

# Digital Language Use in Bangka as Contribution to Digital Culture and Heritage

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**Abstract.** This research aims to find out how the bilingual speakers of Khek and Malay in Bangka communicate using the messaging app, find out regarding what shifts that could be identified in the use of the languages, and find out what the attitudes of the Bangkanese people are towards Khek and Malay. The method is approaching a descriptive qualitative design which involves some screenshots of WhatsApp chat to analyze as well as a questionnaire for the participants to answer. The results show that they indeed use the certain codes while performing a digital communication such as language shift, code switching, code mixing, and unique words. Moreover, they have a positive attitudes toward both Khek and Malay for some reasons. The most important part is that through the digital communication have they spread the cultures from both Chinese-Indonesian and Malays by using Khek and Malay as well as the fact that the languages used during the process of digital communication have exposed their heritage and identity. This research needs to be further investigated about the language preservation due to the fact that some people cannot speak one of those particular languages actively. With further investigation will reveal the current condition of those languages.

## 1 Introduction

[1] made an opinion that digitalization can act as both problems and advantages for the people in the whole world. "Spending a lot of time in front of the screen, has changed the understanding of people, cultures and languages as it changes everything through the process" [1]. Koç's statement is much related to the way people live a life these days because technology is so advanced that people can interact with each other in an instant. Moreover, they will interact with many kinds of people, cultures, and languages which results the cultures to be exposed in a form of digital via social media and messaging app. In this case, WhatsApp is widely being used by Bangkanese people which means the exposure of people with different cultures and languages is high.

Bangka Island, the island that is located between Sumatera Island and Belitung Island is a place that contains people who rarely use Indonesian as their daily language. Instead of Indonesian, they are usually speaking either Khek or Malay every day. In general, Malays can speak from two to three languages (obviously Indonesian and Malay, potentially English). On the other hand, Chinese-Indonesian are able to speak from three to five languages (obviously Indonesian, Khek, and Malay, potentially English and Mandarin).

From that alone has created a phenomenon that is specifically regarding the Chinese-Indonesian community where they tend to shift their language from Khek to Malay and vice versa once they are talking with

fellow Chinese-Indonesian people in a messaging app. One of the causes behind it is due to their parents who chose Malay as their language of choice when they were teaching their children how to deliver a text message.

Therefore, conducting a research regarding this phenomenon is needed because language is part of a culture. In this case, Khek and Malay are the ancestral languages that are originated from two different cultures. This means that Bangka Island is indeed a multicultural and multilingual community. Furthermore, not only do the cultures exist in the real world but also exist in the digital world. Thus, there are three problem statements that will be discussed later on such as:

1. How do bilingual speakers of Khek and Malay in Bangka communicate using the messaging app?
2. What shifts could be identified in the use of the languages?
3. What are the attitudes of the Bangkanese people toward Khek and Malay?

### 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this research is to find out how the bilingual speakers of Khek and Malay in Bangka communicate using the messaging app. Moreover, this paper will also find out regarding what shifts that could be identified in the use of the languages. The other objective is to find out what the attitudes of the Bangkanese people are towards Khek and Malay. With those objectives, it is hoped that the readers will be able

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to learn such phenomenon as well as their cultures because shifting language towards the same community is indeed an unusual fact to know since it happens when they shift their language during the transition from the real world to the digital world. This is also a great chance to see what Bangkanese people have contributed for the digital culture and heritage.

## 2 Literature Review

Language shift is an act of switching from one language to another language [2]. [3] states that language shift is like a coin that has two sides where one language is either shifts to another language or cannot be shifted by any languages. In detail, the shifted language is the language that is unable to withstand the effect and that effect is called language choice that is done collectively by the groups of at least three generations. Language choice happens due to the language, social, and cultural contact [4]. [5] conducted a theory regarding the occurred factors of language shift such as economic factor, social factor, political factor, demographic factor, and attitude and value factor. He also provided the explanations of all factors starting from the economic factor where people learn a new language in order to get a job. Social factor could occur if the people think there is no reason to preserve their language. Political factor happens when they must adapt themselves to the society and finally learn the specific language to achieve victory. Demographic factor determines the speed of language shift and it is theorized that rural area has a slower speed than urban area due to their self-isolation towards political as well as a fulfillment of their social needs. Finally, the attitude and value factor means a slower language shift among groups if being highly appreciated and it can be maintained forever until the groups no longer see their own language as their identity. [6] define language maintenance as an effort that is being done by the groups to preserve the existence of their language by keep using that particular language as a daily language which purpose is to use it as an identity towards the same group and the different groups as well as preventing their language from extinction. [7] provide four domains of language use like family domain, neighbor domain, work domain, and religion domain. Yuniarti et al. (2017) believe that between those four domains, family domain may be the smallest one, but this domain is an important indicator whether the language is maintained or shifted at the end. After all, children will get their mother tongue for the first time in this domain. Thus, parents will have a responsibility regarding the languages learned by their children.

Bilingual means the ability to use two languages fluently [8]. [9] also defines multilingual as the ability to use several languages fluently. [10] state that bilingualism and multilingualism are the phenomenon where people use two or more languages that differ in speech sound, vocabulary and syntax. [11] outlines that the only difference between bilingualism and multilingualism is the number of languages that they can use where bilingualism can only speak two languages

while multilingualism can speak at least three languages or more.

[12] states that "Code switching can be defined as the use of more than one language, variety, or style by a speaker within an utterance or discourse, or between different interlocutors or situations". In other words, more than one language is being spoken during a process of communication and this could happen depending on the occasions that the speaker needs to fulfill. Poplack in [13] provide three different types of code switching such as inter-sentential code switching, intra-sentential code switching, and extra-sentential code switching or known as tag switching. First, inter-sentential code switching happens in the middle of a sentence without disturbance. Second, intra-sentential code switching happens between sentences, or after a punctuation mark like comma or quotation. Third, extra-sentential or tag code switching happens if a slang word or a phrase from another language is used in a sentence that is supposed to be used in its original language.

Saputro in [14] defines code mixing as a skill that applies more than one language and this happens when a speaker fuses two or more codes in a language discourse. Code mixing itself will influence people depending on the factors such as education background, social life, culture, economy, and the environment [14]. [15] share their opinion that code mixing is a skill that is able to mix different languages during a process of communication with other people where only the language changes while retaining the situation. [16] provides three different types of code mixing such as intra-sentential code mixing, intra-lexical code mixing, and involving a change of pronunciation. To begin with, intra-sentential code mixing happens within a form of a phrase, a clause, or in sentence. Next, intra-lexical code mixing happens when a specific word is included in the spoken language. Finally, involving a change of pronunciation happens if the language is mixed in the level of phonological.

In short, language shift is an act of switching from one language to another language. Language shift is connected to language choice which can happen due to the language, social, and cultural contact. There are five factors of language shift such as economic factor, social factor, political factor, demographic factor, and attitude and value factor. Language shift can be prevented by putting an effort to maintain the language which is called language maintenance. While using that particular language, there are four domains regarding where they use that language such as family domain, neighbor domain, work domain, and religion domain. Bilingualism and multilingualism are the abilities which people are able to use two or more languages with the only difference where bilingualism can only use two languages while multilingualism can use at least three or more languages. There are two types of codes while changing the languages such as code switching and code mixing with the only difference where code switching fulfills different occasions while code mixing retains the same purpose.

### 3 Methods

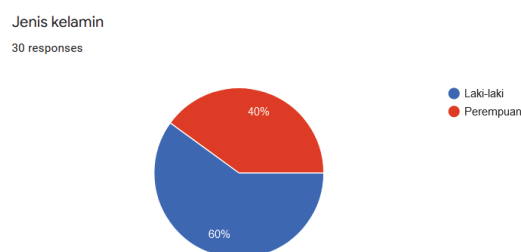
In this research, the method is approaching a descriptive qualitative design which involves some screenshots of WhatsApp chat to analyze as well as a questionnaire for the participants to answer. Analyzing WhatsApp chat is the key to find out how they communicate using the messaging app and what shifts that could be identified in the use of the languages. Meanwhile, conducting the questionnaire will reveal their attitudes toward Khek and Malay such as the usage of those languages in different domains, their opinions regarding whether or not people in Bangka must be able to speak those languages, and their reasons when using those languages.

### 4 Data Collection

The data collection for this research will be in form of survey and observation. The questionnaire was made on Google Form, consists of 2 multi-select, 2 multiple choice, and 2 open-ended questions. The questionnaire was spread on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 and reached 30 participants on Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2022. The participants will only be limited to Chinese-Indonesian living in Toboali, a town that is located in South Bangka Regency simply because only Chinese-Indonesian are able to speak both Khek and Malay. Moreover, the limitation has accelerated the speed of data gathering. Meanwhile, the screenshots of chat will only be taken from WhatsApp because the majority of people in Bangka indeed use WhatsApp as their daily messaging app. The screenshots were taken from a group called *Peduli Kwan Ti Miao* which is a religion-based group and only one personal chat's screenshot due to a unique word that exists in the screenshot. The process of observation began from 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 until 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2021

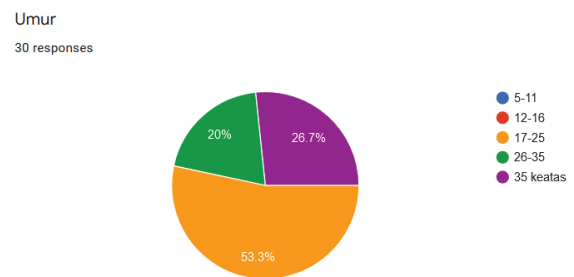
### 5 Results and Discussion

Before discussing the results of this research, the figures below show the summary of the participants' basic information:



**Fig. 1.** Genders of 30 participants

Figure 1 shows the participants' genders where there are 18 (60%) males and 12 (40%) females.



**Fig. 2.** Age Groups of 30 Participants

Figure 2 shows the participants' age groups which is being dominated by the age group of 17-25 years old (16 participants, 53.3%) followed by the age groups of 35 years old and above (8 participants, 26.7%) and 26-35 years old (6 participants, 20%).

#### 5.1 Communicate Using the Messaging App



**Fig. 3.** Screenshot of Group Chat 1

In Figure 3, it is shown that they were chatting by using Malay despite of being Chinese-Indonesian. From this screenshot alone has revealed a couple of clues such as the use of code mixing as well as a unique word. The use of code mixing can be seen from the word “*Ko on kem ikak...*” and “*Kecit Lo...*”. Meanwhile, one unique word that appears in this screenshot is the word ‘*cs*’ which is an acronym from Latin that stands for *Cum Suis*.



Fig. 4. Screenshot of Group Chat 2

Figure 4 shows another unique words like ‘*belelep*’ and ‘*cek*’ as well as the additional clues like code switching and pragmatic particle. The word “*Mehe lo*” is the result of code switching which is from Khek. As for the words ‘*la*’ and ‘*wo*’, those are called pragmatic particle.

To conclude this sub-chapter, the way they communicate using the messaging app is that they usually use Malay as their language of choice. However, they never used 100% Malay because there is a chance for them to use Khek by code switching or code mixing. Moreover, adding unique words and pragmatic particles make the language more flexible when constructing words. The explanation of the words mentioned above will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

## 5.2 The Identified Language Shifts

Looking back at Figure 3, the word “*Ko on kem ikak...*” consists of three languages. Those are English, Khek, and Malay. The word ‘*Ko*’ is from Khek which means ‘brother’ while the word ‘*on*’ refers to Aon. In this case, Mariati called Aon ‘*Ko*’ because Aon is older than Mariati. The word ‘*kem*’ is simply referring to an English word ‘camp’ and the word ‘*ikak*’ is from Malay which means ‘you guys’. Figure 3 shows that Mariati’s type of code mixing is indeed intra-sentential and she shifted her language twice from Khek to English to Malay within four words. Meanwhile, in Figure 4, Ahon was suddenly code switching to Khek by saying “*Mehe lo cek*” which means “Of course friend” because he was previously using Malay. ‘*Mehe lo*’ is usually spoken when he/she agrees to the statement that has been made before. This type of code switching is also called intra-sentential. The word ‘*belelep*’ and ‘*cek*’ will be discussed later.

Moving on to the word “*Kecit Lo...*”, ‘*Kecit*’ is a Malay word which means ‘small’ while ‘*Lo*’ is a Khek pragmatic particle which is coincidentally translated to ‘*la*’ in Malay. The word “*...la wo...*” in Figure 4 shows that code mixing happens between particles since the word ‘*wo*’ belongs to Khek. There is one interesting fact about ‘*la*’ and ‘*lo*’ which can also mean ‘already’ like “*Die la pergi*” and “*Ki cew lo*” which means “he/she is already gone” for example.

As previously mentioned, they added some unique words while constructing their words like ‘*belelep*’, ‘*cek*’, and ‘*cs*’. The word ‘*belelep*’ is actually neither from Khek nor Malay. In fact, it is an Indonesian word ‘*kelalapan*’ which in this case, it means ‘suffocate’. As for

the words ‘*cek*’ and ‘*cs*’, both of those words mean ‘friend’ with the only difference that ‘*cek*’ is from Malay while ‘*cs*’ is from Latin.



Fig. 5. Screenshot of Group Chat 3

Figure 5 shows another variation of calling their friends like ‘bro’ as well as intra-sentential code mixing. This screenshot tells yet another fact that every time a Khek word is constructed right after a number (in this case ‘*khut*’ means ‘piece’ or ‘pieces’, the number before ‘*khut*’ must be spoken in Khek instead of Malay. For example, it originally reads “*Ka anye nek meli yit khut...*”. If the word ‘*khut*’ is replaced to ‘*ekor*’, then it reads “*Ka anye nek meli seekor...*” which means “You only want to buy a piece...”. In other words, code mixing would not have happened if the word ‘*khut*’ was not there. Meanwhile, the word “*jd kamkai bro*” consists of three languages once again where the word ‘*jd*’ or ‘*jadi*’ is from Malay which means ‘so’, ‘*kamkai*’ is from Khek which means “it is not enough”, and ‘bro’ is simply an English word ‘brother’.



Fig. 6. Screenshot of Group Chat 4

Figure 6 shows another examples of Khek language in numbers and intra-sentential code mixing and code switching. Pay attention when Ahon said “*men biasa urng jual 3 wan 1 khut bro*” which means “usually people sell thirty thousand a piece bro”. For the same reason like the word ‘*khut*’, the word ‘*wan*’ also forces the number 3 to be spoken in Khek. The word ‘*wan*’

basically means ‘ten thousand’. However, if the nominal is more than ten thousand, then the word construction must begin at any number from 2 to 9 before adding ‘wan’. Not long after Ahon said those words, he shifted his language to Khek by saying “*Mohan bro*” which means “Busy bro”.



**Fig. 7.** Screenshot of Group Chat 5

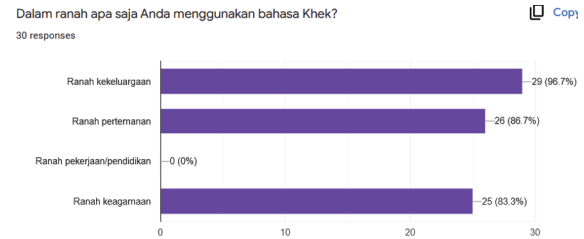
Figure 7 reveals yet another variation of calling their friends, ‘sis’ which is an English word ‘sister’. On the other hand, a blending word has been spotted after Lita said ‘*Naspa*’ which is originated from two words: ‘*Nasi*’ which means ‘rice’ and ‘Padang’ which is a city located in West Sumatera.



**Fig. 8.** Screenshot of Personal Chat

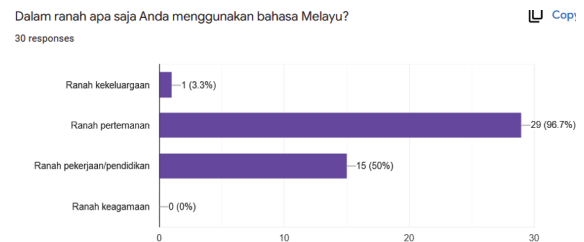
Sometimes, not every words can be directly translated because it depends on the context. In figure 8, the word “*Bapak die*” usually means “*His/Her father*”. However, this is not the case because the second person is actually reacting the word “*Ashiapp*”. People in Bangka usually say “*Bapak die*” in order to show their expression which is absolutely the expression of being surprised. The chance of saying “*Bapak die*” is when someone is making a statement that contains the element of surprise or witness something surprising.

### 5.3 Attitudes Toward Khek and Malay



**Fig. 9.** Domains of Using Khek

Figure 9 shows the result of the domains while using Khek. It looks like the majority of the participants use Khek in family domain, friendship domain, and religion domain which were chosen by 29 (96.7%), 26 (86.7%), and 25 (83.3%) participants respectively. However, none of the participants chose work/education domain. This is as expected since the majority of Bangkanese people are filled with Malays who cannot understand Khek. In other words, it is guaranteed that they will meet Malays while they are working or studying. As for the reasons why they use Khek, it will be discussed in the later part of this sub-chapter.



**Fig. 10.** Domains of Using Malay

Figure 10 shows the same domains, but this time, it refers to the usage of Malay. The result tells that most of the participants use Malay in friendship domain and work/education domain that were chosen by 29 (96.7%) and 15 (50%) participants respectively. What is interesting is that only one participant chose family domain. The specific reason for this is because the participant have to use Malay to communicate with her family in law. The family in law is indeed full of Chinese-Indonesian people. However, some of them can only understand Khek passively. Thus, using Malay is the alternative language for them in order to communicate. The rest of the reasons why they use Malay will also be discussed in the later part of the sub-chapter.

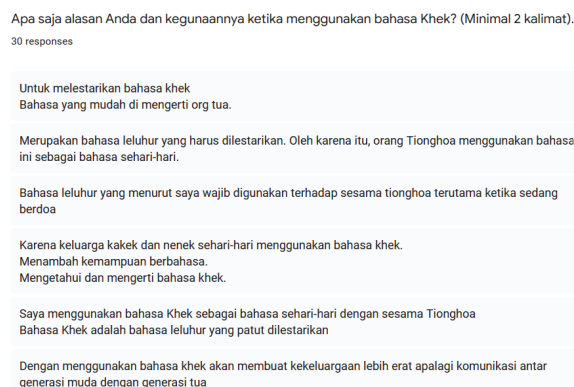


**Fig. 11.** Must Someone Be Able to Speak Khek?



**Fig. 12.** Must Someone Be Able to Speak Malay?

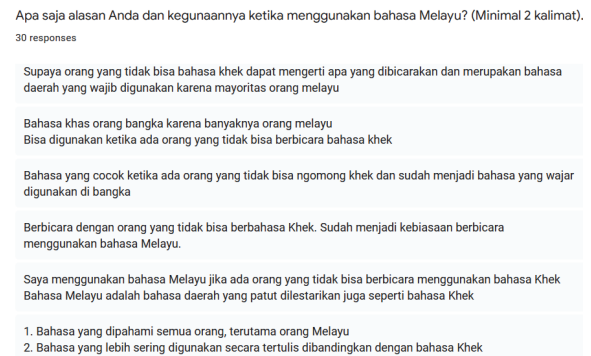
In Figure 11 and Figure 12, these are the opinions of the participants whether or not the mentioned language must be able to speak by someone. The first pie chart reveals 24 (80%) participants who are neutral while 6 (20%) participants agree to the statement. However, there is an increasing number of participants who chose agree in the second pie chart which are 12 (40%) of the participants. This has reduced the number of neutral participants by 20%, leaving 18 (60%) of the participants left. It is assumed that they chose agree because of the reason that has been previously mentioned: The majority of Bangkanese people are filled with Malays who cannot speak Khek.



**Fig. 13.** Reasons of using Khek

In Figure 13, most participants said that they are using Khek with fellow Chinese-Indonesian people as a daily language. This reason connects with another reason where they said Khek is the ancestral language that needs to be preserved. Moreover, it sounds like Khek is also used for praying purposes and it is assumed that it will be used while wishing or performing a praying ritual. Those reasons are more than enough to signify that they are proud of using Khek every day. This also means that they have a strong identity as a Chinese-Indonesian people thanks to their attitude towards Khek. There are some rare reasons that can be found in this question such as to train his/her ability to speak Khek, a language that is easier to understand by the older generation, and to be more familiar with family especially the communication between younger and older generations. At this rate, a hypothesis can be made that first, some Chinese-Indonesian people can only understand Khek passively. Second, some older generation may be struggling to understand Malay. And third, people must be using Khek in order to perform an

intergenerational communication either with younger or older generation.



**Fig. 14.** Reasons Of Using Malay 1

In Figure 14, the most common answers from the participants are to speak with people who cannot speak Khek, adapting themselves because the majority of Bangkanese people are filled with Malays, and it is their local language that needs to be preserved just like Khek. It is interesting to know that Chinese-Indonesian people in Bangka are also proud of using Malay and even said it as the local language that needs to be preserved. Adapting themselves because of the majority has signified that Chinese-Indonesian people in Bangka have been exposed with the cultures from Malays. This means that they are obviously living in a multicultural and multilingual community.



**Fig. 15.** Reasons Of Using Malay 2

Figure 15 shows some rare answers such as for trading, easier to understand by their friends, and easier to pronounce Malay words. For trading reasons, it has been previously mentioned that they will definitely meet with Malays while working. The “easier to understand” reason can be assumed that some Chinese-Indonesian people in Bangka understand Malay better than Khek. For easier pronunciation is understandable because Khek is similar to Mandarin where the intonation of speech can affect its meaning. For example, if the word ‘mai’ is spoken with different intonations, the meaning will be either ‘buy’ or ‘sell’.

## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has shown the contributions from the use of language in digital format by the people in Bangka. There are two important things to keep in mind: One, the usage of the digital language shows the usage of certain codes such as language shift, code switching, code mixing, and unique words. And two, the contributions to digital culture have been made for two reasons. Those reasons are because through the digital communication have they spread the cultures from both

Chinese-Indonesian and Malays by using Khek and Malay as well as the fact that the languages used during the process of digital communication have exposed their heritage and identity. This research however needs to be further investigated about the language preservation due to the fact that some people cannot speak one of those particular languages actively. With further investigation will reveal the current condition of those languages.

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