentage was 38.8% and the lowest percentage was 5.1%. The younger the interlocutor, the less dialect was used.

Based on Table 6, the six dialect groups can be ranked according to the extent of intergenerational transmission.

(2) Cantonese > Hakka, Hokkien > Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese

Cantonese was maintained for intergenerational interaction to the highest extent among the six dialect groups. In contrast, the Teochew, Hokchiu, and Hainanese groups almost abandoned their dialects in the home domain. The Hakka and Hokkien groups still maintained their dialects in the home domain although to a much lower extent than the Cantonese group.

### Decline of language use in public settings

If a language is only used in restricted settings, its maintenance is not optimistic. In a multilingual society, it is even important to gain more domains or public settings for the purpose of language maintenance (Coulmas 2005). UNESCO also proposed loss of existing language domains as one of the major indicators for linguistic vitality and endangerment (Batibo 2005). In Malaysia, all official domains, such as governmental departments are associated with Malay, the national language. Within the Chinese community, formal domains such as mass media and education are reserved for Mandarin (Wang 2010). Therefore, the space for dialects is relatively restricted. In the current study, four public settings were chosen, namely, coffee shops, restaurants, shopping centers, and clinics. The subjects chose their language use in these four settings. Table 7 indicates the results.

Table 7 presents a clear picture of language use in public settings: Teochew, Hainanese, and Hokchiu have disappeared in these settings; Cantonese was used most in all settings; Hokkien and Hakka dialect were occasionally used in coffee shops only. The ranking according to the extent of language maintenance in public settings is:

(3) Cantonese > Hakka, Hokkien > Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese
Cantonese was maintained in all four public settings; Teochew, Hokchiu, and Hainan dialects were excluded from public settings; Hakka and Hokkien dialects have been almost withdrawn from public settings.

**Summary**

Based on the analysis, the six dialect groups may be categorised into three groups based on the extent of language maintenance.

- **Group 1:** Cantonese high
- **Group 2:** Hakka, Hokkien medium
- **Group 3:** Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese low

Taking language proficiency, language choice for intergenerational communication, and language use in public settings into account, Group 1 (Cantonese) showed the highest extent of language maintenance; Group 2 (Hakka and Hokkien) maintained their language at a medium level; Group 3 (Teochew, Hokchiu and Hainanese) manifested the lowest extent of language maintenance.

Thus far, the first research question has been answered. The six dialect groups do behave differently in their language maintenance. In the next section, the second research question will be addressed, namely, what are the social factors leading to this difference?

**Explanation of social factors**

As mentioned previously, all the six dialect groups originated from southern China and shared a similar migration history and living experience in Malaysia. However, they manifest different extents of language maintenance. What factors have led to such a difference? It is predictable that Group 3 will lose their languages/dialects in the near future. The three dialect groups have something in common, i.e. the small population size. In the following discussion, we will adopt the objective perspective of vitality theory (Giles et al. 1977) to explain the different situations of language maintenance among the various dialect groups.

**Size of population**

The size of population is frequently mentioned in LMLS studies (Appel and Muysken 1987; Coulmas 2005; Hoffmann 1991; Holmes 2001; Li et al. 1997; among others). This factor also plays an important role in ethnolinguistic vitality in a
multilingual society (Giles et al. 1977). A large population size definitely will contribute to the maintenance of a language; on the contrary, a small population size may hinder language maintenance. This also applies to the current study. The three dialect groups which have been undergoing a great extent of language shift are all minor groups within the Chinese community. In contrast, the other three groups (Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka) are all major groups in terms of population.

As reflected in Table 3, Hokkien is the largest dialect group comprising 34.47% of the total Chinese population in KL, followed by Cantonese group (34.07%) and Hakka group (18.43%). The Teochew, Hainanese and Hokchiu groups are all small in terms of population, representing 4.15%, 2.77%, and 0.78% of the total Chinese population, respectively. Based on their proportion in the Chinese population, these dialect groups may be categorised into two groups: (1) minor dialect group, and (2) major dialect group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor groups</th>
<th>Major groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hainanese</td>
<td>Hokkien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teochew</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hokchiu</td>
<td>Hakka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The minor groups which have a small population size tend to shift their language to a greater extent than the major groups as exemplified in the previous section. They are even experiencing language loss. The majority of the subjects claim that they have no proficiency in their dialects any more (cf. Table 5); they never speak the dialect with their siblings (cf. Table 6); and these dialects are absent from public settings (cf. Table 7). In general, these minor groups exhibit a very low degree of language vitality.

**Status and institutional support**

Among the six dialect groups, the Cantonese group shows the highest extent of language maintenance: (1) 73.2% of Cantonese subjects claim that their proficiency is at a good level; (2) over half of Cantonese subjects still speak Cantonese with their parents and siblings; (3) Cantonese is present in various public settings. Although the Cantonese group is the second-largest dialect group in KL, it is obviously the most popular dialect. This popularity is associated with its status as the lingua franca of the Chinese community and the institutional support from both the local and overseas Chinese community.

**Status**

Cantonese is the lingua franca of the Chinese community along with Mandarin in KL. It acquired this status through its economic value since the early twentieth century because of its prominence in business and trade in KL. This prestige status contributed to its maintenance and even induced the language shift of other dialect groups. As Edwards (1985) claimed, the pragmatic or economic issues have top priority in the process of LMLS.
Institutional support

Institutional support for a minority language is very important for its maintenance (Giles et al. 1977). One of the resources for promoting a language is the mass media (Appel and Muysken 1987). In Malaysia, both national and private, free and cable TV channels provide programs in Cantonese and Mandarin. Recently, TV drama series in Hokkien which are imported from Taiwan are available. However, it is still very limited. Cantonese and Mandarin radio broadcasting is also available (Wang 2005). As for other dialects, only a short slot is assigned for news broadcasting. Other mass media in Mandarin or Cantonese, such as movies, DVDs and VCDs, are readily available.

Cantonese in KL is also supported by overseas Cantonese communities among which Hong Kong is the most influential. Tang (2009) proposed the global Cantonese community as a framework to discuss the present situation and future development of Cantonese. The close cultural and economic relations between Malaysia and Hong Kong will consolidate the status of Cantonese in KL and other overseas Chinese communities.

Mode of settlement

As indicated by the three parameters in the last section, the Hokkien group and Hakka group are at a medium level of language maintenance: (1) roughly half of the subjects can speak their dialects at a satisfactory level; (2) Hokkien and Hakka dialects are still alive in the home domain although the situation is not optimistic; (3) they are almost absent in public settings. It is predictable that they will go the way of the minor groups in the near future. Given that both these two dialect groups are major dialect groups in KL in terms of population, what factors have brought this about? The answer is complicated and related to the factor which was discussed in the last section. Moreover, it is not only the push factors but also the pull factors that are playing their roles in this process.

In this section, we are particularly interested in the difference between the Hokkien group and the Hakka group in terms of LMLS. Although the Hokkien group has the largest population (34.47%) in the Chinese community in KL, it did not show the highest extent of language maintenance. However, the Hakka group, the third-largest dialect group, manifested the same or even higher extent of LM. It is obvious that the size of population does not account for the difference at this stage. Instead, mode of settlement may explain this difference.

When discussing ethnolinguistic vitality, Giles et al. (1977) mentioned three indicators, one of which is demographic factor. It includes three aspects: (1) the absolute number and its proportion in the total population, (2) the distribution, and (3) the location. Distribution refers to the mode of settlement, concentrated or scattered. The more concentrated the settlement, the more possibility there is for language maintenance; the more scattered, the more possibility for language shift. For instance, Chinatowns in various countries may facilitate the maintenance of Chinese languages since they provide a space and network for the use of Chinese languages.

In general, the Chinese in Malaysia tend to live in urban areas like KL, Penang, Ipoh, Johor Baru, and other cities (cf. Table 1). However, the settlement in cities tends to be scattered. In a neighbourhood, the inhabitants are from all ethnic groups,
namely Chinese, Malays, and Indians. However, there is a special settlement for ethnic Chinese which is a heritage from the last century. This is the Chinese New Village, which came into being during the British colonial period. Starting in 1949, the British colonial government moved a large number of Chinese residents to certain regions surrounded with barbed wire and controlled the activities of the residents (Lim and Song 2000). This was done in an attempt to sever the ties between the Malaysian Chinese Communist Party with the Chinese community. Currently, there are still 450 Chinese New Villages in Malaysia, accounting for 25% of the total Chinese population. Although the barbed wires have been removed, these New Villages are still self-sufficient to some extent. A village committee is in charge of the management of the village. Basic facilities like schools, markets, post office, public hall, etc. are provided. They are semi-closed communities compared to other modern residential areas. Since 80% of the residents are ethnic Chinese, there is no doubt that Chinese dialects will be better maintained here than elsewhere.

In KL and the surrounding state of Selangor, most of the large-scale Chinese New Villages are Hakka villages, such as Serdang (Seri Kembangan) and Ampang. Within the village, the Hakka dialect is extensively spoken. In contrast, there is no Chinese New Village where Hokkien is the major group. The nearest place (about 32 km) where the Hokkien group dominates is Klang. As a result (cf. Table 5), more Hakka subjects claim their proficiency is at a good level than Hokkien subjects. As we will mention in the next section, these new villages in KL are encountering common challenges from the outside world. Cantonese and Mandarin have gained more and more domains, resulting in the decline of the other dialects.

Summary
In this section, three social factors were proposed to account for the different extents of language maintenance of the six dialect groups. Teochew, Hokchiu and Hainan groups are experiencing the greatest extent of language shift compared to the other dialect groups. The small size of the community is the main reason leading to this radical change. The Hakka and Hokkien group are at a medium level of language shift. The Hakka group seems to have maintained their dialect to a better extent than the Hokkien group due to its concentrated settlement. The Cantonese group demonstrated the highest level of dialect maintenance due to its status as the lingua franca and the institutional support from the Chinese community, local and abroad.

As Appel and Muysken (1987) claimed, these factors are actually interrelated to one another. One factor cannot be isolated from the others. However, through the previous analysis, it is possible to identify salient factors for different groups and different stages of LMLS.

Discussion
Based on the empirical analysis of Chinese dialect groups in KL, a hierarchy tree is generated to summarise the relationship between social factors and the situation of LMLS of various dialect groups. Figure 2 shows the hierarchical layers of social factors in the process of LMLS. The first filter factor is population. Those dialect groups with a very small population size, such as Hainanese, Teochew and Hokhiu groups are experiencing great extents of language shift; those with a large population
size such as the Cantonese, Hakka and Hokkien groups, are undergoing a relatively less extent of language shift. The second factor is status and institutional support. The Hakka and Hokkien groups are facing accelerated language shift because of the lack of institutional support from the Chinese community. In contrast, Cantonese is maintained at an ideal level with the support of various social resources and its status as the lingua franca in the Chinese community in KL. The third factor is mode of settlement which may explain the difference between accelerated and slow language shift. Scattered settlement, such as the Hokkien group, seems to hinder language maintenance while concentrated settlement such as the Hakka group in the Chinese New Villages may resist language shift to some extent.

**Conclusion**

In this article, six dialect groups were investigated in terms of LMLS, which resulted in the categorisation into three groups according to their extent of LMLS. Objective vitality perspective was adopted to account for the different extents of LMLS. By associating the extent of LMLS with relevant social factors, a hierarchical model of LMLS is proposed. This model is testified against the background of multilingual community in KL. However, some limitations of the study have to be mentioned here: (1) Since the sample of this study is made up of students from 16 national schools, it may not represent the whole picture of the Chinese community in KL. (2) The model is based on the association of LMLS and objective factors; no subjective factors such as language attitude are considered. In future studies, the pull factor of LMLS should be integrated into the model. In the Malaysian Chinese community, the spread of Mandarin is a pull force for language shift (Chong and Wang 2009). In fact, both Mandarin and Cantonese are the target languages of language shift of these dialect groups. Whether this pull force plays the same role in different dialect groups requires more research.
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Notes
1. In Malaysia, Hokkien refers to Southern Min Chinese or the Southern Min dialect.
2. Prior to 1970, Kuala Lumpur was under the administration of the Selangor state government.
3. Teochew refers to Chaozhou Chinese or the Chaozhou dialect, which is a sub-dialect of the Min dialect.
4. Hokchiu refers to Fuzhou Chinese or the Fuzhou dialect, which is also a sub-dialect of the Min dialect.
5. The Southern Min group is referred to as Hokkien by the local Chinese. Chaozhou is also known as Teochew and Fuzhou as Hokchiu.
6. National schools refer to the schools run by the government where Malay is used as the medium of instruction.
7. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Chinese classes will be available in a national school as long as 15 parents make a request.
8. The symbol ‘>’ here means ‘better than’.
9. According to the questionnaire, the subjects from these three dialect groups shift to either Mandarin or Cantonese when they communicate with their siblings. For instance, among the Teochew subjects (N = 20), 10 of them speak Mandarin and 6 of them speak Cantonese with their elder brothers. No one speaks the Teochew dialect with their siblings. However, since the other 30 Teochew subjects do not have elder brothers, they left this item blank. Therefore, the low percentage for dialect use between siblings in Table 6 may be due to the small sample.
10. In Jinjiang New Village, the largest new village in Malaysia, the Hokkien group accounts for 40% of the total residents, Hakka 25%, Cantonese 15%, others 20%.

References


