

Hokkien

AN ENDANGERED MINORITY LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA

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PENANG, MALAYSIA. HOKKIEN'S ORIGIN

Malaysia is a country located at Southeast Asia and Penang is an island state in it. Hokkien is one of the dialects spoken by majority of the Chinese in Penang. The dialect originated from China and despite being in the same group as other Chinese dialects, they sound completely different. Hokkien is spread through South-eastern China and Southeast Asia when speakers migrate. The term Hokkien is seldom used in Taiwan or Mainland China; as it is better known as Fujian. Southeast Asia is where the language is referred to as Hokkien more frequently.



Penang, Malaysia (Southeast Asia)



The multicultural people in Malaysia

THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN MALAYSIA

- English/Malay: Taught in school and used in formal context.
- Mandarin/Tamil: Learned by members of some ethnic groups.
- Hokkien/Other local dialects: Learned at home and does not possess a writing system due to its low prestige.

Note: Hokkien is only a spoken language. There is not writing system.

LANGUAGE SURVEY

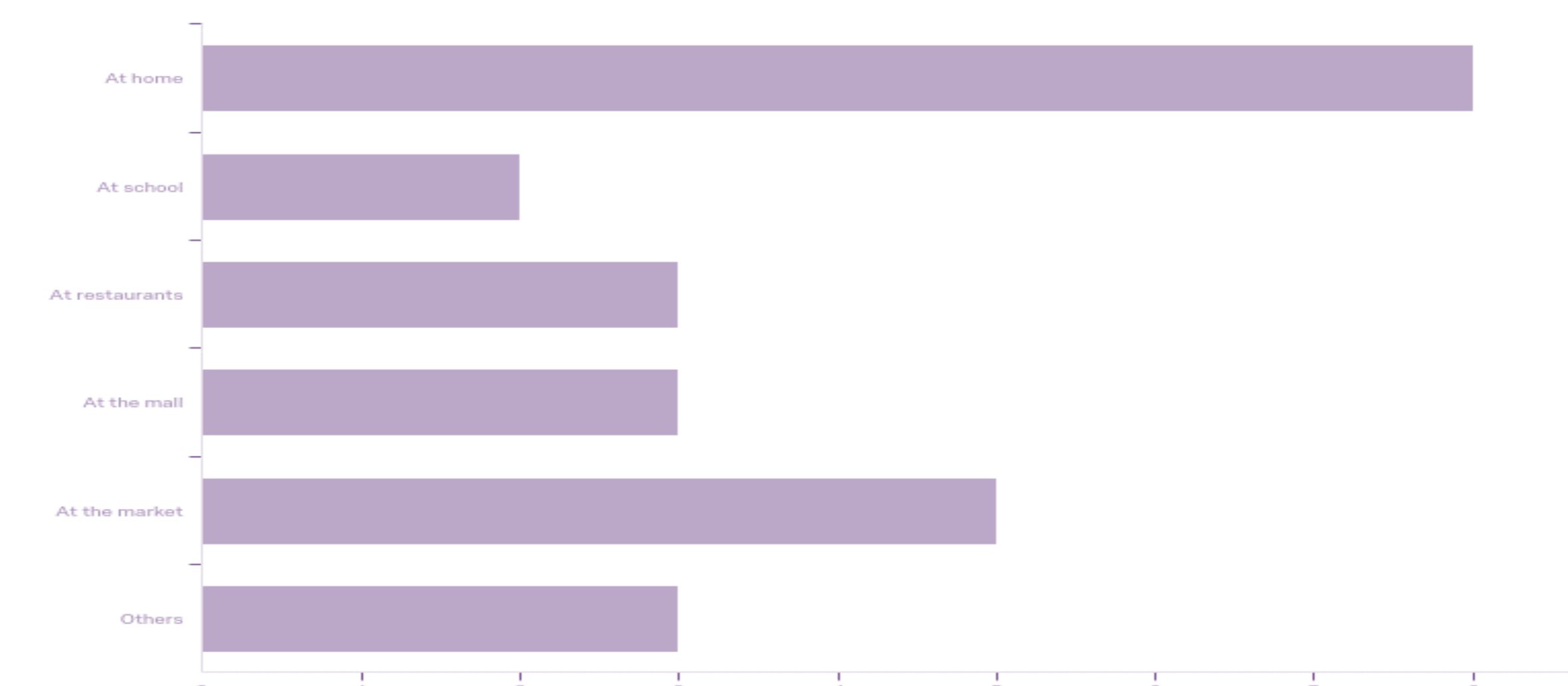
In early 2018, a pilot language survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed to the Penang Hokkien community. The goal is to collect the locals' thoughts and opinions of their mother tongue. Some questions are linguistically structured in order to determine which spelling rules would best match the preference of the people.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

A language survey allows us to examine a language's position within its community. Depending on the outcome, proper next steps can be taken to ensure that the language stays in a good condition. Furthermore, it is a way to spread awareness regarding language death that majority of the minority languages are facing. We might also obtain support and recruit help through language surveys because by getting the community involved, it could increase their interest towards their own culture.

RESULTS

- A total of 8 people participated in the pilot language survey.
- There are Hokkien Chinese children in the upcoming generation that do not speak Hokkien.
- More people tend to speak Hokkien to their peers or the older generation; less towards the younger generation.
- Hokkien is mostly spoken at home.



- Hokkien Chinese are speaking Hokkien less because Hokkien has no international value, learning other prestigious languages are encouraged more and there are no other speakers (from a person who migrated to another country).
- Majority of the speakers consider themselves fluent in Hokkien but do not know common words in such as "office" and "bread".
- Half of the people believed that Hokkien is an endangered language and will go extinct in as early as the next generation.
- Hokkien Chinese still think that Hokkien is important and majority of them are proud of their language.
- Half of the people try to "write" Hokkien on social medias.

Penangites use multiple languages in a sentence!

Example texts

i say: **mai** ask u go Mir Pot
she say:leng.hai hong.mai

waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

Name 1 ask~~~~

Name 2 hungry ok =.!!

ya lar is u ask 1 ma xD

me hungry is zhun zhun oni 😊

den wana eat boh?

- Half of the people think that making a writing system will be a good way to preserve the Hokkien language.
- Majority of the people think that Hokkien should be taught in Hokkien groups and clubs.

LINGUISTIC

Since Hokkien is only a spoken language, there is no definite way to spell a word. Locals tend to just write what sounds right to them. For example, the word "ten" could be written as "chap", "cap" or "zap".

Spelling	Chap	Cap	Zap
English	[tʃæp]	[kæp]	[zæp]
Hokkien	[tsap]		

English speakers might not understand the difference due to the English language's pronunciation

Based on the survey data, most people prefer the spelling "chap". There is a Malay word known as "cap". Thus, we speculate that Penang Hokkien speakers are subconsciously (this information is not mentioned in the survey) avoiding the spelling "cap" because of the Malay influence.

Another question in the survey asked if the Penang Hokkien speakers know the word "bread" in Hokkien. Two people wrote a response as follows:

Bread	
Roti	Loti



Roti is actually a Malay word. Since Malaysia is a multilingual country, code-mixing (an act of mixing of two or more languages in speech) is very common and that could have replaced the word "bread" in Hokkien. On the other hand, the "r" sound do not exist in the Hokkien language and we can see that people are replacing it with the "l" instead. This allows us to see that Hokkien is evolving and going through changes through time.

TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- In the "ten" question, "cap" is avoided because there is an identical word in Malay. However, in the "bread" question, the Malay word is borrowed into Hokkien. Perhaps for an existing Hokkien word, native speakers are trying to avoid Malay influence but if the word is borrowed as a whole, then it is acceptable. Looking up for more words to determine the spelling preferences for "ch", "c" and "z" would help.
- The replacement of "r" with "l". To make sure that the "r" sound really does not exist, look for more borrowed words where "r" was replaced with "l".
- Survey participants stated that they would like Hokkien to be taught in Hokkien groups and clubs, so one next step is to look into collaborating with existing Hokkien groups and clubs.