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**LANGUAGE USE AND WORKPLACE PARTICIPATION IN THE
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF BUMIPUTERA MALAY
UNDERGRADUATES IN MALAYSIA**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Malay identity in research literature is often constructed as an essentialised bond between ethnicity (Bumiputera Malay), religion (Islam) and language (Bahasa Melayu). This study presents a contemporary reading of Bumiputera Malay identities by focusing mainly on language use but also taking into account the *adat* (culture) and *jiwa* (soul) as part of Malay sociohistory. Towards this aim, I examined the roles of three languages (Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese) in the process of identity construction for a group of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates from a Bumiputera-exclusive university in Malaysia before, during and after their industrial attachments in the final semester of their diploma studies. Working within a part essentialist and part post-structuralist framework, I carried out my fieldwork in two cycles from December 2010 to April 2011. In the first cycle, a survey instrument was used to profile 102 undergraduates from the university's Administration and Management Faculty. Then, in the longer second cycle, eight focal students were invited to participate further. Multiple qualitative instruments were employed to collect data as these students carried out their work roles within the private sector. Using a communities of practice theoretical framework (Wenger 1998, 2009) analysis of the data revealed the interrelationships between their language use and workplace participation. The findings point to three critical phases in the process of identity construction: campus, working and future life; these are interconnected phases within their 'life journey'. The life journey, as both process and product of identity construction, opens up multiple vantage points where the past, present and future of the undergraduates, both real and imagined, came together. This, in turn, helped them not only to imagine the selves that they wanted to become but also to exert their agency and influence episodes within their day-to-day lives. As they used the languages that they know and participated in their workplace communities, identities were constructed and reconstructed. Although not all their language and workplace experiences were useful in shaping their life trajectories, on the whole, the eight participants began to explore future possibilities when they utilised the attachment as proving grounds for themselves as young urban professionals.

For my parents, *Emak* and *Ayah*, half of me.
And, *Altaira Yusra Airil Haimi*, my other half.

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Glossary

A&M Faculty	Administration & Management Faculty
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BM	<i>Bahasa Melayu</i> / Malay language
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
GDP	Gross domestic product
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat / Council of Trust for the Indigenous Peoples
PR	Public relations
RIDA	Rural and Industrial Development Authority (of the Malayan Federation)
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran</i> Malaysia / Malaysian Certificate of Education
STPM	<i>Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia</i> / Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education
UAHPEC	The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
UPSR	<i>Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah</i> / Primary School Achievement Test

Chapter 1. Introduction

Like all the participants who made the writing of this thesis possible, I too am part of the Malay community. We are Malay by race, Muslim by birth and we speak *Bahasa Melayu* (BM) or Malay language as our mother tongue, and as Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia (Government of Malaysia, 2009, p. 130) clearly outlines we are Malay because:

“Malay” means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and –

(a) was before Merdeka Day [31st August 1957] born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or

(b) is the issue of such a person.

Living in contemporary Malaysia, we are also considered part of the largest and only ethno-political group, the *Bumiputera*. This term is a combination of two BM words originally from Sanskrit, *bumi* meaning ‘earth’ or ‘soil’ and *putera* meaning ‘prince’ or ‘son’. We are accordingly sons (and daughters) of the earth and Malaysian soil. Being Malay, for obvious reasons, comes naturally for us as our birth right. Following that, throughout our life span we embark on a journey of becoming Malay, expressing our Malayness to others around us. Being Malay and Bumiputera we are afforded with many opportunities in our country, but we also face challenges in many spheres of our lives.

This thesis documents some of those opportunities and challenges through intimate stories of identity construction by young Malay undergraduates as they attempt to cross boundaries of place and space in their (our) country. Using the different languages that they know as an asset, their lived experiences are brought into light as they make the transition from campus to the world of work, and as they change from being university students to becoming young professionals. Centring primarily on the experiences of these undergraduates in the final semester of diploma studies during their 14-weeks compulsory industrial attachment in Malaysian workplaces, this study also takes into account their campus life in a Malay majority university and their visions of what their futures will be like.

In this thesis, the process of identity construction follows the terminology adopted by a range of scholars in different disciplines (see, for example, Block, 2006, 2007; Bucholtz & K. Hall, 2005; Fishman, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 1997, 2000; Wenger, 1998). In everyday life, identity construction is a complex multifaceted practice that becomes complicated when the ethnicity, religion and language of a person come into play. It then becomes convoluted with the existence of legal definitions and ethno-political connotations of a person's identity, as in the case of the research participants whose stories will be presented. At the same time, however, the emancipatory potential of identity construction cannot be ignored. With this in mind, I set about to examine and highlight the identity construction of young (Bumiputera) Malay undergraduates by focusing on two sites of identity practice: language use and workplace (community) participation.

This opening chapter provides relevant background information related to my work. It will close with a preview of the upcoming chapters where most of the information presented here will be revisited.

1.1. Malaysia and the Malaysian language mosaic

Geographically, Malaysia has a total land area of 329,847 sq km and is divided into two land masses, the smaller Peninsular or West Malaysia and part of the island of Borneo or East Malaysia. Situated on the Equator, it has a tropical climate with seasonal monsoons. Some of its main natural resources are tin, gas, petroleum and timber. The economy of Malaysia used to be agriculture-based before being driven by the export of commodities. Today, Malaysia is a middle-income country with an estimated per capita GDP of US \$14,700 in 2010, after undergoing changes from 1970 onwards into a multi-sectored economy (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009).

Politically, Malaysia consists of thirteen states and three federal territories, and each state is further divided into several administrative districts. Malaysia is a democracy with an elected government headed by a Prime Minister, although it also has a Constitutional Monarch (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2004). Socially, there are three main ethnic groups in Malaysia: Malays, Chinese and Indians. Apart from these, there are also several ethnic minority groups such as the indigenous *Orang Asli* (literally 'original people', who are also

included within the ethno-political Bumiputera grouping) in Peninsular Malaysia together with the indigenous multiethnic Bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo (Hooker, 2003).

At the end of 2010, the total population of Malaysia was estimated to be 28.3 million people of whom 91.8% are Malaysian citizens and 8.2% are not. The breakdown of Malaysian citizens based on ethnic groups is as follows: Malays (and other Bumiputera groups) (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and Others (0.7%). Amongst Malaysian citizens, the Malays make up the largest ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia (63.1%). On the island of Borneo, the *Iban* are the majority (30.3%) in the state of Sarawak, while the *Kadazan-Dusun* are the majority group (24.5%) in the state of Sabah. As the Malays make up the majority as a whole, Islam is also the most widely professed religion in Malaysia at 61.3% of the total population. As a multiethnic nation, other main religions embraced in Malaysia are Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011).

Directly related to my work are the languages used by Malaysians. The languages spoken by the peoples of Malaysia vary in dialect and reflect the many ethnic divisions and belief systems that are present within the borders of this country. Although BM as the mother tongue of the Malays has long been elevated to official language status based on the Federal Constitution, other languages are widely spoken. English, several Chinese dialects, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, and even Thai and several indigenous languages are present and continue to be used by different Malaysian ethnic groups (Cheah, 2002; Moore & Saleh, 2003).

Baskaran (1994) refers to language use in Malaysia as the Malaysian 'language mosaic'. The biggest part of that mosaic belongs to BM with its special position and roles. According to P. Tan (2005), it was only after twenty years of independence from British colonial rule that BM started to become influential. This was mainly due to sudden changes in the political climate and periods of societal unrest caused by the disaffection of some quarters in the Malay majority group, who were feeling left out of economic prosperity after the Federation of Malaya achieved its independence. A period of political turmoil reached its breaking point with the race riots of May 13, 1969, involving mainly the Malays and the Chinese. Parliament was suspended under martial laws until 1971 and the government instituted affirmative action policies in favour of the Bumiputera Malays (Adnan & E. Smith, 2001). Incidentally as one

of the foremost authorities on Bahasa Melayu, Asmah Haji Omar notes, the role of BM as the official national language was also reaffirmed by the government (towards nation planning) as part of a direct response to that dark episode in Malaysian history (Omar, 1979, 1982).

More than 50 years after independence, BM is a language that binds this nation through its status as the medium of instruction at all levels and as the sole language of intra-national governance (Hashim, 2002, 2003). BM is not just important because it is the language spoken by the majority, it is important because it was historically chosen by all Malaysians to unify this multiethnic, multicultural nation (Rappa & Wee, 2006). Gill (2004) adds that BM now plays a central role not just as a “tool for developing national identity and unity during the post-independence period [but as] ‘*Bahasa jiwa bangsa*’ (BM is the soul of the people)” (p. 137). For this reason, BM carries the spirit of the nation and its people. It is the zeitgeist of modern Malaysia since independence (Mustafa & Adnan, 2009), and it is one of the primary vehicles that have helped the citizens of Malaysia to unite to achieve economic growth and social progress since the 1970s (Harper, 1999).

At the same time, Ooi (2009) and other local academics point to the existence of another language in the Malaysian language mosaic that continues to play a key role in national development, English. The legacy of this foreign language continues in Malaysia until today for several reasons. First of all, only English seems to be the medium of communication that ‘belongs’, as it were, to all Malaysians. This notion of English belonging to every Malaysian echoes the idea presented in Omar’s (1992) volume on Malaysian linguistics. She suggests that the spread of BM in Malaysian society due to government policies and the education system has not stifled the overall growth of English as the unofficial second language. English belongs to all Malaysians, at least in theory.

Today, English is still spoken and understood by a large number of Malaysians, even though the variety in use is mostly ‘Malaysian English’ and the language is becoming more of a foreign than a second language for most Malaysians in rural communities. As Omar (2007) puts it:

English has now been given the role of ‘second most important language’, second only to the national language. In reality it had always been playing this role, but the role had never been explicitly stated in formal circles in view of the sensitivities in relation to the position of the national language. (p. 354)

Realising the importance of not just English but also other international languages, local publicly funded universities have been quick to widen the teaching of regional languages such as Mandarin (Chinese) and Japanese to Malaysian university students. Mandarin for example, is now seen as a language of choice for the Bumiputera Malays who generally show positive orientation towards learning Mandarin as a third language. This interesting linguistic phenomenon is observed by local researchers who examined third and foreign language learning in local university campuses with a sizeable Bumiputera Malay population (see, for example, T. Tan & Hoe, 2007; Zubairi & Haji Sarudin, 2009).

In addition, local higher education institutions (Malaysian private education providers in particular) have been instituting changes at ground level by giving more focus to English, and other languages like Mandarin and even Arabic, compared to BM. This is part of a concerted effort to produce graduates who are linguistically equipped to enter the modern world of work where Malaysia is a trading partner to major economic players in Asia and the Middle East (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001). Even if BM continues to be dominant, English is now used widely during lectures, in the preparation of teaching materials and for examination purposes. Accordingly, as China establishes itself as a regional and global superpower, and as Malaysia renews its old economic ties with the Chinese, it is highly likely that Mandarin will become the preferred additional language for many Malaysian students.

These developments, however, are causing tensions between policymakers and stakeholders, (David & Govindasamy, 2007). On the one hand, policymakers from the Bumiputera Malay majority group want to continue to uphold the special position of BM. But on the other, direct stakeholders (e.g., urban parents and businesses with regional ties) and members of the academic community believe that the continuing focus on BM is not reflecting the authentic linguistic needs of young Malaysians, especially those who are preparing to join the regional labour markets after their tertiary studies (Kirkpatrick, 2010). It is to the Bumiputera Malays that I turn my attention to next.

1.2. Malayness, language use and identity issues

Ethnicity, religion and language are closely linked, and together they are reflections of identity (Al-Sahafi, 2010; Al-Sahafi & Barkhuizen, 2008; Fishman, 1999). The link between these constructs is clearly present in the Malay world:

Malay language is the embodiment of the very nature or spirit of being a Malay. Malay language to the Malays is more than a language for communication; it has sociocultural meanings and brings with it the connotation of good upbringing and proper ethical values. To lose the language means more than the loss of an instrument to communicate, it can lead to the loss of one's ethical and moral values or even one's *jiwa* [soul or spirit]. (K. Abdullah & Ayyub, 1998, p. 187)

Additionally, Noor and Azaham (2000) state that the link between BM and the Malay person is not only cultural and communal, it is also very personal to the extent that the presence of other languages in Malay communities might be seen as a threat to Malay identity as a whole. Similar proposals are echoed and repeated in many texts regarding the makings of Malayness (see, for example, Haji Nawang, 1998; Sloane, 1999). Based on the work of these scholars and data from several studies (Adnan, 2001, 2005, 2010), I have also attempted to define the experience of being Malay in Figure 1-1. Though simplistic, this graphical depiction illustrates that a Malay individual is naturally (and normally) defined by his or her ethnicity, religion and language. It is through these constructs that her or his Malayness is expressed through day-to-day interactions with others, and projected through the way that he or she navigates the immediate environment.

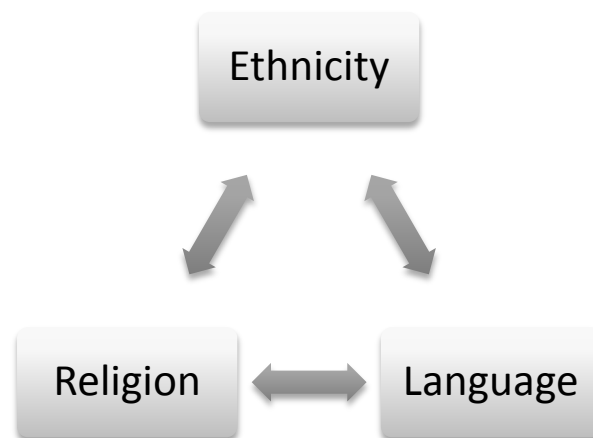


Figure 1-1. Tri-componential depiction of the makings of a Malay individual.

That some Bumiputera Malay undergraduates prefer to use BM as a symbol of shared identity instead of practising and using other languages should not be surprising based on the tenets of the last paragraph. Pennycook (1996) refers to this linguistic situation as a ‘battle’ and it is still continuing on Malaysian university campuses. Rajadurai (2011) attributes this to the “essential identity” (p. 36) of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates. The relationship between

culture, ethnicity and language seems to create a unique situation where there is an internal clash between ethnic Malay monolingualism and a desire to be bi/multilingual. Similar views are also shared by other scholars (see, for example, David & Govindasamy, 2003, 2007; S. K. Lee, 2001, 2003, 2008; P. Martin, 2005; Rajadurai, 2007a, 2007b). Their work collectively suggests that this situation is a real drawback for the Malay ethnic group in the education sphere, and it is undesirable due to the fact that it will impact negatively on the education policies of the Malaysian government (Mohamad, 1986). At this moment in time, this issue is perceived as something that needs to be remedied. My study aims to problematise this essentialist belief in an attempt to comprehend what is happening at ground level by focusing on the diverse lives of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates.

Even as the debate continues Bumiputera Malay students who still want to learn and use foreign languages widely, English for example, compared to their mother tongue, have found ways to do so. This is not an impossible task and they are still able to employ certain individual and group strategies, for instance, masking their language ability in front of the majority group and creating smaller support networks to help them learn and use English (Adnan, 2001, 2005, 2010; Rajadurai, 2010a, 2010b). S. K. Lee's (2003) study on the identity construction of English language learners in Malaysia provides a glimpse into this situation. According to her, in newly independent countries like Malaysia where English will always be seen as an artefact of British colonialists, the use of English as a lingua franca is a really complex issue, even more so for the Malay majority group. As S. K. Lee explains:

The Malay participants of this study, who were all proficient users of the English language, described their need to make strategic identity switches not to distance, offend, annoy, or embarrass members of the local group, or to avoid showing off or 'boasting' in a former colonialist language. Using English could be interpreted as being Westernized or renouncing their Malay cultural identity. It could also be interpreted as being less religious. (pp. 153-4)

This suggests that the need to hide or mask the ability to use English then becomes an important part of the identity practice of Malays who want to invest in the English language, as is the case with some Bumiputera Malay undergraduates. At this juncture, I must point out that although much has been written about the Malays and English language, there is not much data on the 'problem' that other languages present to the Malay ethnic group. Indeed, as the closing paragraphs of the last section indicated, insofar as learning Mandarin is concerned Malay undergraduates seem not only inclined to learn that language but they also show positive orientation towards using it. This brings the notion of the internal (eternal)

clash between ethnic Malay monolingualism and a desire to be bi/multilingual into question, something that I hope to bring into light by the end of this thesis.

1.3. Tertiary education and industrial attachments

This section introduces Malaysian tertiary education and briefly explains how industrial attachments help university students to start participating in the workplace. Malaysia's education system still shows traces of the colonial system developed by the British. It is only recently that the American system has made its mark in Malaysia, particularly in the tertiary sector (M. N. Lee, 2004). After six years of primary education young Malaysians undergo a minimum of five years at secondary level until Form Five before they can continue studying at tertiary level, normally around 18 years of age. At present there are 20 government-funded public universities and many more private universities and colleges offering a range of specialisations at certificate, diploma and degree levels (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2010). Even though certificate and diploma courses are open to all school leavers, degree courses are not. Students normally need the A-level equivalent Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education (or STPM) that will take two years to complete after Form Five.

As my participants are diploma students, I will limit my discussion to this educational level. There are differences between Malaysian public and private tertiary institutions in terms of the qualifications on offer (S. Y. Tham & Kam, 2008). For example, undergraduates in public universities need three years to obtain their diplomas whereas those enrolled in private institutions usually graduate in two and half years. There are two reasons for this; first, the government wants to reduce the cost of studying at private institutions, and second, some undergraduates at public institutions must complete an additional (final) semester of industrial attachment before they can graduate (Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim & Raphael, 2012). The attachment, however, is not compulsory for all students. Even within the same university system there are some diploma courses with an additional semester of industrial attachment, but there are also other courses with three years (or six semesters) of solid lectures. Today, the same difference seems to apply to diploma courses in some private tertiary institutions (see Ghafar, 2004).

Before the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2010) introduced its national policy on industrial training at tertiary level, there were no specific directives from the government

regarding this matter. As a result, local tertiary institutions were free to make any decisions regarding attachments. As someone who has worked in the Malaysian tertiary sector I have observed many issues regarding the management of industrial attachments, leading to confusion in the student population and creating extra workload for staff members. For instance, the length of attachments varies based on workplaces, not all students (in the same programme) are allowed to go for attachments, and faculty requirements during attachments keep changing. Moreover, some public universities do not allow attachments so that more theory-based subjects could be offered or because these institutions wanted their students to graduate earlier (Daud & Sapuan, 2012).

Nevertheless, these administrative issues should not detract from the pedagogical usefulness of attachments. Wood (2009), who expands the traditional notions of apprenticeship and on-the-job training, believes that in higher learning institutions periods of attachments in workplaces play a crucial role in fulfilling the objectives of educational programmes. He also suggests that there should be an increased focus on linguistic ability before students gain workplace experience, something I hope to examine in my study. This is because the ability to communicate is a key skill in the modern world of work, and all employees must be able to cooperate and work with each other to achieve the objectives of their organisation. In addition, Lehtonen and Karjalainen's (2008) study on the language needs of graduates as perceived by employers in Europe suggests that language ability in the world of work must be viewed in a more global manner due to the high demands put on a graduate's language skills, not just in English but other languages as well.

Looking at Malaysia, with more commercial entities doing business with emerging economic powerhouses like China, India and countries in the Middle East, it is possible to foresee a future where the ability to only use a graduate's mother tongue, or even English for that matter, would not be enough to confer full membership in certain workplace communities. Perhaps this will be the future for the Malaysian private sector where local companies have been more global in outlook after the Asian currency crisis of the 1990s. The work of Holmes and Marra (2005), Postmes (2003), and Riddiford (2011) also suggest the central position of the ability to communicate in the construction of the professional identities. Their views are supported by Firth's (2009) recent study on *lingua francas* in the modern workplace.

For Andrew and Kearney (2007), “work placements are recognised as a way of bridging the classroom and the world of employment for English as an Additional Language learners” (p. 31). They believe experiences in the workplace positively influence the development of learners by helping them to preview and shape their professional selves, what Wenger (2009) describes as a process of ‘becoming’ in formal communities of practice. The positive aspects of gaining experience in the workplace as a mode to construct individual and social identities, and as a way to enhance language accuracy and fluency, are also supported, amongst others, by the studies done by Green and Evans (2000) in Hong Kong workplace communities and Cooke, Brown and Zhu (2007) in New Zealand workplaces; and Myles’ (2009) study on language competency during internship in Canadian industrial settings. In the Malaysian context, the work of researchers like Morais (1998), Nair-Venugopal (2000, 2001, 2006) and David and Govindasamy (2007), also place an emphasis on the central role of languages in Malaysian workplaces.

Taking English as a case in point, Nair-Venugopal (2000, 2001) found that competence in English continues to be an important requirement for access to the Malaysian labour market, namely in administration, manufacturing, finance, and other key commercial sectors. This reflects what is evident in the labour markets of other economically vibrant postcolonial societies within the British Commonwealth, such as Singapore (Chew, 2007), Hong Kong (Tsui, 2007) and India (Agnihotri, 2007). As Malaysia continues to make its economy more export-intensive and knowledge-based, the need for English and other international languages will become more critical as local business entities engage in business ventures with their overseas counterparts.

1.4. Identity, investment and community of practice

In this section three key constructs central to my work are briefly addressed: language identity, language investment, and community of practice. To begin, identity is not an ideal fixed construct but it is a multi-layered process (Block, 2006, 2007). The process of identity formation and change is strange and problematic as opposed to being natural and harmonious, an idea that finds support in the work of linguists like Bucholtz (2011), Edwards (2009), Lin (2008a, 2008b) and Spolsky (2010). Individuals are likely to have mixed feelings and sometimes feeling lost as they attempt to shape their identities because identity is:

Socially constructed, a self-conscious, ongoing narrative an individual performs, interprets and projects. ... Identity is about negotiating new subject positions at the

crossroads of the past, present and future. The individual is shaped by his/her sociohistory but also shapes his/her sociohistory as life goes on. (Block, 2006, p. 39)

The identities of language learners are also subject to change and constant positioning. They are constrained by local factors but are also shaped by what is happening globally (Block, 2007). The existence of macro and micro level forces are constantly reshaping identities. This idea fits with the Malaysian situation where national education policies and ethnic-based politics are but two of the macro level forces that impinge upon the identity of Malaysian learners (H. G. Lee, 2010; Hashim, 2009). At the micro level, future careers, personal aspirations and the need to fit in within the larger community are but three of the forces that shape identities. But even if identity is a social construct that is difficult to explain and even harder to measure a study of identity offers many rewards, as suggested by the classic work of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934).

Closely related to language identity is Norton's (2000) idea of 'investment' and I will explore this to allow for a better understanding of how individual agents (i.e., Bumiputera Malay undergraduates) try to become members of different communities. In comparison to others who might be protective of BM as their mother tongue and who reject the use of English and other languages to show solidarity with the majority, there is a small minority who heavily invest in the languages that they know as assets for their future lives (S. K. Lee, 2001, 2003; Rajadurai, 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, even though her conceptualisation of identity is based on post-structuralist and feminist ideologies, and she deals mainly with the lived experience of immigrant women, Norton (1997) forwards a dynamic depiction of identity that is in line with the aims of my study. She suggests that identity is intrinsically linked to the investments made by learners, as they attempt to move ahead in the world:

[Language learners] are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space. (Norton, 2000, pp. 10-11)

Other scholars have also taken up the idea of language investment as a useful construct to examine the efforts of learners to acquire languages in different cultural and social milieus (see, for example, Clark, 2008; Prendergast, 2008). In this thesis, investment is a useful measure of participation (or non-participation) of my research participants, as they prepare for future employment. Choices in language use before starting the attachment and the degree of participation through the languages that they know in workplace communities, will all be

instances of investment for their future lives. I chose to conceptualise the modern workplace as workplace communities based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) socially situated theory of learning. They argue that the process of learning and becoming cannot be viewed separately from the ongoing activity of participating in a 'community of practice'. In applied linguistics, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) define this term as a group of individuals who jointly engage in some kind of common enterprise (following Lave and Wenger's original definition):

Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (p. 464)

Furthermore, by adopting the idea of communities of practice, applied linguists can learn about the things that people do to help them become members of different communities, and examine how much they belong to those communities (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999).

Lave and Wenger (1991) also suggest that the process of gaining access to any community of practice should be approached from the perspective of apprenticeships whereby a person undergoes a period of transformation before becoming a fully fledged member of a certain community, which they refer to as "legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 27). Thus from a novice at the periphery, a newcomer learns how to become an expert and moves to a more central position within the community (or social context that they are in). Nevertheless, Lave and Wenger's theory works mostly at the macro level. As Haneda (2005) writes, "an analytical consequence is that the way in which individuals agentively negotiate their way within a community and across communities is not dealt with adequately" (p. 273). The application of this theory must also take into consideration the development of individual identities (Wenger, 1998, 2009). It is due to this that identity, community of practice and investment, will be explored in my inquiry of the Bumiputera Malays in Malaysia.

1.5. The study

In this section, I describe my proposed study on language use and workplace participation in identity construction, ending with my research questions. A comprehensive account of the methods, and data collection and analysis process, is provided in Chapter 4.

1.5.1. Theoretical contributions

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on identity construction, language use and participation; not just for the Malays in Malaysia, but also for the benefit of other researchers who are interested in examining the interrelationships between these constructs in other geographical settings. There are already a number of studies that have focused on some parts of these constructs in the Malaysian context (see, for example, David & Govindasamy, 2007; S. K. Lee, 2003; P. Martin, 2005; Rajadurai, 2011) but a search of current research literature does not indicate any studies that have examined these constructs in combination. This study will explore identity construction through two sites of identity practice: prior language learning and current language use, and a period of workplace participation through industrial attachment. A search of related literature also reveals a dearth of empirical data that relates specifically to the language use and identity development of learners during a period of internship or industrial attachment in the Asian context.

A final theoretical contribution that this study could make is to problematise and readjust the assumptions of prior studies that have examined Malay ethnic identity through language learning. As stated earlier, researchers like Rajadurai (2011) have forwarded the idea of a 'core' Malay identity that creates challenges when a Malay individual tries to learn and use languages other than her or his mother tongue. I hope that my research will be able to show the ability of members of my ethnic group to be flexible in identity construction and to be open-minded enough to view the world through global lenses, and not perceiving other languages as a threat to their identities. Furthermore, the added dimension of Mandarin as a third language in combination with BM and English is hitherto an under-explored subject that is worthy of examination given the fact that China is becoming a global powerhouse. As such, this proposed study should have relevance to other nations in South East Asia and the greater Asian region that are witnessing the growth of China, and it will be useful to understand the place and role of language(s) in these geopolitical contexts.

1.5.2. Practical reasons

As English continues to play a vital role in the Asian region in terms of commerce (Kirkpatrick, 2010), smaller countries like Malaysia need to be prepared to assist its people who want to be more proficient in this international language. Although undoubtedly there are many providers that deliver English courses to the local population, at the same time, having a clear idea of the right frame of mind to acquire English at the individual level will

be useful to all Malaysians not just the Malays. Accordingly, the rising prominence of Mandarin should not be ignored. It might prove useful not just as an additional language for the non-Chinese population in a country like Malaysia, but it should also serve as an intercultural bridge between the Chinese and other ethnicities. For the Malays specifically, there will be strategies to be adopted to become a successful learner and user of both English and Mandarin. I aim to explore these in greater depth employing the voices of my participants to highlight the different steps to be taken if one wishes to learn and use both English and Mandarin apart from one's mother tongue.

1.5.3. Personal motives

By carrying out this study, I am taking a closer look at the lives of my own students for the first time. Having taught in the same campus for nearly a decade and teaching English to the same administration and management undergraduates, throughout the years I have noticed certain indicators that predicted the future career paths of these students: communication ability, language repertoire (proficiency in Mandarin especially), orientation towards the future, strong desire to enter the world of work, and a strong sense of 'me'. Although these are unquantifiable descriptors, they seem to heighten the potential of certain individuals to be able to realise their 'dream careers'. I have also been involved in delivering tertiary level soft-skilling programmes (Shakir, 2009) in my own campus and at other institutions. Experience gathered in those programmes tells me that the indicators I have observed are sometimes lacking in a section of local undergraduates, leading to their inability to secure employment after years at university. This is for lack of a better term, a waste, especially considering that the Malaysian government has made progress plans for the country (M. N. Lee, 2004). If local universities are not able to produce employable graduates who are not only ready to join the local but also regional job market, there is a possibility that Malaysia will remain a middle income economy for years to come.

1.5.4. The research project and research questions

Studies point out that Bumiputera Malay undergraduates who try to use languages other than their mother tongue need to do this by masking their linguistic ability from the majority group (S. K. Lee, 2003, 2008; Rajadurai, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). By so doing, a minority group who are proficient in other languages could join the lucrative Malaysian private sector in the future, opening doors that might be closed to those who are only able to communicate in BM (David & Govindasamy, 2003, 2007). It is possible to infer that this investment would yield

rewards for those who are willing to adopt a pragmatic view of the world around them. Accordingly, participating in workplaces entails becoming a member of communities that exist within those formal contexts, bringing about personal change as one learns to become a professional. These constructs will be explored in my study as presented in Table 1-1.

From language use in a community of learners (within a <i>Bumiputera</i> exclusive university).	From <i>past</i> experience, identity in a university community shaped by ethnic grouping and the discourse of race.
To language use in a community of practice (workplace) during a period of industrial attachment.	To new (<i>present</i>) experience and participation, and constructing new identities in a workplace community.
Onto (imagined) language use in a community of practice (possible workplace of the future).	Onto <i>future</i> (imagined) life trajectory, professional identity in an imagined workplace community.

Table 1-1. Identity construction incorporating the idea of community and investment.

In order to critically study these constructs, the general questions that helped to frame my research project are as follows. How does the experience of learning and using languages impact and shape the life of a Malay person studying in a Malay majority university? Will the industrial attachment period change the attitudes and language use patterns of these Malay undergraduates? As they are attached to the private sector, would the students then use English and other languages like Mandarin more compared to their mother tongue as reported by previous studies, thus leading to a reconstruction of their identity as young professionals-to-be? In addition, what possibilities and limitations does the period of attachment present to these learners in terms of learning and using English and the other languages that they know in different communities of practice? How then should Malaysian university tutors who teach English prepare their students as they move out into the world of work so that they will be ready linguistically and professionally, in line with the government's policy on English that views this international language as a key component in the teaching and training of young Malaysians for the globalised workplace environment? Are the same lessons applicable to the teaching of crucial third languages like Mandarin? Lastly, are there connections between the past, present and future in being Bumiputera Malay, and what are the contemporary characteristics of Malayness? How do they contribute to the bigger picture and wider story of the Malays as embodied in and illustrated by the experiences, hopes and dreams of young Bumiputera Malay adults? I have operationalised all these queries into the three research questions below:

First research question

What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of undergraduates in a Bumiputera-exclusive university community, and more particularly, as they prepare for their final semester industrial attachments?

Second research question

What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates during their industrial attachments?

Third research question

In what ways do Bumiputera Malay undergraduates use the languages that they know during their industrial attachments to invest in their future individual and social identities, and shape their future life trajectories?

1.6. Organisation of thesis

This thesis is an extended piece of writing that will cover a range of topics and address a multitude of concerns. In this section, I preview and summarise all its chapters starting with this current one. Chapter 1 introduced Malaysia, its language mosaic and the Bumiputera Malays. I then discussed its education system before I briefly addressed the constructs of identity, investment and community. Next, I presented the rationale for this study and outlined my research questions. Chapter 1 closes with this preview of the ten upcoming chapters.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on identity and participation that relates to my study. The literature briefly covered in Chapter 1 on identity, language investment and community participation is extensively reviewed here. Chapter 3 takes up the discussion on identities and provides a social-historical account of the Malay ethnic group. Then, the Malay '*adat*' and '*jiwa*' are highlighted as part of Malay identity. A discussion of the more recent 'Bumiputera' ethno-political identity ends this chapter. In Chapter 4, the methodology chapter, I discuss the purposes of carrying out this research project together with a rationale for choosing a mixed-

methods design. The theoretical and practical considerations that informed the collection and analysis of data are also covered together with a report on my fieldwork.

Six data presentation and analysis chapters examine the ‘campus life’, ‘working life’ and ‘future life’ of the participants in this study. Chapters 5 and 6 on campus life, answer the first research question by looking at the way life is organised and experienced within a Bumiputera-only university in Malaysia. Chapter 5 profiles 102 undergraduates from the Administration and Management Faculty (A&M Faculty) on that campus before zooming in on the lived experiences of eight focal participants. Chapter 6 chronicles the stories of campus life as told by them. Chapters 7 and 8 on working life, answer the second research question. Both chapters examine the experiences of the eight participants as they begin their working lives and pass the middle mark of their attachments. Whereas Chapter 7 focuses on their common experiences as a group of young professionals-in-training within the Malaysian private sector, Chapter 8 presents their individual stories of working life. Chapters 9 and 10 on future life, answer the final research question. Both chapters deal with the aspirations of the participants as they start to plan for their future and to decide on life trajectories to be taken as their attachments draw to a close. Chapter 9 looks at their preparations to move from the attachment into the future and considers how they tried to make sense of their working experience. Then, Chapter 10 examines not just each participant’s own plans but also her or his actual life decisions at the end of the period.

In Chapter 11, the concluding chapter, I provide an overview of my study and present my conclusions. I consider the implications of my work to policymakers and stakeholders in Malaysia and beyond. Employing a conceptual map, I then discuss the implications of seeing the connections between past, present and future to make sense of experience sieved through ethnic heritage and individual agency. Limitations of this empirical study and future research opportunities are also highlighted. My concluding statements end this chapter.

Overview of Chapter 1

In this chapter I have introduced Malaysia, its people and their linguistic heritage, focusing specifically on the Bumiputera Malays. I also discussed the Malaysian education system together with industrial attachments and the three central constructs that bind this thesis together. I finished this chapter with a brief presentation of my study, my research questions

and a map of this thesis as a whole. In the next chapter, I review the literature on identities and consider the notions of participation, investment and community of practice.

Chapter 2. Identity in language use and workplace participation

Young (Bumiputera) Malay undergraduates must cross boundaries both real and imagined as they make the transition from campus life to the world of work, and as they change from being university students to becoming young professionals. These boundaries and changes need to be understood to make sense of the characters, plots and subplots within the stories told in the second half of this thesis. Chapter 1 proposed that being Malay is tied to ethnicity, religion and language, a proposal that will be addressed in this chapter and continued in the next. Specifically for this chapter, I highlight language use and workplace participation in and through the process of identity construction to set the scene for studying the issues mentioned above. Chapter 2 draws mainly on the literature on language and identity and is divided into three parts. The first will focus on identity theory by reviewing essentialist and post-structuralist concepts within the study of identity. The second will move to identity in practice beginning with how identity construction is conceptualised and operationalised within the limits of this thesis, and ending with an exploration of five identity categories. The final part will discuss workplace participation as one of the three core topics of this thesis employing the communities of practice model. By reviewing them and examining the ways constructs in these three parts relate to each other, this chapter maps out the theoretical framework that informs my research.

2.1. Essentialist and post-structuralist conceptions of identity

In this first part, I adopt a broad post-structuralist stance based largely on the research literature on language and identity to show how I started to make sense of identity. I begin by comparing post-structuralist views of identity to essentialist ones. I then review five important concepts within post-structuralist theories of identity construction, namely the self, discourse, positioning, space and place, and power.

2.1.1. Employing post-structuralism and essentialism in exploring identity

According to Rajadurai (2011), “unlike the other ethnic groups in the country, the category ‘Malay’ is still moored as an essential identity in Malaysia, implicating non-negotiable linguistic, religious and cultural loyalties” (p. 36). In Chapter 1, the essentialist components

that constitute and define a Malay person's identity were mentioned: ethnicity, religion and language. I identify with Rajadurai (2010a, 2010b, 2011), S. K. Lee (2003) and other Malaysian researchers when they choose to make sense of Malay identity in Malaysia in this light. At the same time, to view identity in essentialist terms is generally avoided in contemporary social scientific research. As Block (2007) observes:

there has been a movement away from a preoccupation with stability, function and structure to a priming of individual agency and a shift from fixed essentialized versions of demographic categories such as race, ethnicity, gender and age to a generally constructivist perspective which sees these categories as more fluid and unstable. (p. 3)

Individual agency and fluid, unstable categories suggest that post-structuralist ideas of identity place the individual at the centre. In other words, people are not necessarily limited by their traditional demographic categories. They might choose to respond differently and construct their personal identities, for instance, through ways of acting that might not correspond to their biologically determined or given demographics (see, for example, Canagarajah, 2004; Kanno & Norton 2003; Llamas & Watt, 2010; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Linking back to the language core of this thesis, whilst post-structuralist conceptualisations of identity are by no means stable or unified, researchers see them as useful, perhaps because "language is thus theorized not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated" (Norton, 2010, p. 351). As a result of post-structuralist oriented language and identity research, several identity categories have been brought to the fore.

Interestingly, when comparing essentialist (structuralist) and post-structuralist views of identity, Block (2007) notes that "what theorists and researchers mean by identity seems to veer back and forth between structuralism and post-structuralism" (p. 14). The process of identity construction in this thesis has the same underpinnings. As mentioned above, Malay identity is commonly framed within essentialist terms because deep interconnections between ethnicity, religion and language have led to an essentialised form of identity for this group (K. Abdullah & Ayyub, 1998; Noor & Azaham, 2000). Accordingly, essentialism is a legitimate way to frame identity, as Bucholtz (2003) postulates:

attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited; and (2) that group members are more or less alike. (p. 400)

In this thesis, I adopt a similar broad post-structuralist view of identity. Although identity and language-related research is seen as moving from structuralism and essentialist forms of knowledge-making (Bucholtz, 2003; Bucholtz & K. Hall, 2004, 2005) to post-structuralism (Block, 2006, 2007; Norton 2010; Norton & Early, 2011) I believe that drawing on both ends of the continuum builds a more appropriate framework for my study. For instance, in relation to group attributes and behaviours, essentialism, particularly strategic essentialism (Lin, 2008a, 2008b; Spivak, 1990) is a useful model to analyse Malay identity in a university exclusively meant for the Malays and other Bumiputera groups. As Bucholtz (2003) writes, essentialism readjusts “power imbalances, as when the group under study is seen by the dominant group as illegitimate or trivial, or when a stigmatized group forms an oppositional identity to counter such negative ideologies” (p. 401). S. K. Lee, in her work on identity and language in Malaysia (2001, 2003), calls this ‘masking’ where individuals (Malays especially) conceal and portray different versions of their identity as a response to those that they come into contact with and what goes on around them. With reference to the Malays, it is possible that local researchers are conflating two identities: Malay and *Bumiputera*, as the next chapter will review. Thus, within my research niche both structuralist-essentialist and post-structuralist concepts need to be part of the framework.

2.1.2. Important concepts within post-structuralist theories of identity

There are, of course, many significant concepts within post-structuralist accounts of identity. I will, however, focus only on five: the self, discourse, positioning, space and place, and power. It is worth mentioning that because identity in post-structuralism is fluid, multiple and unstable there will be overlaps between these concepts.

2.1.2.1. The self

The ‘self’ is an important concept within a post-structuralist perspective of identity as it is connected to the genesis of a person’s identity. The self must also be understood from the outset because it is tied to how individuals use the languages they know, and draw on their history and imagination to define themselves as individuals and as parts of a larger whole (Joseph, 2010; Llamas & Watt, 2010). In this section, I view the self as an ever-changing reflection in the eyes of others that leads to points of self affirmation but also periods of struggle between trying to be part of the larger whole, and trying to maintain individual uniqueness. The self is the performance of different identities in day-to-day interactions both consciously and unconsciously leading to impressions of the self in the eyes of others.

In studying the relationship between bilingualism and identity based on the experiences of children of Japanese expatriates, Kanno (2000) found that these learners attributed different meanings to the two languages they know, Japanese and English. While they show a strong desire to be included in the mainstream by using Japanese as their mother tongue, they also felt a strong need to assert their uniqueness by using English as their second language. Hence, Kanno proposes that the sense of self or 'who' we are depends on what others think about us. She adopts the post-structuralist metaphor of 'the looking glass self' to illustrate how identity is socially constructed, an idea that she refines in further studies on language and identity construction (Kanno, 2003a, 2003b, 2009). The looking glass self is originally a concept introduced in Cooley's social-psychological text (1902/1983).

Cooley sees the self as the catalyst for identity construction (McIntyre, 2006). Through the looking glass, as it were, three things happen: a person imagines how she or he appears in the eyes of others, what others see in him or her, and that person starts to develop a sense of self (Yeung & J. Martin, 2003). Through the process of socialisation from birth and continuous interactions with others, an individual goes through cycles of changes leading to points of self affirmation. The self then transforms across time and space throughout a person's lifespan. The looking glass self is also a key concept within symbolic interactionism, which has been attributed to the work of Mead (1938). As a follower of Cooley, he believes that it is impossible for a person to create a self that is unconnected to the social world. Mead further posits that the self is continuously reconstructed through contact with others. Nevertheless, Mead (1982) takes this idea a step further in his assertion that social interactions are the very foundations of the self.

The above suggests that the social world is a space that allows for the formation of the self. At the same time, the self is not stable and will continue to change leading to different permutations based on experience. Goffman (1981) adds to this perspective on identity by drawing on the 'performances' of individuals in their day-to-day interactions or what Block (2007) refers to as "how individuals do identity in different contexts" (p. 17). When he began to take a sociolinguistic perspective on identity formation, Goffman (1981) suggests that by performing various identities, an individual creates a 'front' to engage effectively with others. Thus, knowing what is appropriate becomes a critical factor in expressions of multiple selves (identities). Goffman also argues that being able to perform various sets of identities and

successfully constructing different fronts are part of the larger process of individual development in modern societies (Denzin, 2002).

2.1.2.2. Discourse

Blommaert's (2005) broad definition encapsulates discourse as "all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments" (p. 3). In this sense, discourse is a construct that goes beyond language, although at the same time language can be placed at the centre. From another angle, Pennycook (1994a), who like Blommaert also draws on Foucauldian approaches, proposes that discourse relates to "ways of organizing meaning that are often, though not exclusively, realized through language. Discourses are about the creation and limitation of possibilities ... systems of power/knowledge within which we take up subject positions" (p. 128). Pennycook's definition is useful as he suggests that meaning is derived from different sources that combine both power and knowledge in the organisation of lives, and not just from individual will, languages or biologically determined demographics. Discourse is situated in interactions and social institutions as the embodiment of a multitude of different relationships (Pennycook, 1994b, 1998), making different discourses resources of identity construction.

A particular discourse related to this thesis is found in the work of Norton. She suggests that to uncover the connections between identity and language "it is important to understand the poststructuralist theory of language, which is defined as discourse" (2010, p. 349). Norton highlights other texts related to language by Bourdieu (1991), S. Hall (1997) and Weedon (1997) as samples of post-structuralist discourse. As mentioned earlier, structuralist accounts of language and identity are built upon essentialist assumptions that all human groups are stable because individuals that make up these group are, in essence, similar. Although structuralist-essentialist notions are useful to shed light on some aspects of language and identity, a broad post-structuralist orientation will portray a more comprehensive picture.

Based on post-structuralist accounts, conflicts and struggles are at the heart of human experience and they are observed at individual, communal and societal levels (Norton, 2001; Norton & McKinney, 2011). As a result, language is not a neutral avenue for individuals to communicate but is "understood with reference to its social meaning, in a frequently inequitable world" (Norton, 2010, p. 350). Norton (2010) adds that this conceptualisation of language is in fact discourse, as understood by post-structuralists. Within this discourse, the

concept of power becomes central to tease out the interconnections between language and identity because power is related to all struggles and conflicts. In the words of Bourdieu (1991), using language is “an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power” (p. 66). Discourse is indeed a resource of identity construction, particularly when viewed together with language use; and with reference to the self, discourse works at multiple levels to continuously position and reposition the self.

2.1.2.3. Positioning

Goffman (1981) positions the self in the performance of various identities through different fronts. This view of identity is seen as limited because even before identities are performed and fronts constructed individuals already embody multiple subject positions (Block, 2007). In other words, although a person’s self can manifest through social interactions, the person’s self is already present in the eyes of others prior to interacting. Davies and Harré’s (1990) post-structuralist concept of ‘positioning’ takes this further:

[It is] the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. (p. 48)

Positioning has currency in the process of identity construction because it moves the self from performing given roles to embodying chosen positions. Roles are fixed categories, if the self is understood through roles, it is constructed as stable and static based on formal arrangements and traditional rituals, and as a result the self becomes stereotyped within role relationships. Stereotypical role relationships, for instance, between child and parent, worker and boss, are quite limiting for two reasons. Firstly, they are based on our common sense understanding of the world that might be useful as a shortcut for thinking but limited as a window into how these relationships are experienced and maintained. Secondly, taken-for-granted notions of the role of a child, parent, worker or boss cannot account for the fact that they are context dependent and are continuously changing based on experience.

In the words of Davies and Harré (1990), roles see individuals merely as “actors with lines already written ... determined by the particular play they find themselves in. Nor do they have much choice as to how to play these roles in any particular setting” (p. 41). In contrast, positioning is dynamic, simultaneously creating and drawing on multiple subject positions linked to the ever-changing identities of individuals. Most importantly, because subject

positions are not stable and static they are reconstructed through “ongoing engagements with others as individuals participate in their day-to-day activities” (Block, 2007, p. 18). Accordingly, “because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in” (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 46) individual agency plays a critical role in the construction of identity as people endlessly position themselves and are positioned by others.

There are three parallels between positioning theory and the work of Weedon (1997), who is often viewed as one of the original contributors to conceptualising identity from a post-structuralist perspective (Block, 2007; Norton, 2010). First, Weedon also sees identity, or in her own terms ‘subjectivity’, as being constructed through discursive practices. Subjectivity, she writes, “is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (1997, p. 32). Second, Weedon too adopts subject positions to account for how individuals reconstruct their sense of self using language. Conversely, she believes that language is a double-edged blade that might provide opportunities to access certain social groups but limit right of entry to others. Lastly, Weedon notes that even if all subject positions allow for agency, the ongoing construction of identity is a process that involves conflicts and struggles because identity (subjectivity) is a social construct, and one that changes based on time, activity and context.

Positioning and subjectivity are important because they relate to the past, present and future as individuals interact socially (Weedon, 1997). Positioning theory also embodies the concept of co-constructed shared narratives, an invaluable metaphor for constructing the self for the self and for others (see Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Due to the utility of these ideas, within language and identity studies many researchers draw on them to examine aspects of language learning and use, in relation to identity (see, for example, Barkhuizen, 2010; Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006; Norton, 2001, Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko, 2001). These ideas are noteworthy for two reasons. First, identity construction relates to the past, present and future as individuals draw on their agency to engage in discursive activities. Second, the metaphor of individuals telling and writing life stories means that these ‘stories’ are invaluable resources to study identity construction.

2.1.2.4. Space and place

The metaphors of place and space contextualise identity construction because places and spaces are marked by boundaries both to exclude and to include individuals (Scollon &

Scollon, 2003). Thus, moving between these spaces and places are momentous events within the process of identity construction, particularly when ‘border crossing’ happens for the first time, for instance, from campus to workplace and from student to professional. At the same time, crossing borders happens through language use within social groups and across different communities. One instance where crossing happens is when an individual uses a language which is perceived as not really belonging to her or him (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997; Rampton, 1998, 2010).

Rampton (1998) who coined the term (language) crossing suggests that it “involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries, and it raises issues of legitimacy that participants need to reckon with in the course of their encounter” (p. 291). One can only imagine the struggles faced by Bumiputera Malay undergraduates with three languages in their repertoire. It is possible that at one end of the spectrum the ability to use these languages will lead to positive permutations of identity at the personal level, but on the other end, using these languages might lead to repercussions at the social level. Looking at the bigger picture, as these university students move off campus to learn to become young professionals in the world of work they are likely to face challenges at every juncture.

Bumiputera Malay undergraduates need to cross physical boundaries (from campus to the world of work) together with ideological ones (from being university students to becoming young professionals). Crossing boundaries between real and imagined spaces also feature in the studies by S. K. Lee (2001, 2003) in the general Malaysian context, and Rajadurai (2010a, 2010b) who focuses on the lives of the Malays. Therefore, post-structuralist concepts of space and place are useful metaphors as they illustrate the situatedness of identity construction. Blommaert (2005) points to the fact that previous scholars have employed these two concepts in exploring identities because in narratives of identities individuals make references to spaces and places, as part of “a framework in which meaningful social relationships and events can be anchored and against which a sense of community can be developed” (p. 221). He adds that the process of communication also happens within these spaces and places, both physical and imaginary/ideological.

2.1.2.5. Power

Within post-structuralist theories of language and identity, power must be acknowledged because it is tied to both constructs. As with other concepts within post-structuralism, power

works at many levels and it overlaps with the other post-structuralist concepts reviewed earlier. Bourdieu (1991) states that language use is really “an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power” (p. 66). It is present between those who possess languages as capital and those who have limited access or do not possess them. In addition, Bourdieu (1991) suggests that language use and “linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant” (p. 53). Perhaps this is why Bumiputera Malay undergraduates face challenges when they try to use other languages as opposed to their mother tongue. As the next chapter will highlight, the issue is one of power, patronage and authoritarianism particular to Malay society.

Building on the idea of language as capital, Norton (1997, 2000) believes that language investments contribute positively to identity construction particularly in second language contexts. As power permeates all aspects of language use and identity construction, and “speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks, and the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships” (Norton, 2010, p. 350), conflicts and struggles continue in the lives of individuals. For Bucholtz (2003) these relate to the continuing search for individual recognition in the eyes of others. The term she employs is ‘authentication’ and it “is instantiated through the assertion of one’s own or another’s identity as genuine or credible” (p. 408). Authentication is at work, for instance, when an individual joins a workplace community for the first time and tries to achieve authenticity as a professional. On one level, the person must be able to prove that she or he is a professional. On another level, becoming a real professional is also tied to the acceptance by others in the group. Not only must that person be able to show competency in that particular job, he or she must also be able to interact in a manner that appropriately symbolises being a member of that professional community.

2.2. Language use and the process of identity construction

Building on post-structuralist concepts related to identity theory, the main objective of this second part is to review identity in practice. I start by outlining what I mean by identity (construction) and how I see identity construction as the focus of my research. Then, I discuss language use as part of the construction of five identity categories: ethnic, religious, national, language and professional.

2.2.1. Broad open-ended aspects of the process of identity construction

One of the hardest challenges I faced in writing this thesis is to describe identity in such a way that I can organise my ideas coherently and explain clearly what it is that I am studying. Consequently, I abandoned the search for a single unitary definition of identity and instead started to search for utilitarian definitions of the construct. As Bucholtz and K. Hall (2010) put it, this kind of open-ended approach “allows for a discussion of identity often left implicit in scholarship” (p. 18). In other words, some degree of theorising about identity must be made explicit because one of the biggest drawbacks in identity and language research is the risk of using identity as an ‘umbrella’ justification for everything that the researcher observes (Llamas & Watt, 2010). This resonates in Lin (2008a) who argues that identity “seems to have become one of the most commonly used, but under-theorized and often only partially understood terms, especially in the field of language” (p. 197).

With reference to the three cores of this thesis (i.e., language use, workplace participation and identity construction), in this section I offer working definitions to account for individual and social identities. Although in post-structuralist accounts identity is implicitly a work in progress (see, for example, Block, 2007; Bucholtz, 2011; Norton, 2010; S. Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997), I employ the term ‘identity construction’ to refer explicitly to this process. In the rest of this section, I structure my discussion around five aspects of identity construction using a broad open-ended approach with the support of relevant literature. These five aspects relate to the topics covered in this thesis but this by no means is an exhaustive list. Additionally, these aspects work in tandem and in overlapping ways within the process of identity construction, and they do not imply any sort of sequence or order of importance.

First, identity construction is a personal journey of the self which also takes place in the company of others, leading to the emergence of multiple identities.

There are, Blommaert (2006) suggests, two sides of identity, “the identity people themselves articulate and claim [and] the identity given to someone by someone else” (p. 238). The interrelationships between the individual and others in the social world as part of identity construction are apparent because the conception of the self depends mainly on what others think about us (Kanno, 2003b). Still, these interrelationships should not be taken to illustrate that an individual is merely a passive observer in the process of identity construction because as Bucholtz (2003) notes, we exert agency in constructing identities for self empowerment.

Similarly, agency comes into play when individuals are positioned in less than favourable ways in the company of others. As Lin (2008b) observes, “through mobilizing and drawing on other available positive identities and resources to forge more fluid and empowering identities” (p. 3), individuals are enabled to resist and counter those subject positions. Simultaneously, the power relations that exist in the company of others can never be ignored within the process of identity construction. As Bucholtz (2011) writes, “identities are not the projects of individuals alone but are constantly co-constructed, supported, negotiated, and challenged by others” (p. 236). Ultimately, the self is not just a psychological entity but a social construct that is situated in and emerges from groups and communities.

Second, identity construction is based on experience and feeds on the imagination of the person because identities are inextricably tied to the past, present and future.

To explain this aspect of identity construction, Norton’s (2000) insight is most useful. She suggests that identity is “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). As the next chapter will show, the past must be understood to make sense of identity in the present. Block (2007) proposes that “individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on” (p. 27). In this sense, past experience is brought to the fore in identity construction. Additionally, when the past and present combine, possibilities for the future can be imagined and acted upon. In Lave and Wenger’s learning theory (1991; Wenger, 1998, 2009), this idea is related to identity trajectory or “a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future” (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). Indeed, imagination has been explored in many studies relating to language and identity (see, for example, Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006; Kanno, 2003a; Norton, 1997, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). My study aims to contribute to this growing body of research.

Third, identity construction is a process that might lead to conflicts and struggles both imagined and real but it also affords opportunities and achievements.

In discussing discourse, I quoted Norton (2010) to illustrate that language use and identity construction happen in an unequal world. Extending this idea, Skeggs (2008) argues that “Identity is not equally available to all and so operates as an unequal resource that only some

can use” (p. 11). The problem does not, however, lie in identity per se but conflicts and struggles related to identity in practice. Within formal education, Lin (2008a) notes that problems arise when social institutions employ “rigid identity boundaries and contents to label, stereotype, and limit possibilities of groups of people/students, and to exclude them [and] deny their difference or existence and ignore their needs altogether” (p. 215). In reality, individuals are able to exert different degrees of agency in facing the issues that Skeggs and Lin highlight. One example, says Canagarajah (2004), is through the act of resistance. In studying different communities of language learners, he observes that individuals create unseen spaces to positively negotiate identities. Another option, according to Bucholtz (2011), is to re/do certain aspects of certain identities but not others. Being a member of certain social groups for instance, does not mean that individuals must sacrifice their personal identities, hopes and dreams and just copy, as it were, the identities of others around them.

Fourth, identity construction is inextricably linked to language use and all forms of communication and interaction in everyday life.

This undoubtedly is the most important aspect of identity construction within the limits of this thesis. In relating language use to wider social institutions and structures, Norton (2000) states: “I foreground the role of language as constitutive of and constituted by ... identity” (p. 5). In other words, there is a reflexive relationship between language and identity; language shapes identity and identity shapes language. Similarly, Llamas and Watt (2010) postulate that the interrelationship between identity and language “is a fundamental element of our experience of being human. Language not only reflects who we are but in some sense it *is* who we are, and its use defines us both directly and indirectly” (p. 1). It is language that creates and delineates individuals so much so that language becomes identity. Taking a more pragmatic stance, Joseph (2010) believes that strong ties are present between language and identity at macro and micro levels, as a result, the “sense of who we are, where we belong and why, and how we relate to those around us, all have language at their centre” (p. 9). Even so, Scollon and Scollon (2003) caution against overextending the role of language in identity citing ‘multimodality’ where language is just one mode of interaction. Accordingly, Bucholtz and K. Hall (2010) situate language and identity in broader discourses where identities emerge and shift from and within different languages and varieties. Hence, the fundamental focus of research on identity construction is understanding ways of doing things socially using language, which ultimately is the principal endeavour of this study.

Fifth, identity construction is connected to established norms for classifying social groups and institutions but the process is never limited by them.

Identities are related to ethnicity, nationality, gender, social class (Block, 2007), and other traditional categories that most post-structuralist scholars critique as being too essentialised. For that reason, Norton and Toohey (2011) who reviewed research on language and identity that draws on these traditional categories found that post-structuralist scholars largely “do not regard such identity categories as ‘variables’ but rather as socially and historically constructed processes within particular relations of power” (p. 424). These classifications, therefore, should never be seen as stable and unchangeable but rather as social processes Pennycook (2007b). Working within a Foucauldian framework, Pennycook (2007a) adds that these “taken-for-granted categories ... must be understood as contingent, shifting and produced in the particular, rather than having some prior ontological status” (p. 39). Based on the similar precept that established norms are connected to identity but never limited by them, Bucholtz (2011) forwards the idea of employing ‘style’ to talk about identities. In her own words, identity “operates as a repertoire of styles, or ways of doing things that are associated with culturally recognizable social types ... beyond familiar demographic categories like race and gender to encompass entire ways of being in the social world” (p. 2). Style is seen in everyday interactions, shared activities, and even by how people dress. This clearly relates to the final aspect of identity construction as it is a process that is never limited by established social categories. I now turn to them to continue building the framework of my study.

2.2.2. Language use and the construction of five identity categories

The discussion in this section is related to the fifth aspect of identity construction mentioned above. As identity construction is complex and multifaceted, the ideas in this section are also inevitably related to the four other aspects. Before discussing language use and the construction of ethnic, religious, national, language and professional identities, it is useful to address the use of terminology when addressing them. Language and identity researchers, in one way or another, employ identity not as objects to be discovered but processes to be explained (see, for example, Barkhuizen, 2010; Bucholtz, 1999a, 1999b; Kanno, 2000; Norton, 2000, 2001; Rampton, 1998, 2010). Conversely, different researchers refer to identity categories using different terms, such as ‘dimensions’, ‘perspectives’, ‘positions’ and ‘types’. Based on these observations, and although in this thesis I refer to these social constructs

(ethnic, religious, national, language and professional identities) as categories, I also approach them as ongoing processes and not concrete objects. To answer my research questions, these categories will become useful to map the social to the individual and vice versa. As Edwards (2009) puts it, “Our personal characteristics derive from our socialisation within the group (or, rather, groups) to which we belong [and] individual identities will be both components and reflections of particular social (or cultural) ones” (p. 20).

Below, I draw on facets of identity categories as examples of identities in practice. As my work is focused on language use, I offer evidence mainly from the social or sociocultural ‘turn’ in applied linguistics. This turn is commonly related to second language acquisition within the broad discipline of applied linguistics. My work, however, deals with not just learning and using a second language but also the mother tongue and a third language. Together, the use of these languages will be related to identity construction through participation in communities. It is the fundamental focus on identities within language related research from the social/sociocultural turn that feeds my treatment of these five identity categories: ethnic, religious, national, language and professional. Additionally, to connect the discussion here with the next chapter, wherever possible links will be drawn between these five categories and the Malaysian situation.

2.2.2.1. Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity, Block (2007) observes, is based on “shared history, descent, belief systems, practices, language and religion” (p. 43). Other researchers also suggest characteristics of ethnic identity. First, it is shaped within the context of the collective or a group of people who develop identification from culturally shared practices (Fishman, 2010). Second, ethnicity is one of the most enduring demographic categories due to its association with biology (as race) and perceived naturalness (similar to the sex of a person), leading to the manifestation of ethnic identity as an objective construct (Joseph, 2010). And third, this identity category is also a subjective construct that is dynamic and ever-changing based on the notions of place and space (Bucholtz, 2011, Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Spolsky, 2010). Hence, ethnic identity is concrete and fluid, involuntary and voluntary. It is prescribed based on characteristics of individuals within groups but it is also ascribed by individuals to themselves. That said, compared to other identity categories viewed through the lenses of postmodernism, May (2001) cautions that options might be limited for individuals to reconstruct ethnic identity due to its concrete, involuntary and prescribed nature.

May's proposal links to my claim that in some situations ethnic categories (like Bumiputera and Malay) are essentialised and non-negotiable. This is evident with reference to language use and the process of ethnic identity construction. Relating to the shared consciousness within ethnic groups, Fishman (1989) posits that "languages will continue to be both symbolic of this collectiveness and instrumental for them, with respect to their self concepts, their antagonisms and their co-operative potentials" (p. 32). Garcia (2010) concurs, saying that language plays a central role in "an ethnic group's formation as it adopts and adapts the group's subjective belief in a common ethnic identity" (p. 522). Language then becomes a resource for ethnic identification that differentiates one group from another whilst at the same time plays the function of mode of communication for group coherence and unity. The roles that language play during contact situations where ethnic groups meet (or collide) further strengthen the relationship between language use and ethnic identity.

This interrelationship is linked to Myers-Scotton's (2006) assertion that "language is the most 'visible' symbol of an ethnic group. And there are many examples all over the world where language seems inextricably linked to ethnic identity" (p. 102). Nevertheless, she also points to examples of other situations where individuals maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity although they do not exclusively use the shared language of the group (commonly the mother tongue). In the Malaysian multilingual context, Hashim (2009), S. K. Lee (2003), Rajadurai (2010a, 2010b), and many others who study the interconnections between language and identity, make similar observations when referring to the Malays. First, as I have stated, the Malays are defined by their use of Bahasa Melayu as a shared symbol of identity; second, the bonds between the Malays and their mother tongue are so strong that these seem essentialised. Nevertheless, at the individual level everyday life is not cast in stone and the subjective dimensions of ethnic identity construction become manifest in degrees through personal agency, language investments and imagination. BM shapes the ethnic identity construction of the Bumiputera Malays at one level, yet members of this group are also able to shape their ethnic identities through the use of other languages that might not correspond to the shared practices of the majority. The next chapter explores these issues further.

2.2.2.2. Religious identity

In his coverage of identity categories, Block (2007) suggests that religious identity should be explored because "there is a growing interest in identity defined in terms of religious

practices ... identities [that] emerge at the crossroads of language and religion” (p. 44). Researchers interested in language use in society like Fishman (1989), Omoniyi (2006), and those who examine language use within the construction of ethnic, national and other identities like Al-Sahafi and Barkhuizen (2008), Feuer (2008) and Safran (2008) all point to the deep interconnections between language and religion. Like ethnic identity, religious identity is essentialised in everyday life: it is part of the self as concretised by prescribed (religious) practices, and it is simultaneously a marker of membership within religious communities where professing to one religion excludes individuals from others. This sense of stability within religious identity is tied to deeper belief systems or, put simply, the spirit of an individual. Due to these profound links and concrete prescribed practices, language and religion tie individuals to one-to-one relationships, for instance, Arabic to Muslims (Al-Sahafi & Barkhuizen, 2008), Hebrew to Jews (Feuer, 2008), and Latin to Christians (Joseph, 2004). Certainly, as Fishman (1989) posits, “The religious domain has more authoritative (and, therefore, more resistant) boundaries ... its language use is more sanctified, and its whole tradition is more tradition-and-stability oriented” (p. 229).

In the Malaysian context, language and identity research on the Malays (Mohd-Asraf, 2004, 2005; Che Dan, Haroon & Naysmith, 1996), and the work of Islamic educationists (Wan Daud, 1998), all attempt to shed light on the links between BM and Islam. The Malays are perceived as being fiercely protective of their mother tongue due to its ties with their religious and ethnic identities. Being Malay implies some non-negotiable behaviours and it is clear that Malay ethnicity assumes Islam as its natural religion, and BM (and to some extent Arabic) as the markers of Malayness. In contact situations, for instance, when English enters the domains of the mother tongue of the Malays, Mohd-Asraf (2005) observes that the former is “seen by many as being the embodiment and carriers of Judeo-Christian cultural values, and that of Western civilization, and conjures various images – positive as well as negative” (p. 104). In truth, when combined together ethnicity-religion-language forms a kind of ‘holy trinity’ for the Bumiputera Malays in their expressions of Malayness.

Nonetheless, even when viewed under such static lenses there is room for individuals to shape the process of identity construction towards personal growth whilst conforming to aspects of the shared practices of the status quo. Wan Daud (1998), for instance, argues that although Arabic is used within Islamic practices as the bridge that connects Malay-Muslims to their Creator, in truth, God understands all languages. Therefore, if Arabic is Islam then

Malay-Muslims should abandon BM and use Arabic exclusively. New studies in Malaysia bring into question the notion that Malay-Muslims should only use BM and shun other languages because they are threats to their religious identity. Looking at Malay students in rural Malaysian schools, Mohd-Asraf (2004, 2005) concludes that they value the experience of learning other languages, particularly English. Her participants even related the learning of English to the teachings of Islam as a reflection of “the Islamic worldview that one will earn God’s pleasure when one seeks knowledge and when one learns languages (in this case, English) in order to seek knowledge” (Mohd-Asraf, 2005, p. 111). Focusing on Islamic religious schools, Che Dan, Haroon and Naysmith (1996) collected data that show students in such schools understood how English can help them academically without threatening their religious and ethnic identities. Hence, like ethnic identity, the construction of religious identity through language exhibits fluidity even though religious identity is perceived as concrete and prescribed in many ways.

2.2.2.3. National identity

I begin this section with Spolsky’s (2010) observation of national identity and its related sense of nationalism. The process is generally “defined by a common history and culture (a great tradition), a common language, and a traditional territory” (p. 175). From common history, shared culture and the same language, people who live within the borders of a geographical territory construct a national identity. This view is somewhat essentialist as it assumes that as a category, national identity is concrete and stable. Alternatively, Anderson (1983, 1991) forwards the idea that nations are really ‘imagined communities’ of people who happen to live within the same borders. Extending this, Omoniyi (2010) argues that national identity is a political concept: “an ideological and a belief-based identity shared by people who reside within the same statutorily defined territory” (p. 126). Consequently, there are two important dimensions of national identity. First, it is demarcated by ideological and geographical boundaries, and maintained through the use of common languages (Bamgbose, 1991; Omoniyi, 2006); second, it is inculcated through familiar objects (e.g., flag, national anthem) and routines (e.g., flag raising, singing national anthem) (Adnan & E. Smith, 2001). It is the first dimension with a focus on language that I am interested in.

Chapter 1 situates language use within a legal framework where BM is a defining factor of ethnic identity. This, however, is not an experience which is unique to Malaysia and is observable in other post-colonial nations like Singapore (Chew, 2007), Hong Kong (Tsui,

2007) and nations on the African continent (Bamgbose, 1991). Identity ‘projects’ are common in these settings, for example, to bind national language to national identity through language planning. Hence, in Nigeria, Omoniyi (2010) finds that language use and identity (like in Malaysia) are worded in the highest laws of the land. Contrarily, because there are over 500 Nigerian languages and the majority of Nigerians have limited access to education, the subject of language use and national identity remains “a highly political and politicised subject [compared to countries] where we can observe one-to-one correlations between nations and national languages” (p. 237). Yet, even in Malaysia, which is not as highly multilingual as Nigeria, language and identity remain highly contested.

Malaysia and Malaysians have seen various nation-building projects to implant a sense on shared national identity (Leetee, 2007). Language-focused identity projects like *Satu Bahasa, Satu Negara* (One Language, One Nation) and *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (Language as Soul of the Nation) have been ongoing since the independence of Malaya in 1957 and the ensuing formation of Malaysia in 1963 with mixed results at ground level (Haji Musa, 2005; Hashim, 2009; Omar, 1992, 2007). Two observations can be made. Firstly, as life in Malaysia continues to be structured around polarities of majority/minority and Bumiputera/non-Bumiputera, the deployment of BM as the one language of the nation and as the soul of the nation will continue to bring mixed results. As Omar (1982) suggests, attempts to appease the majority who use BM as their mother tongue that the language will remain the marker of national identity, must be balanced with efforts to show other Malaysians that this move is not a means to exert Malay hegemony. Secondly, although projecting this language as the national identity of all Malaysians serves the nation-building strategy, the truth is ethnic identity is a more powerful identity category for most Malaysians than national identity. Thus, the common use of ethnic mother tongues and English by members of non-majority groups will continue in future (Ward & Hewstone, 1985).

2.2.2.4. Language identity

Language identity is a term borrowed from Block (2007) who acknowledges that in studies on language and identity (particularly those focusing on language maintenance) this category is also referred to as ‘ethnolinguistic identity’ (see, for example, Giles & P. Johnson, 2009). Block’s conceptualisation of language identity resonates with the process of identity construction in my study through Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese. Block argues that language identity is built on the “relationship between one’s self and different

means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality” (2007, p. 43). He discusses three avenues to make sense of interrelationships between the self and different modes of communication. Based on the work of Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) and Rampton (1995) these are ‘language expertise’, ‘language affiliation’ and ‘language inheritance’.

Language expertise is related to an individual’s proficiency not just in terms of being able to use language accurately (e.g., grammar, structure) but also to use language appropriately, so much so that that person is able to “talk a particular talk in such a way that he/she is accepted by other users of the language, dialect or sociolect” (Block, 2007, p. 40). Within identity construction, language expertise is applicable not just to mother tongue use but also to the additional languages of a person. Furthermore, it takes into consideration the fact that learning and using a language involve knowledge about the language and knowing how to use the language socially. Accordingly, language affiliation is the sense of identification that a person feels towards the mother tongue and additional languages as part of her or his repertoire. Affiliation is also linked to attitudes toward these languages and the motivation to learn them, and vice versa. Closely tied to affiliation is the concept of language inheritance or language as birth right. In the case of Malay individuals, being born into a Malay family will likely mean that BM will be part of their inheritance. As the sections on ethnic, religious and national identities have illustrated, in the world of the Bumiputera Malays, this language implies essentialised ways of thinking and behaving. However, given the dynamic nature of identity construction, Block cautions that all identity categories are subject to reconstruction within one’s lifespan and a person “can be born into a language community – a question of inheritance and possibly expertise – but then later in life develop a strong affiliation to and expertise in another language community” (Block, 2007, p. 40).

I end this section by including ‘investment’ as an important notion within the process of language identity construction, to meet the challenge put forward by Norton (1997), who calls for an inclusive view of identity that takes into consideration both individual and contextual factors. As she sees it, “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing” (Norton, 2000, pp. 11). Two reasons compel me to include Norton’s model in this section. First, in Block’s (2007) treatment of language identity he closes by using examples of identities that emerge when individuals use their second language. However, language identity should not take into

account only one language, be it the mother tongue, second or additional language(s) but rather to cover all languages as part of a person's repertoire. Second, and central to this thesis, the concept of investment arguably can feature in all five aspects of identity construction, and in all identity categories, particularly in the construction of language and professional identities. In Norton's (2010) words, "the construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction" (p. 354). Investment entails participating and taking action for individual growth through the medium of language. When they invest in languages, individuals hope that they will be able to acquire personal resources that will help them to raise their 'cultural capital'.

The inclusiveness of language investment and its usefulness as part of the process of identity construction will become clearer in subsequent chapters. Investment permeates and shapes the three central cores of this thesis. Furthermore, although originally developed within the context of second language learning, investment has currency in explaining the experiences of individuals within workplace communities. Therefore, my own extended formulation of investment is as follows: people invest in constructing their identities through language but their investments in their identities go beyond the use of language, as they interact on a daily basis with others in their social environments in and across communities. It is not surprising then that investment also happens to be a central concept when discussing language use and the construction of professional identity.

2.2.2.5. Professional identity

Norton (Peirce) (1995) builds her theory of social identity, investment and language learning based on the experiences of her research participants: immigrant women whom she argues were highly motivated to learn English but simultaneously had to contend with challenges and struggles to find their voices in an English speaking context. Although she did not draw specific attention to this, most of her participants also dealt with deconstructing and reconstructing aspects of their own professional identity, an identity category largely manifest in workplace communities. For instance, she reports that one of her research participants, Katarina, "had a great affective investment in her status as a professional" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 19) whilst facing difficulties when communicating with others in her working environment.

Facets of professional identity are also present and important, for example, in the work of researchers like Barkhuizen (2010), Canagarajah (2012) and Norton and Early (2011). They address in differing degrees the construction of professional identity, operationalised as expertise and professionalism in different professional (occupational) fields. In Barkhuizen's (2010) study, the experience of a migrant pre-service English teacher is brought to the fore as this teacher imagines a better life for herself through her chosen professional field even though her professional identity is a construct full of challenges and a site of constant struggle. The same broad focus is also addressed in Canagarajah's (2012) autoethnography recounting his effort to "develop a strategic professional identity" (p. 258) as a TESOL practitioner. Through years of struggle, he highlights the identity conflicts he felt in different subject positions, for example, as a migrant, a non-native speaker of English and a developing professional. Additionally, in Norton and Early's (2011) study they report on their experience as professionals with 'researcher identities' as they engage in their occupational fields as academics. Although there are other studies on language and identity that broadly address professional identity construction, from the three mentioned here it can be seen that professional identity emerges from occupational related experiences, and in connection to my own study, the ability to use languages as symbols of professionalism.

There are also researchers who focus directly on language use in workplace communities. I find the work of Holmes and Marra (2005) and K. Richards (2006) particularly illuminating as resources for working definitions of professional identity construction, and for providing examples of aspects of workplace participation. Looking at how competent and experienced managers use narratives or what they term 'workplace anecdotes' in day-to-day business communication, Holmes and Marra (2005) argue that this aspect of language use contributes "to the construction of the professional identities of managers" (p. 193). By studying how their participants issue directives to their co-workers, respond to humour initiated by other co-workers and conduct staff meetings, they suggest that in these situations experienced professionals exhibit quite complex professional identities. This implies that the journey to become a legitimate member of a workplace community does not only entail having the ability to show expertise and professionalism, a professional must also be able to participate in business talk that will "reflect the different interactional practices and workplace cultures in which they are embedded and from which they emerge" (Holmes & Marra, 2005, p. 211). These findings echo the work of K. Richards (2006), who studied the interrelationship between language and professional identity in workplace communities. His approach focuses

not on the individual but the group, and processes in which “collaborative professional groups construct and reaffirm their own identities” (p. 3). Drawing on the notions of ‘grouptalk’ and ‘groupthink’, he shows how arguments, humour, storytelling and other acts of communication are both processes and products that give rise to a professional identity for the individual, and for the group of professionals to whom that individual belongs. Whilst acknowledging that the model of a group might be seen as essentialised, he believes that this approach is useful to demonstrate the conflicts and struggles that staff members face to become, and more importantly, to be seen as professionals. Additionally, K. Richards (2006) argues that at the individual level “what is professionally achieved is also linguistically achieved and the identities that emerge from engagements with daily business are as much linguistic as professional” (p. 219).

These findings and assertions are evident and applicable in Malaysian workplaces, as Chapter 3 will highlight in an attempt to situate the multifaceted processes of professional identity construction in the Malaysian world of work. My work will bring an added dimension to this topic by exploring professional identity based on the experiences of young Bumiputera Malay undergraduates who are learning about, and at the same time beginning to join, the real world of work in their critical period of industrial attachment (or apprenticeship). Based on the discussion above, it can be assumed that the process of professional identity construction is challenging, although it also affords opportunities for success. Consequently, the workplace, both as a physical place and an imagined space, is where a great deal of investment is needed to enable an individual to participate in workplace communities and become a professional in the eyes of others. Making sense of workplace participation both as a site and a process to achieve growth and demonstrate professional development is the undertaking of the final part of this chapter.

2.3. Workplace participation and the process of identity construction

This final part connects identity construction and identity categories, particularly language and professional identities, with my working definition of workplace participation. Framed by Lave and Wenger’s social theory of learning, I explain what I mean by workplace participation before addressing other pertinent concepts within the theory proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2009) to complete my research framework.

2.3.1. Conceptualising and operationalising workplace participation

I suggested above that workplace participation is both a site and a process for personal growth and professional development. On the other hand, I have employed the term ‘workplace communities’ to suggest that the workplace is made up of communities both at the group and organisational levels. Workplace participation, in this thesis, attempts to broaden the notion of communities of practice in two ways. First, it takes into account that the complex and multi-layered make up of the workplace is a physical place and an imaginary space particularly for individuals who are only beginning to participate in the world of work. It is a metaphor for the newcomer or apprentice who is making the transition into the workplace both physically and psychologically, and who will be attached socially to that workplace (as part of her or his attachment). Second, as the process of identity construction is dynamic and ongoing, workplace participation refers to the active steps that one must take to learn to become a professional. By participating actively in workplace communities, the newcomer learns about his or her job scope and achieves some degree of professional expertise. At the same time, she or he also learns to become a member of that community and looks for acceptance.

Workplace participation also builds on the work of earlier researchers, mainly Lave and Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (1998, 2009) social theory of learning and their community of practice model. The community of practice is not just valuable for studying workplace communities, it has been and continues to be expanded due to its inclusiveness in researching the interrelationships between language and identity. Several studies that I cited earlier employ this theory to make sense of these interrelationships by drawing on the notions of imagined communities and identities in researching language and identity (see, for example, Feuer, 2008; Haneda, 2005; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Rajadurai, 2011). This focus is a reflection of the real world. As Norton and Toohey (2011) observe, “people interact directly with members of many communities: they may be involved in neighborhood, workplace, educational, medical, and religious communities” (p. 422). However, because social life is made up of a nexus of interrelationships, people not only interact with physical communities, they “also affiliate with communities of the imagination” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 422). Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2009) extend Anderson’s (1983) ‘imagined communities’ to introduce their own model of communities of practice, communities where imagination and participation combine to construct individual and social identities.

Within the study of language and identity, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, 1999) were amongst the earliest scholars who included communities of practice in their theoretical framework. Being interested in the interconnections between language and gender identities, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) draw on this model as a means “to explore in detail how social practice and individual ‘place’ in the community interconnect [based on] a conception of a community that articulates place with practice” (p. 464). They also forward a working definition of the term:

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. (p. 464)

This definition resonates with the idea of participation. Within the workplace, individuals come together to engage in activities that reflect their professional fields but also shape them. At the same time, at all levels in that workplace communication happens and from these interactions, both formal and informal, professional identities emerge. For the newcomer, apprentice or what I term ‘young professional’, participation is part of the learning process or what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’.

On the other hand, making sense of the world through communities of practice is not without critics. Some researchers have criticised the neutral position of the theory and its assumptions that all communities are uncomplicated and unproblematic (see, for example, Barton & Tusting, 2005). Others argue that the model is ambiguous and that the social learning theory proposed by Lave and Wenger inadequately addresses issues of power, discourse and language (see, for example, Creese, 2005; Tusting, 2005). Still, key concepts within this theory, including legitimate peripheral participation and the role of imagination within communities of practice, make it relevant and useful for my work, and also because this theory was developed based on data that Lave and Wenger gleaned from studying workplace apprenticeships, thus paralleling my own focus on industrial attachments. In the next section, I discuss these central ideas to close my discussion on workplace participation.

2.3.2. Identity construction, participating and learning in communities of practice

The focus of this final section is learning, specifically, learning in and from communities of practice. The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2009) suggest several aspects of identity construction in relation to communities of practice and I will discuss three

that are applicable to my own endeavour. First, they propose that identity is reconstructed both individually and through social interactions within communities of practice. In the socially situated process of learning, individual and social identities combine together in an act of becoming where the self changes, bringing possibilities for development and growth. Second, identity involves a movement or trajectory that propels an individual from the past into the present towards the future. Thus, past histories and present experiences shape imagined futures (and imagined identities) within and through communities of practice. At the same time, an individual's identity trajectories are not linear as there can be movements across time and space because the journey is dynamic and ongoing. Third, identity construction involves learning and entails active participation. It is a process where the individual constantly learns about and re/negotiates memberships within different communities of practice that are beneficial for her or him.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a principally social and situated activity and “it has as its central defining characteristic a process that we call *legitimate peripheral participation*” (p. 29). Specifically, they see learning as participation in “communities of practitioners ... communities of knowledge and practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). As mentioned earlier, their theory is based on their research on apprenticeships, a specific mode of learning that is socially situated and structured through relationships. Whilst acknowledging the reality that apprenticeship is perceived as traditional master-student relationships where the student learns by doing based on instructions from the master, they believe that this mode of learning should be extended to take into consideration that it allows the newcomer, through the passage of time and the accumulation of experience, to progress and construct new identities as a fresh member of a community of practice. These identities are important because they relate to the process of becoming through “mutual engagement, joint negotiated enterprise, [and] a shared repertoire of negotiable resources” (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). In other words, the process of learning to become part of any community of practice is the process of identity construction. Accordingly, ‘becoming’ entails continuous engagement and directed learning at many levels (Wenger, 2009). Most importantly, as this thesis aims to illustrate, becoming members of workplace communities is a continuous process involving language use for day-to-day interactions and also the learning of work-related practices, leading to being seen as a fully fledged member of the community by others within it.

As the process to become members of different communities of practice continues, so too does the process of identity construction where, according to Wenger (1998), “our identities form trajectories, both within and across communities” (p. 154). For Wenger, identity is connected to time and its construction is ongoing in and through social contexts. At the same time, he suggests that within the context of communities of practice there are different trajectories related to identity construction. ‘Inbound trajectories’ seem to be most relevant to my own study on workplace participation through a period of workplace attachment. Wenger sees inbound trajectories as: “Newcomers are joining the community with the prospect of becoming full participants in its practice. Their identities are invested in their future participation, even though their present participation may be peripheral” (1998, p. 154).

I find the concept of trajectories useful as another avenue towards understanding identity construction. Moreover, Wenger argues that “as trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present” (1998, p. 155). For this reason, in the construction of identity individuals are always working out things that are important to them and things which are not, and things that will contribute positively to their identities. In essence, what is at work here is imagination. Earlier in this chapter, I addressed the central position of imagination in identity construction. In Wenger’s view, imagination “refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (1998, p. 176). Being part of something greater is an important feature of identity construction (which Wenger refers to as ‘alignment’ with broader, larger communities) but imagination can also help individuals to express their individuality. Imagination creates mental pictures of the individual in her or his communities of practice, and opens up possible identity trajectories within those communities through mutual engagement and joint participation toward common goals. Furthermore, identity trajectories are not linear progressions through a given timeline or a set course. This is because through experience and with imagination there are many trajectories that a person might discover and take within the process of identity construction.

Lastly, in this and the previous chapter, I have used the term workplace communities as an extended metaphor of communities of practice. Although Lave and Wenger’s (1991) original work is in line with this idea, communities of practice are also present and observable in other social domains, as Norton and Toohey (2011) point out. As long as there is joint enterprise and engagement in mutually agreed practices that also involve shared resources, it

can be argued that this constitutes a community of practice. Therefore, in discussing the lives of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates, their memberships in other communities of practice must also be studied (where relevant) because individuals are part of a “nexus of multimembership” (Wenger, 1998, p. 158). Consequently, this means that everyone must learn about and negotiate memberships within different communities of practice, which together contribute to the production of their identities. Furthermore, learning is clearly an important activity within the process of identity construction because all learning is practice (Wenger, 2009), and it happens constantly as individuals negotiate their different positions (marginal, peripheral or full) within different communities. Constant learning and continuous negotiating must happen to ultimately lead to individual and social identities that might be mutually enforcing. Without a doubt, whether the community of practice in question is a group of final year university students, staff members in the same department or majority ethnic group within a country, an individual who holds full, peripheral or marginal memberships to these communities must continue to participate and to learn as part of the lifetime process of identity construction.

Overview of Chapter 2

This chapter laid the foundations of the theoretical framework that has informed this study. Divided into three main parts, the first was about identity theory. I began by comparing post-structuralist views of identity to essentialist ones. I then reviewed five concepts within post-structuralist theories of identity: the self, discourse, positioning, space and place, and power. The second part of this chapter was about identity in practice. I started by outlining five aspects that I conceive as identity construction. I then continued by reviewing language use as part of the construction of five identity categories: ethnic, religious, national, language and professional. The final part of this chapter was framed by Lave and Wenger’s social theory of learning to explain what I mean by workplace participation. Pertinent concepts within the theory complete my framework on language use and workplace participation in identity construction. In the next chapter, I continue my review of literature focusing on the sociohistories of the Malays from the past into present Bumiputera identity with Malaysia as a multiethnic, multilingual nation providing the backdrop.

Chapter 3. Identity: being Malay, becoming Bumiputera in Malaysia

The previous chapter mapped out the foundations of the theoretical framework for this study that focuses on the experiences of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates as they move from their campus to the workplace, and as they change from students to professionals. This chapter continues the discussion by reviewing the sociohistory of the Malays as a group of people from the earliest times to the present world of the Bumiputeras in Malaysia: a world bound by ethnicity, religion and language. To do this, Chapter 3 is divided into four parts. The first part will sketch out Malay sociohistory through the ‘*adat*’ and ‘*jiwa*’ as essences of Malayness before closing with the beginnings of Malay identity as personified by two legends that continue to inspire the Malays. The remainder of the chapter takes up the discussion from the 1900s onwards to examine ‘Bumiputera’ identity as an ethno-political extension of Malay identity. Starting with the sociohistory of this recent identity category in Malayan and later Malaysian society, I consider the role of languages as part of the Malaysian multiethnic tapestry before ending with a brief review of the Malaysian education system, focusing on the position of Bumiputera Malays within this system. In short, Chapter 3 adds to the theoretical framework in the last chapter by providing the backdrop against which my research questions on language use and workplace participation in identity construction can be answered.

3.1. Malay sociohistory, Malayness and the genesis of Malay identity

In this opening part, I begin by focusing on the uniquely Malay concepts of *adat* and *jiwa* in the expression of Malayness before ending with the genesis of Malay identity told through the stories of two Malay (literary) legends.

3.1.1. *Adat* and *jiwa*: essences of expressing Malayness

The Malays are a group of people who share common ancestry, language, religion and social practices. This echoes the definition by Yaapar (2005): “In current everyday usage a Malay is someone who speaks the Malay language, practices Malay customs, and in most cases, follows the Muslim faith” (p. 26). Yaapar adds, to really understand what a Malay person is, one must start by considering what constitutes Malayness from the outset. For this reason, two uniquely Malay constructs will be considered: the *adat* and the *jiwa*. Together, I argue

that they are the essences of Malayness. The centrality of the *adat* is captured by this old Malay idiom: *Hidup bersendi adat, adat bersendi hukum, hukum bersendi Kitabullah*. Its translation is as follows: Life is based on *adat*, *adat* is based on order, and order is based on the Holy Book (Al-Qur'an). This Malay idiom is a testament to the central position of *adat* as it is performed from birth, during the lifespan and after the death of a Malay person (Mohd & Hassan, 2002). While the concept of *Al Asabiyah* (collectiveness) is commonly reduced to community spirit, the same could be said of *adat*, which is translated as 'customs.' However, like *Al Asabiyah*, which is a portmanteau of Arabic concepts (Adnan, 2006), *adat* also carries multiple meanings for all Malays, namely community practices, customary laws, shared traditions and a thorough understanding of local norms and values.

At the same time as the *adat* is performed, the *jiwa* is enriched. In the same manner that *adat* is reduced to customs in translations, the true meaning of *jiwa* is limited to 'spirit'. Yet, like *adat* which carries multiple meanings, so too does *jiwa*. This classic Malay '*pantun*'¹ from Ridhwan and S. Hussin's compilation (1990) reflects the significance of the *jiwa*:

<i>Berapa dalam lubuk Ingeris,</i>	No matter how deep the well of the English,
<i>Saya berani menebar jala;</i>	I should cast my net in it,
<i>Berapa tajam mata keris,</i>	No matter how sharp the blade of the <i>keris</i> ² ,
<i>Saya berani membuang jiwa.</i>	I would offer my <i>jiwa</i> for it.

Although it is difficult to express the nuances of the above *pantun* in English, the literal translation that I have offered suggests that the *jiwa* embodies more than just the spirit of a Malay person. The underlying message of this *pantun* is of bravery and courage, and that the *jiwa* will only falter after death. In other words, the only way a Malay individual can part with the *jiwa* is through death. In life, the *jiwa* refers to the Malay-Muslim spirit, temperament, deep feelings and outward personality. As aforementioned, when the *adat* is performed the *jiwa* is enriched, and as a result 'Malayness' is expressed. Due to the highly intricate links between the *adat* and *jiwa* both constructs must be examined simultaneously to connect past and present Malay identities. Another reason is that *adat* and *jiwa* are oftentimes inseparable in the world of the Malays, and they are manifest in language use, customs and daily life.

¹ The *pantun* (*pun-tone*) is believed to be uniquely Malay. It is the most popular Malay traditional poetry genre and continues to play a social role in Malay communities. Source: Institute of Language & Literature, Malaysia (2006). *A brief tutorial on the pantun*. Available at: <http://www.esastera2u.com/index.php/articleview/id/113>

² The *keris* is a South East Asian dagger.

3.1.2. *Adat, jiwa* and language use

Language use is perhaps at or near the top of the list of ways to express Malayness. Language use is connected to the *jiwa* of a Malay person through the performance of *adat* (K. Abdullah & Ayyub, 1998), and it combines with ethnicity and religion in the process of being Malay. Although Burhanudeen (2006), S. C. Tham (1977), and other local researchers see language use as the only root of the *adat*, for three reasons I offer an alternative view that combines both *adat* and *jiwa* in language use. Firstly, language use for a Malay person is an act that involves *adat* and *jiwa* simultaneously. It begins when language is used in communication (Bahasa Melayu by default) and some aspects of the *adat* are performed. For example, as Mohd Shariff (2004) outlines in his volume on the mannerisms of the Malays, the Malay *adat* dictates that a person is not supposed to boast while communicating, to be impolite, to criticise others blatantly or to generally put down others for whatever reasons. If a person abstains from all the above, the *jiwa* is enriched as she or he is able to treat others in an honourable, principled manner. This is also because Malay religion (Islam by default) highly values these behaviours.

The second reason why language use involves both *adat* and *jiwa* is that it goes beyond the realm of communication for the Malays (see, for example, Haji Musa, 2005; Hussein, 1984). Not only should a Malay person abstain from boasting, being impolite and directly criticising others, that person must also ensure that he or she knows how best to convey a message the way a Malay person should. Aspects of the Malay *adat* are very particular about this; for example, knowing how to talk to a person who is older or one who holds a position of power, how to refer to oneself when talking to family members and relatives, even to the point of knowing when the right time is to interrupt a conversation between adults and people who are more senior (Roff, 1974). The performance of Malay *adat* by knowing these unwritten rules of communication will avoid communicative faux pas and prove the character and depth of one's Malay-Muslim *jiwa*.

The final reason why *adat* and *jiwa* are inseparable is observed in different Malay literary art forms, especially when peppered in daily communication. The idiom I cited to illustrate the place of *adat* (from Mohd & Hassan, 2002), and the pantun I used to project the nature of *jiwa* (from Ridhwan & S. Hussin, 1990), are exemplars of the combinatory effects of *adat* and *jiwa*. Accordingly, language use should be packaged in a certain way, or as the Malay

language expert Omar (1986) puts it, in “refined Malay, known as *bahasa halus* (*halus* = refined) ... Its use is linked with gentility and good breeding” (p. 194). Found within this refined language form is the regular use of idioms, *pantun* and even ‘*syair*’ (melodic Malay verse) as features of day-to-day communication. In truth, *bahasa halus* is derived from the *adat* and the ability to use refined Malay will surely enrich the *jiwa*. In contrast, the close relationship between language use, *adat* and *jiwa* might create practical difficulties, for instance, when one chooses to use a different language in the world of the Malays. The inability to understand the nuances of *bahasa halus* and failure to communicate with refined mannerisms might also be detrimental to the social standing of that person.

3.1.3. *Adat, jiwa, Malay customs and lifestyle*

The Malays have gone through several periods of social change through exposure to external influences. The languages, cultures and religions of peoples from the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, the Malay Archipelago, China and other Asian empires left indelible marks on the Malays even before the first century A.D. (Winstedt, 1962, 1968). Nevertheless, with the rise of several Malay sultanates on the Malay Peninsula and the expansion of the powerful Melaka Malay-Muslim empire, the Malays began to assert more control over their destiny. Malay customs and a distinctly Malay way-of-life began to take shape, and different aspects of the *adat* are observable in these customs and daily rituals as they are performed to enrich the *jiwa*. By and large, these customs continue to be practised, although some have changed in form and function to reflect and express modern Malayness (Milner, 2008). I summarise some customs that relate to birth, marriage and death as examples of the beginnings of a uniquely Malay identity below.

The Malay rites of initiation begin immediately after birth when the father (or commonly the grandfather) recites the Muslim call to prayers into the child’s ear (Rauf, 1964). Within a couple of days, the baby is introduced to the community through ‘*berendoi*’ (literally, to lull) where neighbours and family members will sing praise to God for the birth, and ‘*bercukur*’ when the baby’s hair will be shaved to signify purification (N. Abdullah, 2005). When the child grows up and it is time for marriage, another set of rites are performed (Al-Hadi, 1978). The initial contact is called ‘*merisik*’ (literally, getting-to-know), to send matchmakers from the prospective husband’s family to make contact with the family of the prospective wife. Then, the wedding ceremony ends, not with a honeymoon but ‘*bertandang*’ (or to call on) whereby the wife takes her new husband to meet her extended family, and vice versa. Finally,

when life ends, final rites of a Malay-Muslim begin with passing on the message about the death to the community. After burial, on the third, seventh, fourteenth, fortieth and one hundredth day after death, '*kenduri arwah*' is held, which is a religious gathering to offer prayers for the deceased. This continues annually after the passing of that person.

Although the above is a highly condensed account of the lifespan of a Malay person, it illustrates two core dimensions of the *adat* and *jiwa*. First, a sense of togetherness and belonging is undoubtedly part of the Malay mindset. Thus, it is not surprising that rituals of birth, marriage and death involve the participation of the wider community. Second, the performances of these rituals are really the performance of the *adat*, as a means of elevating the *jiwa*. In short, although an individual is born Malay it is through the family, community and society that this individual experiences the process of becoming Malay. This section has presented the Malay constructs of *adat* and *jiwa*. They link the past to the present in the social and physical world of the Malays and they outline the common attributes of Malay identity (Barnard, 2004). However, because *adat* and *jiwa* carry multiple meanings and interpretations they could also become "problematic [and] nebulous" (Vickers, 2004, p. 41). The next section will discuss Malay identity and Malayness in more practical terms, based partly on historical accounts and partly on local fiction.

3.1.4. Genesis of Malay identity and expressions of Malayness

As the Malays rose to prominence in the South East Asian region and beyond, Malay identity and Malayness were brought to the fore. Although it could be argued that the process began when the ancestors of the Malays settled on the Malay Peninsular, economic progress and political changes in several Malay sultanates, particularly the Melaka Malay-Muslim empire, ushered in the golden age of the Malays (N. Hussin, 2007). As a result, the Malays started looking inwards to trace their heritage and lineage that, hitherto, had been largely recorded in oral form. As Malay historians Ismail and B. Salleh (2003) write:

Real historical figures replaced fictitious ones when court historians began to write the genealogies of their masters. Some famous one are: *Sulalatussalatin* (popularly known as *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals/History), *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, *Hikayat Patani*, and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*; the genealogies of the rulers of Melaka, Pasai, Patani, and Kedah, respectively. (p. 170)

Early accounts of Malay history, however, tend to conflate historical facts with local fiction. Although this presents a real challenge for historians, for the purpose of contextualising my

own research and to provide background information on Malay identity and Malayness, this presents two possible advantages. First, in an attempt to fictionally glorify Malay heroes and icons, Malay historical writings epitomise the aspirations of the Malays. In spite of the fact that these accounts were exaggerated in the fictional sense, they are related to the process of becoming Malay. The didactic tone of many Malay historical writings also preached to the Malays about what they could and should become. Second, these historical writings imbued with tales from the Malay Archipelago, represent the genesis of Malay identity and Malayness, and provide background knowledge relevant to this thesis about “changing Malay values and worldviews” (Ismail & B. Salleh, 2003, p. 180). In this section, I present Malay identity and ways to express Malayness with the help of two Malay heroes and icons, *Laksamana* (Admiral) Hang Tuah and *Panglima* (Commander) Awang. Without dwelling on the factual accuracy and historical underpinnings of their stories, by the end of this section I hope to achieve two things: develop the idea of an emerging Malay identity, and illustrate how these two legends express Malay identity and Malayness.

3.1.4.1. *Laksamana* Hang Tuah

Haji Salleh and Robson-MacKillop (2010) provide this contemporary English translation of ‘*Hikayat Hang Tuah*’ or The Epic of Hang Tuah which was supposedly written around the 17th or 18th century:

This is the legend of Hang Tuah, a mythical hero and the champion of the Malays, a knight who served the King of Melaka with exemplary loyalty which shaped his life, endowing it with purpose and meaning. (p. 1)

The tale of Hang Tuah reflects parts of the written records found in *Sejarah Melayu* or the Malay Annals, and his story portrays all the qualities that a Malay person should aspire to possess. In this summary of a 550+ pages epic based on Ahmad’s (1975) definitive version, Malay identity is again framed as a communal construct. Being brave, dutiful, responsible to others, are qualities that a Malay person should acquire, and they are apparent in Hang Tuah’s personality, perhaps even to a fault. Additionally, Haji Salleh (2003) and Maier (1999) share the same belief that the legend of Hang Tuah shows important aspects of Malay identity, namely to be loyal to leaders, to be a devout Muslim, to fulfil all the roles given by society, and to be thorough in performing the *adat*. As Maier (1999) sees it, through the voice of Hang Tuah, a Malay individual is reminded to:

Serve your lord; follow the rituals that accompany the construction of a house; trust your dreams; be always willing to assimilate with others; prepare yourself for your

journeys; know that you will die; know what happens when you try to achieve a name. (p. 357)

To ‘prepare yourself for your journeys’ is an important lesson for the Malays, as portrayed by Hang Tuah, the Malay Renaissance Man. Of direct relevance to my study, Haji Salleh (2003) notes that from a young age Hang Tuah was given lessons on language and literature, and he went through periods of internship to learn the trades of businesspeople and later keepers of peace (i.e., Malay warriors). Undeniably, Hang Tuah is portrayed as an avid learner of languages as written in Haji Salleh and Robson-MacKillop’s (2010) translation of this epic:

When he had mastered word-formation in Arabic, he said to his father, “Father, I think I’d like to study afresh, this time with an Indian teacher” ... so Hang Tuah studied with an Indian teacher and after a while he knew the Tamil language. He then spoke of his wish to study with a Siamese teacher so that he may acquire that master’s language. When he had finished learning Siamese, he was tutored by a Chinese teacher. In a short time, he was able to master the Chinese language; after which he studied with a Javanese teacher, for he wished to learn his language. Eventually he acquired, in all, the mastery of a total of twelve languages. (p. 20)

Although this is likely to be an exaggeration, it does reflect the historical significance of the Melaka Empire as a burgeoning metropolis. At its peak, Melaka was a large harbour city visited by streams of ships from around the world. It is estimated that 84 languages were spoken in Melaka at one time (Cheah & Haji Ismail, 1998; Shellabear, 1982). Hence, it would not be difficult to imagine the importance of foreign language learning for the Malays in and around Melaka. To learn new languages and to prepare for employment from an early age are clearly part of Malay identity, and they are legitimate expressions of Malayness in the past. There are obviously more lessons within the pages of this epic but most importantly, as Maier (1999) explains, the story of Hang Tuah gives counsel, and “like every other tale in the Malay world [it] suggested possibilities of how to live well and how to keep the community together” (p. 359). Lessons on the qualities of Malayness continue through the eyes of a more recently ‘discovered’ Malay icon, Panglima Awang.

3.1.4.2. *Panglima Awang*

Whereas *Laksamana* Hang Tuah is the personification of the Malay Renaissance Man, Panglima Awang is the archetype of the Malay explorer of the world (Mahmud, 1966), for he is thought to have travelled with none other than Ferdinand Magellan and his crew who completed the first circumnavigation of the globe (Pigafetta, 1969a, 1969b). Nevertheless, I would like to state that the identity of *Panglima Awang* in its current form is a fictionalised,

romanticised account by the Malay author Harun Aminurrashid (1958, 2011). In original historical texts, the character of *Panglima* Awang is attributed to a sailor in Magellan's party. This sailor is simply referred to as 'Enrique or Henrique of Malacca' in all the historical writings of Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's chronicler. Enrique is believed to have been a Malay servant of Magellan, although he is also described as the party's chief translator in the Malay Archipelago. It is believed that he was highly fluent in Spanish and other foreign languages (Nik Abd Rahman, Md Radzi, Mohd Tamrin & Abu Bakar, 2009). There are conflicting accounts regarding Enrique's position in Magellan's party or who he really was in terms of ethnic and religious background. Nonetheless, as Mahmud (1966) notes, in the Malay mindset not only did he play an important role in this momentous journey, he is also the Malay quintessence of Magellan.

In spite of who and what he was, *Panglima* Awang in the eyes of the Malays is a modern day symbol of what the Malays could and should become (Shafei, 2006). Although he might not be as iconic as Hang Tuah, given the fact that little is known about him, Enrique was a real person based on historical accounts, whereas Hang Tuah is likely to be a composite character. *Panglima* Awang's place in the Malay psyche should rightly be acknowledged for two reasons. First of all, although it might be argued that he was not presented with much of a choice, being Magellan's servant, Enrique or *Panglima* Awang was a highly able linguist and interpreter. Although his role was more prominent in and around the Malay Archipelago, Gelpke (1993) posits that as an interpreter he was likely to discharge his duties in other geographical regions that Magellan and his party traversed. If this is true, it supports an earlier point that to be able to learn and use many languages is part of Malay identity and a valued expression of Malayness. Secondly, whoever he really was, Enrique or *Panglima* Awang was an adventurer and an explorer of the world. Even though he might not have been given any choice by Magellan, being the explorer's young manservant, the fact remains that *Panglima* Awang continued to travel with Magellan's party that circumnavigated the globe even after his master was killed in the battle of Mactan on April 27, 1521 in the Philippines (Levesque, 1980). This was a major achievement for a young Malay person of his time, reflecting the same sense of duty and honour that Hang Tuah represents. Although these two icons continue to be uniquely Malay symbols, through the passage of time and critical sociohistorical changes Malay identity and Malayness also went through transformations as part of the process of identity construction. These will be examined next.

3.2. The beginnings of Bumiputera Malay identity in Malaysia

Although they are often used interchangeably and taken to address the same ideological constructs, Bumiputera identity and Malay identity should be seen as separate. In this thesis, I mainly refer to the Malays as ‘Bumiputera Malays’ for reasons that should be clearer from the unfolding story of the Bumiputeras as part of Malaysian society from the 1900s onwards.

3.2.1. From early Malay identity to Bumiputera Malay identity

Earlier I presented the genesis of a collective Malay identity that rose to prominence through economic progress and political changes in the Malay sultanates of South East Asia. The Melaka Empire was the apex of the rise of the Malays in and around the Malay Archipelago. Conversely, foreign interference by Portuguese, Dutch, British and Japanese colonialists brought periods of instability for many years prior to the Federation of Malaya’s independence from British colonial rule in 1957. For the Malays it was a mixed blessing. Faced with internal strife and problems related to poverty, the Malays as the majority group could not affect further progress after they had developed a shared sense of identity and community. At the same time, the fire of Malay nationalism burned bright, particularly in the early and mid 1900s, inspired by the resurgence of political awareness of Malay community leaders and scholars (Halimi, 2008). As a result, a new ideology and novel identity came to the forefront; it continues to this day to strongly influence Malay identity and mindset: ‘*Bumiputera*’. Harper (1999) argues:

The core notion that arose out of these debates, that of the Malay Bumiputera, or son of the soil, and of his entitlement to special rights and privileges in economic life, became the ideological cornerstone of the modern Malaysian state. (p. 229)

The World War II period was particularly difficult for Malay communities in Malaya. Their struggle continued during the Emergency or *Darurat* from 1948 to 1960 when the Malayan government and the British waged war on communist guerrillas or *Parti Komunis Malaya*. Being largely based in rural areas and dependent on subsistence farming due to the British divide and rule policy (Rappa & Wee, 2006), Malay communities were at risk for many years and their access to formal education and healthcare was severely curtailed. Poverty and diseases made it doubly difficult for the Malays to focus on something other than day-to-day survival; only members of local royal families, the ruling elites and minority urban Malays at that time had access to education and healthcare (Kadir, 2002). The introduction and rapid spread of Bumiputera ideology was, in a sense, a direct response to the misery felt by the

Malays at large (Rappa, 1997). Becoming Bumiputera was also the avenue taken by the Malays in their struggle to maintain their political existence in the years before self rule. In 1948, when the British government proposed the ‘Malayan Union’ to place the Malay Peninsular under direct British rule and bypass the traditional powers of Malay royals and ruling elites, Malay communities felt threatened and Bumiputera ideology was adopted as part of the resistance (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). When the Malays started to see themselves as Bumiputeras and to think of themselves as the majority group, things started to happen at ground level leading to profound changes (Reid, 2004). Better access to formal education, the creation of economic opportunities, and the blending of old Malay identity with new Bumiputera ideology were the most significant. These will be discussed in the following subsections.

3.2.2. Bumiputera Malays and formal education

As Bumiputera ideology spread and the Malays began to see themselves in the same light, calls for Bumiputera Malay families to send their children to school became more common (Halimi, 2008). Malay newspapers, for example, carried news and editorial pieces suggesting that English schooling was the way forward for Malay communities, although such opportunities were limited. As Harper (1999) notes, “in 1953 there were only 26,215 Malays in English schools ... a quarter of the total pupils” (p. 234). At the same time, although quite limited in number, Malay schools or ‘*sekolah rakyat/Melayu*’ assisted rural Bumiputera Malays to gain access to formal education. Even if most rural Malay schools were faced with management problems and acute shortages in teachers and funds, the setting up of these schools, mostly by members of local communities, proved that Bumiputera Malays are open to learning and not insular as suggested by some authors during that period (Melebek & Moain, 2006). Another possibility for young Bumiputera Malays to learn came in the form of Islamic religious schools or ‘*sekolah pondok*’. Although perceived as less formally organised, Islamic schooling also provided opportunities for Bumiputera Malays to access education, a practice that continues in contemporary Malaysia (Rosnani, 1996).

Two challenges were also present as Bumiputera Malay communities started to become direct stakeholders in formal education (S. Hussin, 1993). The first came in the form of parents who did not encourage their children to learn formally. Many parents, for example, still harboured mistrust towards English schools that were normally run by Christian missionaries. Perhaps in many ways Bumiputera ideology made the link between ethnicity and religion more

fundamental for the Malays. The second challenge came from the British colonialists who at that time were still holding key positions of power. According to Harper (1999), “British officials still saw education as merely a means of teaching the rural Malay to be a better cultivator” (p. 235). In fact, the teaching of mainly vocational skills was the norm at that time. As Rappa and Wee (2006) observe, “British policy towards education continued to play second fiddle to their primary objective of economic exploitation and political control over the [Malay] archipelago” (p. 33). These challenges clearly had to be faced considering new economic opportunities were being presented to the Malays that did not involve agricultural exploits, which I will focus on next.

3.2.3. Bumiputera Malays and economic opportunities

Earlier Malay sultanates created wealth through trade and commerce. The Melaka Empire, for instance, had strong economic ties with global powerhouses during its dominance in the region. Traders from China, India, Europe and the Middle East all came to do business in Melaka and its surrounding areas (N. Hussin, 2007). Decades of foreign rule and internal strife however, pushed the Malays towards subsistence farming and other limited agricultural exploits, and these were reinforced by the British government’s divide and conquer strategy. Consequently, Malay communities commonly existed in rural settings with agriculture as their source of income (Rappa, 1997). Nevertheless, the English education system also created a new class of Bumiputera Malays who were educated, and with formal education came wider employment and economic opportunities. During the commencement of British rule, only members of royal families and politically connected urban Malays “were educated and recruited for high administrative positions in the colonial bureaucracy” (H. G. Lee, 2010, pp. 180-181). However, by the 1950s the number of Bumiputera Malays receiving formal education could be considered substantial given the fact that many communities still existed in rural settings and were tied to agriculture. Those who were able to complete their schooling either in English or Malay schools now had the opportunity for waged employment in the civil service. Although English skills were still the crucial determinants for acceptance, more Malays enjoyed social mobility with its economic benefits (Harper, 1999).

Those who could not join the civil service often opted for jobs in the police, army or Malayan Special Constabulary (Nonini, 1992). Thus, for the first time ever in Malayan history, labour was in short supply as an apparent sign of modernity (Milner, 2008). Subsistence farming also diversified into other fields like paddy and rubber planting, and commercial fishing.

Even though agriculture-based economic opportunities still provided limited gains due to the lack of technical expertise and archaic practices in income distribution, Bumiputera Malays started to share a more substantial piece of the Malayan economic pie (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). Although to this day Bumiputera Malay share in the nation's economy remains a sensitive issue (roughly 30% for a 60% majority group), the mid 1900s marked positive economic changes for a group of people plagued with years of strife and poverty (Rappa, 2002). The education, urbanisation and modernisation of the Bumiputera Malays meant that this group could retake its place as the main political force on the peninsular, in the years before and after the independence of the Federation of Malaya.

3.2.4. Bumiputera Malays as a renewed political entity

The rise of the Bumiputera Malays as a political force opened doors that hitherto have been closed. As formal education and economic opportunities continued to improve, the collective power of Bumiputera Malays instigated other positive changes. The colonial government realised this and responded by setting up co-operatives to assist rural Malay communities and by stimulating waged employment for urban Malays and those who had come to Malayan cities to seek employment (Haji Ahmad, 1987). Perhaps the most important result of the collective bargaining power of the Bumiputera Malays came in the form of RIDA or the Rural and Industrial Development Authority officiated by the British in August 1950 (Abd Rashid, 2004). RIDA was tasked with developing rural Malay communities and providing tertiary education and training for Malay youths.

Although some might argue that the setting up of RIDA was purely a token by the British to appease the Malays (see, for example, Lim, 2004), in the next decade RIDA became MARA or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (Council of Trust for the Indigenous Peoples). MARA is a change agent for the educational empowerment of Bumiputera Malays until this day. With the powers given to the RIDA, in 1956 *Dewan Latehan RIDA* or RIDA Training Centre was set up near the Malayan capital together with *Taman Asuhan RIDA* or RIDA Education Centre. These centres with different aims and objectives were the first of their kind in Malaya (S. Hussin, 1993). Together, they provided the initial framework for the setting up of Bumiputera universities in contemporary Malaysia, and an education strand catered specifically to this majority group from secondary to graduate and professional education. According to Idris and Nik Pa (2008), *Dewan Latehan RIDA* started its operations by offering courses fully delivered in English. In-house courses were also delivered to ensure that highly trained RIDA

officers were able to assist Malay communities throughout the peninsula. When MARA upgraded the centre to *Maktab MARA* or MARA College, internationally recognised courses were introduced for the first time (Gale, 1981). *Taman Asuhan RIDA* must also be mentioned as a tool for Bumiputera Malay progress. It was established specifically to provide training for Malay women in various vocational fields and to raise the living standards of Malay communities (Mahyiddin & Yusof, 1997). Within six months of its inception, this centre trained 460 trainees as proof of the effectiveness of RIDA as an early vehicle for Bumiputera Malay empowerment.

There were of course other initiatives, both government-run and community-led, that propelled the Bumiputera Malay agenda from the mid 1900s onwards. Though some only had limited success (Rappa, 2002), as a whole the Bumiputera agenda and ideology became ingrained into Malay psyche and behaviour resulting in what I propose to be the Bumiputera Malay identity as an extension of the original Malay identity. The resurgence of the Malays as a political force came to its apex when local Malay leaders together with their Chinese, Indian and Borneo counterparts travelled to England to demand independence. On 31st of August 1957, this became a reality after the Federal Constitution of the Federation of Malaya was written. Later, together with the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo, on 16th of September 1963, 'Malaysia' was born (Halimi, 2008). Despite periods of civil unrest, the nation was moving forward as one. Together with the Chinese, Indians, Bumiputeras (indigenous population) of Sabah and Sarawak, and other ethnic groups, the Bumiputera Malays began to construct a Malaysian identity. As the next part will illustrate, it is the diversity of Malaysians that adds character and lends credence to this national identity, particularly through the languages that Malaysians use.

3.3. Languages as part of the Malaysian multiethnic tapestry

Language use is one of the three cores of this thesis. In this part, the roles of Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin (Chinese) within the Malaysian context will be discussed. Further, their connections to the construction of Bumiputera Malay identity will be examined.

3.3.1. Bahasa Melayu

In Chapter 1, I cited Article 160 of the Federal Constitution that defines what Malay means in legal terms. It is only appropriate that I begin discussing Bahasa Melayu (BM) through the

same legal scaffold. Within the laws of Malaysia, “Malay means a person who ... habitually speaks the Malay language” (Government of Malaysia, 2009, p. 130). In reality, BM plays a vital role within this nation as the language of solidarity and national identity. It does not just define who or what a Malay person is, BM also delineates what it means to be a Malaysian across ethnic, religious and political boundaries. The provisions for the status and roles of BM are enshrined in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution (ibid., p. 122):

(1) The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in such script as Parliament may by law* provide:

Provided that –

(a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and

(b) nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation.

In spite of these legal provisions, the decision to make BM the national language met a number of challenges, as it was seen as a move by the Bumiputera Malays to exert dominance over other ethnic groups (see, for example, H. G. Lee, 2010; Postill, 2006). The idea that BM is a tool for hegemony might be related to the strong ties between Bumiputera Malays and their mother tongue. Bumiputera identity was based partly on a call to the Malays to stake a hold on the management of this country or in the words of Harper (1999): “it was a clarion call to the Malays to wake up and be active” (p. 263). Perhaps this is why Bumiputera Malays are seen to be over-protective of BM and why certain groups view this as an act of domination. That said, provisions under Article 152 cannot be amended unless called for by the Council of Malay Rulers or *Majlis Raja-Raja Melayu* under Article 159 (5).

Such provisions are appropriate because BM use permeates the Federal Constitution, and BM embodies Malaysian national identity (Sariyan, 2006). Accordingly, under Article 10 (4), the position of BM can never be questioned. In this sense, it might also be said that BM has reached the level of ‘sacred’ in the Malaysian context (Omar, 1979). The Constitution, nevertheless, recognises that the position of the national language should not restrict the intrinsic rights of all Malaysians. As Malay linguists Karim (1999) and Omar (1982) point out, under Article 152 clause (1) (a) and (b), the teaching and learning of other languages are allowed, as long as not for official use. For official use, BM remains to this day the only

medium of communication. In truth, BM must compete for space within the Malaysian language mosaic, as it started to become influential only after more than two decades of independence. Today, particularly within the Malaysian education system, the roles of BM are continuously challenged by English and other ethnic languages like Mandarin Chinese (Abu Bakar, 2008). In addition, Clause (1) (a) and (b) of Article 152 paved the way for the establishment of National Type schools or *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* where BM need not be the medium of instruction. In these schools, which are set up mainly by Chinese and Indian communities, Mandarin and Tamil are the usual modes of communication, although all ethnic groups are accepted. I will return to this issue in the section on Mandarin.

Today, national leaders are not required to use the national language in official ceremonies (Lubis, 2008). Additionally, although the government enforces the use of BM in Malaysian courts, BM is not fully used during proceedings (Abu Bakar, 2008). Even education policies that ensure the continued use of BM are coming under threat from other languages. In private institutions, the Malaysian Education Act 1961 revised 1996 (Government of Malaysia, 2006b) acknowledges that education providers are free to choose their mediums of instruction. These institutions can either follow the practice of National Schools or *Sekolah Kebangsaan* where BM is used, National Type schools where Mandarin and Tamil are used, or apply for exclusion and choose English as the sole medium of instruction. Unsurprisingly, BM is increasingly taught just as an additional subject because it is not compulsory for these institutions to use BM. Due to the fact that private education institutions are normally the choice of non-Bumiputeras, particularly at tertiary level (Daud & Sapuan, 2012), this Act might defeat the purpose of having BM as a national language in the first place.

BM is a language of unity and solidarity in a country of many different peoples (Hashim, 2002, 2003). This language is important because it is the language spoken by the majority and it was the language historically chosen to unify multiethnic Malaysia (Rappa & Wee, 2006). It should rightly be seen as the soul of the nation (Gill, 2004), although its position is endlessly challenged. The 1996 Malaysian Education Act, for instance, presents a clear challenge to BM. At the same time, as I will illustrate in the rest of this chapter, this law has also given the majority group full access to other languages, like English, in Bumiputera-only tertiary institutions. Nonetheless, the rebranding of BM from *Bahasa Malaysia* (or Malaysian Language) back into Bahasa Melayu some years back suggests that there are splinter groups within the Bumiputera Malays who want BM to become a tool of ‘ultra-Malay’ authority

(Mustafa & Adnan, 2009). Whether the agenda of these fundamentalists will undermine the continuing role of BM as a catalyst for national identity and ethnic unity is unknown. What is clear is that the notion of “*Bahasa jiwa bangsa* or BM is the soul of the people” (Gill, 2004, p. 137) will continue to be debated for years to come.

3.3.2. English

Although BM has been accorded special status and roles, other languages are widely spoken in this country. As mentioned above, the teaching and learning of other languages are allowed, as long as not within the context of official use (Karim, 1999; Omar, 1992). At this point in time, English, several Chinese dialects, and many local languages continue to be used by different groups of Malaysians (Moore & Saleh, 2003). In this and the next section, I will focus on two languages: English and Mandarin (Chinese).

With reference to English, two factors continue to make this language an ‘obligatory’ investment. First, it is seen as the language that belongs to everyone and tied to national development. Second, it plays the role of Malaysia’s most important language alongside BM in education and the economy. At the same time, the intricate history of Malaysia means that English might always be seen as part of the British colonial legacy. Still, English is part of Malaysian heritage and an important language for national development that belongs to all Malaysians (Omar, 2007). If BM is viewed as the language for national identity and ethnic unity, English plays the unofficial role as the catalyst for national development (Ooi, 2009). The idea that English is related to national development is implicit when the Malaysian government instituted the ‘Vision 2020’ social engineering project and other master plans (Mohamad, Tieh & Abdulai, 2002). In reality, although BM is the national language it is still considered new as a language of learning. Non-fiction and reference books in English, for example, easily outnumber similar texts in BM. Despite the fact that steps have been taken to ameliorate this problem, even some Bumiputera Malay academics choose English over BM (Abdullah Sani, 2007). Simply put, English remains a necessity in Malaysia. As Adams (1994) writes:

Malaysia tried through its educational system to impose a national identity by insisting on the use of the Malay Language in the national curriculum, only to find out later that the reintroduction of the medium of English in schools became an economic and political necessity. (p. 14)

Clearly, BM has not suppressed the expansion of English as the unofficial second language. As Omar (2007) sees it: “In reality it [English] had always been playing this role, but the role had never been explicitly stated in formal circles” (p. 354). Undoubtedly English is spoken by many Malaysians, although the variety in use is largely a localised form (Baskaran, 1994). Conversely, English might also be turning into a foreign rather than a second language for some Malaysians, particularly for Bumiputera Malays on the peninsular and the Bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo (Adnan, 2005, 2011). From a different perspective, within the Malaysian education and economic realms English does not just play second fiddle, its roles might put it on a par with, or even exceed that of BM, for instance, as the language for higher learning and commerce. Prior to the revision of the Malaysian Education Act (Government of Malaysia, 2006b), English was already accepted as an asset and a necessary investment based on the attitudes and beliefs of Malaysians toward English (H. G. Lee, 2010). Although these have changed throughout the years since independence, many Malaysians continue to show positive orientation towards English (Hashim, 2009).

English proficiency continues to be a critical factor for employment in the Malaysian labour market in the public, and especially the private sector. A case in point is Morais’ (1998) study on language use in the manufacturing industry where top and middle level communication is dominated by English although language mixing is also common. On top of that, research by David and Govindasamy (2007) and Nair-Venugopal (2006) found that in the Malaysian private sector, English is a useful investment for administrative and managerial staff as it is taken to reflect professional identity and status. This linguistic situation has even filtered down to lower-ranking staff members and some government ministries within the Malaysian civil service (Rajadurai, 2004). This trend looks set to continue as Malaysia and its ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) neighbours try to make their economies more diversified (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Nevertheless, one of the hurdles to institutionalising the wider use of English is the resistance from within the Bumiputera Malay group. On the one hand, influential Bumiputera Malay individuals want to maintain the special position of BM; on the other, stakeholders across all ethnicities, believe that solely focusing on BM does not reflect the linguistic needs of young Malaysians (Kandasamy & Santhiram, 2000). Mustafa and Adnan (2009) refer to these individuals as ‘ultra-Malays’, whilst Omar (1998) refers to them as ‘*pejuang*’ or warriors promoting their own version of the Bumiputera Malay agenda. These ultra-Malay *pejuang*

want the maintenance of BM at all costs, even if it means excluding other languages from becoming part of Bumiputera Malay identity. As this thesis is being written, the voices of the ultra-Malay *pejuang* have managed to overturn the decision by the government to teach Science and Mathematics in English (Wong, K. S. Lee, S. K. Lee & Yaacob, 2012). They argued that most Malaysian educators are unable to use English proficiently, and the language will disadvantage rural Malaysian communities (Pandian & Ramiah, 2003).

Interestingly, before Bumiputera identity started to pervade Malay communities, learning and using other languages had never been a contested issue. In addition, the Malays of the past placed high value on the ability to master languages, so much so that multilingualism became part of the original Malay identity. Yet, in the present socio-political climate, becoming Bumiputera Malay might preclude a person from learning and using other languages, particularly English with its colonial baggage. It could be that it is this social reality that led S. K. Lee (2003), Rajadurai (2010a, 2010b), and other scholars of Malaysian languages to conceptualise an essentialist view of Malay identity. It is also highly likely that what they have observed was the performance of Bumiputera Malay identity, as latter chapters will illuminate.

3.3.3. Mandarin Chinese

As the formal means of communication for the second largest and most economically vibrant ethnic group in Malaysia, Mandarin is a valuable investment for Chinese and non-Chinese students alike. Nevertheless, empirical data on Mandarin as a language within the Malaysian education system, and as a language for economic purposes, is limited at this time. As Fei et al. (2012) observe, “Official statistics on this is surprisingly scarce although the issue is widely discussed on the Internet and in the local papers” (p. 147). In this section I will focus on two possible factors that make Mandarin a valuable investment in Malaysia: first, the perceived status of the Chinese school system not just for ethnic Chinese, but also other groups including the Bumiputera Malays; and second, the increasing popularity of Mandarin as an additional language at tertiary level for non-Chinese learners.

Earlier, I mentioned that Malay and Islamic religious schools afforded access to education for the Malays from the mid 1900s onwards with the backing of the British government. For the migrant Chinese and Indians, however, the same levels of assistance were not given because of their undecided nationality status at that time (Fei et al., 2012). In spite of this drawback,

Chinese communities started to build and finance their own institutions, and to create their own school curriculum with Mandarin as the official mode of instruction based on the Mainland China model (Sim, 2012). After independence, enrolment in these schools increased with their new status as National Type Schools. Parents from Chinese communities generally believed that there are several advantages in sending their children to these schools compared to National Schools. For instance, the Chinese school system focuses on instilling discipline and developing important academic skills, like numeracy and literacy, from a very early age. At the same time, young Chinese children will be able to learn Mandarin, as well as BM and English as additional languages in these schools.

According to Xu (2006), practical reasoning, which is part of the Chinese psyche, has prevented many Chinese parents from sending their young ones to National Schools where only BM and some English are taught, and where the teaching of numeracy, for instance, is not as successful compared to Chinese schools. Because of this, Masami (2010) estimates that in the last decade less than 10% of Chinese children were enrolled in government-funded National Schools all over Malaysia. The perceived quality of education in Chinese schools has also enticed parents from other ethnic groups to send their children there. Preliminary data on this phenomenon collected by Muhriz, Afif and Wan Jan (2011) suggest that today privately-funded Chinese National Type schools are the choice of many Malaysian parents. Even Indian and Bumiputera Malay parents have been sending their children to such schools for many years. According to these researchers, in Chinese primary schools, particularly those in larger Malaysian cities, the enrolment figures show that in some academic years the number of non-Chinese children enrolled far exceeds those from Chinese families. Interestingly enough, it seems that urban Bumiputera Malays are leading the way in terms of non-Chinese admissions to these schools for the same reasons that Chinese parents prefer these schools compared to National Schools (Ang, 2007). Though official data is limited at this time, local research in these settings suggest that this trend is set to continue.

At tertiary level, researchers are observing the same upward trend with reference to the learning of Mandarin. The popularity of Mandarin is also observed at secondary level. Ang (2007) suggests that this upward surge is connected to the success of the Malaysian Chinese in education and the economy. Chinese business owners have led economic activities in Malaysia even before the independence of Malaya. This was largely due to the business acumen of the Chinese but also because of the way life was organised by British colonialists

(Harper, 1999). The economic stewardship of the Malaysian Chinese community continues today and is clearly evident in many sectors. For that reason, Mandarin is a valuable investment, particularly for undergraduates who wish to join large Chinese business organisations and corporate firms after they finish their studies (Yen, 2008). Accordingly, as China establishes itself as a regional and global superpower, and as Malaysia renews its old economic ties with the Chinese mainland, it is expected that Mandarin will continue to be the preferred additional language for Malaysian university students.

This exciting development is even observed by researchers in public university campuses with a sizeable Bumiputera Malay population (T. Tan & Hoe, 2007; Zubairi & Haji Sarudin, 2009). Large-scale empirical studies that they conducted indicate that Mandarin is now the additional language of choice for Bumiputera Malays in diploma and degree programmes. Although not many courses require proficiency in an additional language, it is interesting to note that these learners generally show positive orientation towards learning Mandarin. Perhaps the voices of the ultra-Malays are not as loud when it comes to learning the official language of the Chinese. This is noteworthy, considering that these two ethnic groups continue to have public disagreements over many issues, mainly due to the centralisation of political power within the hands of the Bumiputera Malays and the near total economic dominance of the Malaysian Chinese population (Yen, 2008). So, when it comes to learning from the Chinese, especially in matters related to the economy, it is a positive indication that even with the ultra-Malays dominating political discourse, a growing number of Bumiputera Malay individuals find that working together towards common goals is more beneficial compared to other alternatives.

3.4. The Malaysian education system and Bumiputera Malays

In this fourth and final part, I examine education in Malaysia starting with an account of key moments in Malaysian education history focusing specifically on language-related policies and practices. Then, to finalise my research framework that began in the last chapter, I chart a path within the national education system tailored specifically for the Bumiputeras.

3.4.1. Developments in education and language policies in Malaysia

One of the results of the new Bumiputera identity is observable when the 1956 Razak Report or *Penyata Razak* was submitted by Bumiputera Malay leaders to the British government one

year before independence (Idris & Nik Pa, 2008). To integrate the ethnically diverse population of Malaya for the purpose of nation building, the report laid the foundations for a modern and formal national education system. A major proposal within the report was that all existing schools should be incorporated within the national system. Nevertheless, a few years later with the introduction of the 1961 Education Act (Government of Malaysia, 2006b), Bumiputera Malay leaders started to consider a truly national system with BM as the sole medium of instruction for rapid national integration. From that point onwards, the increased political bargaining power of the Bumiputera Malays led to the establishment of the 1963/1967 National Language Acts (Government of Malaysia, 2006a). This happened soon after the formation of Malaysia, which united peninsular states with Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo. BM instantly became the official national language for governing Malaysia in all social spheres. A concerted effort at governmental level was initiated to establish BM as the sole medium of instruction within the national education system.

The 1969 ethnic riots provided the move to implement BM as the official medium of instruction with a greater sense of urgency, and as a result, in 1971 Malay medium schools replaced all English medium primary schools and were thereafter called 'National Schools' (Amin, 2009). By 1977, the conversion process began to affect English medium secondary schools as Malay medium primary students progressed to secondary level, and soon after, English medium schools were no more. In 1983, the national education system cemented the role of the national language when BM was established as the only medium of instruction at tertiary level (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2001). But, as highlighted earlier, policy reversals at national level are nothing new in Malaysia. The revision of the Education Act in 1996 (Government of Malaysia, 2006b), for instance, lessened the influence of BM in the education system and in Malaysian society. Even if the Bumiputera Malay agenda remains as strong as ever, today even some Bumiputera-exclusive educational institutions have adopted an English-first policy when it comes to choosing the medium of instruction. Accordingly, the recent Industrial Attachment Policy adopted by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2010) supports this mode of thinking, presumably as a means to propel young Bumiputera Malays forward to allow them to acquire the skills that are seen as necessary for success in the modern world of work.

These policy changes and reversals should be viewed within the wider structure of the New Economic Policy (NEP) or *Dasar Ekonomi Baru* that began after the ethnically-driven riots

of 1969. The NEP is an affirmative action agenda, in response to the perceived disadvantaged position of all Bumiputera ethno-political groups, not just the Malays (Abd Rashid, 2004). It was introduced by the second Prime Minister with an explicit goal of achieving national unity and integration. It was formulated in the context of a two-pronged approach. The first is to reduce and eradicate poverty by raising income-levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians. The second is to accelerate the process of restructuring Malaysian society to 'correct' economic imbalances, so as to reduce and eliminate the identification of race with economic function (Faaland, Parkinson & Saniman, 2005).

For the Bumiputera Malays specifically, the process of education was highlighted as a change agent. This was evident earlier on with the introduction of RIDA. Today, MARA continues this affirmative action agenda through its role within the education system with the assistance of other government apparatuses. This has led to a distinct path of education for the Bumiputeras generally and Bumiputera Malays specifically (H. G. Lee, 2006), which is the focus of the next section.

3.4.2. Bumiputera Malays within the education system

Before I begin this final section, it is important to acknowledge that to some Malaysians this is a sensitive topic because education is seen by some as a tool to maintain the hegemony of the majority group, at the expense of other Malaysians. Even so, this section will not dwell on this debate, and instead describe options available to young Malaysians and Malaysian Bumiputeras (not just the Malays) within the national education system at secondary and tertiary levels. Another objective of this section is to consider some of the challenges that Bumiputera students face as products of the positive discrimination agenda.

After two years of (optional) preschool, all young Malaysians around the age of seven enter primary schools. They then continue schooling until the age of twelve when they have to sit for the Primary School Achievement Test or UPSR (*Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah*). Then, these students begin their lower secondary education facing the Lower Secondary Assessment or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* at the age of fifteen. Based on their results, they choose either an academic or technical/vocational strand at upper secondary level for the next two years. At the age of seventeen, these students face the Malaysian Certificate of Education or SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) to complete their secondary education. They then have different choices depending on their results and socio-economic background: stay two more

years in the Sixth Form, enter Matriculation colleges, or start certificate or diploma courses at public (publicly-funded) or private (fully paid for) colleges and universities. More than 15% of school leavers choose the final option each year (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001).

Bumiputera youngsters, however, are presented with wider opportunities to access formal education starting from secondary level with the government's full backing. This is safeguarded by Article 153 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution (Government of Malaysia, 2009. p. 124), in particular, Clause (3):

[The Supreme Ruler of Malaysia] may, in order to ensure in accordance with Clause (2) the reservation to Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of positions in the public service and of scholarships, exhibitions and other educational or training privileges or special facilities, give such general directions as may be required for that purpose to any Commission to which Part X applies or to any authority charged with responsibility for the grant of such scholarships, exhibitions or other educational or training privileges or special facilities; and the Commission or authority shall duly comply.

As a way to acknowledge the original settlers of the land, Article 153 was agreed upon by the founding fathers of the nation a decade before the independence of Malaya (Bari & Shuaib, 2004). It is based on Article 153 that the affirmative action agenda continues to this day within the sphere of education in Malaysia (H. G. Lee, 2006). Children from Bumiputera families who score excellent grades in *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* can apply to enter fully funded *Sekolah Berasrama Penuh* or Government Boarding Schools. They can also submit an application to enter *Maktab Rendah Sains MARA* or MARA Junior Science Colleges around the country. Those with outstanding grades who missed out can still apply three years later after their *Penilaian Menengah Rendah*. Inadvertently, these secondary schools are all considered to be elite institutions within the national education system, for two reasons. First, the high funding levels in these schools mean that only the best teachers and top facilities are provided, comparable to local private international schools. Second, students from these institutions who score excellent grades in *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* are almost guaranteed government scholarships to study at tertiary level in Malaysia or even overseas.

To cater for annual growth in the number of school leavers, Bumiputera-exclusive tertiary institutions are set up based on the philosophy behind *Maktab RIDA* and *Taman Asuhan RIDA*. Nevertheless, unlike their elite counterparts at secondary level, most Bumiputera-exclusive tertiary institutions are meant for Bumiputera Malays from all walks of life (i.e.,

due to less stringent selection procedures at post-secondary level). For instance, whilst the 19 other government-funded public universities (Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2010) are highly competitive and open to all ethnicities, Bumiputera-exclusive tertiary institutions are sometimes perceived as providing a second chance for those who are unable to enter reputable institutions. Although this image has been improving in recent years, these institutions remain the bastion of the positive discrimination agenda of the Malaysian government with its generally negative perception by some members of other ethnic groups. It is at one of these tertiary institutions (a Bumiputera-only university branch campus with its Bumiputera Malay undergraduate population) that my own research begins.

Looking at related literature, there seems to be an undertone that some undergraduates in Bumiputera-exclusive institutions are not as able compared to their peers in other tertiary institutions. For instance, some of them find it difficult to gain placement for attachments, and later to enter the world of work (S. Y. Tham & Kam, 2008). Others do not possess the necessary skills to market themselves and require extra training before they can graduate (Shakir, 2009). It is also believed that students in these institutions face challenges when they try to express their individuality. They cannot choose their own paths because of pressure to conform to shared Bumiputera Malay identity exerted by the majority student population (S. K. Lee, 2003; Rajadurai, 2011). Due to these and other ethnic-related factors, it is argued that some students from Bumiputera-only institutions will graduate with limited options for employment (Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim & Raphael, 2012). It is unclear whether these assertions are applicable to all Bumiputera Malays. What is clear is that there are gaps in knowledge regarding Bumiputera Malay undergraduates that must be investigated.

Overview of Chapter 3

This chapter builds on the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 and provides the backdrop for my research. Divided into four parts, I started by sketching out Malay sociohistory through *adat* and *jiwa* as essences of Malayness, and the beginnings of Malay identity through the stories of two Malay legends of the past. I then moved the discussion to the 1900s onwards to examine Bumiputera identity as an ethno-political extension of original Malay identity, starting with how the Bumiputera Malays came into being on the Malay Peninsular. Next, I considered the three main languages of Malaysia: Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese. These languages were discussed based on the roles that they play within

contemporary Malaysian society, and with reference to Bumiputera Malay identity. Lastly, I reviewed the history of education in Malaysia generally, and for the Bumiputera Malays specifically. In closing this last part, I set the scene for my own work. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of my study.

Chapter 4. Methodology

My study makes use of multiple cases to explore language use and workplace participation in the process of identity construction, focusing on Bumiputera Malay undergraduates from one faculty in a Bumiputera-exclusive university in Malaysia. To examine these constructs, the study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in two sequential cycles/phases based on the ‘quan → QUAL’ mixed methods typology. In this methodology chapter, I discuss the research paradigm related to the study that I carried out and my rationale for choosing a (sequential) mixed methods design. Following that, I highlight case study as the research methodology or strategy of inquiry that I draw upon to carry out my empirical work. I then present some background information about the participants and discuss ethical and practical issues that arose as I worked with them. Next, I outline the procedures for data collection in the field and describe in detail the research instruments I employed during two data collection cycles. I also describe how I compiled and managed my data records from different sources (both quantitative and qualitative) and the procedures involved in analysing and interpreting them. To end Chapter 4, I present my thoughts regarding the ‘quality’ of the study that I conducted, reiterating critical steps that I have taken to ensure that my inquiry adheres to quality management frameworks in mixed methods design, mixed data collection, analysis and interpretation.

4.1. Pragmatism and mixed methods research

Before embarking on an empirical inquiry, Creswell (2009) argues that it is crucial to prepare a research design framework consisting of three central cores. He believes:

researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the strategy of inquiry that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice. (p. 5)

I address the first core in this section, which is the philosophical worldview assumptions behind my study: pragmatism. Pragmatism transcends the divide between knowledge that is perceived as context-dependent (i.e., based on qualitative methodologies) and knowledge that is viewed as universally generalisable (i.e., based on quantitative methodologies) (B. Johnson

& Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, 2009; Morgan, 2007). More fundamentally, pragmatism takes into account issues of practicality in knowledge generation by advocating the use of whatever means necessary to research real world issues (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). It is this real life stance of pragmatists that sets them apart from other philosophers of knowledge. Rather than focusing on the differences between interpretivists (as qualitative researchers) and positivists (as quantitative researchers), pragmatists argue that research should first and foremost be practical, pluralistic and concerned with answering questions through the ‘Third Way’ (Morgan, 2007). It was this Third Way that cleared the path for mixed methods research in Western scholarship (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). As this thesis reports on a mixed methods study it is strongly aligned to pragmatism. In the following paragraphs, I explain the assumptions of pragmatism and relate them to the field of mixed methods research.

Many scholars have written about the philosophical worldviews or paradigms that relate to the construction of knowledge in Western thought (see, for example, B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Cherryholmes, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). One of the central concerns regarding paradigms is how they relate to research methodologies. Historically, positivists and their theories of knowledge based on observable facts dominated scholarship. Later on, post-positivists realigned themselves to the notion that all facts are value-laden and reality is constructed. As a consequence, what is perceived to be real and true is really a kind of social-based reality (Cherryholmes, 1992). Knowledge construction during this early period was largely based on the deep divisions between positivists and constructivists (also referred to as interpretivists), turning this into the ‘mono-method’ period (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). The defining characteristic of the mono-method period was the way researchers chose either a purely quantitative or purely qualitative approach to designing research. This ensured that they stuck exclusively to research methods drawn from either the post-positivist or the constructivist-interpretivist camp.

In my attempts to understand the quantitative-qualitative continuum to frame my own inquiry, I find that Eisner’s (1991) statement provides a good starting point:

There is a kind of continuum that moves from the fictional that is “true”, the novel for example – to the highly controlled and quantitatively described scientific experiment. Work at either end of this continuum has the capacity to inform significantly. Qualitative research and evaluation are located toward the fictive end. (pp. 30-31)

Obviously there are ideological and practical differences between quantitative and qualitative inquiry (Angouri, 2010). For example, quantitative studies often employ experiments and statistical measures for hypothesis testing based on the post-positivist philosophical worldview. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, rely on the constructivist-interpretivist philosophy of knowledge generation and examine social phenomena in their natural settings guided by research questions. Even so, Eisner's statement proposes that knowledge is a continuum that should be referenced in terms of qualities and how it informs human comprehension about the world. As such, it is the quality of an empirical inquiry that should be judged especially in terms of its contribution to the store of human knowledge (Bygate, 2004; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Lazaraton, 2000). I will return to the evaluation of research quality to end this chapter.

The mono-method period and quantitative-qualitative debate later led to a kind of paradigm 'wars' in the 1960s. It started originally as a challenge to the dominance of the mono-method era and resulted in the emergence of mixed methodology and the mixed research model in the 1990s. At that point, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) differentiated between 'mixed methods' (i.e., mixed in the methods of the study) and 'mixed model' (i.e., mixed in more than just the methods). The first term, mixed methods, indicates designs that mix quantitative and also qualitative approaches during the data collection stage through the use of methods from both camps. The second term, mixed model, describes mixing aspects of quantitative and qualitative approaches at various points, for instance, in research design, data collection and/or analysis. All the same, this distinction is now largely abandoned. More recently, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) suggest that mixed methods inquiries should be categorised in two broader groups: mixed and quasi-mixed studies. In mixed studies, there are conscious attempts to combine both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the inquiry whilst in quasi-mixed studies such attempts are not made.

The paradigmatic debate regarding the construction of knowledge continues even as the adoption of mixed methods research is becoming more prevalent (Morgan, 2007). For Cherryholmes (1992), on one side are the 'incompatibility' theorists, who continue to declare that post-positivist and constructivist philosophy are incompatible, and therefore, mixed methods research is indefensible. On the other, are the 'compatibility' theorists, who argue that the differences between post-positivist and constructivist philosophy and the

exclusiveness of their methods are exaggerated. The debates between post-positivists and constructivists and the emergence of mixed methods research have led to the rising popularity of the Third Way as a paradigm for doing research (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). At the same time, pragmatism and mixed methods research continue to undergo changes due to ambiguities with reference to the use of different terminologies and inherent differences in some research procedures from the quantitative and qualitative camps (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

These ambiguities and differences are possibly connected to the fact that pragmatists try to link the selection of strategies of inquiry and the specific procedures for research directly to their research questions (Creswell, 2009). Still, by so doing, mixed methods researchers are able to explore real world issues that do not sit comfortably within a purely quantitative or qualitative approach to doing research. As Cherryholmes (1998) sees it, “Pragmatic research is driven by anticipated consequences [and] pragmatic choices about what to research and how to go about it” (p. 13). As a direct result, the worldview of pragmatists has a strong appeal for researchers who are looking for practical ways to carry out their work (B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Darlington & Scott, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Moreover, they can embrace methods that are appropriate to them and their empirical work, and analyse and employ their data in any way that they see fit in alignment with their pragmatist view of knowledge construction.

Mixed methods designs contribute to the quality of empirical inquiries in two ways. Firstly, mixed studies are built on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods; and secondly, by combining quantitative and qualitative data and analysis inherent weaknesses in research instruments will be lessened (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Duff 2008). In addition, mixed methods studies are often underpinned by the needs of researchers to answer their research questions practically. As Denscombe (2008) reiterates, mixed studies offer “a third paradigm for research through the way it combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies on the basis of pragmatism and a practice-driven need to mix methods” (p. 280). Adopting a pragmatic stance, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) also highlight the benefits of doing mixed methods research. First, a mixed methods design allows the researcher to test the overall consistency of research findings using different instruments. Second, this design allows the researcher to check and build on the data collected by one instrument with that collected by other instruments. Third, data collected using a mixed

design will be richer and more detailed compared to data derived from a single method design. The claims by Greene, Caracelli and Graham can be repackaged into a central construct within mixed methods research: triangulation (Jick, 1979). Triangulation is the process of bringing together research findings to look for points of convergence and divergence. Although triangulation carries different meanings in different studies, it is believed to be easily achievable in mixed methods inquiries where quantitative and qualitative data are combined and co-analysed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007). Data triangulation, where a variety of sources are cited to justify research findings, and methodological triangulation, where multiple methods are used to find answers to research questions, are just two examples of how mixing approaches has the advantage of allowing for triangulation. It is not surprising, therefore, that triangulation is a common feature of mixed methods studies.

A mixed methods design creates the best-fit scenario for my inquiry. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that this design creates a logical progression between two cycles of data collection in a quan → QUAL sequential mixed methods study where a smaller scale quantitative cycle precedes the larger scale qualitative cycle. Creswell (2009) suggests that this is a typical sequential design “with a quantitative method ... followed by a qualitative method involving detailed exploration with a few cases or individuals” (p. 14). By employing a survey to broadly profile a population, for instance, the data can subsequently be used in several ways. Examples include using the data to select participants for the next cycle or to draw on the survey item pool to inform the design of further instruments for the following cycle (Babbie, 2011; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

The second reason is that my inquiry is interested in identity construction through language use and participation in the world of work. Angouri (2010) observes that it is within this context that a mixed methods design is most appropriate in that it crosses disciplinary boundaries and overcomes limitations associated with mono-dimensional approaches to the study of complex phenomena and research sites (such as the workplace). Others like Duff (2005), Hornberger (2006), and Ivankova and Creswell (2009) also highlight the potential of a mixed design to build representations of complex phenomena (e.g., language use and identity) and dynamic sites (e.g., diverse communities of practice). Next, I examine case study as the methodology/strategy to carry out my inquiry.

4.2. Case study methodology (strategy of inquiry)

As a research methodology, case study continues to be adopted by researchers from different disciplines, from the life sciences to the social sciences and from nursing to linguistics (Flyvbjerg, 2011). There are different ways to conceptualise a case study but as a strategy of inquiry, it is largely concerned with real life phenomena in real life contexts (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Case studies can also be linked to mixed methods designs as the former can easily integrate both quantitative and qualitative data (Duff, 2008, 2012). In this section, I justify why this methodology was used in my own inquiry. Starting with typical case study subtypes and the paradigmatic assumptions underlying case study research, I then describe characteristics of this methodology and summarise some of its advantages and limitations.

Yin (2009) suggests that there are three subtypes of case study research: exploratory, descriptive and also explanatory. The first subtype, exploratory case study, is used to search for interesting phenomena for further examination. For instance, small scale fieldwork may be conducted beforehand to structure the final research framework. Piloting instruments can also be considered an example of this subtype. In a descriptive case study, the main objective is to describe data as they occur in real life. Researchers recount interesting phenomena that occur within the data and use theory to support different ‘stories’ within the study (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). In an explanatory case study, researchers scrutinise data both on the surface and at a deep level to explain phenomena. They might ask why a certain phenomenon has been observed and then propose a hypothesis to test this (using their data). However, a single case study can incorporate exploratory, descriptive and explanatory dimensions. For this reason, I find Stake’s (2005) description sensible. For Stake, a case study can be intrinsic, instrumental or collective. In an intrinsic study, researchers examine a certain case for its own sake. In an instrumental study, they select a few participants to study certain beliefs or behavioural patterns in depth. Finally, in a collective study, researchers work with data from multiple sites and sources; more commonly labelled a ‘multiple case study’ (Duff, 2008).

The way case studies are designed and carried out enable researchers to engage with data from and within different contexts, allowing for what Geertz (1973) terms a ‘thick description’ of reality. As an ethnographer, he suggests that a thick description of behaviour does not just focus on actual behaviour but also takes context into account. As Dicks (2012)

puts it, striving for thick description is “an attempt to describe and interpret what a person ‘inside’ is thinking or doing, by a person outside. ... It is developed by looking at the whole as well as [different] parts” (p. 43). Although initially applied to the field of ethnography, thick descriptions are also applicable to case studies. In most instances, a case study begins with the careful selection of case(s) that can be an area, institution or even a single individual (Chapelle & Duff, 2003). Investigating these cases is the fundamental reason for carrying out case study research in applied linguistics. Duff (2012) explains:

The general philosophy underlying case study research is that much can be learned by looking both holistically and in close detail at the behaviors, performance, knowledge or perspectives of just a few subjects. ... By studying small numbers of research subjects, complex and dynamic interactions between the individual and the local, social, cultural and linguistic environment can be observed. (p. 98)

From her extensive work on case study methodology, Duff (2008) observes that case studies share common characteristics including “boundedness or singularity, in-depth study, multiple perspectives or triangulation, particularity, contextualization, and interpretation” (p. 23). The first of these is boundedness or singularity. As mentioned above, doing a case study starts with case selection. Whilst there are many reasons why cases are selected, the underlying principle in case selection is the singularity of cases that allows the researcher “to understand the complexity and dynamic nature of the particular entity, and to discover systematic connections and relevant features of the context” (D. Johnson, 1992, p. 84). At the same time, a case can also be selected based on the fact that it shows extreme characteristics or particularity, which makes it useful as an exemplar of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003). What is most important is that a case is built based on clear boundaries between behaviour, phenomenon and context.

A case study is also conducted in depth, drawing on multiple perspectives and allowing for triangulation (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Duff, 2008; Yin, 2009). Many studies collect data of cases longitudinally so that the researcher can observe events over a longer duration, and collect and analyse data extensively before writing up the report. Many case studies in applied linguistics are also longitudinal, for instance, Norton Peirce’s (1995) work on identity, language and investment. Other researchers like Bucholtz (2011), Day (2002) and Toohey (2000) have carried out similar work. These studies draw on multiple perspectives and include triangulation. Case study methodology suits my mixed design “by being able to accommodate many different methods, mainly qualitative but also quantitative” (Casanave,

2010, p. 77). The collection of qualitative data through interviews, narrative essays, diary entries and field notes together with quantitative survey data, for instance, allows case study researchers to build impressive data records. Consequently, the combination of multiple data sources allows for a thicker description of reality and when these sources are triangulated, they “produce either converging or diverging observations and interpretations” (Duff, 2008, p. 30). These observations and interpretations will be open to further investigation by researchers. As Stake (2005) remarks, the potential of case study as a research methodology is only limited by the imagination of researchers.

Two other characteristics of case study research are contextualisation and interpretation. With reference to contextualisation, three aspects must be considered: theoretical, methodological, and “the actual situation in which the case is embedded and in which the research questions will be addressed” (Duff, 2008, p. 125). In the main, context is significant so that others can judge the quality and transferability of case study data. Qualitative data are not value-free and are co-constructed by participants and researchers. It is fundamental that the researcher’s position and role within the research context be highlighted as much as possible in the report (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With regards to interpretation, case study research relies heavily on researchers’ interpretations to build representations of cases. It is important to appreciate that “case study data analysis cannot assume a one-size-fits-all approach, although most have some elements of description, understanding/interpretation, and explanation” (Duff, 2008, p. 153). With its interpretivist-constructivist underpinnings, there are procedures to ensure quality of interpretation in analysing case study data. This normally begins with compiling and transcribing raw (textual) sources into an extensive data record followed by multi-level coding and data reduction. Simultaneously, ‘member checks’ and other related procedures to ensure improved interpretation must also be carried out.

To summarise the points raised in the preceding paragraphs, there are many advantages of adopting case study methodology. Firstly, in case studies, data are never taken out of the context. As case studies are normally conducted within the actual research sites, researchers are able to provide thick descriptions of the beliefs and behavioural patterns of participants. Secondly, the boundedness, in depth nature (often longitudinal) and multiple perspectives of case studies ensure comprehensive representations of experience and observed phenomenon. In addition, case studies allow for the collection and analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data, which is in line with the aims and objectives of pragmatic mixed methods

research design. As a final point, in the words of Duff (2012), case study research in applied language studies “is a potentially powerful yet quite practical form of inquiry and theory building” (p. 95). In this sense, case study methodology is appropriate for looking at language use and participation in the process of identity construction. This proposal is confirmed by Duff:

Its focus is a small number of participants. ... The individuals’ behaviors, performance, knowledge and/or perspectives are then studied very closely and intensively, often over an extended period of time, to address timely questions regarding ... identity, or other current topics in applied linguistics. (2012, p. 95)

To end this section, some of the criticisms levelled against case study research must also be mentioned. One enduring criticism is that, as a methodology, it lacks rigour. Even proponents of case studies argue that some researchers are sloppy and/or biased in presenting and interpreting data (Yin, 2009). Consequently, this has led to the general misconception that case study research is of low quality compared to studies based on other methodologies. Another criticism is that case studies are generally weak in terms of data generalisation (Merriam, 2009). This is because researchers only work with a limited number of cases, sometimes focusing on merely a single case in writing up the final report. Duff (2008) argues that this is an unfair criticism and a misrepresentation of case study research. Like Merriam (2009) and Stake (2005), Duff judges the quality of case studies in light of ‘transferability’.

These researchers leave it to the consumers of research to make their own judgements with reference to the quality and overall ‘truth value’ of case studies and other qualitative methodologies, a proposal supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Other classic criticisms against case study research include its reported form (long-winded, difficult to follow), dubious selection of cases by researchers (abnormal, atypical cases highlighted as exemplars of normality), researcher bias (the voice of the researcher being omnipresent in the data) and problems related to ethics (risks to anonymity as it is possible to trace actual research sites and participants from the final report). In addressing these criticisms, case study researchers point to the fact that they can be countered by managing the overall quality of the inquiry (Duff, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009).

4.3. Participants’ background and ethical considerations

In this section, I present background information on my participants. Practical considerations with reference to working with the participants and ethical issues will also be addressed based

on the approval given by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee or UAHPEC (see Appendix A) to conduct my study.

4.3.1. Background information

I worked with a group of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates from the Administration and Management Faculty (A&M Faculty) of a Bumiputera-only university (branch campus) as they prepared for, and participated in, their 14 week industrial attachment in workplace communities across Peninsular Malaysia. These students were all doing the same university diploma programme.

According to the A&M Faculty coordinator, her students are “special” as they are required to undertake English proficiency and business English subjects for the entire duration of their diploma programme. These students are also required to pass Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin proficiency papers. As part of their diploma, they must study Mandarin as a foreign/third language for at least three semesters (their diploma programme takes a minimum of three years or six semesters to complete). Other faculties normally cease focus on communication skills and languages after the third semester. For these reasons, these students can be considered highly able language learners (though not necessarily highly proficient language users, for instance, when it comes to Mandarin), because no other faculty on campus requires such rigorous training in communication and language skills. Accordingly, the attachment period is a key component and it takes place in the final semester of study. Failure to complete the attachment satisfactorily results in failure to complete the course as a whole.

All undergraduates are given the chance to apply externally for placements at the start of their fifth semester. That said, this opportunity is usually taken up by students who could be considered more able for two reasons. First, local companies and organisations only accept students after strict screening. Second, most of these companies and organisations are from the private sector or high profile Malaysian government linked companies (GLCs). In these business entities, personal traits like ability to communicate effectively in different languages, to work independently without supervision and to actively contribute to the workplace community are compulsory. Students who do not apply externally to do their attachment or those who fail to gain entry will normally be sent to organisations within the Malaysian civil service. I must acknowledge that some very able students opt for this second avenue as a pre-requisite for induction into the exceedingly competitive upper-level ranks of

the Malaysian civil service (or *Pegawai Tadbir Awam/Pegawai Tadbir Diplomatik*). Finally, students with the lowest Cumulative Grade Point Average and those who are considered to be low achievers will normally be asked to stay on campus where they will be attached to other faculties or departments as a ‘pseudo’ industrial attachment (Faculty coordinator, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

The faculty coordinator also explained that data from the last ten years show that, on average, about a quarter of students were accepted by private companies and organisations for their industrial attachment. Nevertheless, in the past few years the number has been on the lower end of the average figures. The coordinator cited two reasons for this. First, the Malaysian private sector is now generally reluctant to accept interns who are too young or those who are untested in the job market. Second, she believes that a number of students are in their “comfort zone” and do not want to trouble themselves by applying externally for the attachment (Faculty coordinator, personal communication, May 7, 2010).

At the end of the attachment, all students are required to hand in a substantial report of their workplace related activities and to present this information formally to a panel of faculty reviewers. A satisfactory outcome in these two assessment components results in the conferment of a university diploma. If history is taken into account, it would be possible to predict the career paths of these undergraduates as they leave campus: they either pursue their first degrees or enter the world of work, based on their experiences during the attachment period. This fact was highlighted by the coordinator through our email exchanges.

4.3.2. Ethical considerations

My study employed several instruments to collect data in two cycles: a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and written narratives and reflections through online channels. Parts of the post-attachment formal reports by eight participants/cases were also collected. In the process of data collection, measures were undertaken to ensure that I adhered to the ethics guidelines set by the UAHPEC. This commenced with getting informed consent from all parties involved. Written consent was given by the faculty coordinator and 102 undergraduates who completed and returned my questionnaires. The 102 respondents were also asked to write their ‘nickname’ on the first page (I originally missed this and it was raised by one of the faculty lecturers present when the questionnaires were administered). In the more extensive second cycle, identifying details of workplaces were changed in

consultation with the eight participants to ensure that they remained unidentifiable. Participants were also asked to ensure the confidentiality of all information shared. From the first day I entered the campus, participant information sheets and consent forms were duly distributed to, signed and collected from all parties involved in this study.

There was always the possibility that participants might feel coerced to provide data, as this study is sanctioned by their faculty and university. To guard against this dilemma, before the questionnaires were distributed, I explained that they should not feel obligated to complete the questionnaire and to make themselves available for the second cycle. I also repeatedly highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary and if they decided to participate (or not) their choices would neither affect their grades nor their attachments in any manner. All documents relating to the research instruments and procedures were written in a simple manner and they highlighted the main objectives of my study, the rights of participants, issues related to confidentiality and the security protocols of all the data sources collected.

Contact with the unit that manages all research activities in this university was initiated from the very beginning and the unit became my official base in the first cycle. The unit liaised with the faculty, and the coordinator gave her permission for me to proceed with the study. I kept in close contact with the coordinator via email and she provided pointers that helped shape the design and direction of this study. As a final point, the rights of the participants were respected at all times during data collection. For example, they were given full access to all information about my study, given the chance to ask questions and seek clarifications, and they were also required to offer consent at every juncture before they were asked to provide data. Lastly, all the participants had the right to withdraw the data that they did provide up to 21 working days after the data had been collected. Those who did not wish to provide data or participants who wanted to withdraw were also not disadvantaged in any way.

4.4. Procedures, instruments and analyses of mixed data

In this section, I start by explaining the initial procedures for data collection and continue with coverage of all the instruments I employed to collect data, including the ways in which I compiled and organised the quantitative and qualitative data records. I also describe the steps taken to manage, analyse and interpret the data.

4.4.1. Initial procedures

Data were collected and compiled from several research instruments using sequential mixed methods research procedures aligned to the quan → QUAL typology (Creswell, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007; Duff, 2008). Before the start of the attachment period in late December 2010, a questionnaire on language proficiency, identity-related issues and language use was administered to respondents in the first cycle (quan). For the second cycle (QUAL), eight participants were identified and invited to take part. These participants provided qualitative data longitudinally from periodic semi-structured interview sessions and online written narrative tasks (reflective narratives). Further documentary data were also obtained in the form of formal written reports that the eight participants submitted to their faculty at the end of their attachment. The data collected generally correspond to the temporal and trajectory focus of my three research questions, as reflected in Table 4-1.

[Focus of RQ1] From <i>past</i> experience, identity in a university community shaped by ethnic grouping and the discourse of race	Cycle 1 (quan): survey questionnaire Cycle 2 (QUAL): semi-structured interviews, reflective narratives
[Focus of RQ2] To new (<i>present</i>) experience and participation, and constructing new identities in a workplace community	Cycle 2 (QUAL): semi-structured interviews, reflective narratives
[Focus of RQ3] Onto future (<i>imagined</i>) life trajectory, professional identity in imagined workplace communities	Cycle 2 (QUAL): semi-structured interviews, reflective narratives + (QUAL): parts of written reports

Table 4-1. Data sources mapped onto the coverage and focus of research questions.

Initially, I planned to collect data in focus group sessions but this idea had to be abandoned as I shall explain later in this chapter. The qualitative data were mainly collected during the 14 weeks attachment period although post-reflections and discussions continued beyond that period. Additionally, the instruments employed in the second cycle did not intrude upon the workdays of the participants as all data were collected off-site, outside of work hours.

The survey questionnaire was administered to students on Friday, December 17th, 2010. With the help of the coordinator and two faculty senior lecturers, we distributed and collected the questionnaires on the final day of pre-industrial attachment seminars. On that day, nearly all students who were registered in the programme were present. All of them were required to be on campus in the weeks prior to their attachment period. During this time, they had to finalise the details of their placements and attend preparatory seminars related to the attachment. A full hour was allocated to me based on prior arrangement with the faculty and the university.

I was present in the hall at all times to answer queries from the students. One of the lecturers present also advised me to ask students to write their nickname (pseudonym) on the first page of the form to enable me to quickly identify the questionnaires. Altogether, 102 forms were collected at the end of that hour.

Based partly on the questionnaire data collected, a smaller group of eight participants were identified and invited to take part in the second, longitudinal cycle of data collection based on the following criteria:

- i) They exhibit a level of proficiency that is higher compared to their peers in Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin, as reported in the questionnaire, indicated by their grades from the first semester onwards, and confirmed by their lecturers;
- ii) They had applied to undertake their attachments in the Malaysian private sector and had been accepted by a reputable private firm or organisation;
- iii) They would be working in a capacity generally related to their university course of study and/or attached to the department that they had specifically requested;
- iv) They were willing to provide all the data requested for the longitudinal second cycle of data collection.

Some suitable participants who met the criteria above had to be excluded based on the locations of their workplaces. I wanted to collect data from only two areas due to logistical constraints: the northern states of Perak and Penang and the central states of Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (the distance from my home state of Perak to Penang is around 164 km and 205 km to Kuala Lumpur). The final makeup of the participants/cases is as follows: the 'northern group' consisted of four students who undertook their attachments in Penang and Perak, both considered to be the most developed states in northern Peninsular Malaysia; the 'central/southern group' was made up of four students who undertook their attachments in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and the state of Johor. These states are the most economically vibrant in Malaysia, due in part, to a large number of private organisations doing business there. Figure 4-1 shows the approximate geographical locations of the workplaces of the eight participants. One participant ('Fadil') who was based in Johor, on the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia, had to be recruited to replace another student who withdrew before the second cycle began. Although the distance from my home state, Perak, to Johor is approximately 573 km, Fadil was the only student kind enough to respond at the

eleventh hour when contacted by the faculty. As the focal cases in my study, these eight participants will be introduced, in context, in Chapter 5.

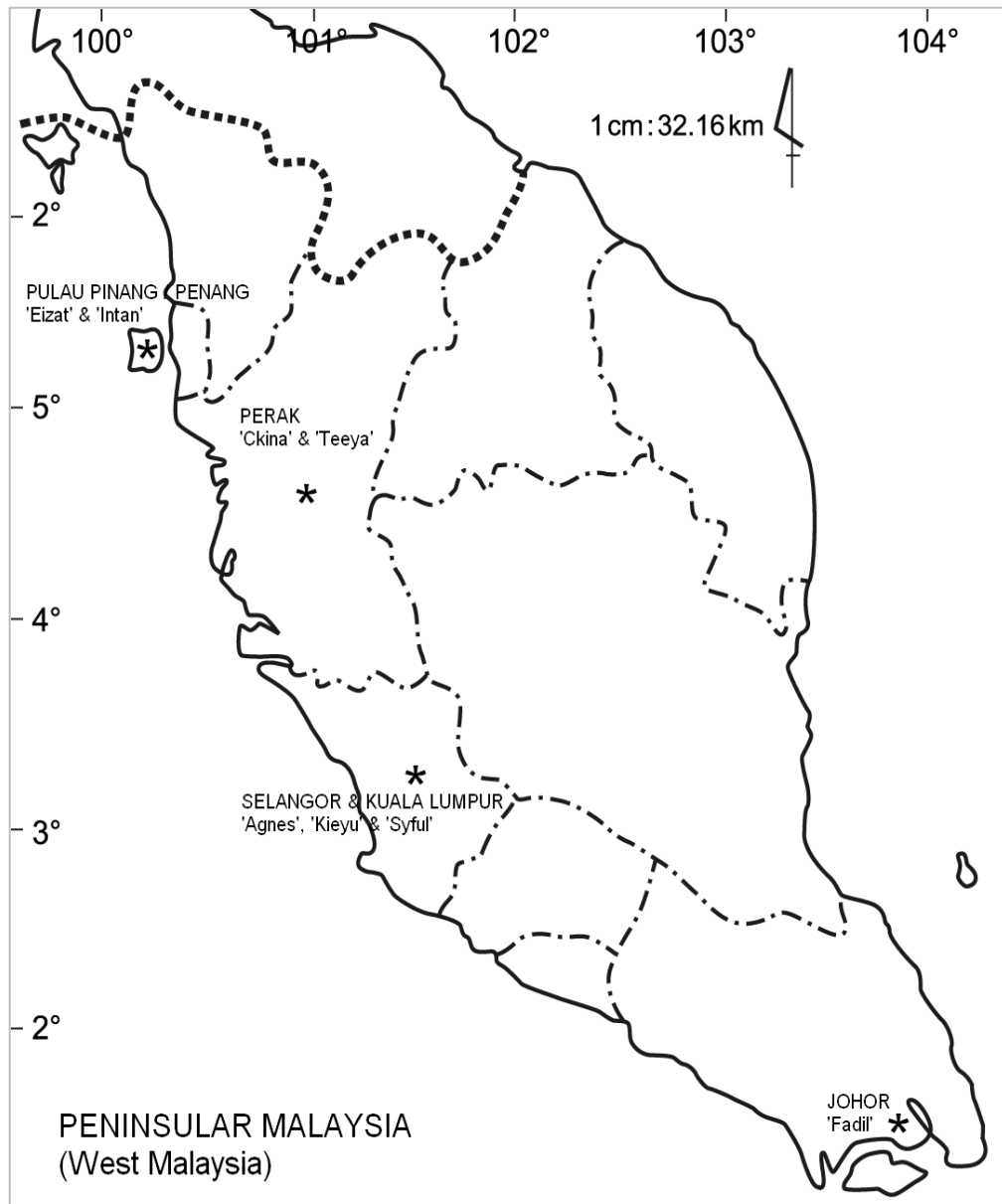


Figure 4-1. Geographical location of eight participants/cases in the second cycle.

The purposive sampling of eight cases for the second cycle was a conscious effort to maximise information gathering about language use in the Malaysian private sector. Even if it was not possible for me to enter any of their places of work, I specifically chose the Malaysian private sector since the research literature tends to suggest that this sector is more diverse in terms of language use compared to the public sector. In the former, other than English, local mother tongues are widely used within workplace communities of practice; in the latter, Bahasa Melayu seems to be the solitary language used by employees. Incidentally,

this is also one of the unstated objectives of my study and an area of personal interest. Many of my highly able students (in languages and communication skills) who have graduated from the same university programme seemed to ‘naturally’ find their niches in private firms all over Malaysia. Some have even managed to find employment opportunities outside of Malaysia. The next section will explain how my instruments were designed, improved and deployed in the field.

4.4.2. Research instruments

I had to accommodate my plans to fit with the availability of my participants especially for the second cycle of data collection (Appendix B outlines the originally planned timeframe). In general, I was able to keep to my plans although occasionally participants had to cancel meetings at the last minute. That said, some participants also took the initiative to travel to my home state to attend interview sessions that they had missed. Table 4-2 outlines the various data sources that I compiled and later analysed.

Cycle 1 (quan): survey questionnaire	102 respondents/participants returned the questionnaire on the same day the forms were administered (17/12/2010)
Cycle 2 (QUAL): semi-structured interviews	40 interviews were conducted (between 12/2010 to 04/2011), each of the eight participants was interviewed 4+1 times (+1 denotes the focus group session that was turned into an additional interview)
Cycle 2 (QUAL): reflective narratives	51 narratives were collected (between 12/2010 to 04/2011), some participants combined different tasks into extended pieces of writing and reflections on their feelings, experiences and aspirations
Cycle 2 (QUAL): written reports	8 formal written reports were collected from all the participants

Table 4-2. The number of different data sources collected during fieldwork.

4.4.2.1. Cycle 1 (quan) survey questionnaire

I began the first cycle by administering my survey questionnaire on language proficiency, identity issues and language use (see Appendix C for the full version). The purpose of this survey was to gather attitudinal and behavioural data to build a general profile of the target population: students from the A&M Faculty who were going for their attachments. They constitute one of the cases in my multiple case study (I will present key parts of this profile in Chapter 5).

The design of a survey is critical from a researcher’s point of view as problematic items can lead to difficulties in the analysis stage (Barkhuizen, 2002; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Poor survey design, superficial questions and respondents not knowing how to answer questions are common examples of challenges in preparing and administering surveys on language use. My survey questionnaire was developed based on two sources as suggested by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010). The first involved using exploratory data that I gathered from informal discussions in a social network with graduates of the aforementioned diploma course. The second source was similar instruments from the research literature which were adapted to suit my needs. The questionnaire adheres to general principles of surveys as espoused by Dörnyei (2007) and Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010). The inclusion of open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire was to enrich the data collected (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The survey questionnaire employed mostly closed items but included open ended questions to elicit further responses from all the students who were starting their industrial attachments in late December 2010 and early January 2011. After giving their informed written consent in the presence of three faculty lecturers and myself, 102 students completed and returned the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections. Fifty six closed items were presented in the first two sections where participants had to choose from six responses along a Likert scale. This was followed by nine open questions (short response type) in the third section. The final section elicited background information on the participants. Table 4-3 is an excerpt of the three main sections of the survey (not including the final section).

Section ONE (part 4): Writing skill

25. I am able to write articles in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

26. I can write personal materials like letters and emails in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

27. I can write short memos and notes in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

Section TWO: Language and identity-related issues

35. I am ready to become a professional because I am able to use English proficiently.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

36. My command of English makes me feel worried about looking for a job after graduating.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

37. I can easily switch between using Malay and other languages if there is a need to do so.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Section THREE: Open questions (short response type)

63. As you prepare to start your industrial attachment, do you think that you now possess the language ability expected from an administration/management professional? Please elaborate.

64. Describe concrete actions that you have taken to make sure that your language ability is polished before you begin your industrial attachment.

Malay _____

English _____

Mandarin _____

Table 4-3. Excerpt of items from the three main sections of the survey instrument.

The first section of the questionnaire was constructed based on survey instruments used to study language proficiency in the world of work, particularly in English as a second or foreign language settings (Green & Evans, 2000; Nair-Venugopal, 2001). I also structured this first section according to previous surveys that study language attitudes, preferences and use in educational contexts (Barkhuizen, Knoch & Starks, 2006; Karib & Adnan, 2005; Kassim & Adnan, 2005). For the second section, proven survey instruments employed to examine identity-related issues in second language learners of English were consulted (Gao, Cheng, Zhao & Zhou, 2005; Gao, Zhao, Cheng & Zhou, 2004, 2007). For the third section with the nine open ended questions, I relied heavily on the exploratory data gathered from recent graduates of this diploma programme.

A first draft was then prepared and submitted to two doctoral candidates in my department who provided initial feedback on the construction of the survey. The survey was then piloted on 18 recent graduates of the programme. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) view the pilot stage as “an integral part of questionnaire construction” (p. 53) and their view is in agreement with other survey researchers in linguistics (see, for example, Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Lazaraton, 2000). The pilot study was completed in two stages. Both stages were completed online due to the considerable geographical distance between myself and the pilot respondents. Working within the quantitative research tradition, Gillham (2008) makes a distinction between trialling and piloting. Trialling is to find out whether items in the questionnaire are understood by participants and to gauge the average time needed to complete the whole survey. Piloting, on the other hand, “is a simulation of the main study, carried out under the same conditions, so that you can learn any last-minute lessons before sending off questionnaires” (Gillham, 2008, p. 64). Whilst many survey researchers in applied linguistics do not differentiate between trialling and piloting, they all point to the importance of doing a pilot (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). For my own pilot, I incorporated aspects of both trialling and piloting.

Due to geographical and temporal constraints, I adopted the proposals of Gillham (2008) and Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) to pilot my survey using electronic mail (email). Lumsden (2007) and Roberts (2007) provide the theoretical justifications for online piloting, whilst Rogers (2008) describe in practical terms how to pilot questionnaires online. Even though the decision to do so can be seen as limiting the usefulness of the pilot study, there are advantages to be gained from online piloting of surveys. Provided necessary design procedures are followed, for example, to allow for ways to respond in the online questionnaire that mimic what respondents will do in the final written version, online piloting should prove to be as useful as real world piloting.

So, I embarked on the online piloting of my questionnaire in two stages in September 2010. Both stages took around two weeks to complete. Initially, in the weeks preceding the first stage of the pilot study I contacted recent graduates from the same programme. Using an online social media platform, I posted several calls for assistance (with detailed explanations about what I expected from this pilot study) to those graduates who were either working or continuing their studies. This process was quite easy as I have nearly 1,000 graduates and current students of the programme in my personal network on that online platform. To ensure

a level of control, I only sought the assistance of recent graduates. 51 individuals responded and I invited them to complete the questionnaire through email. They were all sent a copy of the questionnaire as an MS Word attachment and were given a week from 16th to 22nd of September, 2010 to submit the completed questionnaire. Only 18 respondents returned complete and useable responses before the deadline. On 24th September, 2010, I emailed the 18 respondents a post-pilot protocol to get their feedback regarding the overall format and usability of the questionnaire. They were given another week to respond and complete this piloting stage.

The pilot not only provided initial insights into the main research site (the Bumiputera-exclusive university), I also received useful feedback about the design of the questionnaire. I grouped the feedback received into four categories: time factor, item clarity, response factor and overall observation. In terms of time factor. I predicted that it would take the pilot respondents around 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The responses I received from the 18 respondents indicated that it took them between 25 to more than 60 minutes (by one respondent) to complete it. On average, from the responses I received, I estimated that the questionnaire would take around 40 minutes to complete. The biggest problem seemed to be choosing responses in the online version. As one respondent, Kristina, mentioned “it takes time to create the circle thing [in Word]. It’s easier to use a pencil!”

For item clarity, many of the respondents posed questions related to Mandarin. As Shazlin puts it, “I’m confused about the Mandarin Skill section especially Writing and Reading. Is it about *Hanyu Pinyin* or *Hanzi*?” According to the graduates, they are more familiar with Hanyu Pinyin or simplified Chinese written in the Roman alphabet. Although they were also taught traditional Hanzi characters, their Mandarin tutors did not place much emphasis on Hanzi. This problem area was duly rectified in the final draft. Another issue was the tag – *in this language* – that I used in the survey (see Table 4-4). Some respondents thought that I wanted them to choose only one language in which they feel they are most proficient. Rather than changing the statements, when the survey was administered I pointed this out to the 102 respondents.

26. I can write personal materials like letters and emails in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

27. I can write short memos and notes in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

28. I can write academic essays in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 4-4. Feedback on item clarity during extensive survey piloting.

As for the response factor, many of the pilot respondents suggested that I use a five-item Likert scale, adding a neutral response, instead of using a six-item scale. I still went ahead with the six-item scale as it has been used in previous studies that sought the opinions and beliefs of learners regarding their language proficiency (Dörnyei, 2002, 2007). Furthermore, Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) observe that researchers use “an even number of response options because of the concern that certain respondents might use the middle category ... to avoid making a real choice” (p. 28). There is also a cultural rationale for this decision. Some researchers found that Asian students were culturally inclined to adopt a neutral standpoint when it comes to judging their ability in learning (see, for example, Chen, S. Y. Lee & Stevenson, 1995). For the final response category, overall observation, nearly all of the respondents seemed to be unsure about my decision to probe Mandarin-related issues. Many of them wrote at length about their low proficiency in Mandarin, some even commented about their bad experience in learning and using Mandarin on campus. After reviewing the comments made by the pilot respondents, I was even more determined to learn about Mandarin in the identity construction of these undergraduates.

Piloting and refining the questionnaire helped me to identify several areas to focus on and to improve, so that the final draft could be used to collect data to build a general profile of the population under study. Useful comments were also collected in the third section where respondents were asked to write about their experiences of learning and using Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin on campus. All 102 students effectively became the first case in my multiple case study. Their responses will be presented and discussed mainly in the next chapter. Additionally, based on data from the three sections and the demographic data provided by respondents, I was able to identify students who then became the eight cases that I focus on in the second, longitudinal cycle of data collection.

4.4.2.2. Cycle 2 (QUAL) semi-structured interviews

In studies based on the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, interviews are oftentimes employed as research instruments to collect rich qualitative data from participants (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Kvale, 2007a; McLeod & Thomson, 2009). After the dawn of the mixed methods era, researchers also started to employ interviews to collect data in their mixed methods studies (Dörnyei, 2007; Flick, 2007a). Research interviews mainly attempt to uncover and explain the meanings of central themes in the lives of participants. Hence, in employing interviews, researchers aim to understand the meanings of what interviewees say. Personal one-on-one interviews are particularly helpful for researchers who want to get behind the story as it were, of their participants' feelings, experiences and aspirations (K. Richards, 2009). In social science and applied language studies, there are three interview subtypes that have proven to be useful: unstructured or open-ended interviews, semi-structured and fully structured ones.

Of the three types, semi-structured interviews strike the right balance between getting useful data on the feelings and experiences of the participant whilst still allowing for a degree of control and flexibility for the researcher (Babbie, 2011; Dörnyei, 2007; Kvale, 1996). This is also the reason why semi-structured interviews are the most commonly employed in empirical inquiry. For my study, I constructed semi-structured interview questions based on Carspecken's (1996) critical ethnography framework. I drew on Carspecken's work as it was successfully adopted by S. K. Lee (2001, 2003), whose doctoral thesis on language use and identity construction in the Malaysian context is the seed of my own inquiry. Carspecken's rigorous framework for interview data collection states that the development of semi-structured interview questions begins with the preparation of appropriate protocols. Within these interview protocols, the researcher starts by clearly defining macro 'topic domains' to be studied. After that, for each topic domain a concrete and useful 'lead-in' question is constructed. This lead-in question is then followed by many possible 'follow-ups' that are connected to the lead-in. Carspecken's model also suggests the use of what he terms 'covert categories' for each topic domain. These categories are essentially points of interest that the researcher wants to address within an interview session but without directly asking the participant about them.

With these guidelines in mind, I started developing several interview protocols which then underwent further revisions (see Appendix D). For the identification of macro topic domains,

other than research literature on language and participation in identity construction, I also relied heavily on online discussions with recent graduates of the programme and the faculty coordinator. In addition, the item pool that I used to develop the survey provided ideas about the follow-up questions in the interview protocols. At the same time, I was mindful to structure my interview protocols with a particularly strong narrative slant. Building on the narrative work of Mishler (1986), Kvale (2007a) suggests that interviews with a strong narrative slant “focus on the stories the subjects tell, on the plots and structures of their accounts” (p. 72). He adds that narrative-focused interviews “emphasize the temporal, the social and the meaning structures” (p. 72) in the lives of participants. Given that another instrument that I used was reflective narratives, my semi-structured interview protocols with their narrative slant strengthened the narrative quality of the data collected. Also, my focus during each interview session was always on the ‘stories’ that participants had to share; stories about their feelings, experiences and aspirations seemed to be closely linked to their journey of identity construction beginning on campus and continuing in the workplace and beyond. The eight participants also referred to the data they provide as stories (I will cite these stories in upcoming chapters). In this context, the interview protocols were useful as conversation starters but I tried to ensure that they never restricted the natural flow of the interview session.

In all, I managed to conduct 40 interviews between December 2010 to April 2011, with each participant being interviewed five times. My original plan was to carry out the first interview session in the week prior to the industrial attachment or by the first week of work. This initial interview was to be followed by three more sessions around weeks four and eight, and ending with an exit interview in week fourteen or immediately after that. In the field, however, my interviews were all based on the availability of the participants although I did manage to stick roughly to the original schedule. Nevertheless, I had to change part of my original plan and I turned the group session into an additional one-on-one interview session. Overall, each session took, on average, around 50 minutes with different protocols prepared for each session. Some sessions went well over 90 minutes, particularly as participants neared the end of their attachment period.

As data had to be collected off-site, all of the interviews were conducted in informal settings, and more often than not, in a relaxed café atmosphere somewhere in Penang, Perak, Kuala Lumpur or Johor. The participant and I would chat over a drink and then the interview would

begin. I ensured that the basics of interview procedures were covered, for instance, having a quality digital recorder (I recorded sessions in 'Linear PCM' format, which was as close to natural audio as possible) and a backup recorder with extra batteries in hand. The recordings had to be very high quality so that I could improve their quality and filter out background noise using audio manipulation software and further employ a state-of-the-art digital voice recognition software ('Dragon Naturally Speaking', version 11) to help me transcribe the clips. With these tools, it was possible for me to come up with a draft transcript at most within 2-3 days after the interview. I would then email this transcript with the full sound clip of the session to the respective participant for member checking. After the participant sent a reply, I would read the transcript a number of times and begin open coding.

Being an 'insider' assisted me greatly in building rapport and working with the participants. In the process of analysing all the data sources I was also able to apply my *emic* worldview as an insider or native as opposed to just having an *etic* worldview as an outside observer. The advantages of being an insider and being able to apply an emic view of the world have been highlighted by researchers (see, for example, Angrosino, 2007; Fishman, 1999). Main advantages cited by these researchers include being more familiar with the research context, being able to engage intimately with participants, and being able to bring personal insights about the research site and to easily move within it. During the first round of interviews I got to know the eight participants more personally. Subsequent protocols started with pre-interview reflections on the previous session, guided by interview transcripts (that I had by then improved and coded). Following that, new topic domains were discussed during that particular session and this process was repeated until the exit interview. These pre-interview sessions included discussions about the reflective narratives and any other stories that the participants wanted to share. The flow of data was never one-way but cyclical and progressive as each participant and I co-constructed the data by adding new information and insights whenever we met or communicated on the telephone or online. I will elaborate on this aspect of my fieldwork in the next section.

I originally planned to conduct focus group sessions with the eight participants near the end of the attachment. However, logistical complications meant that this plan had to be abandoned as my fieldwork progressed. I found that bringing the participants together, even in small groups and on non-working days, was impossible due to their work-related, familial and personal obligations. Once preparations had been made and participants had given the

green light, for example, at least one of them would pull out. Another issue was the physical location of the participants. Even on weekends some of the participants were required to be at work whereas others had volunteered to take on additional work roles. In hindsight, I realise now that the group discussions should have been done much earlier when the participants were not so deeply immersed in the world of work (although this would have defeated the aim of doing the collective interviews, which was to bring the participants together near the end of the attachment period). Due to this unforeseen difficulty, I decided to turn the focus group session into another round of one-on-one interviews. And so, at the end of my fieldwork, I had conducted a total of five interviews with each participant instead of the four that I originally planned.

4.4.2.3. Cycle 2 (QUAL) reflective narratives

Collecting stories from the participants about their feelings, experiences and aspirations proved to be useful to me as a researcher. As Barkhuizen (2011) observes, “In telling stories, participants are performing themselves; they are doing their identities” (p. 9). As a central focus of my thesis is the process of identity construction, the collection of written narratives from the participants together with data from the interviews helped me to start to make sense of how the participants’ identities were re/constructed in different stages of their lives. Indeed, the eight participants shared many stories about facets of their identities that were related to their campus, working and future life. These ‘life phases’ are the three macro categories that I focus on in the following chapters. In describing the written reflections that I collected and the interviews that I conducted as ‘narratives’, I drew on the current state of knowledge in narrative research where these data are referred to as narratives (B. Smith, 2007). In my process of narrative knowledging (Barkhuizen, 2011), I relied on the research literature on narratives to structure the second longitudinal cycle of data collection. For this particular instrument, the reflective narratives, I began with the definition by Chase (2005):

A narrative may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation [for instance], a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters [or] an extended story about a significant aspect of one’s life. (p. 652)

Starting with this definition, I constructed eight broad reflective narratives for the participants in the second cycle (see Appendix E). These narrative tasks were staggered throughout the attachment period and they focus on the feelings, experiences and aspirations of the participants. All eight narrative ‘focus topics’ were sent via email and the written products

were collected in the same manner. In studies on language and identity, the use of narrative is “conducive to documenting the changing conditions of lives and the impact these new conditions have over time on all aspects of an individual’s life” (Murray, 2009, p. 47). In fact, in many such studies the collection of oral and written narratives seems to be the preferred instrument by researchers (Schiffrin, de Fina & Nylund, 2010). Working along these lines, I structured the eight reflective narratives so that participants would focus on facets of their everyday experiences in the workplace as stories to be shared with me as the researcher. The reflective narratives also included topical prompts that are connected to identity-related issues, the journey of ‘becoming’, and the use of language, thus ensuring a wider breadth of data. The prompts were worded in an informal and open manner to invite narratives of language and identity that are personal and rich. The participants were also invited to be open with their feelings and opinions and to not worry about formal writing conventions or code-mixing. At the end of my fieldwork, I collected 51 written narratives from the participants. Although 56 were expected, some participants decided to be creative and combined some questions to better reflect the realities of their lives through extended reflective narratives.

The numbers above, however, do not tell the whole story about the written narrative data that I collected. As narrative data is commonly co-constructed by both the participant and the researcher (Barkhuizen, 2011; Pavlenko, 2007), I decided to embrace this fully by responding to each narrative piece personally with my own reflections on what the author had written. As mentioned in the last section, I found myself engaging in extended reflective sessions with participants in the course of conducting all the interviews. The same largely unintended effect also happened with the reflective narratives where my comments and reflections invited further post-reflections from the participants. For some topics, the original author would come up with additional and more specific information as our email exchanges went back and forth (some even added extra pages to her/his original reflective narrative). As a result, although the shortest written narratives I received were only about 200 words in length, a number of narratives went over 3,000 words. As my study progressed and I became more familiar with all the participants, we frequently communicated with each other using online social media and through text messages. Even though these bits of information do not contribute to primary data in this study, they do crop up now and again in data sources. Put simply, narratives were shared often and in different ways as communications went back and forth during the second cycle of data collection. Figure 4-2 illustrates the co-constructed nature of data from this cycle through the interviews and reflective narrative tasks.

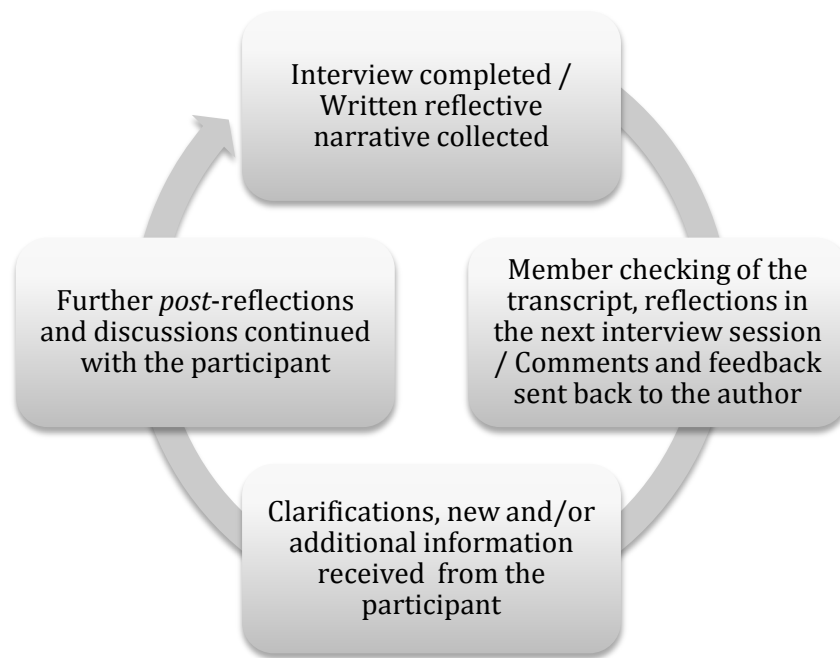


Figure 4-2. Co-construction of the textual/qualitative data in this study.

One of the main advantages of the reflective narratives, according to the participants, was that in writing stories, they were made to reflect on many aspects of their lives before the written narratives were sent to me. In other words, by writing about their experiences they were made to focus on various aspects of their identities on campus and in the workplace, even those that had gone unnoticed before. The fact that online communication mediated the collection of data and further exchanges about the data added to the strength of this particular instrument, in line with the principles of the emerging field of online research or ‘Netnography’ (Kozinets, 2010). Together with qualitative data from the survey instrument, semi-structured interviews and written reports, these written reflective narratives enabled me to build comprehensive cases.

4.4.2.4. Cycle 2 (QUAL) written reports

Although I had initially hoped to ‘shadow’ the participants in their places of work, this idea had to be abandoned. According to the strict regulations adopted by the university, only full-time faculty members are allowed to visit students during the attachment. Furthermore, as an outsider (i.e., not a faculty member and on study leave), it would not have been difficult for me to gain access to the premises of most of the business organisations. After I raised the issue of workplace access with the coordinator, we came to a compromise. The faculty gave

me permission to use parts of the formal written reports that the eight undergraduates (in the second cycle) submitted at the end of their attachments. Even if I was only able to access sections related to communication patterns and language use in the workplace, this final data source allowed me to enhance my profiling of the eight participants.

The use of texts and documents as research data has gained wider acceptance since the late 1980s (Peräkylä, 2004). A document is structured and written in a certain way by the author to project feelings, opinions and experiences. Even a simple document has these qualities. Moreover, what is written on the page is selective because the author has chosen to include some details and not others. Rapley (2007) explains (with his original emphasis):

Exploring a text often depends as much on *focusing on what is said* – and how a specific argument, idea or concept is developed – as well as *focusing on what is not said* – the silences, gaps or omissions. (p. 111)

As I began to read and analyse the post-attachment reports provided by the eight participants, I kept in mind Rapley's guidance above. The reports that I received contained day-by-day records of participants' language-related activities in the office, akin to a logbook (although some entries were written by them in a diary style). The longest of the reports was more than 150 pages and even the shortest one was around 100 pages in length. The reports cover, amongst other subjects: tasks that the eight students worked on (e.g., email/letter writing, taking down minutes of meetings, preparing internal presentations, meeting clients on behalf of their organisations), and reflections on difficulties they faced in carrying out their tasks (in relation to their communication and language abilities). They also included copies of the actual work that they produced. These documents helped me to further authenticate and triangulate my full data record.

4.4.3. Management and analysis of mixed data

In this section, I explain how I compiled my two data records: numerical (quantitative data) and textual (qualitative data), from my multiple data sources. I also illustrate the steps that I took to analyse and interpret data (especially through NVivo's visual modelling feature for my textual data). I divided my data into two 'data records' as the analysis of numerical and textual data happened sequentially in my study. That said there were constant movements from, and references to, different sources as I created and further refined nodes/themes from the whole data record.

4.4.3.1. Analysis of mixed data: numerical/quantitative

As soon as I collected the survey forms from the 102 respondents in the first cycle, I started to compile my numerical data record. Although the survey relied solely on self reports, I accepted this drawback as the instrument was a practical way to generate a broad profile of the population. To start, I build matrices of responses from each closed item for every respondent (Larson-Hall, 2010) in an electronic spreadsheet (MS Excel). Table 4-5 is an excerpt of the matrix for the first section of the survey for ‘Afham’, one of the respondents, covering the skill of listening in three languages (possible responses range from ‘1’ for ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘6’ for ‘strongly agree’). The first section contained 32 items. A similar but slightly modified matrix was used for the second section of the survey, as shown in Table 4-6 (possible responses are the same as the first section). The second section contained 24 items and Afham’s first six responses are presented in this table.

ID 2008460987 Afham	Malay	English	Mandarin
#1 listening	6	6	3
#2 listening	6	5	2
#3 listening	6	6	4
#4 listening	5	5	3
#5 listening	6	6	2
#6 listening	5	4	1
#7 listening	6	4	2
#8 listening	6	6	2

Table 4-5. Example of matrix used for survey items 1 to 32 (Section One).

ID 2008460987 ‘Afham’	Response?
#33 identity	4
#34 identity	4
#35 identity	4
#36 identity	3
#37 identity	5
#38 identity	4

Table 4-6. Example of matrix used for survey items 33 to 56 (Section Two).

It took some time to complete the analysis of the first and second sections of the survey forms from all 102 respondents. As earlier explained, these sections cover language proficiency and identity-related issues, and they are also linked to the lives of the eight focal participants. Using descriptive statistics macros (i.e., frequency counts and percentages) in the spreadsheet software I used, I built a profile of all the respondents as the first case in this multiple case study. For the first section, I worked on frequency counts and percentages for three languages in sequence (Malay/BM, English and finally Mandarin) for each item in the survey. The second section on language and identity-related issues was more straightforward as each item only had six possible responses. To present these numerical data in a clearer manner, I decided to group the responses differently for the first and second sections as I will elaborate below. Table 4-7 is an excerpt of my analysis of the first section (drawing on items 1 and 2 from the survey) whereas Table 4-8 is an excerpt from the second section (using survey items 34 and 35 as examples).

Survey item # Language	Low ability level		Medium ability level		High ability level	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. I understand what others around me are talking about when they use this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	17	16.7	85	83.3
Mandarin	42	41.2	41	40.2	19	18.6
2. I can follow someone speaking in this language without asking for repetition.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	20	19.6	82	80.4
Mandarin	41	40.2	47	46.1	14	13.7

Table 4-7. Example of survey items analysis for Section One.

Survey item # Response	Strongly disagree & disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree & strongly agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
34. I am confident to start my attachment because I can use many languages proficiently.								
*	10	9.8	23	22.5	30	29.4	39	38.2
35. I am ready to become a professional because I am able to use English proficiently.								
	-	-	26	25.5	30	29.4	46	45.1

Table 4-8. Example of survey items analysis for Section Two.

As shown in Table 4-7, I grouped the original six responses into three language ability levels (low, medium and high) to better reflect the concept of language proficiency measured through survey items 1 to 32. As for language and identity-related issues in Table 4-8, I grouped the responses into four major categories for one practical reason: responses chosen by the majority of respondents tend to gravitate towards the middle of the scale ('slightly disagree' = 3 or 'slightly agree' = 4). This observation is also reflected in Afham's responses in Table 4-6.

As a final note, I did not subject my numerical data to parametric tests (e.g., T-Test and One-Way ANOVA) for three reasons. Firstly, even though literature on language use in Malaysian workplaces suggests that in the public sector Bahasa Melayu is the dominant language whilst English dominates the private sector, in reality, some very able students (top-scorers who also possessed high abilities in language and communication skills) from the A&M Faculty purposely applied to the public/government sector to do their attachments. Therefore, discriminating between sub-groups from the A&M Faculty might not lead to significant findings in my inquiry. Secondly, my three research questions do not discriminate between students who would be attached to different sectors of the Malaysian economy (public/government and private/business). Finally, I found that a number of applied language studies researchers who attempted to build general profiles of their population successfully followed the same procedures I adopted to analyse, and especially to present, their survey data (see, for example, Park, 2011; Slaughter, 2007). For these reasons, I relied wholly on frequency and percentage counts to analyse the numerical data from my survey questionnaire. Selected findings from my numerical data record will be discussed in later chapters.

4.4.3.2. Analysis of mixed data: textual/qualitative

The analysis of my textual data record started with prepping the data or what I will refer to as data management (although I also found that as my fieldwork progressed, data management and analysis often happened simultaneously). To manage the extensive textual data from the interviews and written narratives, I relied on technological tools to build a comprehensive data record. With reference to the interviews, after each session was completed I immediately transcribed a draft version of the session and subjected it to member checking. As aforementioned, with the aid of digital technology, I was able to finish transcribing fairly quickly. Then, I revised the transcript based on the feedback given by the respective

participant. All my transcripts followed transcription conventions that are compatible with the Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) 'NVivo', version 8. I adopted a broad transcription convention as opposed to narrow transcription as my focus was on the overall contents and meanings of the interviews. Each interview transcript was then computed into NVivo as a single data source. The same procedure was applied to each reflective narrative that I received from the eight main participants. Sections of the formal reports were also fed into the software together with textual data from the third section of the survey questionnaire.

I made the correct decision to utilise NVivo for data management. At the end of my fieldwork, each case, on average, contained 15 (textual) data sources including the survey, the interviews, the narratives and the formal report. In terms of word count a single case, on average, contained roughly 45,000 words. Handling this much data is never easy. Fortunately, CAQDAS technology proved to be extremely useful as I began to reduce and analyse my textual data (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time, NVivo did not dominate in terms of coding and thematising. CAQDAS is primarily designed to assist researchers to manage and reduce data prior to analysis (Bazeley, 2007; L. Richards, 2009). NVivo does not recommend carrying out the process of analysis automatically because human coding and manual identification of themes still need to take place. In this sense, using NVivo enabled me to extend my manual ability to code and analyse my textual data. This meant that I was able to proceed to one of the most critical procedures in my inquiry: data analysis and interpretation.

I searched for an appropriate framework to analyse and interpret my textual data, and I chose the framework by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998). Even though theirs is a framework primarily for 'pure' narrative researchers, I found it useful to analyse the textual data in my mixed methods study, for three reasons. Firstly, narrative research can be linked to the pragmatist paradigm that I align with. As Lieblich and her colleagues (1998) observe, narrative methods are considered "real world measures" (p. 5) that are appropriate for the investigation of everyday issues. Insofar as my work is concerned, identity construction through language use and workplace participation is a real life issue that is worthy of examination through (partial) narrative lenses. Secondly, even though this is a mixed methods inquiry, one of my research instruments involves the collection of written narratives from the participants where I focus on "the socially-situated content of narrative" (Barkhuizen &

Hacker, 2008, p. 37). Thirdly, I also found that this framework can incorporate procedures from qualitative content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As my inquiry is aligned to the pragmatist paradigm, this final reason means that I could meticulously analyse my textual data record, combining procedures from both narrative and general qualitative research.

And so, I began the “holistic-content analysis” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber’s, 1998, p. 13) of my textual data. The starting point of the analysis was a general reading of all data sources from each participant, including qualitative data from the survey and the post-attachment reports. The general reading stage was important as it helped me to start thinking critically about my data and for making meaning out of the multiple data sources linked to each participant. In addition, from the general reading stage, recurring patterns started to become apparent. The three excerpts below, from Eizat, one of the focal participants, illustrate patterns of language use connected to ethnicity from his own perspective (with my emphasis in bold):

Mula-mula, saya gila benci masuk SMA [In the beginning, I really hated being sent to an Islamic religious school]. Also, **I hate Arab** [Arabic] ... it’s just so hard to learn and also **I’m not the Arab people**. (Eizat, n1, 25-29)

But when **people talk to me in BM**, how can I reply in Arabic? In Malay, we say *kurang ajar* [very rude]. If people are talking in BM, **why use another language?** (Eizat, i1, 61-63)

Most of the **people coming to that hospital are Chinese**. So, **I used my Mandarin** a bit ... they were impressed. (Eizat, i1, 230-231)

The general reading stage helped me to see many different patterns of language use for all eight participants that broadly relate to my three research questions. Of course, other patterns worthy of further exploration also became evident and I coded their occurrences in each data source for each participant.

After the general reading stage, I moved on to the specific reading stage where I started to explore each participant’s feelings and experiences whilst trying to understand how these combine to compose ‘bigger stories’. At this stage, I also focused on finding specific links between each participant’s stories and my research questions. To illustrate what I mean, the three excerpts below from another participant, Intan, show how she started to imagine her industrial attachment:

This [the attachment] is my special chance to show I'm not this passive girl. People on campus always say [that] to me. ... I join this line [the automotive industry] as CS [Customer Services intern] to push myself to talk to help the clients. *Ini niat hati saya* [This is the intention of my heart]. (Intan, n1, 35-41)

I think in our area [diploma], language skill is compulsory. That's basically it and without it, you can't [find] work! (Intan, i1, 293-294)

So, yeah, if I can be a good communicator in their language [the customers who speak Mandarin or Hokkien] I think the company will take me [accept as full-time staff] just like that. (Intan, i1, 450-451)

These excerpts suggest that Intan's campus experience generated a desire for her to prove herself during the attachment. She also understood her language ability would allow her to become a good Customer Services intern, up to the point where she might even be accepted as a full-time staff member, if she is able live up to her own potential. So, for me, the bigger story here is Intan's 'journey' to use her language and communication abilities to help her prove herself in the eyes of others and to become a young professional (which I then continued to look for in other data sources involving Intan). As this also relates to my first research question, I added a node on NVivo that I called 'Intan's journey' for further exploration. Figure 4-3 is an illustration of Intan's journey as a visual model. I created many versions of this and other models for my participants, adding, combining and removing nodes during data analysis.

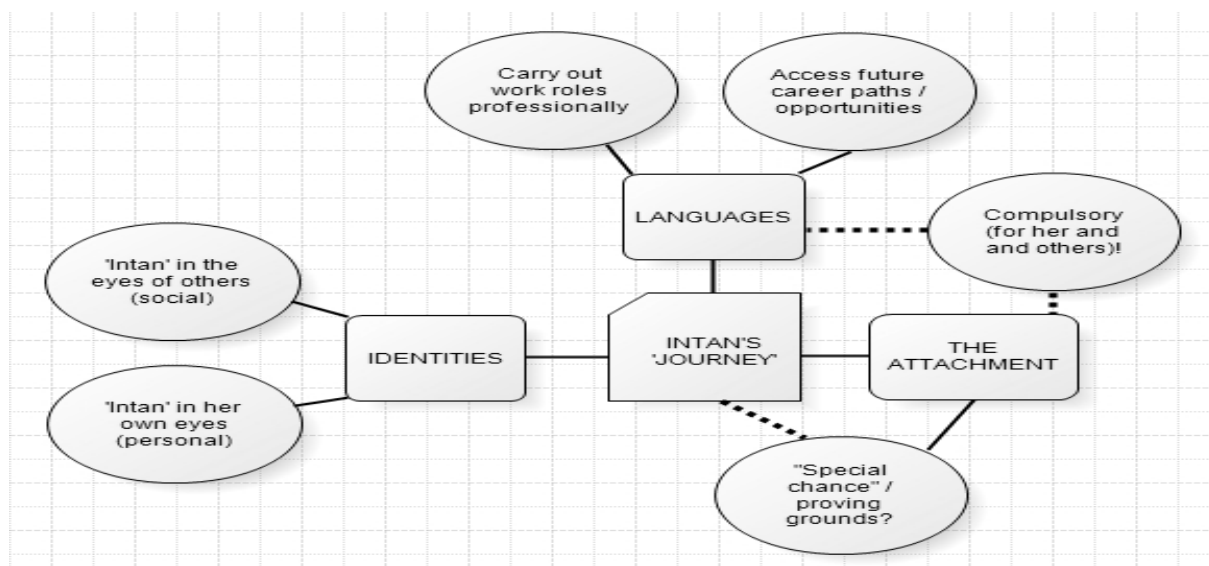


Figure 4-3. Sample of visual model to compose 'bigger stories' from the textual data.

I also looked for bigger stories in the lives of the other seven participants and how these stories are related to the process of identity construction (in particular the act/process of ‘becoming’). I also found that these bigger stories are very personal, with each participant exploring different life trajectories during the course of my fieldwork. There was also a kind of ‘thread’ that weaves stories together for each individual; they combine the feelings, experiences and aspirations of each participant. For instance, Syful saw his strong writing ability as a currency that allowed him to contribute fully to his work roles. For Teeya, the more involved she became with the attachment, the more sure she became that her future career paths should be related to languages. As each individual’s stories are unique, I decided to present significant aspects of these bigger stories in Chapters 6, 8 and 10 to complement data from the focal group (as a whole).

Once the general and specific reading phases were completed, I then attempted relational readings of the textual data, trying out both intra-textual and inter-textual readings of all sources to come up with more refined themes from the numerous nodes that I had added to the textual data record. Intra-textual readings searched for connections between the spoken and written data from a single participant whilst inter-textual readings looked for interconnections across data from all eight participants. The two excerpts below are examples of what I found from my intra-textual reading of Eizat’s data sources. They are grouped under the parent node/theme ‘becoming professional’:

Do I feel like admin management professional? Very strongly! I do so many things to professionalize myself. (Eizat, n6, 27-28)

So, to be professional, I must talk like the professional people. To start, with our manager ... we speak in formal English to show respect. During meetings, when visitors come, we also use formal English. Even if I use BM ... not many staff here speak BM fluently. Majority are non-Malays, mostly Chinese. They are more comfortable using Mandarin. I try to use it too. (Eizat, i2, 130-136)

Instances like these helped me to identify prevalent themes, especially as I was able to find links between what the participants said and what they wrote. After repeating the same procedure for the other participants, inter-textual readings of the data then helped me to evaluate the salience of certain themes. Taking ‘becoming professional’ as an example, Figure 4-4 is part of a more complex visual model created for this theme. The complexity convinces me that this is a salient theme and aspects of the theme should be included in reporting my findings.

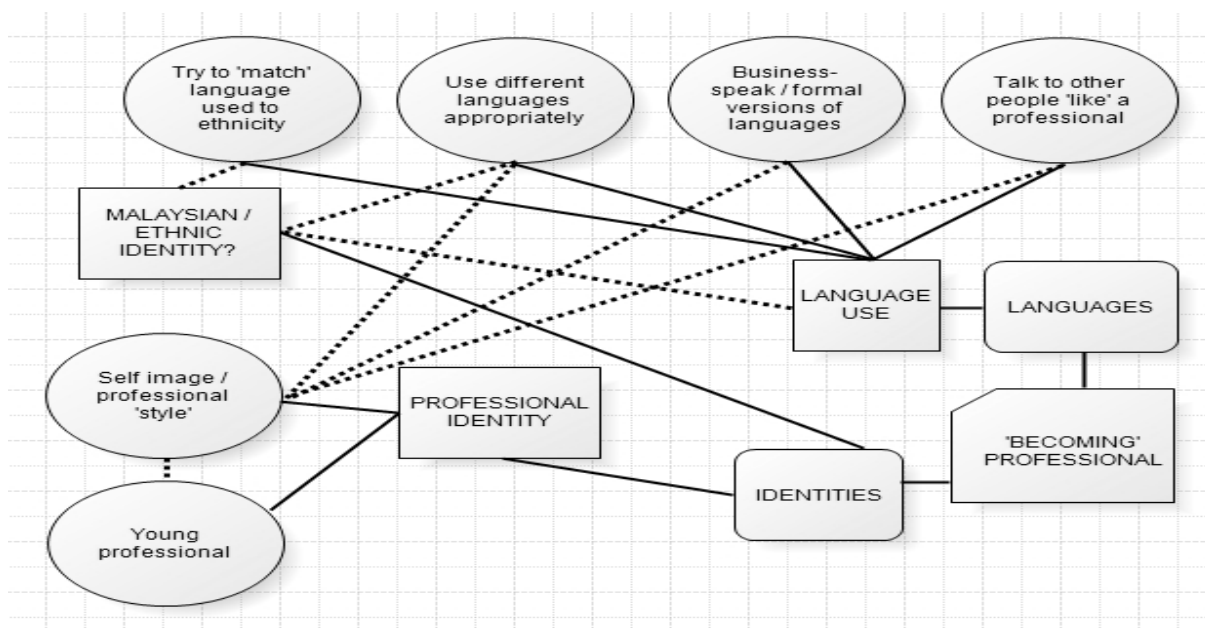


Figure 4-4. Sample of visual model created for the parent node 'becoming professional'.

Further, the four excerpts below show how this particular theme is linked to the lives of four different participants (with my emphasis in bold):

When we work, we learn all the **professional things**, how to talk to people, what to talk, the teamwork, everything. ... Also, we Malaysian peoples have many languages. When I become manager, I must know all languages of my workers and the public so **I can be the top level professional manager**. (Ckina, i3, 190-193)

Remember my story when the manager offered that job for me? If I can **continue and show the professional PR image**, sure more offers will come. ... I must work hard so when people look at me, **they see Agnes this PR Exec**. (Agnes, n2, 32-36)

I want to perform the best. ... I want to show my family especially my father that **I can be the best worker**. Also, I want to polish my languages up ... when **people talk to me, they don't know I just intern** here. (Kieyu, n2, 23-28)

You have ... language skills, PC skills, expert whatever but if that company won't let you use [your skills], then how? ... Seriously, how **can I become professional** if I work in the **place that is totally not professional?** (Fadil, i5, 139-142)

Figure 4-5 is a visual representation of my step-by-step analysis of the textual data record to make the whole process visible (Ryan, 2009). Even though the relational readings stage signalled the completion of data analysis (with 69 nodes/themes identified in the data), engagement with the data records, both numerical and textual, continued as I returned frequently to them for clarifications and to draw on particularly illuminating bits as aide-

mémoires (Keats, 2009) to write up chapters of this thesis. To coincide with my research questions and critical periods in the lives of the participants, I decided to present my data record in three main findings chapters: ‘Campus life’ (Chapter 5), ‘Working life’ (Chapter 7) and ‘Future life’ (Chapter 9). The idea to categorise these life phases comes from the actual data and how participants referred to these different periods in their lives.

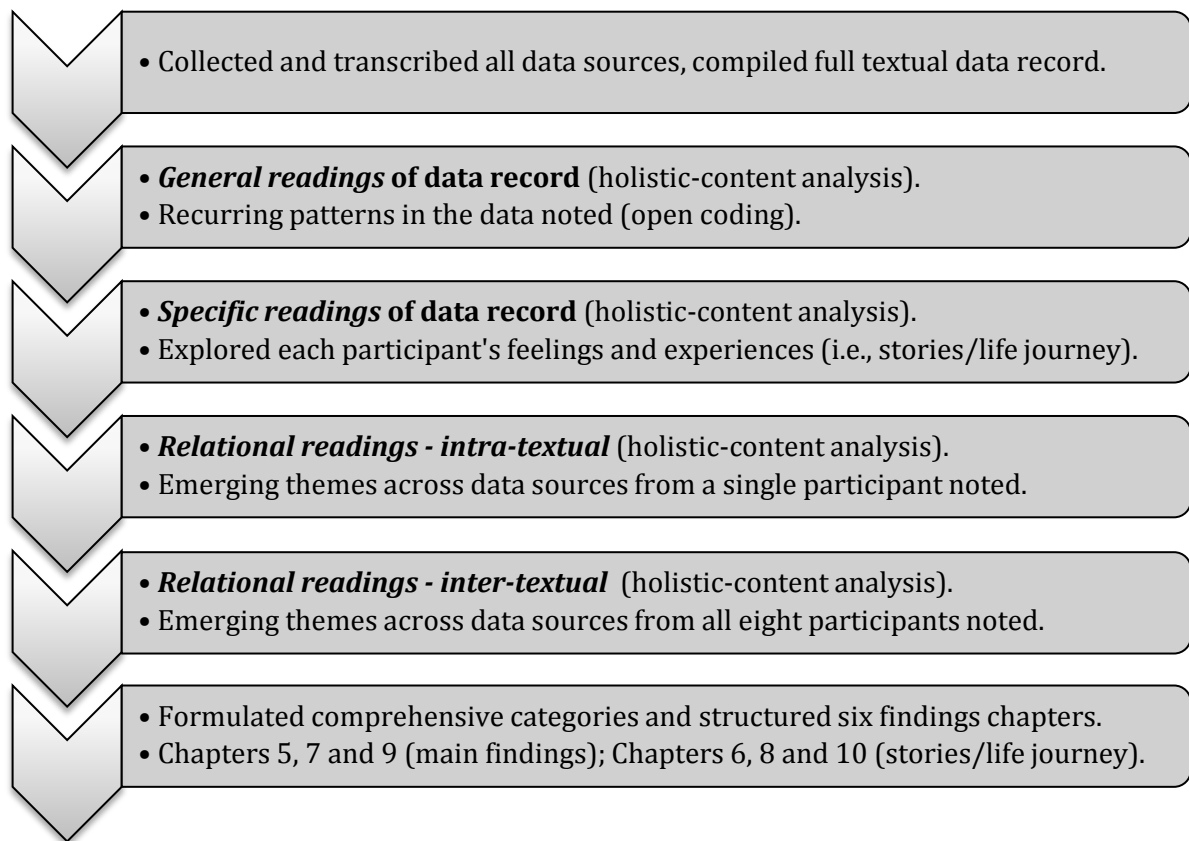


Figure 4-5. Step-by-step analysis and interpretation of the textual data record.

The same analytical framework was also applied to the third section of my survey (that contained nine open ended questions) as I searched for prevalent themes that could be further explored to determine their salience across 102 respondents. Some steps of the framework were combined (general with specific readings) and modified (intra-textual readings only focused on the connections between the written data as no spoken data were collected) to better reflect the nature of textual data collected through the survey. I also built links between themes in this third section with comparable items in the first two sections of the survey so that they would complement each other. Chapter 5 will discuss main aspects of the said data as connected to the respondents’ lives on campus.

4.5. Managing quality in a mixed methods study

Quality is a fundamental construct in mixed methods research and it is the decisive factor for judging the final ‘product’ of a mixed study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Duff 2008; Flick, 2007b; Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). That said, different criteria for quality have to be met in a mixed study and different scholars recommend different quality management frameworks. So, I will start by addressing the general quality of mixed research. Then, as this is a sequential mixed methods study (quan → QUAL), quality criteria related specifically to quantitative and qualitative paradigms will be discussed.

Before the age of mixed methods research, the quality of research output has always been judged on the basis of reliability, validity and generalisability (Flick, 2007a, 2007b; Kvale, 1995). As mixed studies became more common, quality criteria that relate to this particular paradigm were needed (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). At the same time, because mixed methods research is still recent (compared to traditional quantitative and qualitative research) the quality criteria applied to mixed studies are not uniform. In Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (2003) framework, for example, they outline several quality criteria. Two of these are ‘design quality’ and ‘inference quality’. Design quality refers to the successful design of a mixed study, particularly the integration between quantitative and qualitative methods. Inference quality, on the other hand, refers to the quality of data analysis and interpretation from both paradigms. In terms of quality management, Tashakkori and Teddlie state that researchers must be able to justify the choices that they make in carrying out their mixed methods study from start to finish.

The discussions in this chapter, particularly in the last section, have attempted to address the design quality and inference quality of my study. I have also justified all the choices that I made from aligning my work to pragmatism as the research philosophy/paradigm, choosing case study as my methodology and employing quantitative and qualitative instruments for data collection. The rigorous procedures for mixed data analyses and interpretations have also been explained. In doing all of the above, I also endeavoured to meet Dörnyei’s (2007) three mixed methods quality criteria in applied linguistics. For him, the researcher must be able to clearly demonstrate: “(a) the rationale for mixing methods in general; (b) the rationale for the specific mixed design applied ... and (c) the quality of the specific methods making up the study” (p. 62). Whilst the final judgement of my work is in the hands of the reader, the issue

of quality was central in my mixed methods study. Adhering to Ivankova and Creswell's (2009) mixed methods quality framework was particularly helpful. Their broad guideline is as follows:

a researcher needs to design and conduct the study carefully ... systematically apply the appropriate procedures in the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, and integrate the two methods as the mixed methods design dictates. (p. 154)

In the following two sections, I review some of the important steps that I have taken to adhere closely to this guideline.

4.5.1. Quality of the numerical/quantitative findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) pose this question: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). My answer to their question is quality, specifically, by managing and ensuring quality in my mixed methods study that began with the first cycle of data collection (quan). In fact, 'quality control' procedures began much earlier, even before the survey data were collected. I outline below some of the important quality control procedures that I took with reference to my numerical data.

The foundation of a 'quality' quantitative study is its design, specifically the design of its data collection instrument, most commonly the survey questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, a significant amount of time was spent in designing my own survey. This was to ensure its integrity and usefulness as an avenue to find answers to my research questions. Some of the items in my survey were also adapted from more established instruments that have been tested in the field by other applied linguistics researchers. And, as I have explained at length, I piloted the instrument online with the assistance of a similar population to collect feedback. A post-pilot stage was also initiated to learn about the overall reliability and validity of items in the instrument and to answer a critical question: Will it be able to do what it was intended to do? After I was sufficiently satisfied that I could positively answer this question, the final draft of the survey questionnaire was written.

After the survey was successfully administered to 102 respondents from the A&M Faculty, I quickly began compiling the numerical data in a systematic manner. With the help of spreadsheet software, I started creating matrices of responses from each closed item for every respondent. I also rechecked the numerical data that I computed into the software for each

respondent. I then started the tabulation stage so that the data could be analysed. At this stage, descriptive statistics features (frequency counts and percentages) of the software enabled me to generate a general profile of all students from the A&M Faculty who were going to start their industrial attachments in December 2010/January 2011. After checking all figures again, I finalised the tables that would be used to present parts of these data. The systematic approach adopted to manage my numerical data record was meant to increase the ‘transparency’ of what I did towards enhancing the quality of my study (Bryman, 2007). A final quality assurance procedure I undertook was to ensure that there would be a degree of integration between both my numerical and textual data when findings were to be presented. As Bryman (2007) notes, failure to integrate findings in a mixed methods study will normally lower the overall quality of the final report.

4.5.2. Quality of the textual/qualitative data findings

This section illustrates how I endeavoured to ensure the quality of the textual data I collected and analysed, especially since mine is a quan → QUAL sequential mixed methods study. Although the notion of quality applies to both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of my inquiry, the qualitative paradigm has its own sets of quality standards to follow. This can be a real challenge for mixed methods researchers (Bryman, 2007). Edge and K. Richards (1998) capture the essence of this challenge as the need to provide a ‘warrant’ to justify claims made by researchers who use qualitative methods. They argue:

the demand is that the warrant they provide should be appropriate for the claims that they make. In times of shifting paradigms and competing perspectives, one cannot simply take the acceptability of one’s position on truth and reality for granted. One has to be prepared to argue for it. (p. 353)

The notion of a warrant to justify the findings of a qualitative line of inquiry is useful in my study because of the extensive second cycle of qualitative data collection. As Duff (2006) notes, such data “can provide concrete, situated instances of an abstract phenomenon, which, when done well, may contribute meaningfully to theory-building and to knowledge in the field” (p. 89). At the same time, it is never a straightforward task to demonstrate that the analysis and interpretation procedures employed when working with qualitative data are solidly grounded and theoretically sound. As a result, researchers who employ qualitative instruments and procedures need to work hard at choosing the criteria on which to judge the quality of their own work (see, for example, Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002; Hacker, 2008).

With reference to managing the quality of my qualitative data collection and analysis, I drew on two quality management frameworks that I feel are appropriate: Lincoln and Guba's (2000) construct of 'trustworthiness' and 'the role of the reader' framework as proposed by Eisner (1991). For Lincoln and Guba (1985), a qualitative inquiry must conform to the notion of trustworthiness to ensure its quality and future value as a product of research. As a complete quality management framework, trustworthiness can be divided into four criteria: 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'. These four criteria are comparable to the quantitative principles of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Flick, 2007a, 2007b). I now address the four criteria of trustworthiness in my study.

To ensure the credibility of my textual data, the findings chapters will present the lived experiences of my participants on campus and in the world of work. I also tried to triangulate all the data sources that I collected, both qualitative and quantitative. I employed data triangulation where a variety of sources are cited to justify findings and methodological triangulation where multiple methods were used to answer my research questions. All the data sources were also managed in a systematic manner with secure backup copies. This was to ensure that no data record would be lost from the start to the end of my study. I also performed multiple rounds of member checks by sharing data sources with the participants, especially interview transcripts, to refine them and thus to enhance analysis. To increase the transferability of my study so that the findings might be applied in other research contexts or with different participants, I present thick description of the data to allow the reader to better judge its transferability. My insider's viewpoint in co-constructing the qualitative data also provided a unique emic perspective and readers can decide for themselves if the findings are transferable to their own contexts. Ultimately, for dependability and confirmability, I endeavoured to leave an adequate audit trail in case future researchers might want to replicate this study or attempt to corroborate my analyses and interpretations of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that an audit trail must be created so that others can ensure the findings of a qualitative inquiry can be traced back to their original sources.

It goes without saying that qualitative studies are prepared for others to read, be it examiners or an academic community of practice. Nevertheless, Eisner (1991) observes that "there are no operationally defined truth tests to apply to qualitative research" (p. 53). This is due to the fact that both the researcher and the consumers or readers of qualitative research will share

the task of judging the significance and overall quality of an empirical study, an idea that was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). For the consumers or readers of qualitative research ‘products’, Eisner (1991) proposes three quality evaluation criteria: ‘coherence’, ‘consensus’ and ‘instrumental utility’. Coherence asks the reader to consider whether the research makes logical sense and whether the conclusions drawn by the researcher are carefully backed up with solid evidence. As for consensus, this criterion is connected to the notion of data triangulation and how the researcher has allowed for data triangulation in her or his study. Lastly, instrumental utility asks the reader to consider the overall usefulness of an empirical study to shed light on a condition or situation that might be too confusing or puzzling for common sense. It is impossible for me to make these judgements on behalf of readers of this study. All the same, I have followed quality management procedures, both quantitative and qualitative in carrying out my inquiry. Hopefully, the final product will be considered to be of sufficiently good quality to satisfy the criterion of trustworthiness. In the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985), only by managing and ensuring quality can a researcher “persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p. 290).

Overview of Chapter 4

I started this chapter with a discussion of pragmatism as the paradigm that built the foundations of my work. As a logical progression, I highlighted the interconnections between pragmatism and mixed methods research, the latter being the design that I chose for this study. I also explained my rationale for choosing a mixed methods design to carry out this study. Following that, I presented case study as the research methodology or strategy of inquiry. Key characteristics of case study research were then illustrated. As research ethics is an important consideration, I addressed the issue of ethics after I provided basic background information about my participants. The bulk of the discussion in this chapter covered the procedures for data collection in the field and descriptions of the instruments employed during fieldwork in two data collection cycles. I also explained the steps taken to manage my numerical and textual data records for analysis. In the closing section, I shared my views regarding the management of research quality. Here, I highlighted the different measures I took to make certain that my work meets several quality criteria in mixed methods design, mixed data collection, analysis and interpretation. In the next chapter, I will present findings related to the first ‘life phase’ of my participants: Campus life.

Chapter 5. Campus life

In this chapter, I present findings from the initial research site: the campus of the Bumiputera-exclusive university. As my fieldwork was carried out based on a sequential mixed methods design (quan → QUAL), in the first part of this chapter, I present and analyse mainly quantitative and also some qualitative data from the survey instrument in the first cycle of data collection (quan). The data will build a profile of the first case that I focus on in this multiple case study: 102 Bumiputera Malay undergraduates from the Administration and Management Faculty (A&M Faculty) who were preparing to start their industrial attachments in late 2010 and early 2011. Then, the second part begins with an introduction to the eight participants who were selected as the focal cases in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 4, these participants generated extensive textual data from instruments that I used in the second, longitudinal cycle of data collection (QUAL). Even though all my findings chapters address aspects of my three research questions, Chapters 5 and 6 explore particularly the first: What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of undergraduates in a Bumiputera-exclusive university community, and more particularly, as they prepare for their final semester industrial attachments? To find answers to this question, the following themes identified in the data will be examined: language ability levels, language and identity-related issues, Bumiputera Malay identity and languages on campus, language use in friendship groups as identity strategy, securing the attachment through languages, and imagining language use in the world of work. Whilst these themes are linked to the eight participants, the first two are related to all respondents from the faculty.

5.1. Broad profile of undergraduates on campus

The main objective of the survey was to build a profile of students from the A&M Faculty who were preparing to start their attachments between December 2010 and January 2011. In all, 102 respondents completed the survey. To reflect the objective of the survey, the first section focuses on the Malay (Bahasa Melayu/BM), English and Mandarin proficiency of the students. Findings from this section relate to four language skill areas: listening and reading (receptive skills), speaking and writing (productive skills). The second section focuses on language use and identity-related issues. Findings from this section highlight manifestations

of personal (the self), language and professional identities in the lives of the respondents. The third section introduces a qualitative dimension (employing short answer questions) to further probe language proficiency and identity-related issues in the campus lives of the respondents. Findings from the third section will be analysed, where appropriate, in addition to the quantitative data. Only selected items from the survey will be presented and discussed. The rationale behind this is twofold. Firstly, I believe that these items are the most relevant for building a broad profile of students from the A&M Faculty. Secondly, the items are also connected to the lives of the eight focal participants (that I will discuss in detail in this and upcoming chapters). As such, I will draw links, wherever possible, between aspects of the survey data and the extensive data collected longitudinally from the eight participants.

5.1.1. Language ability (proficiency) levels

The findings in this section are from selected survey items that relate mainly to language skill areas relevant to the world of work, although I will also look at some items that relate to general language skills. On the whole, the language ability levels of the students were as expected. Their first language, Malay or Bahasa Melayu, is the language in which they felt they are most proficient. For instance, all of them generally believed that they possessed high ability levels in listening and reading although in speaking and writing the figures are slightly lower. As for their second language, English, although for some survey items the number of high ability students reached up to 80%, there were multiple items with nearly equal spread between medium ability and high ability levels. At the same time, a small number of students reported low ability level in English particularly in items that probed formal language use in the workplace. Finally, for Mandarin as their third language, there were multiple items where the respondents chose low ability as their proficiency level. Between 60% to 70% of the respondents believed that their ability level was low, especially for items on formal aspects of Mandarin use in the workplace. That said, my observations showed degrees of variation as the four tables below illustrate. The tables are grouped together based on receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading) and productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing) as I found that there are substantial differences between these skills as reported by the respondents.

Table 5-1 presents findings related to the skill of listening in three languages. Five of the most relevant survey items are presented in the table. Whilst items 1 and 2 relate to general listening ability, items 5 through 7 focus on formal aspects of this skill. Unsurprisingly, all of the respondents reported high ability level in Malay for all items in the table. For English,

there were some who believed that they only possessed medium or low ability levels. Interestingly, students who chose low ability levels are only found in items relating to formal English usage (listening to instructions, meetings or presentations). Even though the figures for high ability students were still high (between 53% to 79% corresponding to the last three items), it is noteworthy that there were also students who reported low ability levels between 4% to 12%, despite English being the medium of instruction on campus. For Mandarin, the percentages were reversed. The majority of students reported possessing low ability levels in general and more specifically in formal listening skills. Even so, it is interesting that as high as 23.5% of respondents believed that they could understand formal instructions in Mandarin. Indeed, the percentages of high ability level students were between 13% to 24% for all five items related to listening in Mandarin, which is noteworthy for a third language.

Survey item # Language	Low ability level		Medium ability level		High ability level	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. I understand what others around me are talking about when they use this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	17	16.7	85	83.3
Mandarin	42	41.2	41	40.2	19	18.6
2. I can follow someone speaking in this language without asking for repetition.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	20	19.6	82	80.4
Mandarin	41	40.2	47	46.1	14	13.7
5. I can understand formal spoken instructions given in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	4	3.9	19	18.6	79	77.5
Mandarin	35	34.3	43	42.2	24	23.5
6. I am able to follow important points made during formal meetings in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	10	9.8	39	38.2	53	52.0
Mandarin	48	47.1	41	40.2	13	12.7
7. I can understand questions asked in this language if I was carrying out a presentation.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
* English	12	11.8	33	32.4	57	55.9
Mandarin	45	44.1	42	41.2	15	14.7

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-1. Responses to selected survey items on listening skills in three languages.

Five selected items relating to formal reading practices in the workplace are presented in Table 5.2 below. Continuing the trend observed in the skill of listening (and indeed all four major language skills for Bahasa Melayu), all but two of the respondents reported high ability in Malay for items 21 and 23. For English, the percentages were somewhat lower overall compared to listening. In addition, high ability level students are between 51% to 90% for all five items in the table. As for Mandarin, even though the numbers for low ability students are relatively high, the numbers for medium ability were generally higher compared to listening, except for the ability to comprehend business documents. The percentages of high ability students in Mandarin were also generally lower for this skill area, other than the ability to read memos and notes.

Survey item # Language	Low ability level		Medium ability level		High ability level	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
19. I can understand the main points in short memos and notes in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	12	11.8	90	88.2
Mandarin	32	31.4	44	43.1	26	25.5
21. I can read business related documents like portfolios and reports.						
Malay	-	-	2	2.0	100	98.0
English	5	4.9	44	43.1	53	52.0
* Mandarin	69	67.6	29	28.4	4	3.9
22. I can read formal emails and other online business communication.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	1	1.0	36	35.3	65	63.7
Mandarin	38	37.3	55	53.9	9	8.8
23. I can understand formal charts, graphs and tables related to the world of work.						
Malay	-	-	2	2.0	100	98.0
English	4	3.9	47	46.1	51	50.0
* Mandarin	29	28.4	64	62.7	9	8.8
24. On the whole I am able to read and understand formal materials in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	2	2.0	39	38.2	61	59.8
Mandarin	36	35.3	54	52.9	12	11.8

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-2. Responses to selected survey items on reading skills in three languages.

Table 5-3 shows the most important findings for speaking based on five items that I selected from the survey. Items 9 and 10 relate to general speaking skills whilst items 13 to 15 focus on formal speaking practices. For Malay, the trend mentioned in the previous paragraph continued and nearly all students chose high ability level for the items selected. As for English, there was greater variation in ability levels for all but item 9. For instance, for speaking during meetings, only 32.4% of respondents chose high ability whilst the majority believed that their ability level is medium. Finally, for all items relating to Mandarin, low ability was the most common response; between 49% to 66% of students chose low ability as their proficiency level. The percentages for medium ability were also high, between 29.4% to 33.3% compared to high ability level, which is 5.9% to 21.6% for all items in the table.

Survey item # Language	Low ability level		Medium ability level		High ability level	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
9. I can join everyday conversations when others around me are talking in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	19	18.6	83	81.4
Mandarin	49	48.0	31	30.4	22	21.6
10. I can speak clearly in this language without having to repeat myself frequently.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	6	5.9	25	24.5	71	69.6
Mandarin	58	56.9	34	33.3	10	9.8
13. I can give formal spoken instructions to other people in this language.						
Malay	-	-	5	4.9	97	95.1
English	8	7.8	46	45.1	48	47.1
Mandarin	55	53.9	33	32.4	14	13.7
14. I can express my feelings and opinions during formal meetings in this language.						
Malay	-	-	5	4.9	97	95.1
English	19	18.6	50	49.0	33	32.4
Mandarin	66	64.7	30	29.4	6	5.9
15. I can carry out a presentation in this language in front of a group of people.						
Malay	-	-	2	2.0	100	98.0
* English	9	8.8	29	28.4	64	62.7
Mandarin	59	57.8	33	32.4	10	9.8

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-3. Responses to selected survey items on speaking skills in three languages.

Table 5-4 outlines the findings for writing. The five items presented in the table are those most clearly related to formal aspects of writing, in particular business writing sub-skills in workplace settings. Although no respondents chose low ability in Malay, the figures for medium ability level were the highest (5.9% to 23.5%) compared to the three earlier skills. For English, writing business documents and online communication seemed to be the hardest to master for the respondents although again the percentages for high ability level were quite high (48.0% to 87.3% for all items). As for Mandarin, writing is clearly the productive skill which was hardest to master for the respondents. Between 37.3% to 75.5% believed that their ability was limited. Students of modest ability also outnumbered high ability ones in Mandarin at a ratio of roughly 2:1.

Survey item # Language	Low ability level		Medium ability level		High ability level	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
27. I can write short memos and notes in this language.						
Malay	-	-	-	-	102	100.0
English	-	-	13	12.7	89	87.3
Mandarin	38	37.3	40	39.2	24	23.5
29. I can write formal portfolios and business reports related to my area of study.						
Malay	-	-	24	23.5	78	76.5
English	12	11.8	51	50.0	39	38.2
Mandarin	77	75.5	17	16.7	8	7.8
30. I can write formal emails and other online business communication.						
Malay	-	-	16	15.7	86	84.3
English	11	10.8	42	41.2	49	48.0
* Mandarin	63	61.8	27	26.5	12	11.8
31. I can prepare formal charts, graphs and tables related to my area of study.						
Malay	-	-	6	5.9	96	94.1
English	4	3.9	37	36.3	61	59.8
* Mandarin	58	56.9	28	27.5	16	15.7
32. Generally I am able to structure and write formal materials in this language.						
Malay	-	-	9	8.8	93	91.2
* English	3	2.9	39	38.2	60	58.8
* Mandarin	65	63.7	24	23.5	13	12.7

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-4. Responses to selected survey items on writing skills in three languages.

Looking at the findings as a whole, trends in all four skill areas relating to Malay/BM, English and Mandarin suggest that on campus there are specific ‘domains’ for language use. These domains include both physical places (e.g., the faculty, classrooms, cafeterias, etc.) and interactional spaces (e.g., ‘faculty friends’, small friendship groups, etc.), and they will be further explored in this chapter. Take Mandarin as a case in point. The respondents were generally able to listen and read in Mandarin although they clearly had difficulties speaking and writing it, especially when it came to formal aspects of speaking and writing. The same can be said with reference to English. Still, it should be noted that for general everyday use of English on campus, none of the respondents believed that their ability level was low. When it comes to formal speaking and writing practices to prepare themselves for their industrial attachments however, there were marked differences between ability levels. In contrast, Malay is used in every language domain on campus, so much so that most respondents believe that they possessed high ability in Malay for informal and formal use.

Links can be made between the qualitative findings from the survey and the quantitative findings. With regard to qualitative findings related to language proficiency, two themes become evident: language domains and language exposure. Even though the qualitative findings from the survey were generally what I expected in terms of language roles (first, second and third languages) and skill areas (higher ability in receptive skills, lower ability in productive ones), several points of differences were also observed. One instance is that the students felt more able in general language skills compared to formal language skills related to the world of work. It is likely that some of them feel that they have not been given enough exposure to the latter set of skills on campus. As such, the attachment should turn out to be a productive experience as well as an eye-opener as they learn to become young professionals in the working world.

I now turn to the two themes of language domains and language exposure from the third (qualitative) section of the survey. First and foremost, data from the third section indicate that there are specific domains for language use on campus. All respondents described the roles of their first, second and third languages within these domains. Farhana’s comments are a representative example of campus language domains. For item 57 (*On campus, when and where would you use Malay, English and Mandarin?*), Farhana wrote:

[Malay] Usually, I will use Malay when we chit-chat. Any conversations with my friends, in the college or cafeteria, wherever, we normally use this language.

[English] I use this language mostly during class and also when I communicate with the lecturers. But I also use this language when talking with my close friends.

[Mandarin] Usually in the classroom when I talk to my *lǎoshī* [teacher]. My *lǎoshī* will teach us this language. Sometimes I just use it with my close friends but also not really that much.

Nearly all of the respondents made similar comments. Clearly, Bahasa Melayu plays a dominant role in a Bumiputera-exclusive university, so much so that another student, Amna, wrote: “Most of the time I use BM. I use BM every time ... even in class we will use it even though we can’t [not supposed to] use it.” For English, other than formal classroom contexts, many respondents wrote that English is often used when they socialise with their close friends. Using English within small friendship groups was also a way to learn it in a less threatening and more supportive setting, as these respondents wrote. Mandarin was also learned and used in the same manner as English, although the frequency of use for Mandarin (outside of the classroom) was quite limited for the majority of respondents.

Language exposure is the second theme that I analysed from this section of the survey. In section three, items 59 (*Do you feel that you have had enough exposure to English on campus? Answer "Yes" or "No", and please elaborate*) and 60 (*Do you feel that you have had enough chances to use English on campus? Answer "Yes" or "No", and please elaborate*) focused on English language exposure whereas items 61 and 62 asked the same questions about Mandarin. Regarding English, a small number of students wrote that they did not get enough exposure on campus. Nurulz, for instance, wrote: “I think learning English here [on campus] is only in English class ... for sure [it is] not enough to master this language.” Other common reasons for not getting enough exposure to English include relying too much on Bahasa Melayu and not having the personal drive to use it outside of the classroom. The majority, however, felt that they had gained much exposure to English during their time on campus. For item 59, as a representative example, Farhana explained:

For me, yes. Because even in the syllabus, we use the English language as the main language. If compared to other universities, they still use BM in their syllabus. So, I think I had enough exposure to English and also during our presentations we must do them all in English for sure!

Item 59 also suggests why 64% of the respondents said that they possessed high ability to do presentations in English (see, survey item 15, Table 5-3). Having English as the medium of instruction (in this Bumiputera-only campus) not only provides sustained exposure to the students, they are also required to produce English on a day-to-day basis. As a result, the students seem to possess a distinctive set of language skills compared to other public universities where the national language remains the medium of instruction. In other words, although they might be studying in a Bumiputera-exclusive environment where BM is dominant, their long-term exposure to English might have helped them develop a distinct view on the value of proficiency in other languages like English (and also Mandarin), as I will illustrate in following sections.

At the same time, compared to their level of exposure to English, many of the students argued that they had not received enough exposure to Mandarin on campus. Opportunities for using Mandarin were also fewer, perhaps due to its third language status. Ikma's comments for item 61 represented the shared views of most students:

No, not enough because we just learned and use Mandarin only during class because in our course, that's the core subject we must pass. Therefore, I don't have so much exposure to Mandarin language. It's also limited outside the class although we do try to use it sometimes.

Mandarin thus remains a third language used mainly within the classroom. Some of the students also wrote that their Mandarin tutors were not very supportive of their efforts to learn more about this language. They argued that their tutors were only interested in helping them pass the subject but not really in helping them acquire Mandarin as part of their language repertoire. Still, there were some respondents who said that opportunities to increase their ability levels in Mandarin were available during their time on campus. Examples they gave include joining the Mandarin language society, entering Mandarin public speaking contests every semester, frequently watching Chinese movies (in Mandarin rather than the popular Cantonese dialect), and taking the time to get help from friends on campus who were products of the Malaysian Chinese education system (i.e., from Chinese primary and secondary schools). I will present the case of a participant who is the product of the Chinese education system further in this chapter. To profile these undergraduates as they prepared to start their attachments, the survey also examined aspects of their identities. These findings will be presented next.

5.1.2. Language and identity-related issues

Responses from the most relevant and salient survey items are grouped into four categories in the following tables (i.e., Strongly Disagree and Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree and Strongly Agree). I grouped the responses in this manner because most items in this section tend to gravitate towards the middle of the scale (slightly disagree/agree). Finally, this section ends with examples from the third part of the survey (short answer questions).

Table 5-5 shows the findings related to personal identity or aspects of the self. I have selected four survey items that are most noteworthy to highlight the findings, specifically items 53 through 56. Item 53 focuses on language and the self. 46.1% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that language use did not affect them at the individual level. The percentage of respondents who slightly agreed is also high at 41.2%. These figures are quite surprising and raise questions about the identity literature that I have earlier reviewed (see, for example, Block, 2007; Fishman, 1989; Joseph, 2004). It might be that the respondents did not understand the implications of this item or perhaps they really did not feel language use affected their campus lives at the personal level. The next item, item 54, is related to language and personal change. Figures for item 54 are somewhat similar to item 53, although 47.1% of respondents chose slightly agree as their response. Again, even though the figures for items 53 and 54 might seem contrary to beliefs about Bumiputera Malay attitudes towards language learning and use (see, for example, Gill, 2004; K. Abdullah & Ayyub, 1998; Rappa & Wee, 2006), from experience, I believe that some Bumiputera Malay undergraduates really do feel this way (at least at the personal level and in isolation from the campus social milieu). In addition, having taught students from this A&M Faculty for nearly a decade, I know that they are expected to constantly learn (and use) their three languages up to a point where perhaps they might feel language learning/use was just a normal part of their campus lives. Even so, the stories shared by the eight main participants should shed further light on these peculiar findings.

The last two items showed more even spread between different responses, although again, the figures seem to contradict beliefs about Bumiputera Malays and language use that I reported above. In item 55 that probes language attitude, 54.9% of respondents overall agreed that ‘a language is just a language’ as opposed to 45.1% who generally did not agree. For item 56, 65.7% of the respondents overall agreed that individuals who change after learning a language are just trying to be different from other people. 30% of the respondents did not

agree with this statement. Figures for items 55 and 56 strongly suggest that when it comes to themselves (i.e., personal level), most did not feel that the languages they know changed them or affected them personally. However, when the focus is turned to ‘a person’ or ‘that person’ (i.e., group level), the majority felt that other people tried to act differently or changed themselves after learning certain languages. Indeed, these ideological distinctions between self/individual and others/group in terms of language and identity were quite noticeable in responses to several survey items (both quantitative and qualitative). I will revisit key aspects of these findings in my discussion of the eight main participants.

Survey item # Response	Strongly disagree & disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree & strongly agree		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
53. In my opinion, whichever language I use does not affect me as an individual.	4	3.9	9	8.8	42	41.2	47	46.1	
54. I think it is a waste of time to talk about personal changes just because one learns a new language.	*	6	5.9	11	10.8	48	47.1	37	36.3
55. I feel that a language is just a language and people should stop making a fuss about it.	18	17.6	28	27.5	33	32.4	23	22.5	
56. If a person changes after learning a language, I think that person just wants to be different.	13	12.7	22	21.6	39	38.2	28	27.5	

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-5. Responses to selected survey items related to personal identity (the self).

Table 5-6 illustrates key findings with reference to language identities by drawing on seven survey items: 37, 39, 43 and 49 to 52. I chose these items as they are the most importantly related to language identity. Items 37, 49 and 51 examine code-switching between the mother tongue of the students and other languages. Code-switching is a common language identity (and also national identity) practice in the multiethnic and multilingual Malaysian context (Morais, 1998). Being able to ‘flow’ naturally between different local languages and to code-mix are common language practices for the majority of Malaysians, particularly between Bahasa Melayu and English and other local tongues (Baskaran, 1994). In item 37, more than 70% of the respondents believed that they could easily switch between Malay and other languages, whilst 24.5% slightly disagreed and 4.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

For item 49, the majority of students slightly agreed that they felt strange for being able to think in many languages simultaneously. Students who generally disagreed with this statement are less than 25% of the total. For item 51, a little more than half of the respondents overall disagreed that thinking in English and Malay causes them to get confused. The other half, however, felt that this statement applied to them. Responses to items 37, 49 and 51 reflect the common practice of code-switching within the community of students in this faculty and in Malaysia generally.

Survey item # Response	Strongly disagree & disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree & strongly agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
37. I can easily switch between using Malay and other languages if there is a need to do so.	5	4.9	25	24.5	45	44.1	27	26.5
39. I usually stick to English when communicating with certain people that I know.	2	2.0	19	18.6	50	49.0	31	30.4
43. I use English frequently because I feel that this language is more versatile than Malay.	* 17	16.7	30	29.4	33	32.4	22	21.6
49. I feel weird because in my mind I am thinking in many languages at the same time.	* 10	9.8	15	14.7	59	57.8	18	17.6
50. It is hard to use English and Mandarin outside of lectures as people will say I am showing off.	25	24.5	41	40.2	20	19.6	16	15.7
51. I am easily confused nowadays between adopting the English or Malay mode of thinking.	19	18.6	38	37.3	36	35.3	9	8.8
52. The languages that I use make it hard for me to fit in with other people everyday.	21	20.6	55	53.9	19	18.6	7	6.9

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-6. Responses to selected survey items related to language identity.

Items 39 and 43 focus on attitudes toward English. Whilst attitudes toward English remain positive for the majority of Malaysians, researchers (see, for example, Omar, 2007; Sariyan, 2006) argue that some Bumiputera Malays display negative attitudes toward English. This is because English is seen as a threat towards ‘pure’ Malay ethnic and language identities. Aspects of this view are reflected in my data. In item 39, nearly 80% of the students agreed

that they use English exclusively with certain people that they know but only a minority agreed strongly. Only about a fifth of the respondents did not agree with item 39. The domain-specific and ‘person-specific’ use of English will be addressed in the following sections, particularly as the preferred language in small, intimate friendship groups. For item 43, equal numbers of participants disagreed and agreed that English is more versatile than Malay, at 46% and 54% respectively. More students felt that their English is more versatile compared to their mother tongue for reasons that will be made clearer as this chapter unfolds. The idea of English being versatile is also not uncommon within the Bumiputera Malay community, particularly for the younger generation and urban Malays who are more exposed to English use (Adnan, 2001).

The other two items in Table 5-6 (items 50 and 52) are related to language use and the perceptions of others. For item 50, I expected that most of the students would overall agree that using languages other than Bahasa Melayu on campus would be seen as an act of ‘showing off’ to others in their campus community. The results, however, are the opposite with more than 60% opposing this idea. For this reason, the negative labelling that happens when Bumiputera Malays use other languages (see, for example, Wong, K. S. Lee, S. K. Lee & Yaacob, 2012; S. K. Lee, 2001; Rajadurai, 2011) might not be strongly felt in this particular site. This proposal finds support in item 52. Only about a quarter of the respondents generally felt that it was difficult for them to fit in (on campus) due to the languages that they know and use. 53.9% slightly disagreed with this statement whereas another 20.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings, however, might only relate to students from the A&M Faculty. From my own experience as a campus teacher, students from other faculties are more inclined towards the use of BM. Still, compared to other Malaysian public universities, students in this university system might be more open to the use of English (and other languages) due to its medium of instruction policy.

The final focus of this section is professional identity. Studies done in the Malaysian setting suggest that there is a strong relationship between language ability and professional identities, especially for fresh graduates who are looking for permanent positions for the first time (see, for example, Kandasamy & Santhiram, 2000; Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim & Raphael, 2012; Shakir, 2009; S. Y. Tham & Kam, 2008). I chose four of the most noteworthy items that relate to the beginnings of professional identity for Table 5-7 below (as respondents prepared to start their

working lives). These survey items (34, 35, 46 and 47) are also connected to the experiences of the eight cases that I will discuss in this and subsequent chapters.

Survey item #	Strongly disagree & disagree		Slightly disagree		Slightly agree		Agree & strongly agree		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
34. I am confident to start my attachment because I can use many languages proficiently.									
	*	10	9.8	23	22.5	30	29.4	39	38.2
35. I am ready to become a professional because I am able to use English proficiently.									
		-	-	26	25.5	30	29.4	46	45.1
46. After learning languages at this university, I find myself more ready to enter the job market.									
	*	1	1.0	7	6.9	53	52.0	41	40.2
47. I think I will be successful in my career because of my ability to use many languages.									
		4	3.9	22	21.6	39	38.2	37	36.3

* Percentage total is either less or more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 5-7. Responses to selected survey items related to professional identity.

Item 34 makes connections between language proficiency and the industrial attachment. 67.6% of the students felt confident to begin their attachments because of their ability to use different languages. Only 22.5% slightly disagreed and another 9.8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this particular item. The figures for item 35 are very interesting. None of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that English is linked to their professional ability. Only about a quarter slightly disagreed whereas the majority believed that they were ready to become ‘professional’ partly due to their English language ability. For item 46, only eight students or 7.9% felt that they were not ready to look for work after being exposed to different languages on campus. Overall, more than 90% felt otherwise. This is a very significant percentage as it suggests that nine out of ten students from the A&M Faculty perceived language ability as one of the core skills needed to secure their employment in the Malaysian labour market. Additionally, when it comes to imagining the future in item 47, the majority of students believed that they will have successful future careers because of their ability to use different languages. 21.6% of respondents slightly disagreed with item 47 and only 3.9% or just four students either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The figures in Table 5-7 are also reflected in the qualitative responses by the respondents, which I present next.

To summarise the main findings from the tables above, languages appeared to play multiple roles in constructing the identities of these students on campus and as they prepared to leave campus to start their attachments in the real world of work. At the level of the self, the general feeling was that languages did not change them personally but when asked to judge others around them, the majority felt that they could see changes when other people used certain languages on campus. In terms of language identity, code-switching was not a problem for the majority although they also felt a degree of confusion when they started thinking in different languages simultaneously. For attitudes between mother tongue (Bahasa Melayu) and English, the students were nearly equally divided in terms of which language is more versatile, although the scale was slightly tipped towards English. Quite surprisingly, the majority of students did not agree that using English or Mandarin was a sign of boasting or an act that would lead to some sort of negative labelling. With reference to professional identity, nearly all of them believed that language ability was linked to this identity category. In addition, the ‘power’ that English exudes over other languages in the Malaysian workplace was also reflected in the favourable responses of most respondents when discussing their second language.

Moving on to data from the third section of the survey, although no questions directly focus on personal and language identities, items 63 (*As you prepare to start your industrial attachment, do you think that you now possess the language ability expected from an administration/management professional? Please elaborate*) and also 64 (*Describe concrete actions that you have taken to make sure that your language ability is polished before you begin your industrial attachment*) examine facets of professional identity construction through language use. Item 63 asks the students whether they felt that they possessed the language ability expected from an administration/management professional. Most of them felt that they did, although a few felt unsure about what was expected of them during the attachment period. As one student, Athirah, wrote: “I think I do. But also maybe no, because basically I have no idea what their expectations are when I start my training [attachment].” Even the other students who said that they felt they were ready mentioned their reservations. On the one hand, they felt that they already possessed all the language skills needed, but on the other, some of them wrote that they might be asked to carry out difficult language-related tasks in the workplace. On the whole, however, the students all showed confidence in their language ability as administration and management professionals. Comments made by Azusa

and Nazratul are particularly illuminating and reflect the shared feelings of the majority of students. They wrote:

Yes, I have the language ability. It's been almost two and a half years now on campus I've been exposed to so many [language] subjects. Now, all the things that I must do I already know. I know I can be a great worker. (Azusa)

Yes, I think I have the language ability where I'm able to communicate well with my co-workers, as well with all the customers in the frontline. I am sure I can easily understand all the everyday tasks in my office. (Nazratul)

Finally, item 64 asks the students to write about initiatives that they have taken to increase their language ability specifically for their industrial attachments. As expected, each of them has taken steps to improve their proficiency in English and Mandarin. But, when it comes to Malay, the majority felt that as this is their mother tongue they did not have to focus too much on the language. As one student, Azhar, explained: "Honestly, there are no preparations for Malay because it just comes naturally for me." Even if most of the respondents generally performed below par in their Bahasa Melayu subjects (as reflected in the demographics data they shared in section four of the survey), they felt that their level of BM is good enough to help them succeed as young professionals. A representative example of language preparation for the attachment is provided by Farad:

[Malay] There are no action or preparation in terms of this language because for me, I think that BM it just more spontaneous for all of us.

[English] I had prepared myself in terms of communication in English language so much. Well, not as much as I want, but at least I prepared and I always practised my communication skills every day.

[Mandarin] For this language, actually there are not many actions except to practise hard in class. But I think I will mostly just use BM and English when I start working.

Now that I have profiled the 102 undergraduates from the A&M Faculty, the next half of this chapter will begin to examine the qualitative data gathered longitudinally from the eight main participants chosen from the original survey respondents.

5.2. Introducing the eight focal cases in context

From the general population of undergraduates in the A&M Faculty who were preparing to embark on their final semester attachments, eight were invited to take part in the second, longitudinal cycle of data collection. Henceforth, 'stories' that they shared about their feelings, experiences and aspirations from campus to working to future life will be discussed.

Their stories make up the main constructs that I focus on: language use, workplace participation and identity construction. I have explained how these participants were selected, and have shown the locations of their workplaces (see Figure 4-1). In this section, I offer further information about the eight participants to introduce them in context, starting with their demographics as a group and followed by information about each of them in turn.

5.2.1. Ethnicity, age, working experience

All eight participants can be considered Bumiputera Malay even though in terms of actual family lineage, Teeya's mother is an ethnic Chinese-Muslim and Syful's parents originally came from Indonesia. The other participants are all from Malay families. Being Bumiputera Malay, they were all accepted to study in the Bumiputera-exclusive university (the initial research site). As a group, they can be considered young, with 20 years being the average age. However, Eizat, Syful and Fadil are older as the three did not enter university directly after completing their secondary education.

During my fieldwork, Eizat and Syful were both 22 years old. Both had decided to take a two-year break from their studies to work and "focus on other things". For Eizat, other than casual work in a few companies, he was also actively involved in community projects. Being one of the youth leaders of a local political party in Penang, Eizat was active in promoting the Bumiputera Malay political agenda. Syful worked as an editorial assistant at a large publication house in Kuala Lumpur. Although Syful said that the wages he received were low, he gained a lot of experience in copywriting and editing, both in English and Bahasa Melayu. Fadil was the eldest in the group and also the most experienced worker. At 26 years of age, Fadil possessed a post-secondary vocational Certificate in Business Studies. He worked in the government sector as an accounts assistant for more than three years before deciding to return to full-time study. Fadil strongly felt that a higher qualification would allow him to go further in the world of work. He also wanted to move into the administration and management field from business and accounting.

Even though the other participants (Intan, Ckina, Teeya, Agnes and Kieyu) started their studies directly after finishing secondary school, they were also not new to the "working world". All of them engaged in part-time work during their semester breaks. According to them, this was a common practice, especially for students from their faculty who were quite flexible and versatile in terms of job scope. From working in the service industry (e.g.,

kitchen assistants in fast food restaurants, housekeeping staff in hotels, etc.) to the manufacturing industry (e.g., manual production operators on factory floors, etc.) to starting their own small-scale business ventures (e.g., printing t-shirts, making souvenirs, selling traditional Malay food, etc.), the five of them were industrious and had become accustomed to the demands of the world of work. They cited three reasons for working during semester breaks. First is gaining useful knowledge from different occupational areas. Second is immersing themselves in the world of work to learn new skills that would allow them to become better workers in future, for example, communication skills and working as part of a team. The third reason is, somewhat unsurprisingly, getting extra income to supplement their study loans.

5.2.2. Language ability levels

Another notable observation about these eight students (as a group) was their good grades in language subjects. Their cumulative grades (from semester one to five) were as follows: ‘B’ average for Bahasa Melayu and ‘A’ average for both English and Mandarin. Their proficiency level in Bahasa Melayu, their first language, was surprisingly lower than their second and third languages (English and Mandarin respectively). Two reasons for this were revealed by the participants. The first was the relative difficulty of their BM academic papers. As Eizat exclaimed:

BM is hard to pass, more than Mandarin. It’s not like SPM *tapi* BM *tinggi* [advanced level]. Our lecturer said anyone who got ‘A’ is good enough to become a professional translator. Also, if you ask me although we’re all shy to admit ... our BM is not really good-*lah* [laughs]. (Eizat, i1, 44-47)

Eizat’s comment reflected the feelings shared by the group with reference to their mother tongue and they were not proud to tell people about their grades in advanced level BM (although they all said that BM is an important investment for their future careers). A second reason for their lower academic proficiency in Bahasa Melayu is:

the technical BM paper is two semesters only, it’s a killer. You have to write, present reports, business proposals and more. How shall I say this? This high level of BM nobody really uses. ... Plus, we are all more exposed to English, BM not so much. (Syful, i1, 25-28)

5.2.3. Attachment work roles

For their attachments, all eight participants applied on their own initiative and were accepted by business organisations and private companies across Peninsular Malaysia. As a group, the

main rationale for the choices they made was simply “convenience”. Seven of them applied to work in or near their home towns so that they could stay with their families during the attachment period. The only participant to travel outside of his home state was Fadil.

All of them, except for Fadil, also requested specific work roles within particular departments or divisions, to be carried out during the attachment under the supervision of their designated ‘workplace mentors’. These requests were made in their application letters or during selection interviews. Not all of them had to go through interviews although all were required to submit evidence of their academic abilities and workplace-related skills like communication and proficiency in languages.

Interestingly, not all of them applied for workplace roles that were directly related to their university course of study. According to the participants, unlike other courses on campus, their diploma is broad in focus. For instance, even though they were trained to become administrators/managers, they were also exposed to other career paths like public relations and event management. Even though these do not relate to administrating and managing in the strictest sense, the subjects were taught to enhance their employability. The participants also said they had to do non-examined soft-skills courses on weekends from the first semester of their diploma. These focused on practical skills like writing résumés, attending interviews and other job-finding skills. They also learned about effective communication skills when they carried out small-scale projects to nurture these skills as part of their soft-skills courses.

Due partly to the above, the participants were all able to pursue their own interests during their attachments. Some of the reasons for the personal choices that they made will become clearer later in this thesis. Now, I provide brief details about the eight participants, their places of work and ‘work roles’ during the attachment period below.

Eizat, Assistant Project Coordinator, *P-Hospital*, Penang: Based on experience gathered whilst working part-time within the Malaysian health industry, Eizat applied to and was accepted by a state-government linked private hospital in Penang (henceforth ‘P-Hospital’) to complete his industrial attachment. After passing a semi-formal entrance interview, Eizat was given the role of assistant project coordinator in the community outreach and corporate social responsibility unit of P-Hospital. Eizat’s choice was unique. For him, the attachment had to

serve two purposes: help him get his diploma and open up career paths that are in line with his own aspirations.

Intan, Customer Relations Intern, *J-Automotive*, Penang: After seeing how some of her seniors were able to get permanent positions in the Malaysian automotive industry after graduating, Intan was inspired to start her own career in the same sector. With the help of one of her seniors, Intan applied to a Japanese automotive firm ('J-Automotive') for her industrial attachment. After successfully getting through two rounds of interviews, Intan chose the customer relations department as her base as she was interested in this particular field. During the attachment, Intan was given the role of customer relations intern for J-Automotive.

Ckina, Administration Division Assistant, *M-Telecoms*, Perak: According to Ckina, being part of the Malaysian telecommunications industry had always been her dream since starting her studies at the A&M Faculty. Hence, Ckina applied to a government-linked private telecommunications provider ('M-Telecoms') for her attachment and was accepted after a telephone interview. M-Telecoms gave Ckina several choices for her actual placement. Ckina chose the role of temporary assistant with the administration division at a branch of M-Telecoms near her home town, a role that she said suited her administration and management background.

Teeya, Assistant to the Chief Secretary, *L-Engineering*, Perak: Teeya applied to two international companies in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur for her attachment and she was accepted by both. However, as her family wanted her to stay closer to home, she reapplied and was accepted by an engineering consulting firm ('L-Engineering') in her home town. She did not have to attend an interview because the company was partly owned by a friend of her family. For her attachment, Teeya was given the role of assistant to the company's chief secretary and placed in the management department of L-Engineering.

Agnes, Public Relations Intern, *B-Media*, Kuala Lumpur: Agnes described herself as a people person and she had her mind set on becoming a public relations professional, even though her diploma was in administration and management (she planned to do a first degree in public relations and mass communication after graduation). Agnes applied to two media companies for her industrial attachment: a television station and a publishing house in the

Malaysian capital. After being interviewed and accepted by the latter ('B-Media'), Agnes requested to be attached to the public relations department. During the attachment period, she was given the role of public relations intern for B-Media.

Kieyu, Corporate Communications Assistant, P-Industries, Kuala Lumpur: For Kieyu, who saw himself as a hands-on person, there was only one place for him to go for his industrial attachment: the manufacturing plant of one of Malaysia's automotive giants ('P-Industries'). Kieyu was fortunate as his father holds a senior position in that company and he was accepted partly due to this fact (even though his father did not support the choice he made). Kieyu was given the role of assistant in the corporate communications division of P-Industries which the company deemed relevant to his background. Kieyu accepted this even though he originally wanted to be placed in the manufacturing division.

Syful, Creative Assistant, T-Realties, Kuala Lumpur: According to Syful, he is more a creative-type than a management-type person. With actual working experience under his belt, Syful applied to a transnational real estate development firm ('T-Realties') to do his industrial attachment. He explicitly asked to work with the advertising and promotions department of T-Realties and was given the role of creative assistant in that department. Even though Syful deviated from his field of study on campus, he was accepted by T-Realties based mainly on his previous working experience and his abilities in writing and carrying out media-related promotions.

Fadil, Legal Department Intern, J-Incorporated, Johor: Amongst the eight participants, Fadil was the most experienced worker and is the oldest within this group of undergraduates from the A&M Faculty. With his extensive working experience, Fadil applied to a Malaysian government-linked multinational corporation ('J-Incorporated') and was accepted without having to take any tests or participate in interviews. As he did not specify which department he wanted to be attached to, Fadil was asked by the human resources division to be an intern at the legal department. Fadil was also the only participant to travel out from his home state to complete the attachment.

In the next two sections, I share findings mainly from the extensive textual data provided by these participants. These findings are clustered under themes that cut across their lived experiences within their Bumiputera Malay campus community.

5.3. Languages as part of life in a Bumiputera campus community

The lives of my participants were inextricably linked to their participation in their campus community, for instance, within small friendship groups, in the A&M Faculty and also the wider undergraduate community in their Bumiputera-only campus. In this section, I explore the different roles of languages within these contexts to understand their links to the process of identity construction. Two themes will be highlighted to explore these roles. The first is Bumiputera Malay identity and languages on campus. The second theme relates to language use within friendship groups as an identity (construction) strategy whilst still keeping to the *adat* of living within a Bumiputera Malay community.

The first theme explores some of the intricate links between languages and identities, both personal and social, on this campus. Research literature on identity construction suggests that languages are “the most ‘visible’ symbol” (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 102) of belonging within communities. For instance, a certain language can be used to portray different facets of ethnic, religious and national identities. Studies on language and identity construction within the Malaysian context also point to the existence of this social reality, particularly when referring to the lives of the Bumiputera Malay majority. Other than ethnic identity, the mother tongue of the Malays has deep ties to religious and national identities (S. K. Lee, 2001, 2003; Mohd-Asraf, 2004, 2005). Due in part to the complex interconnections between the ethnicity, religion and language of the Bumiputera Malays, Malaysian researchers argue for the existence of an essentialised Bumiputera Malay identity (see, for example, Rajadurai, 2010a, 2010b). It is difficult to ignore some essentialised manifestations of Bumiputera Malay identity. On the other hand, to pin down Bumiputera Malay identity exclusively to ethnicity, religion and language might not reflect the lived experiences of the eight participants. Navigating the *adat* of living within a Malay community and understanding the shared culture of that community are examples of the process of identity construction that extends beyond ethnicity, religion and language.

The second theme highlights one of the most useful strategies the participants have adopted to adhere to the *adat* of living within their Bumiputera-only community yet still explore identities that might be useful for their futures through languages: the formation of friendship groups. These small intimate groups were safe places for the participants to learn about and use English and Mandarin, whilst avoiding some of the stigmas linked to students on campus who were perceived as rude by the majority (due partly to their language choices and the identities that they projected to others). This strategy is interesting as it extends the findings of researchers in similar contexts in Malaysia (for example, S. K. Lee, 2001; Rajadurai, 2011). My findings also indicate that the eight participants were fully aware of the *adat* of living on campus. In the presence of others within their community they normally engaged in shared practices, for instance, by widely using Bahasa Melayu. At the same time, being Malay and Bumiputera do not necessarily mean that they must and/or will only stick to BM in defining themselves. And so, their friendship groups became safe spaces to express themselves in whatever language they chose. In this manner, the participants were able to use the languages that they know to construct their campus identities. Drawing on representative cases, findings that relate to these themes will now be examined.

5.3.1. Bumiputera Malay identity and languages on campus

My discussion in this section begins by looking at what it means to be or not to be seen as Bumiputera Malay for my participants. Starting with their general opinions regarding their Bumiputera Malay identity, I link these to their lives within this Bumiputera-only campus community. I also discuss the campus language environment to explore how this is linked to the lives of the participants and their identities on campus.

Numerical data gleaned from my survey raised some questions about the way links between Bumiputera Malay identity and language use were felt by undergraduates from the A&M Faculty. On the one hand, results for items 53 and 54 relating to language and the self, suggest that most students from the faculty did not feel that the languages they learned and used affected them at the personal level (see Table 5-5). On the other, when it comes to language use at the social level, more than 35% of the students felt that it was difficult for them to use languages other than Bahasa Melayu within this campus community (see item 50, Table 5-6). Additionally, more than 25% felt that the languages they used on campus made it difficult for them 'to belong' within their Bumiputera-only community (see item 52, Table 5-6). I suggest some likely explanations for these results, for instance, a gap between the

self/individual in contrast to others/group (within this community) where the power of the group strongly impacts the campus lives of individual students. Textual data from the eight main participants shed further light on these survey findings.

When asked to share background stories about their campus lives, all participants made explicit references to Bumiputera Malay identity and how this was linked, in many ways, to their language use. Although each participant had slightly different opinions regarding this identity category, upon closer examination two groups emerged. The first consists of Eizat, Intan, Ckina, Kieyu and Fadil. These participants saw themselves as “just a normal Malay”, a person who uses “BM nearly all the time ... a Muslim and an IPTA [public university] student” (Ckina, i1, 118-119). Whilst all five participants talked about themselves as being “basically Malay”, for Eizat and Fadil, their Malay selves were also tied to their Bumiputera socio-political identity. As Fadil tried to explain:

I am Malay, Bumiputera ... the difference? Well, Malay is race. Bumiputera is like a politics thing, like our university. They're same but different. There are different *Bumis* [Bumiputeras] but just one Malay group. In Malaysia, Malays are Islam and use BM ... but not all Bumis are like us. It's hard to talk about these. You must study [Malaysian] history first. (Fadil, i1, 114-118)

His attempts at explaining differences and similarities between Malays and Bumiputeras reflected the difficulties faced by a small number of Malay individuals to refer to themselves as Bumiputeras perhaps, like Fadil said, because it is “a politics thing”. But, even if Fadil faced difficulties in trying to see himself as Bumiputera, he highlighted an implication of him becoming Bumiputera: having access to a Bumiputera-only university education.

For the participants in my research, studying at a Bumiputera-exclusive university (as opposed to public universities that also take in students from other ethnic groups) is a privilege afforded to them by the Malaysian Federal Constitution. Whilst some did not like the fact that on campus they did not have the opportunity to mingle with other ethnic groups and they were aware that they would never face healthy competition (academically) with other ethnic groups, in general, participants felt that being students on this campus was just a normal part of their lives. In addition, even without the presence of other ethnic groups, they argued that they were in a good position to better themselves academically, for instance, due to the languages that they learned on campus. Kieyu's comment highlighted this:

I am a Malay guy because in my *IC* [Malaysian identity card] it's written I'm Malay and also Islam. And, I can study here also. BM is our natural language but doesn't

mean if you learn English you become *orang putih* [a Westerner]. ... In our campus we learn so much English and Chinese to make you more superb. For me, this is very good for us [the Malays]. (Kieyu, i1, 254-259)

I asked Kieyu how he could become “more superb” just by learning English and Mandarin when he did not have the opportunity to use these languages with native speakers. He answered that this was not a problem because, like the other participants, he saw the attachment as an opportunity to apply the language and communication skills he had acquired over the last five semesters. For him, just because other public universities are more inclusive (ethnically), this does not necessarily mean that students in those institutions will learn together and use each other’s languages.

As for the second group of participants, Teeya, Agnes and also Syful preferred not to define themselves as Bumiputeras and/or Malays when asked to talk about their campus lives. This was perhaps a reflection of some unpleasant experiences they had on campus. It was also a reflection of alternate identities that they constructed: Teeya sees herself as “Chinese-Malay”, Syful is “strongly Anglicized”, whilst Agnes is an “*orang KL*” (literally ‘people from Kuala Lumpur’ this term carries positive connotations but it is really a derogatory social label as I will further clarify). For Teeya, her mixed-ethnic heritage (Chinese and Malay) made her proud to be Malaysian. She preferred to be seen as Chinese-Malay instead of Bumiputera Malay. The main reason why she accepted a place in this university was the highly subsidised fees (i.e., very low compared to other public universities). But, being “nearly Malay but then not really [Malay]” (Teeya, i1, 263), she found it difficult to get along with most of the students in her campus community. She felt as if there were “invisible walls” around her that made it difficult for most students, especially those in her faculty, to get to know her personally. As a result, Teeya said she “retreated” into herself and only became close friends with a few students (in her faculty).

The only aspect of herself that Teeya said endeared her to others was her Mandarin ability. Many students, even those whom she felt disliked her, would approach her for help with their Mandarin assignments and to prepare for their Mandarin tests. Her proficiency in Mandarin was easily the highest compared to the other participants (and perhaps the whole A&M Faculty) because she spent her primary years in a Chinese school (or *Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina*). She also spoke in Chinese (using the Cantonese dialect) as her “natural language” at home. As an avid learner of languages she also invested in Japanese, learning

her fourth language during her long semester breaks using the income from her part-time work. Teeya explained how languages shaped her sense of self and the frustration she felt for not being able to share her passion (for languages) with others on campus:

I'm a hybrid *Ah Moi*³ [laughs]. At home, we use Cantonese and BM because we are *Peranakan*⁴. ... My grandma and mom spoke Cantonese so I picked it up. I also use BM because dad's Malay, with sisters English. I also love *Nihongo* [Japanese]. I always try to write *kanji* [Japanese scripts]. Languages are fun. ... But, if you have no one to share your passion [on campus], when you must mix with only one gang [the Malays], it's not so. (Teeya, i1, 264-275)

For Syful and Agnes, even though they are Malays they both felt that their “Malayness” or lack of it made their campus lives less than idyllic (especially for Syful). Syful said that within the A&M Faculty he was misunderstood, especially by male students who liked to make fun of him and accuse him of things. He was brought up in an upper-middle class family in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. He was sent to an international school because “my parents wanted me to be English-educated, just like them” (Syful, n1, 15). Accordingly, he became “strongly socially Anglicized” (Syful, n1, 19). He also preferred a ‘Western’ style-of-life compared to a typically Malay one. His decision to study administration and management was largely to appease his parents who wanted him to become a high-ranking *Pegawai Tadbir* (see Chapter 4) in the Malaysian civil service. Given the choice, he would have preferred to work rather than to study. It was on campus, Syful wrote, “that things I always took for granted became such big issues for the others [students in the A&M Faculty]” (Syful, n1, 47-48). These “issues” include his preference for everything English and Western, his refusal to be part of shared practices on campus like going for mass prayers (for Syful religion is a very personal matter) and the fact that he loved to debate things openly (which made him unpopular with students but well-liked by most of his tutors).

Because of the difficulties he faced, Syful (like Teeya) isolated himself from most of the students in his faculty. He instead chose to become close friends with students from other faculties, especially those doing arts and design courses. Strangely, said Syful, the same students from his faculty who questioned his Malayness would always approach him to edit and proofread their individual and group assignments (which, more often than not, must be written in English). But, unlike Teeya, he charged them for his “professional services”. For

³ *'Ah Moi'* or *'Amoi'* is a local term to refer to a female Chinese adolescent.

⁴ *'Peranakan Chinese'* or *'Nyonya Baba'* are descendants of Chinese immigrants to the Malay Archipelago in the 15th and 16th century. They have fully assimilated Malay customs and are able to speak Bahasa Melayu fluently together with their native tongue.

him, this was a way to get back at these students and make some additional income in the process. Whilst he acknowledged that he was generally disliked, Syful was well-known as one of the best students in his faculty when it comes to the skill of writing, both in English and Bahasa Melayu. In his words:

This paradox is bloody amusing. They [students in his faculty] said I am Westernized, anti-Malay, anti-Islam whatnots. For each accusation I can give my counter-argument. ... start with this – “You hicks say I am a Western pretender pretending to be Malay – is this also why my BM is better than all of you?” (Syful, n1, 53-58)

After reading this narrative, I asked Sfyul whether he actually said the above to the other students as a critique of their Malayness. Syful, who is always open to “intelligent debates”, even those that border on personal attacks, admitted even if he were to argue with these students (which he did on countless occasions), it would never stop them accusing and labelling him negatively. Both Syful and Agnes experienced being given negative labels by students in the A&M Faculty, sometimes leading to open conflicts. One example that they gave was being labelled as *orang KL*. Although this term carries some positive connotations, it is by and large a derogatory term to suggest a person who is self-indulgent, ‘wild’ and a social pretender who does not want to mix with the average crowd. Agnes recalled:

That’s what the seniors started to call me during induction. They all called me *orang KL*. ... Then the seniors said, “Hey, you talk like a Hollywood star. You think you so *stylo* [stylish]?” They picked on me and make fun on everything I say or do. At first I was so sad. Later, I didn’t care. (Agnes, i1, 403-409)

When asked to reflect on her story, Agnes believes that this label was based on her language use (“I usually mix English with BM when talking”), slang (“I talk like how I talk with my friends in KL”) and even her choice of attire (“They were always saying things about my clothes”). However, instead of socially retreating like Teeya and Syful, Agnes chose the opposite: she totally ignored students who openly criticised her, and pushed herself into the middle of her campus community. She participated actively in different campus activities and eventually became the elected leader of students from the A&M Faculty after garnering support from her tutors. In this sense, Agnes’ *orang KL* identity actually became the source of her personal strength, giving her the chance to shape her campus life in a constructive way (I will go further into this in Chapter 6). She even said that it if was not for that label (*orang KL*) she would not have had the chance to show others her true self. For Agnes, her experience was just part of life within a Bumiputera Malay community that called for a deep understanding of the shared culture of the people around her:

It's the culture and also the people. Yes, it's the culture of the university because for me, this university is just a branch campus in the middle of a jungle [laughs]. ... This is what my parents call *hidup dalam kampung Melayu* [life in a Malay kampong]. (Agnes, i1, 415-418)

I doubt that most undergraduates on this campus would be able to emulate her, especially if they were not perceived as “normal” Malays by the majority. Still, by refusing to play the victim when she was singled out and negatively labelled by her seniors in the first semester, Agnes proved that it is possible to project a different identity (i.e., *orang KL*) and still be an important part of this community.

The findings above highlight how life in a Malay community is organised around conditions that reflect the Malay constructs of *adat* and *jiwa*. Expectations are put on members of such communities, for instance, on ways of thinking and behaving. Life is also organised based on group mentality whereby members of Malay communities are obliged to conform to the shared culture of the majority lest they be positioned in a negative way by others. Hence, an individual's background and personal choices (e.g., preference for language use, style of speaking, choice of attire, etc.) will undoubtedly impact her or his life on campus. Seeing that Teeya, Syful and Agnes all had strong opinions on this matter, I raised the issue of shared campus culture with the rest of the participants. Fadil's viewpoint seems to be most useful in terms of learning how to live successfully within a Bumiputera Malay community:

On campus? Go with the flow. Be cool. Don't take things to heart. Don't try too hard [to be different]. Sometimes you can't be yourself. You always hide more than what you show. But that's life ... *adatalah kalau hidup berkampung* [this is the *adat* when living in a Malay community]. (Fadil, i1, 235-238)

Like Fadil, the participants argue that there were many aspects of campus culture that influenced them on a daily basis. But, rather than viewing these as largely negative influences on their identities the participants, in their own ways, chose to rationalise these external influences and accept them as part of their campus lives. Returning to Fadil's list of do's and don'ts on campus, the most noteworthy point he raised relates to the organisation of campus life based on the Malay *adat*: one must *know* and always *follow* the *adat* of living within a Malay community (i.e., “*hidup berkampung*”). Undoubtedly, the *adat* strongly impacted the lives of the participants. Problems arise when shared rules of the *adat* are broken, as I will further elaborate.

Findings from my survey suggest that there were different domains of language use that every undergraduate must learn to navigate within this Bumiputera-only campus. In public places, for instance, Bahasa Melayu is the default language for everyone. Fadil's observation is representative of the shared experiences of my participants: "On campus for BM, well, I use BM with everyone ... in the faculty, with lecturers. Basically all the time it's BM" (Fadil, i1, 9-10). And so, for Bahasa Melayu, the participants said that they did not even think about this matter because using BM was just natural for them. Even for Teeya, Syful and Agnes who were critical about what they perceived to be norms of Malay culture (on campus), "If you talk about BM we use it every day and everywhere. Easy to say, BM ... is there all the time" (Syful, i1, 8-10). She added:

BM is the most common language. ... For me, of course I also try to use English and Mandarin, but I have my own personal objectives to improve myself. How can I explain this? Like this, British people talk with British people, they don't use BM right? [laughs] They use English. So, of course, Malay people naturally talk to Malay people in BM. (Agnes, i1, 10-15)

It is interesting that Agnes chose to draw her conclusions on the use of BM with reference to shared ethnicity. The notion that Malays naturally talk to other Malays in their mother tongue reflects the kind of essentialised identity outlined in related research literature (see, for example, S. K. Lee, 2003; Rajadurai, 2011). The relationship between ethnicity and language use in the Malaysian context was so strongly felt that it became a constant theme across my data sources and in all life phases of the participants from campus to working to future life. At the same time, some of the participants also talked about language use on campus as a way to demonstrate to others that they are Malays:

For me, it's difficult to talk about which language I use. Definitely I use BM so much, I am Malay. ... I also know many languages and I can use them. But when people talk to me in BM, how can I reply in Arabic? In Malay, we say *kurang ajar* [very rude]. If people are talking in BM, why use another language? (Eizat, i1, 59-63)

The term "*kurang ajar*" that Eizat uses is linked to behaviours that do not symbolise the Malay *adat*. It is clearly inappropriate to not use Bahasa Melayu in a Bumiputera Malay community or when others are using it. He also said that, on campus, students who flouted this unwritten *adat* might incite negative responses from the majority. This is because, for some Malays, it constitutes an act of insolence or "*biadap*". Though Eizat did not employ the terms *adat* or *jiwa*, he outlines some of the repercussions of not adhering to these Malay constructs on campus: "A few students I know are like that, *agak biadap sikit* [a bit insolent]. For me, you really don't need to act like *orang putih* on campus too much" (Eizat, i1, 71-73).

I asked Eizat whether these students were *biadap* because they used English. In his opinion, the issue at hand was not the language but the “image” of these students (who coincidentally used English). Further, Eizat highlighted some of the *orang putih* images projected by these students on campus: having coloured (dyed) hair, wearing inappropriate clothes, talking and laughing loudly in public spaces, making fun of random strangers and constantly trying to grab the attention of other students through “cheap publicity”. Fadil’s observation supported Eizat’s views:

Just my opinion, I know some students who are *pelik* [strange]. They sit in their happening [cool] group in the café, then talk loudly [in English] in their fake accents. They laugh when we walk past. I think they look down on us ... maybe they think this place is Beverly Hills. ... Maybe they think they are cheerleaders. (Fadil, i1, 245-250)

Some Malaysian researchers argue that in Bumiputera Malay undergraduate communities, using languages other than Bahasa Melayu is “an attempt to ‘show off’, being ‘boastful’ ... elitist, and a betrayal of the Malay cultural identity and the Malay language” (Wong, K. S. Lee, S. K. Lee & Yaacob, 2012, p. 149). The experiences of the participants in my study suggest that different interpretations are equally plausible. The issue is not just about showing off, boasting or betraying Malay culture and Malayness (through language); it is also about knowing and following the *adat* of living within Malay communities. Flouting the unwritten rules of the *adat*, as in the case of the students in Eizat’s observation, will be deemed as *kurang ajar* and *biadap*, two characteristics that violate the Malay *jiwa*. As a result, these individuals (like Syful, for example) will be perceived as the Other (see Chapter 2 for a description of this identity construct) or students who try too hard to be different from the majority on campus. This is not to say that these issues are not problematic but as the next section will illustrate, there are strategies that Bumiputera Malay students can adopt to be part of their campus community and still construct and express their unique individual identities.

In this sense, using English, Mandarin or other languages is not an issue (in itself) within this Bumiputera-exclusive campus community. According to the eight participants, English, for example, was still widely used in public domains even though Bahasa Melayu maintained its dominance. Nonetheless, because English is also the medium of instruction on campus it enjoyed the same status as Bahasa Melayu in the academic domain (e.g., during lectures and discussions). As for Mandarin, its usage was normally confined to the academic domain. Still, students from the A&M Faculty used Mandarin in public, for instance, to show their shared identity as administration and management students and also as a “short-cut” to share

privileged information amongst themselves (as they were the only group of students who were taught this third language). My data suggest that there is a degree of fluidity to language use within this community. Teeya explained:

Ours is a university for *Bumis*. ... Like everyone, I use BM with friends, lecturers, everyone. English, I use all the time during lectures, with my lecturers and my close friends. Some lecturers prefer to speak totally in English with us. Mandarin, it's normally in class. I always use it with faculty friends because they want me to train them [in Mandarin]. ... But, this is Malaysia. Mostly, we just use whatever. We mix everything like *rojak*⁵. (Teeya, i1, 20-27)

Her admission about using “whatever” language (i.e., mixing between Bahasa Melayu, English, Mandarin and other local languages) is confirmed by the other participants and supported by numerical data from the survey. Items 37, 49 and 51 from the survey examined the occurrence of code-switching/mixing within this campus community (see Table 5-6). Results from these survey items suggest that this linguistic phenomenon was quite prevalent. For instance, for item 37 that gauged the ability to code-switch between Bahasa Melayu and other languages, more than 70% of students from the A&M Faculty felt that they could achieve this quite easily and naturally in daily interactions within their campus community.

In essence, Teeya and the other main participants used languages that made them feel comfortable (although they also mentioned that some languages were more commonly used in certain domains). They also reported code-mixing constantly on campus. The fact that code-mixing happened nearly all the time makes it difficult to propose that using languages other than Bahasa Melayu is tantamount to betraying Bumiputera Malay identity. As Teeya observed, code-mixing is very much part of Malaysian identity. This idea echoed in Intan's comment:

In our social life, almost all the time we use BM but it's not like totally. How can I say this? Everything comes in [during the conversation], especially English. We also know Mandarin. Although it's basically just for Mandarin class, we also use Mandarin for fun. So, everywhere we go (on campus) we just talk the way we talk. If you didn't ask me, I don't even think about it [laughs]. (Intan, i1, 11-16)

Further questioning revealed that even participants who said that they used a lot of English acknowledged that they were constantly mixing the languages that they knew. Furthermore, none of the participants reported that they stuck exclusively to Bahasa Melayu in campus

⁵ '*Rojak*' literally is a local snack made from fruits and vegetables mixed in rojak sauce. Colloquially, this word means a mishmash, a mix of anything and everything.

public domains. Although BM was dominant, code-mixing happened all the time, sometimes even during lectures and with their tutors. The fact that students from this faculty were also able to use Mandarin contributed further to their ability to mix these languages.

Summing up the findings in this section, Bumiputera and Malay identities are strongly linked to language use within this campus community. Even for participants who chose not to define themselves as Bumiputera Malays from the outset, the impacts of these interconnections were strongly felt on campus. Not being accepted as a “normal Malay” person might lead to some negative repercussions due to shared campus culture built on the foundations of Malay *adat* and *jiwa*. Nevertheless, being seen as the Other does not rest on language use alone as there are other factors to take into account like style of speaking and even choice of attire. The participants also highlighted the naturalness of using Bahasa Melayu on campus. Although there were certain domains where certain languages would be used, in truth, code-mixing happened all the time. Most interestingly, the findings in this section illustrate that the participants neither perceived language use as a serious problem within their community nor did they view life on campus as seriously stifling the re/construction of their identities (through language). As the next section will show, on campus, there are ways to adhere to the *adat* of living within a Malay community and still construct unique personal identities that might be useful for their future selves through languages.

5.3.2. Language use in friendship groups as identity strategy

From her research on language and identity construction in the Malaysian context, S. K. Lee (2001, 2003) suggests that Malaysians, regardless of ethnic identity, need to adopt a strategy to deal with non-mother tongue language use that she calls ‘identity masking’. In day-to-day communication, particularly in public domains, identity masking allows “participants to switch and ‘mask’ their identities depending on the changing contexts” (Wong, K. S. Lee, S. K. Lee & Yaacob, 2012, p. 149). Nevertheless, there are also personal drawbacks related to identity masking. For instance, S. K. Lee reports that most individuals will feel that they have to work hard to hide their true abilities so that they do not upset the majority within their own communities, ethnic or otherwise. As a consequence, these individuals might feel that they are just actors and ‘fakes’ within their own communities; they cannot feel the positive sense of belonging that normally comes from being members of such communities.

In this section, I discuss a finding that goes beyond identity masking within this Bumiputera-only community. It takes into account the potential of agency and the power of the group in the process of identity construction. As explained earlier, the participants highlighted the importance of knowing appropriate behaviour and following shared customs when living in their Bumiputera Malay community. One of the most imposing unwritten customs within this community relates to the appropriateness of language use: it is inappropriate to not use Bahasa Melayu when it is widely spoken (in the immediate environment) and when others are using the language. Even though this does not necessarily mean that one automatically becomes the Other by using English or Mandarin, the participants were aware of this possibility especially when it comes to English. Students who acted like *orang putih* on campus will quickly be labelled as rude and insolent. To lessen the possibility of being seen as the Other, the participants relied heavily on code-mixing in their daily interactions. Still, code-mixing only goes so far in terms of helping them to use the languages they know to explore new identities. And so, they turned to the closest friends, forging small friendship groups as a strategy for identity construction through languages.

My data suggest that these small, intimate groups acted as social support networks for undergraduates who wanted to learn more about English and/or Mandarin. Accordingly, these groups opened up possibilities for the future by allowing their members to use English and/or Mandarin to explore new identities linked to the world of work and their future working lives. Three common characteristics of these friendship groups are as follows. First is the relatively small size of these groups. They were usually made up of three to four individuals (including the participant). Some participants reported belonging to larger groups but even these consisted of fewer than seven or eight members. Second is the mode in which these groups operate. They were organised based on convenience, meaning that these friends usually stayed in the same hostel room or quite close to each other. Many group members were also not from the A&M Faculty. At the same time, they shared amongst others, a common objective of increasing proficiency in other languages (especially English). Kieyu explained:

I have like a clique ... three of us including me. With them I speak English so much. They are from different faculties but we all live on the same [hostel] level. When the three of us are together, automatically we use English to speak, to practise ourselves. ... This is fantastic to prepare me to go for work [the attachment]. (Kieyu, i1, 11-17)

The third characteristic of these groups is they operate both in public and private domains on campus, although the latter is more common. For instance, members of one group might set a

certain time and place to get together on campus and practise using English with one another. Members of another group might just use English or other languages informally as they work on their assignments in their hostel rooms. Again, the latter is more common within this campus community. Ckina belonged to a group of seven female students, all from the A&M Faculty, who referred to themselves as “*Geng Batu*” [Rockers Gang]. In her own words:

I express myself in English and BM. ... When I share my personal feelings and I want to tell people what I really feel I use English also, but only with friends who are very, very close to me ... seven of us, *Geng Batu*. When we do assignments together we totally use English. If you used even one word BM, you must put *dua kupang* [twenty cents] in the snack food jar [laughs]. (Ckina, i1, 62-69)

Although not all of the participants would consider themselves to be members of close-knit friendship groups (Agnes, for instance), all shared stories about how certain students helped them to increase their English and Mandarin proficiency. These small, loose social support networks were beneficial for their identity construction not just by helping the participants to bond with other individuals and feel a sense of belonging, these groups also afforded them the space to learn and use languages other than Bahasa Melayu on campus in a supportive manner. Teeya, who found living within this community difficult due to her Chinese-Malay identity, shared her story:

Living on campus taught me so much. It is not easy in this environment. I sometimes feel out of place. There are masks around me. They have nothing to do but finding my faults. Lucky for me I have my sisters [her friendship group]. I can be myself ... say anything to them. We support each other. We hang out and study together. (Teeya, n1, 115-119)

When asked to share more about her experience within her friendship group, Teeya said that her group members saw her as “*lǎoshī*” or teacher of Mandarin; it is an identity that she really appreciates because in her (Chinese) culture, *lǎoshī* is a wise person who is admired and respected by everyone. Furthermore, she felt deeply honoured because *lǎoshī* is normally a term-of-address reserved for “old wise Chinese grandpas”. And so, *lǎoshī* Teeya would tutor all her group members in Mandarin and they, in return, helped her in other non-language subjects. She wrote:

They called me *lǎoshī* and actually I loved that nickname. I feel I can share part of my [Chinese] tradition with them. I try so hard to tutor them even when I am tired. I always make time to help the others ... I do not have that many sweet memories on campus but this is definitely one of them. (Teeya, n1, 125-129)

Teeya also observed that some students in her faculty wanted to be close to her just because they wanted help with their Mandarin. Sadly, when she was unable to help some of these students she became the victim of backstabbing (leading her to refer to these individuals as ‘masks’ in her narratives and interviews). But, whatever negative experiences she went through, for Teeya, ‘sisters’ in her small friendship groups made her campus life tolerable.

For someone like Syful who confessed that he did not really want to be in the A&M Faculty, his own friendship group was made up exclusively of a few students from the Arts and Design (AD) Faculty. He found that these students were more accepting of him than students from his own faculty who constantly made his campus life miserable with their “incessant bullying, venomous accusations and utter lies” (Syful, n1, 61). He said that his friendship group brought him solace on days when he felt like running away from campus. In addition, Syful highly appreciated the opportunities he got to share his personal interests with members of his group:

[They] supported me, told me to be patient when others called me anti-Muslim. ... I love to read Cosmopolitan, InStyle, Vogue ... even this became a huge issue. Crazy! I said, “You all don’t understand, you guys probably can’t even read!” I was so angry ... but my AD friends were open. We talked fashion, worked on sketches all that. And, they always ask for help to check their grammar. They’re creative but not good in writing ... I’m their fashion editor. (Syful, i1, 676-684)

To end this section, whilst the stories shared by Teeya and Syful illustrate the darker side of Bumiputera Malay campus life, on the whole, the eight participants were able to lead productive lives within their campus community. Although they felt differing degrees of acceptance and of being part of this community, they were all able to use the languages that they know to pursue their personal interests, at least with members of their friendship groups. With the support of these intimate social networks, the participants were also able to construct identities with positive potential for themselves through the languages that they know (for instance, by becoming ‘*lǎoshī*’ or ‘fashion editor’). The next section continues my discussion of campus life, focusing on the experiences of the participants as final preparations were made for their attachments.

5.4. Crossing borders: campus to workplace, student to professional

The industrial attachment is such an important milestone in the lives of the eight participants not just because it determines their eligibility to graduate, it also signals their formal entrance

into the world of work. In truth, the attachment period involves crossing 'borders' both physical (from campus to workplace) and ideological (from student to professional). In this section, I discuss some of the steps taken by the participants to prepare themselves to conclude their campus lives and begin their working lives. Two themes are highlighted. The first relates to the experience of securing places for the attachment using their language abilities as part of their 'passports' to enter the world of work, and the second illustrates how the participants imagined their work-related roles before the attachment began.

All eight participants told me about the ways in which the languages that they know helped them to secure their places in the Malaysian private sector for the attachment. Findings that relate to their collective experiences will open the discussion in this section. As they prepared to move from campus life to working life and to change from university students to young professionals, the many roles of languages became evident in my data. For example, Ckina believed that languages would help her to open doors "to go further after this diploma" (Ckina, n1, 18). For Agnes, her language ability is her "passport to fly to strange, interesting places to get my dream job" (Agnes, n1, 29-30). The idea that languages act as passports to help individuals cross different spaces to get to certain places has also been explored by other language and identity researchers (see, for example, Blommaert, 2005; Rampton, 1995, 1998, 2010; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

The second theme I address in this section is closely related to the first. In the final weeks and days before the attachment began, participants actively imagined how their working lives might play out. Unlike students from other faculties, the industrial attachment is such a central component of life within the A&M Faculty that all the participants felt as if their five semesters on campus were merely a preparation for this attachment. Rampton (1998) refers to this (i.e., preparing to start the attachment) as 'crossings'. Crossings are critical milestones in the lives of individuals because they involve what Blommaert (2005) describes as a momentous movement between identity 'spaces and places'. Moving between spaces and places are thus deeply meaningful events in the process of identity construction, particularly when 'border crossing' is happening for the first time. Moreover, crossing physical and ideological borders are never easy. Other than the lengthy preparations involved, individuals also needed to deal with the question of legitimacy once they had crossed these borders. Drawing on representative examples, findings relating to these themes are discussed below.

5.4.1. Securing the attachment through languages

According to the eight participants, several factors helped them to secure places for their attachments, for instance, academic performance, past working experience and their language and communication abilities. This section focuses on their language and communication abilities, mainly on the way these were linked to the process of gaining access to the Malaysian private sector prior to the actual attachment period. It also looks at how the participants planned to use their attachments to explore career paths that were not directly related to the field of administration and management. Data from the survey suggest that undergraduates from the A&M Faculty regard language proficiency as one of the most important abilities they need to focus on before starting their attachments. Most of them also associated language and communication ability with professional identity (see Table 5-7); the higher the ability, the stronger the identity becomes. The beliefs of the student population within the faculty reflect more generally the reality of the Malaysian labour market.

According to the participants, although differing degrees of importance were placed on language ability by their prospective employers, proficiency in English was of utmost importance in all institutions within the Malaysian private sector. Some employers also required high proficiency in Bahasa Melayu and an additional language, which normally means Mandarin Chinese. Language requirements also differed depending on the business sector and department, and/or work role that the participants requested. As mentioned, nearly all participants applied for work roles that were not directly related to their university course of study. Three of the reasons cited are as follows: interest in a career line not related to administration and management, desire to explore other career options after graduation, and desire to use the attachment as an opportunity to realise their dream careers. Stories shared by three participants are particularly illuminating with regard to each of these reasons and to how they are connected to the process of identity construction through language ability.

The first is Eizat's story, an undergraduate who was interested in a career not related to administration and management. The other participants wanted to be attached to profit-making companies and organisations but he had a different plan. Initially, Eizat said, "I thought I just want to get experience in the government because I have work experience in two private companies before this" (Eizat, n2, 2-4). But he changed his mind after another temporary work stint during his semester break. During that period, he worked as a promotional staff member for a community healthcare campaign at P-Hospital. He was asked

to distribute informational leaflets about healthcare to the public. He was also required to provide free basic health tests, for example, to check blood pressure levels and body mass index. After proving his abilities, Eizat was accepted to do his attachment in this health organisation, which is an independent business entity of the Penang state government.

Eizat gave two reasons to rationalise his “strange choice”. First, although he admitted that people might think him odd (for choosing P-Hospital for his attachment), Eizat said that he is fond of corporate social responsibility, a topic covered in his diploma studies. For him, corporate social responsibility was strongly connected to his passion in volunteering and carrying out community-based social projects. So, his attachment to P-Hospital would allow him to work on things that he felt really passionate about. He further explained that in his faculty he was trained to do public relations work and to successfully organise public and corporate events. The second reason Eizat gave was his ability to communicate and work with members of the public. He enjoyed doing this kind of work because he liked to work “in the frontline” meeting people and making a difference in their lives. He believed that one of the main reasons why he was accepted by P-Hospital was his ability to communicate with people, especially in Mandarin:

Most of the people coming to that hospital are Chinese. So, I used my Mandarin ... they were impressed [laughs]. I love meeting, talking to people, helping people. Then, I became close to the manager for the community outreach. ... He asked about my studies. I told him about this [attachment]. He said, “Great!” They are looking for a project assistant [for 2011]. ... So, I said yes. (Eizat, i1, 230-235)

He was also delighted about the fact that he would be working for a predominantly Chinese organisation and getting the opportunity to “learn from the hardworking Chinese” (Eizat, i2, 32). In general, opportunities to learn new things and apply knowledge during the attachment were mentioned by all participants, not only Eizat. The attachment, in a sense, is a proving ground for them and an opportunity of a lifetime. He wrote:

I will enjoy this although it will be totally different to my course. ... I will get so much new knowledge. I can also train my Mandarin and my English. I will have to promote good reproductive health and things like that. It'll be so interesting. (Eizat, n2, 26-30)

Syful also applied for an attachment experience that was not directly related to his diploma. His story illustrates the second reason I reported (for the choices made by participants): wanting to explore other career options after graduation. Like Eizat, Syful's attachment was shaped by his personal aspirations and past workplace experience. Having worked for two

years in the local print media industry, he was also the most capable participant in terms of writing skills, both in English and Bahasa Melayu. His experience as a copywriter and editorial assistant strengthened his resolve to look for other career options for, and after, the attachment period. From his interviews and narratives, I also detected that he was largely unhappy with his diploma studies and that he preferred to work for the media or creative industries instead. So, it was surprising to me that Syful chose the role of creative assistant in T-Realties, a real estate development firm, for his attachment.

When I asked him to explain his decision Syful simply replied, “Why not?” He elaborated, “Yeah, it’s a property firm. But they develop very upmarket real estate. ... For me this is to broaden my horizons, my stepping stone to enter the business world through what I can do” (Syful, i1, 408-410). He also wanted to take a break from fashion and lifestyle writing that he did during his extended work stint after secondary school. As a creative assistant in T-Realties, he believed that he would have the chance to learn about “high-end advertorial and promotional activities” in international business firms and enhance his career prospects:

In some ways, I am just extending what I have done before [media writing], but in other ways I am also crossing into unfamiliar territory [the world of business]. ... I am keeping my options open to see what might come my way after I thicken my portfolio of work. (Syful, n1, 85-88)

Most significantly for Syful, he was accepted by T-Realties principally due to his language ability and writing skills (he was really proud of both skills). He recalled being interviewed and accepted by T-Realties due to the fact that he had produced quality written materials in the past:

It was actually an easy interview. They didn’t ask much, they didn’t ask for a lot. I was accepted on the spot. I showed them things I’ve done before, things published in magazines and all that. I think they loved the fact that I am able to do PR write-ups and print ads in English and Malay. (Syful, i1, 418-423)

The choice of a Chinese firm was also a conscious one for Syful. Like Eizat and several other participants, Syful believed in the business acumen of the Malaysian Chinese community. Hence, he said, to get ahead in the world of business one must start by learning from members of this community. Another reason why he wanted to work for T-Realties was his “so-so” proficiency in Mandarin. Unlike the other participants, Syful did not enjoy learning Mandarin on campus because he could not see the relevance of the subject at that time. So, working in a Chinese-owned international firm was a practical way to re-learn Mandarin. In

his view, when it came to languages the only way to increase one's proficiency was by immersing oneself in the target language as compared to learning within the confines of the classroom. Syful raised this point many times during my fieldwork, using himself as an example of a Bumiputera Malay individual who was able to develop English writing skills by getting actual workplace experience right after finishing secondary school.

Agnes is another participant who chose not to go into administration and management for the industrial attachment. Her story illustrates the third reason I mentioned: to use the attachment as an opportunity to realise dream careers. In Agnes' case, her dream career was to become a public relations (PR) practitioner. She cited her dream career as one of the main reasons why she worked hard to "push" herself into the middle of her campus community even when she was negatively labelled by her seniors. By constantly pushing herself into the middle of things and getting under the limelight, she hoped that "when people look at me, they see Agnes this PR Exec" (Agnes, n2, 35-36). Like the other participants, Agnes appreciated having the chance to develop her skills in other subject areas during her diploma studies. For instance, she loved studying event management and, of course, public relations.

At the same time, Agnes felt that the extensive training she received in language-based subjects was helping her to get ready for her PR work role, even though in the past her communication and language abilities had failed her. For her, PR work was strongly tied to language ability because PR practitioners "are always talking and talking and doing professional communicating ... doing promotions to raise the image of the clients or to raise the public awareness about products and services" (Agnes, n1, lines 55-57). So, the five semesters on campus not only helped to increase her confidence in her communication and language skills which she felt she lacked before, but her campus life also helped her to re-imagine her future life as a "real" PR practitioner. Accordingly, this dream career was constantly at the back of her mind as she searched for a suitable business organisation for her attachment. Due to her being very specific about what she wanted, Agnes became the last person in the group of eight to secure her attachment:

In October my aunt said two companies were looking for contract interns. I applied and finally I got into B-Media. During the interview, everything they asked I answered confidently. I wanted to make a strong impression ... I did, I'm so proud of myself. I also begged them to do PR work [laughs]. They said yes. (Agnes, i2, 11-17)

As the next chapter will illustrate, doors that had been shut to Agnes in the past were now wide open. Even though she would only work as an intern for B-Media on a short-term basis during the attachment period, Agnes mentioned the overwhelming positive feelings she felt. For instance, she was proud of herself for being able to impress her interviewers and for answering all their questions confidently using both English and Bahasa Melayu. She was also happy to be carrying out her attachment in B-Media, one of the largest Bumiputera Malay media relations firms in Malaysia. Hence, Agnes felt as if she was finally on her way to becoming a real PR practitioner, the only dream career that she had ever wanted.

To sum up the findings in this section, although I have only presented the stories of Eizat, Syful and Agnes, all eight participants made explicit references to their language repertoire as passports to secure places for their attachments. For some participants, their administration and management skills took a backseat. They firmly believe that it was their communication and language abilities that helped them make a good impression and to be accepted by business entities in the Malaysian private sector. Without a doubt, their success in securing places for the attachments increased their confidence and readiness to become young professionals and to cross the border from campus life to the world of work.

5.4.2. Imagining language use in the world of work

Although the participants were all excited to begin their attachments, many of them were also feeling nervous because the attachment signified an important crossroad in their lives where they must formally leave the campus grounds and enter the world of work. Even though they all had some workplace experiences, for example part-time work during semester breaks, the industrial attachment initiated a process of identity change from university undergraduates to young professionals. As preparations were being made to cross these borders, I asked them to imagine the roles that different languages would play as they started their working lives. From their responses, these roles differed from one workplace to the next. These roles were also largely related to the actual work that they would carry out during the attachment period. On the whole, the participants felt that languages certainly would be central as they start their working lives. The participants can be divided into two groups.

In the first group, Eizat, Intan, Teeya and Syful imagined that Mandarin would play an important role during their attachments, together with English and Bahasa Melayu. They gave two reasons for this. First, they would be working in private companies and organisations

owned either by the Malaysian Chinese business community or foreigners (Japanese and Singaporeans). As such, they envisaged Mandarin to be an important part of the “professional self” that they would project to others within their workplace communities. In Intan’s words:

I know the workers and customers in J-Automotive will use Mandarin. Of course they use English, Malay also but for customers, mostly it’ll be Mandarin or Hokkien [dialect] because it’s Penang⁶. ... So, yeah, if I can be a good communicator in their language [the customers] I think the company will take me [accept as full-time staff] just like that [laughs]. (Intan, i1, 447-453)

Second, they also felt that their language repertoire would allow them to play more prominent professional roles in workplaces dominated by Malaysians who are not Bumiputera Malays. They all felt that they were in a unique position as multilingual professionals. As an example:

In L-Engineering ... more than 90% of the staff are Chinese. They will be excellent in their mother tongue. They will also know English. But BM? Maybe not so much. So maybe, I can be their translator. They do lots of business with *JKR* [Malaysian Public Works Department]. ... Can you guess in what language? Never fear Teeya’s here. (Teeya, i1, 437-442)

The findings above show how these participants imagined the role of languages within their future communities of practice. The findings also show that the participants linked language ability to their professional standing. By being able to draw on the languages they know, they would be able to project a positive image of a competent young professional within their respective workplace communities. The ability to seamlessly change from one language to another in different work-related contexts would also help them to carry out their responsibilities effectively (this turns out to be the case, as I will show in the following chapters). For instance, when they had to deal with members of the public or professional staff members from other organisations, adopting different language identities (for example, “a good communicator” or “their translator”) would enhance their professional image in the eyes of others around them.

The second group, however, did not imagine much use for Mandarin. Instead, they cited the importance of English and Bahasa Melayu in their workplace communities. For Ckina, Agnes, Kieyu and Fadil, the fact that they would be working in government linked companies or large business organisations owned by Bumiputera Malays meant that Bahasa Melayu and

⁶ ‘Hokkien’ is the dominant Chinese dialect in the state of Penang. Other Malaysian states also have dominant spoken Chinese dialects (most commonly, Cantonese).

English would be important languages for them as part of their professional image. Ckina explained:

[M-Telecoms] is a giant business ... but their image is *syarikat Melayu* [Malay-owned company]. Yes, they do business with all Malaysians. So, all languages will be important. But, I think English will be their corporate language like for answering the phone or sending emails or general office stuff. (Ckina, i1, 289-295)

The idea that English is a language that embodies a modern corporate identity was also shared by the other participants in my study. The power and value that they all placed on English was perhaps a reflection of the central role of English in the Malaysian private sector. But there was also another role of English in the eyes of my participants, which was linked to their administration and management background. This role reflects the position of English as the “unofficial second language” (Omar, 2007, p. 354) of multiethnic, multilingual Malaysia:

When you're an admin person, you must deal with people from all walks of life. Like other workers, also your clients. You know in Malaysia we have so many different races, right? You need to deal with everyone. If you use English, maybe this will make it easier ... to deal with people who are not from your race. (Ckina, i1, 316-319)

The other participants shared the same belief: English is the common language of all Malaysians even though Bahasa Melayu is the national language spoken and understood by many, if not all, Malaysians.

Only Kieyu and Fadil imagined that Bahasa Melayu would be prominent in their places of work. Although they acknowledged the importance of English as part of their professional image and as a passport for real career opportunities in the Malaysian private sector, for both of them, Bahasa Melayu would play a central role in the workplaces they would soon enter.

Kieyu wrote:

I will deal with visitors that come to P-Industries. It is our national company ... we must use Malay and maybe use English. If visitors came to the factory, all the staff and also me must explain to them steps in making our cars. We will show everything, make them understand and then they can ask questions. Only if they need we will translate [from BM]. ... It's company's policy. (Kieyu, n1, 23-29)

Kieyu's conviction lay in the fact that his father briefed him about what was expected from him during the attachment. He also studied operational manuals normally given to new staff members in P-Industries. Coincidentally, all the materials he read were written in Bahasa Melayu. As for Fadil, even if J-Incorporated was an international business entity with global holdings, because the majority of workers are Bumiputera Malays, Fadil imagined that BM

would dominate communication within this workplace community. His opinion also reflects the fact that he did not have a lot of information about J-Incorporated. He confessed, “I don’t know much about this organisation, no ideas. It’s just luck really. ... I didn’t even go for an interview they just say I’ve been accepted” (Fadil, i1, 260-263).

In summary, findings in this section show that in the Malaysian context expectations of language use is largely related to other constructs like ethnic and national identities. By and large, the participants made guesses about workplace language use mainly along ethnic lines, a notion that I will continue to examine in upcoming chapters. Another interesting finding is the influence and power attributed to certain languages as part of professional identity in the Malaysian context. Taking English as an example, the participants imagined the central roles of English as part of the process of (professional) identity construction in the Malaysian private sector. At the same time, it is important to note that for large government-linked companies, Bahasa Melayu remains an integral component of their corporate image in line with the dominant role of the national language in Malaysia.

Overview of Chapter 5

In this chapter, I presented findings from the campus of the Bumiputera-exclusive university in Malaysia. I started with a broad profile of the first case that I focus on in this multiple case study: 102 undergraduates from the A&M Faculty who were preparing for their industrial attachments. This profile drew on the findings from the survey instrument in the first cycle of data collection (quan). The numerical data presented were related to language ability levels and language and identity-related issues. Textual data from the survey were also examined to build a more comprehensive profile of these students. I then introduced eight participants who were selected as the focal cases for my study, together with general details about their demographics and some background information regarding their attachments to workplace communities across Peninsular Malaysia. Following that, I presented findings from the extensive second cycle of data collection (QUAL). Four themes from the data were analysed in two sections. I started with Bumiputera Malay identity and languages on campus, and language use in friendship groups as identity strategy. I then continued with securing the attachment through languages, and imagining language use in the world of work. Chapter 5 addressed the first research question: What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of undergraduates in a Bumiputera-

exclusive university community, and more particularly, as they prepare for their final semester industrial attachments? The next chapter, Chapter 6, presents further findings in respect of this research question.

Chapter 6. Stories of campus life

In this chapter, I present the bigger stories of the eight participants which relate to their campus lives (further in this thesis, Chapter 8 covers stories of working life, whilst Chapter 10 deals with stories of future life). In Chapter 4, I explained that in the process of analysing my data I noticed very personal ‘story threads’ running through the lives of each participant. These are stories told as they moved from the campus grounds to the world of work and as they changed from university students into young professionals. These stories are unique to each participant; they bring together her or his feelings, experiences and aspirations. They are, in fact, stories of identity construction that link the past, present and future in the lives of my participants. Due to the uniqueness of these stories, I refer to them as the ‘life journey’ of each participant (as realised through the industrial attachment). Chapters 6, 8 and 10 examine separately the journey of each participant from campus to working to future life. Their purpose is to re-focus attention on the individual participants’ experiences; to reflect on their distinctiveness as opposed to their commonalities reported in Chapters 5, 7 and 9.

Undoubtedly, each participant’s journey is different but, as a whole, the journeys of these participants are intertwined with the process of identity construction at the personal and social levels through language use. At the personal level a participant’s journey might involve, for example, realising his or her own potential, working towards a certain personal goal or chasing after a dream career. At the social level the journey might be linked to, for instance, living and participating within different communities of practice, exploring and navigating multiple identity categories, crossing borders or going through the process of becoming and dealing with authentication. In essence, these three ‘stories’ chapters serve as a reminder that the process of identity construction is *really* a life journey, and that identities are personal and social constructs that are dynamic, ever-changing, influenced by individual socio-histories yet unlimited in potential due to the power of human imagination.

6.1. Stories of the lives of the eight participants on campus

Experiences within their Bumiputera Malay campus community affected the lives of the eight participants in different ways. Whilst some participants felt that being on campus was just a

natural part of their lives, others felt more constrained and suffocated by shared campus culture. Their backgrounds and personal aspirations were interconnected with the feelings they felt whilst living on campus for five semesters. In truth, life on campus influenced ‘the self’ of the participants in various ways. The self is the constituent part that undergoes changes, for example, when people use the languages that they know to define themselves as individuals and as members of a larger group (Joseph, 2010; Llamas & Watt, 2010). Whether conceptualised through the post-structuralist concepts of the looking glass self or identity as performance/performativity, the notion that the self is the seed of identity is difficult to ignore (McIntyre, 2006; Yeung & J. Martin, 2003). Stories of the campus lives of the eight participants illustrate this in context.

6.1.1. Eizat

Eizat’s journey is intertwined with his “life mission” to be a Bumiputera Malay who is a true Malaysian and, in his eyes, “*warga dunia* [a global citizen]” (Eizat, n1, 42). On campus, he was known as “Ustaz⁷”, a nickname that he did not like “but I accepted this because of my old background” (Eizat, n1, 36). He is the product of an Islamic religious boarding school (or *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama*). Although he hated being sent there, he learned to live with his parents’ decision to make them happy. From his first day on campus, Eizat was called *ustaz* by other students. Slowly, he accepted this nickname and it became synonymous with him. Being asked to lead prayers and other Islamic rituals in the A&M Faculty became part of his campus life. In reality, Eizat disliked this identity label because he felt it restricted him; he never saw himself as an outwardly religious person. Still, by being an *ustaz*, he was given “automatic respect” by other students, which of course he did not mind. At the same time, being seen as someone who is religious meant that he had to be careful with things he said or did. For instance, he found it difficult to joke with others, even though he saw himself as a “really happy-go-lucky guy” (Eizat, n1, 38). Perhaps due to this, Eizat did not feel that his campus life was as exciting as his time in school.

From a different perspective, Eizat appreciated the fact that on campus he had the chance to learn new things to help him with his life mission. He especially liked learning Mandarin (compared to Arabic back in school). He also said that his campus life made him rethink some of his own beliefs. For instance, even though he continued to support the Bumiputera

⁷ ‘Ustaz’, in Arabic, means a male religious teacher or someone who is knowledgeable in Islam teachings.

Malay political agenda, he now preferred inclusion to exclusion within the education system. Citing his campus life, Eizat felt that the Malaysian government's positive discrimination agenda had led to the "laziness" of some Malay undergraduates (compared to hardworking non-Malay students). This was one of the main reasons why he applied to P-Hospital, in order to learn from and with the Malaysian Chinese community. Eizat was thankful for his Mandarin and English ability as a way for him to continue his journey. He explained:

I really feel I'm more confident, ready ... I feel more superb [laughs]. I also feel that if I work, you can just send me anywhere. The confidence makes me want to go further from this campus. Any kind of work, I think I'll be all right. (Eizat, i1, 177-180)

6.1.2. Intan

I examined Intan's journey, in part, in Chapter 4. Generally, Intan felt happy with her campus life although she would constantly refer to her "passive personality" as a factor that stopped her from becoming an outstanding student in her own faculty. This had always been a psychological barrier for her, even when she was in school. According to her, on one hand, other students liked to work with her because she was a good team player who never failed to contribute to her group. However, Intan also said that she could easily "disappear within a group" because she was not outstanding enough, for example, to be chosen as the group leader or as the lead presenter for that group. This experience left indelible marks on her identity as a university undergraduate. For this reason, for her attachment to J-Automotive, she made plans to walk out of the shadows of others. In Intan's words:

This is my own special chance to show I'm not this passive girl. People on campus always say [that] to me. ... I join this line as CS [customer services intern] to push myself ... to help the clients. *Ini niat hati saya* [This is the intention of my heart]. (Intan, n1, 35-41)

Intan further explained that, in truth, she really was a shy person who tended to become really nervous when standing in front of a crowd. During the fieldwork, I tried to help Intan by explaining to her that there were marked differences between being shy and passive; she is shy but as upcoming chapters will prove, Intan is never passive. I also found her work-related role (for the attachment) interesting: why would a shy student choose to become a customer services intern and deal directly with the public? She said that one of her most unforgettable experiences on campus was when she studied 'English for Professional Communication' in semester four. 100% of the course was examined through group projects and simulations, and one of the core components of this paper was communicating with customers. She scored an 'A+' for this paper because she managed to complete all the coursework to the best of her

ability. She then realised that she possessed all the right qualities to become a customer services professional. She saw J-Automotive as her proving ground: an opportunity for her to apply all her abilities and knowledge towards realising her dream career within the Malaysian automotive industry.

6.1.3. Ckina

For Ckina, her life on campus was a “simple life, just normal and actually nothing special ... just me this girl Ckina who is studying hard to become the professional manager – one day, *Insyah Allah* [God willing]” (Ckina, n1, 9-11). She was actually surprised when I invited her to take part in the second cycle of data collection because in her opinion she was a student with “nothing special” to offer. Unlike other participants in this group, however, she was fully interested in the field of administration and management and her life journey was tied to her dream of becoming a “top level professional manager” (Ckina, i3, 193). This made her special within this group. Indeed, she frequently employed the term ‘professional’ to talk about the attachment, her plans for the future after graduation and her dream career in the telecommunications industry. I asked Ckina whether life on campus had helped her to prepare to become professional, at least in her own eyes. She said that one of the ways she learned to “become more professional” was by constantly pushing herself to learn how to communicate and work with others. She also worked hard to increase her proficiency in different languages (especially English) because “this will make it easier ... to deal with people who are not from your race” (Ckina, i1, 318-319).

In her eyes, a top level professional manager is a person who does not just direct other workers but also works together with her team and directly contributes towards the good of the organisation. This manager must also be able to work directly with clients and the public, instead of merely delegating tasks to her team members. This is the person Ckina wanted to become, and life on campus had opened her eyes to who she could be in the future. Unsurprisingly, she felt pleased with herself after being accepted by M-Telecoms to be a temporary assistant with their administration division. She gave two reasons for her sense of satisfaction with this achievement. First, even if the attachment was only temporary, through it she would be gaining entry into the telecommunications industry. Second, she would be working in her own field of expertise (i.e., administration and management) and she could not wait to apply all the knowledge that she had gathered for five semesters at M-Telecoms.

6.1.4. Teeya

As explained in the last chapter, Teeya's campus life was not a particularly pleasant one, but at the same time, she managed to form strong friendship bonds with a few students from the A&M Faculty. She also had one advantage over the other students in her faculty, which was her native speaker proficiency in Mandarin. However, being "nearly Malay but then not really [Malay]" (Teeya, i1, 263) created "invisible walls" around her within her campus community, and Teeya chose to retreat into herself. Yet, her experience on campus never stopped her life journey. She loved languages and she wanted to become an expert in foreign languages, especially Japanese. Teeya said she had no dream career in mind, but that whatever career she ended up in, she wanted it to be closely linked to languages. She also dreamed of working in foreign lands like China or Japan where she could use her language ability to assist her business organisation. These plans, according to her, were always at the back of her mind when she felt trapped within her campus life. She channelled all her energy into her studies because she wanted to obtain excellent results before graduation. In this narrative, Teeya shared what she feels about her campus life:

an ugly caterpillar ... waiting for reborn into a colorful butterfly after metamorphosis - that girl is me. I am not bragging, only speaking my truth. I hate people judging my personality and I am not like poseurs in this place still trying to search for their true identity. Teeya is Teeya. Maybe on campus they cannot 'see' this Teeya. Never mind. Soon Teeya will fly, soar high from this place. (Teeya, n1, 8-14)

For Teeya, the industrial attachment was her chance to start her life in the outside world where she would not feel "suffocated by the negative aura of lots of back-stabbers in this place [her campus]" (Teeya, n1, 21). Although she would have preferred to carry out her attachment in Kuala Lumpur, she did not mind doing it in L-Engineering, in her home town. She also looked forward to becoming the assistant to the company's chief secretary and being placed in the management department of L-Engineering. Latter chapters will show how the attachment took her back to her "first love": languages.

6.1.5. Agnes

Being negatively labelled as *orang KL* did not stop Agnes from becoming a public figure of sorts within her campus community. In fact, her experience illustrates the potential of individual agency in the process of identity construction, even within a Bumiputera Malay community with its strict adherence to the *adat* and *jiwa*. I asked Agnes where she found the inspiration to become the person that she was on campus. She said that she was just "so fed-

up with the past” that when she entered the campus grounds she made a pledge to never fail herself again. There were many failures that made her reassess her life and her future. One of the worst days of her life, according to Agnes, was when she applied for a government scholarship to study abroad after SPM. She failed the interview and carried a “feeling of shame” as she was not able to counter the negative remarks made by the selection committee “all because I could not speak [in English] as fast as them ... I am so nervous and scared but they all just laugh and laugh, shaming me” (Agnes, n1, 36-39). Members of the committee also sneered at her when she said she wanted to study mass communication and could not give reasons to support her application. She said she stuttered all throughout the interview. This life episode made her feel “very unworthy and useless”, leading to a kind of emotional trauma that she appeared to never fully recover from.

Agnes reported that when her seniors called her names this was a “big mistake” because her past experience made her determined not to let others tell her what she could or could not do. This, in many ways, is her life journey: not to let other people define herself and instead to go after her dream career in the field of public relations. Like the other participants in this group, she looked forward to her attachment as a chance for her to shine in the world of work. In her own words: “I must work hard so when people look at me, they see Agnes this PR Exec” (Agnes, n2, 35-36). She refused to see her attachment as a temporary learning experience. Her single-mindedness towards becoming a public relations professional and her hard work towards making her dream career a reality were all due to her desire that the attachment would be her first step “to catch my dream job” (Agnes, n1, 30).

6.1.6. Kieyu

Like Ckina, Kieyu said that there was nothing particularly exciting or interesting about his life on campus. Accordingly, for five semesters he led a normal life, “just doing what the other guys always do [in his faculty] ... play guitar, play football, chill out, check out girls ... everyday studying and studying like others also because for me I really want to get my target job after I finish [the diploma]” (Kieyu, n1, 10-14). Kieyu had his mind set on a particular business sector for his future “target job”: the Malaysian automotive industry, to follow in his father’s footsteps. He said that as long as he managed to gain a permanent position within this industry he would be happy. On campus, he worked really hard to gain as much practical knowledge as possible so that he could make this dream come true. He admitted, however, that he would have preferred to study something “more hands-on” like engineering or other

technical fields for his diploma. Nevertheless, because he was weak in mathematics and pure science subjects, he applied to study administration and management. For him, this was the correct decision because he found that several graduates from his field were accepted as full-time employees at P-Industries, one of Malaysia's national manufacturers of vehicles and automotive parts, and also the company where his father holds a senior position. Kieyu really wanted to follow in his father's footsteps because he saw a bright future in the automotive sector and because none of his siblings wanted to continue his father's legacy.

With his target job in mind, Kieyu applied to do his attachment at P-Industries even if his father did not really support his decision. He and his father "never talked much" because as a teenager he was seen as a troublemaker in the family (he was a *Mat Rempit*, a member of an illegal motorcycle gang, much to his family's disgrace). Hence, Kieyu's campus life was geared fully toward his attachment with P-Industries, and he did not even apply to other companies. He wanted the attachment to be his chance to redeem himself and prove to his family that he was ready to become an adult and young professional. After receiving his acceptance letter from P-Industries, he spent many weeks preparing for his work role as an assistant in the company's corporate communications division. Five semesters on campus, according to Kieyu, had prepared him for this exciting experience.

6.1.7. Syful

Syful's campus life, as highlighted in Chapter 5, was perhaps the most challenging of those within this group. Being "strongly socially Anglicized" (Syful, n1, 19) within a Bumiputera Malay campus community meant that life was oftentimes difficult for him. His Malayness, even his religious beliefs, were constantly called into question by the majority group, so much so that Syful felt he was the victim of emotional bullying, specifically by male students from the A&M Faculty. Perhaps he could have avoided this if he had stayed under the radar but, as he professed, as much as he tried, "things I always took for granted became such big issues for the others [students in his faculty]" (Syful, n1, 47-48). At the same time, he was well-liked by his tutors due to his academic ability and his penchant for academic discourse; He would never shy away from debates (during lectures) even when other students kept quiet and refused to participate. In addition, his superior ability in English and Bahasa Melayu made him quite respected though not necessarily liked. Other students would pay him to proofread their assignments and projects (including students who he did not get along with). This, according to him, was a kind of compensation for all the hurt that he felt from verbal

confrontations with the male students and their “incessant bullying [and] venomous accusations” (Syful, n1, 61). Luckily for Syful, a few students from a different faculty became his close friends and social support network.

Based on the above, I was not surprised when Syful repeatedly said that he could not wait to leave campus and start his attachment. He even said that on “particularly hard days [on campus]” imagining the attachment and knowing that he would have the chance to return to the world of work “soothed my soul” (Syful, i1, 718). He made the decision to apply to T-Realties for three reasons. Firstly, he wanted to learn more about the world of business by learning from the international Chinese business community (as T-Realties is a Singapore-based company). Secondly, he hoped to explore career possibilities that were linked to the field of advertising and promotions. The third reason, and one that was strongly connected to his campus life, he wanted to get away from a Bumiputera-only environment which he felt stifled his personal growth and severely curtailed his view of the world. Syful wrote in his first reflective narrative:

[I need to] dump these memories of the people around me [on campus] before their irreversible, pathetic vibes cling on like the smell of rotten sour grapes. I’m dedicated to the future, at the end of the day I know what my dedication will turn into. ... Despite a sombre past, my present will be colourful my future illustrious. (Syful, n1, 69-75)

6.1.8. Fadil

Being an experienced worker and a “not too young” student in the A&M Faculty was not easy for Fadil. He told me that from the first semester on campus, part of him wanted “to just give up everything here” so that he could return to the world of work. Being around undergraduates who were fresh out of school also made him feel quite alone, and this feeling stayed with him for the duration of his life on campus. Still, Fadil said, he stayed on because he needed a better qualification that would lead to a better position and higher remuneration. He also felt that a diploma from the A&M Faculty would allow him to become a better professional because “I can apply knowledge from my cert and with my diploma altogether ... combine all the mixed skills. Then, I can make sure I become the best employee for my future” (Fadil, i1, 385-388). For five semesters on campus, he worked hard in order to continue his life journey to become a more able professional. Like the other participants, he appreciated the fact that his diploma studies put special emphasis on communication and language abilities. He described himself as a quiet person who was also soft-spoken and liked

to listen to others rather than talk. Learning Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin intensively helped him to become more confident in sharing his views. Consequently, Fadil became more talkative, though not as much as he wanted to be.

With several years of work experience under his belt, Fadil desired to find a workplace that would really challenge him as a young professional. After his father and sister told him about J-Incorporated, the Malaysian government-linked multinational corporation, he decided to apply to this company for his attachment. He tried applying to companies in Sabah and Sarawak (on the island of Borneo); however, none responded to his applications. He was the only participant to travel out of his home state to complete the attachment. His decision to leave his own state became one of our favourite topics whenever we met during my fieldwork. Fadil's maturity and his polite and professional demeanour also made him a very pleasant participant to engage with. In the course of my study, I learned that he wanted to broaden his horizons and use the attachment as a chance to travel and work in a different environment. He sometimes referred to the attachment as his "*hijrah*", an Arabic-Malay word meaning to travel and leave the comforts of one life to start another for the better. By coincidence, his hero and one of the main inspirations for his *hijrah* was presented in Chapter 3: Panglima Awang. Panglima Awang or 'Enrique/Henrique of Malacca' is the original Malay explorer of the world (Mahmud, 1966). He is thought to have travelled with Ferdinand Magellan and his crew in the first recorded circumnavigation of the globe (Pigafetta, 1969a, 1969b). Chapters 7 and 8 will show, however, that Fadil's own journey would not turn out to be as illustrious as his icon.

Overview of Chapter 6

This chapter presented findings relating to the bigger stories shared by the eight participants regarding their lives on campus. Stories in this chapter are part of their 'life journey' from campus to work to a future life; these stories bring to life some of the feelings, experiences and aspirations of each participant as uniquely different individuals within their Bumiputera Malay campus community. They also chronicle the process of identity construction on campus as the participants prepared to begin their attachments in workplace communities across Peninsular Malaysia. The following two chapters will discuss the 'working lives' of these participants.

Chapter 7. Working life

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the experiences of the participants as they begin their working lives and pass the middle mark of their attachments around late February and early March 2011. A number of participants talked about this time period as their ‘working life’ (whereas time on campus was referred to as ‘campus life’). I thus adopted this phrase to refer to the life phase after campus for the eight Bumiputera Malay undergraduates (i.e., the time during the attachment). Chapter 7 addresses the second research question: What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates during their industrial attachments? To search for answers to this question, four themes identified in the data will be discussed. This chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I examine through two themes languages as part of life in Malaysian (private sector) workplace communities: adapting to the workplace language environment and learning through languages in workplace communities. Then, in the second section, I consider the notion of becoming professional and exploring life trajectories through two further themes: changing from university student to young professional and exploring life trajectories through workplace participation.

7.1. Languages as part of life in Malaysian workplace communities

Before they began their working lives, the eight participants imagined how their professional selves would be tied to their communication and language abilities. They also made assumptions along ethnic lines regarding language use within Malaysian workplace communities (e.g., the mother tongue of the majority of staff members and clients would dominate), and they prepared mentally to enter these working environments. At the same time, they readied themselves to apply skills they had previously learned and to acquire new knowledge. Drawing on representative examples, this section examines findings related to the above through two themes: adapting to the workplace language environment, and learning through languages in workplace communities.

The first theme looks at how their language repertoire helped the participants to adapt to and carry out their work-related responsibilities. As they completed the beginning weeks of their

attachments and settled into the day-to-day routines of their working lives, they shared their views regarding the multiple roles of languages in their workplaces based on their experience. Even though it is argued that in the Malaysian private sector English is the dominant mode of communication (see, David & Govindasamy, 2007; Morais, 1998; Nair-Venugopal, 2006), findings in this section illustrate that local languages such as Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin are also important in different business and industrial sectors. Accordingly, speaking and writing abilities in these languages are transferable skills that contribute in many ways to the transition period from campus life to working life, and the identity change from university student to young professional. Findings related to this theme also highlight the ways in which the participants started to use the languages that they know as one avenue to project their professional selves to their superiors, co-workers, and clients.

The second theme deals with workplace learning and how this contributed towards the working lives of the participants or what they referred to as “feeling worker-like” (as opposed to “feeling student-like”) as they approached the middle of the attachment period. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that different forms of workplace learning are all part of the process of identity construction. As a newcomer actively seeks membership within her or his community of practice and moves from the periphery to the centre of that community, he or she relies heavily on communication and language abilities to interact with other members (workers) and to learn shared work practices. From another perspective, Andrew and Kearney (2007) suggest that real experiences in the world of work bridge the classroom and the workplace by helping students (on work-related attachments) to apply their language and communication skills in a multitude of real world situations. Indeed, several studies point to the potential of the workplace as a site to not only enhance communication and language abilities but also to jumpstart identity-related acts of ‘becoming’ for young professionals in-training (see, for example, Cooke, Brown & Zhu, 2007; Green & Evans, 2000; Myles, 2009).

7.1.1. Adapting to the workplace language environment

This section considers aspects of language use within communities of practice in the Malaysian private sector, focusing mainly on the initial weeks of the attachment. I begin by discussing the general language environment as reported by the participants and continue with examples of the ways they started to use their languages to carry out their work.

As the survey showed in Chapter 5 (see Tables 5-1 to 5-4), there were marked differences between proficiency levels in Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin for the majority of students from the A&M Faculty. These differences might be related to the roles that these languages play on campus. For Mandarin, most students felt that their listening and reading skills were above average. However, they had difficulties speaking and writing in Mandarin, especially with regard to formal aspects of speaking and writing (i.e., Mandarin for business and workplace purposes). The same could be said with reference to English for business purposes, although the students generally believed that their English skills were superior to their skills in Mandarin. Findings in this section are important, both in order to compare language use patterns on campus with the workplace, and to highlight the roles of languages in the workplace in constructing the identities of the eight focal participants.

Languages were not only useful for formal communication within the workplace, but also for forming informal relationships between the participants and their colleagues. Realising this, one of the first things that the participants reported doing was quickly learning as much as they could about the “languages in use” within their places of work. The more they learned about these established language use patterns, the more confident they became in terms of communicating and performing their work roles. Focusing on the skill of speaking, two things became clear. First, although language use patterns differed from one workplace to the next, ethnicity seemed to be a primary contributor to these observable patterns. For instance, most participants consciously greeted their customers in the mother tongue of the customers whenever they carried out frontline work (i.e., dealing directly with members of the public). In order to accommodate the typical linguistic preferences of their (mostly) Malaysian customers, the participants might then switch to English, Bahasa Melayu or more commonly they would code-mix during the communication process. Some of them said that they adopted similar strategies, such as using the mother tongue of their co-workers and habitually code-mixing, so that they could “join in the conversation” in more informal social situations.

Teeya, Eizat and Intan, for instance, were immersed in English and Mandarin due to the fact that their co-workers were mainly non-Bumiputeras. In carrying out their work, the three of them reported that “always adding” sentences in Mandarin would help them to project their professional selves to their Chinese colleagues and especially when they dealt with Chinese clients. As Teeya put it, “we oil things to make them smooth, so when we communicate it’s the same. Actually for me, using their language [co-workers and clients] makes things really

smooth. ... Show you're part of them, they'll all really appreciate it" (Teeya, i3, 57-62). Although Teeya's case was unique because of her native-speaker proficiency in several Chinese dialects, she believed that workplace communication was really "a process of give and take". For her, young professionals must be able to invest a lot of effort and time to become part of their workplace community. Teeya wrote:

I am kinda talkative. I enjoy talking in our office. They [her co-workers] ask me stuff, I ask them stuff. We share food, go for lunch and we always chit-chat while working. It helps that I am willing to listen and share and take time to join up with them, [because] I really, really want them to accept me as their team member. (Teeya, n3, 25-31)

Teeya's experience shows the importance of making an effort to be part of the team and to be accepted within workplace communities. Languages play multiple roles in this process, so much so that even Eizat and Intan, who said that they were "not really good enough" in Mandarin, reported how their attempts at using the language were received with due appreciation by their co-workers and clients. They promptly realised the benefits of using the mother tongue of others to help them with their work. Eizat provided an example from his unit at P-Hospital:

There's this one staff ... a very old Chinese lady. She used Cantonese only. I think it's the only language she knew. When I greet her in Cantonese she always smiles, pinch my cheeks [laughs]. For the others, when we communicate, I use English and also Mandarin. I also mix Malay, just like any Malaysian worker. Most important thing ... *kena pandai bawa diri* [is to adapt and carry yourself well]. (Eizat, i2, 263-269)

Eizat's experience was quite similar to Intan, whose placement was at J-Automotive. As a customer relations intern, Intan dealt exclusively with the public. Like Teeya and Eizat, she said that she needed to learn to adapt to the languages around her, not only to carry out her given roles but also to gain acceptance within her workplace community. As part of J-Automotive's policy, Intan was told that "for speaking with customers we must do this fully in English only. First, I was scared, I'm shy. ... Now, I'm more confident. You have to do it. Don't think too much, try to do it first" (Intan, i2, 192-195). But even if English was given priority, Intan realised that to gain acceptance as a team member she had to make the effort to "join up" with her co-workers and adapt to the language environment around her. She explained:

We have many races here, I must adjust [adapt]. Malay staff normally respond to BM. Chinese to Mandarin, and so on. So for Mandarin, I must use it to communicate with customers. Chinese customers quickly will get impressed when I use their language.

Same with staff members, they all really appreciate when I always try to use this language, even when I make so many mistakes [laughs]. (Intan, i2, 204-210)

These participants relied heavily on their Mandarin ability to project their professional selves to their co-workers and clients from the very start of their attachments. Even if certain workplaces (like J-Automotive) tended to have rather rigid formal language use policies, Teeya, Eizat and Intan said that they would always adapt their language use to suit the situation. This did not mean, however, that they relied fully on their Mandarin ability and ignored English and Bahasa Melayu. In reality, English and Bahasa Melayu were also constantly used, depending on context and the interlocutors. Moreover, just as in their campus lives, code-mixing was a common strategy used for workplace communication in both formal and informal situations.

To argue that English plays an exclusive role within the Malaysian private sector, therefore, does not reflect reality. Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin and other local languages are ever-present, playing different roles within different workplace communities. Kieyu and Fadil, for example, indicated that within their own places of work Bahasa Melayu dominated everyday communication between staff members and clients. They mentioned two reasons for this. The first, in Kieyu's case, was related to the official language policy adopted by Malaysian business organisations. As a national company (i.e., the government as majority shareholder), P-Industries adopted the national language as its main medium of communication for workers and visitors. As Kieyu notes, "to become the professional staff worker here, our BM must be really excellent" (Kieyu, i2, 128-129). Still, English remained an important language within this environment as Kieyu soon found out. Being an assistant in the corporate communications division, he noticed that when international delegates who visited the automotive manufacturing plant were taken on tours, English was used as the language of communication. He also observed that amongst higher-ranked and senior staff members (like his father), communication involved both Bahasa Melayu and English. Kieyu explained:

I say BM is the most important here. We all must use it, even non-Bumi staff. But when visitors come ... private university students, international delegates, whoever, automatically we must change into English. Meetings, briefings, everything, almost all using BM although English is always mixed in. ... I just follow their style so they all can see I'm also like them [employees of P-Industries]. (Kieyu, i2, 130-138)

The second reason, in Fadil's experience, is related to the nature of the business carried out by companies within the Malaysian private sector. As an intern with the legal department of

J-Incorporated, Fadil noticed that the legal documents he processed during the early weeks were written completely in Bahasa Melayu (later, Fadil was tasked with checking legal documents that were written in English, prepared mainly for J-Incorporated's business interests in Singapore and the rest of South East Asia). Fadil noted that official legal documentation must be prepared in the national language in order for them to be processed by Malaysian authorities. He added that under certain circumstances, the only way for a legal document to be deemed valid was to have it written in Bahasa Melayu. Therefore, Fadil felt that there were no reasons for most staff members in his department to use English widely, though he was not sure about other units and departments in J-Incorporated. In his words:

So, I only use BM with other staff ... if at all they talked with me. Actually, we use it here all the time. Even my boss here, she's a lawyer, my HoD [Head of Department] she's using BM when she communicates. ... Everything I hear around me ... formal and informal with everyone, the staff mostly will only use BM. (Fadil, i2, 121-126)

Kieyu and Fadil learned to adapt to their language environments so that they could be seen as members of their workplace communities and carry out their tasks accordingly. I noticed in the data that the earlier they learned to adapt to these environments, the more settled the participants felt. Although gaining 'genuine' acceptance of community members was a constant challenge for them (especially for Fadil), in general, the participants were mostly able to settle successfully into their work-related roles due to their capacity to adapt and carry themselves well (i.e., "*pandai bawa diri*").

The findings above are related mainly to the skill of speaking as a way for the participants to join in and become part of their workplace communities. Speaking in Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin was also an important way for the participants to start projecting a professional image in formal and informal work-related situations. An equally important skill that contributed to the construction and projection of this image was writing. The administrative and management skills that the participants possessed helped to define some of their main work-related roles. For a few of them, however, their language skills were even more important because of the highly specialised tasks assigned to them. For these participants, without their advanced language skills, especially writing, they could never have coped with these tasks. The experiences of Ckina, Agnes and Syful highlight this point.

During the early days of the attachment, Ckina was placed on the frontline and she was directed by her workplace mentor to deal with the public. She said that this was actually an

informal initiation and a common practice for “practical students” (i.e., university students on industrial attachments) at M-Telecoms. Her success during this initiation meant that she was slowly accepted by members of the administration division at M-Telecoms. However, Ckina was worried as her good performance early on only led to higher expectations from other staff members, and she was assigned several important tasks to prove her worth within the department (i.e., tasks normally done by relatively senior staff members). Ckina explained:

CC [Chief Clerk] asked me to type formal letters, I focus on that. I also attend to customers who walk in to cover other staff. I do typing, filing, work like that. Last week I joined our training day. I went with the seniors. CC told me to take notes [as] the programme is about staff management. ... Lucky I know SuperWrite⁸. I finished my report next day. ... Everyone got so impressed [laughs]. (Ckina, i2, 45-54)

By drawing on her campus skills, especially her ability to do SuperWrite, Ckina was able to complete this important report efficiently and impress the full-time staff members. Another important writing skill for her (and also other participants) was preparing and proofreading documents. In Ckina’s case, she was assigned the task of preparing and checking all the business documents that her mentor (the Chief Clerk) wanted her to work on. Ckina took these tasks very seriously. Often she was asked to prepare the same document in both English and Bahasa Melayu. She added:

We do all documentation in BM and English. Basically for external communication everything is English, but we also have to make the same translation in BM. ... Sometimes, on the same paper, we also write in Mandarin and Tamil, which is ... not easy to be done. (Ckina, i2, 86-90)

Sample documents in Ckina’s final report (her post-attachment assessment submitted to the A&M Faculty) illustrate what she meant. A general notice to customers of the company regarding a planned network downtime, for instance, was written in all four languages with English and Malay on the first page followed by Mandarin and Tamil on the reverse. Having to prepare documents in this manner was challenging; however, Ckina reported that she had managed to learn this skill reasonably quickly.

Her writing ability also meant that Ckina was well-liked among the other staff members in the administration department. Sometimes her seniors would ask for her help with document preparation because they said her English and Bahasa Melayu writing skills were excellent (although Ckina begged to differ). The experiences of the other participants were similar:

⁸ SuperWrite is a contemporary (English) shorthand system. It is intended for those who need to increase their writing speed without learning more complicated shorthand systems.

their co-workers, especially the more senior ones, often approached them for help to prepare business documents from start to finish. The perception of their colleagues was that the eight participants possessed excellent abilities in professional English and Bahasa Melayu. In time, this general view created a sense of acceptance and achievement within their working lives.

Agnes and Syful underwent similar experiences. They were both engaged in work roles which required their communicative and language abilities to be superior to their general management skills. As a public relations (PR) intern, Agnes was initially surprised that she had to work with a large number of business documents. She initially thought that public relations work mainly focused on speaking. Soon after starting the attachment, however, she realised that she would have to rely on her writing ability in order to complete all her PR tasks. Agnes explained what she learned from her mentor, Miss Sheila:

In PR we start with proposal, step one. This is where you give ideas, push forward projects to clients. ... The proposal stage is like a roundabout [laughs]. We propose, clients counter, and so on and so on. Miss Sheila said sometimes months in circles [repeating the same steps]. That's why proposals must be very excellent from the start so the project can move forward ASAP ... my content, style and everything must be clear. (Agnes, i3, 84-91)

When she proved to be an able and active member of her workplace community, a few weeks into the attachment, B-Media gave Agnes the chance to work independently on a number of PR projects for their clients. Agnes was quick to seize this opportunity so that she could experience all dimensions of being a PR practitioner. She also applied aspects of her administration and management skills to gather information, prepare project timelines and manage the limited time given to complete those projects. Still, Agnes believes that it was her writing ability in both English and Bahasa Melayu that helped her produce “stand out proposals and show off my PR potentials” (Agnes, i3, 94).

The only participant who drew almost exclusively on his writing ability to become an important member of his workplace team was Syful. He reported that from the first day of the attachment he worked tirelessly to produce advertisements and other print materials, in both English and Bahasa Melayu, to promote T-Realties' business activities. Under the supervision of his manager and workplace mentor, Alice, Syful tried as much as possible from the early days of his attachment to exceed the expectations of his colleagues. He wanted them to see himself as a “Wordsmith and Ideacon [Idea Icon]” (Syful, n3, 11), as well as an employee who was able to help the company “to reach out to the hearts and minds of our

target clients, take their hands then put their hands in their wallets and handbags” (Syful, n3, 17-19).

According to Syful, T-Realties had relied on other companies to carry out their advertising and promotion activities in the past. This raised the company’s annual overhead costs significantly. For that reason, the Singaporean owners of his company decided to change the focus of his department (from 2011 onwards) from outsourcing promotional work and liaising with external advertising firms to doing all this work in-house. Syful was all too happy to contribute his “special expertise” and he approached Alice on the first day of the attachment: “I’m not a manager. But I know costing, overheads, all that from campus. I told Alice to give our team a chance. I said we can come out with the best stuff, just let me help” (Syful, i3, 61-64). Based on his work experience and extensive writing portfolio, Syful was given the chance he wanted. Later, he was given other important responsibilities by his superiors due to his expertise.

A summary of this section is as follows. The participants noticed how language use is linked to ethnicity within their workplace communities. Taking advantage of this social reality, some participants drew on their knowledge of Mandarin to speak to their Chinese colleagues and clients in formal and informal situations. This strategy enabled them to become part of their new workplace communities and to enhance their professional image. At the same time, English and Bahasa Melayu were used by certain participants to carry out their work, even if they disregarded official company (language) policies. For a few participants, it was their writing ability that helped them to make headway from the early weeks of the attachment. Additionally, all eight participants carried the identity of proficient language users, regardless of where they were attached. Perhaps this was due to the reputation of their university and its unique language medium policy. Such is the importance of communication and language abilities that, in some circumstances, their administration and management skills were deemed less useful in performing their attachment roles.

7.1.2. Learning through languages in workplace communities

As weeks turned to months, the eight participants became acclimatised to their working environments, and as their working lives continued so too did the process of identity construction. This section focuses on their experiences of learning through languages within their workplace communities.

The participants were obviously not sent on their attachments for the purpose of learning particular languages. At the same time, they reported spending a significant amount of time and effort learning about languages and how languages could be used to project professional selves that fit with their working lives. They also said that learning about languages on campus was not the same as learning to use languages in the world of work. A general feeling shared by the group was that their attachments made everything “concrete and real”: so much so that they could see the advantages of knowing and using more than just their mother tongue. Below, I focus on the experiences of Kieyu, Intan and Syful as representative examples.

P-Industries adopted a ‘national language first policy’ (for speaking) in their manufacturing plant. However, in terms of written communication, Kieyu said that the company was quite flexible. This was due to the fact that P-Industries export their products globally and are involved in business ventures with major automobile companies from Asia and Europe. During the attachment, Kieyu spoke mainly in Bahasa Melayu; however, he was also asked to focus on document preparation in English as part of his internship. He noticed that “our paperwork, like letters, booklets, pamphlets, budgeting, proposals, everything is usually in English. Now, I realise we don’t use BM very much actually for written work” (Kieyu, i2, 194-195). This was challenging for Kieyu because of the high standards expected of him by his mentor (who was also the head of the corporate communications division). Kieyu frequently took home texts he had written in order to do additional proofreading. Fortunately, full-time staff members in his division were also prepared to provide additional editing of his written work. In the beginning, Kieyu found it difficult to adapt to this task but needed less help as he approached the middle part of the attachment, since he had devoted considerable time and effort to learning how to write acceptable corporate communication documents. He explained:

My writing is bad. BM, English really quite suck. At first, I think corporate comm [communications] surely just talking, totally wrong. Now, I always make a stone face, ask everyone to teach me format, check grammar, spelling, everything. Sometimes, I feel ashamed but I must learn everything. You have to push yourself [because] if you do the training really good enough, the company might absorb you. (Kieyu, i2, 487-493)

Kieyu’s single-mindedness with regard to improving his writing skills was part of his “future life plan” to work for P-Industries after graduation. He also worked hard to improve his

speaking skills in order to make this life plan a reality. To ensure that he gained as much workplace exposure as possible, he volunteered to work on every available project and to meet with members of the public, even if this involved working on weekends (without pay). In his mind, his future was tied to P-Industries. Accordingly, the attachment was a learning process “to get my dream. I must learn all the professional ways ... all the skills, so they will see my abilities and real personality” (Kieyu, n4, 47-50).

The attachment also made Intan and Syful realise the importance of re-learning some of the skills that they had acquired on campus, especially those relating to communication and languages. For Intan, the working environment at J-Automotive was very challenging because of the “very strict” Japanese-style management. Her role as customer relations intern was also “very demanding” because she had to constantly assist individual customers with different needs and wants. Although Intan said she could cope with the challenges of working in customer relations most of the time, there were also a number of frustrating situations. In her words: “Truly, customer service is like hell sometimes. People get angry and shout to you ... you must learn to keep calm and respond nicely. Just impossible, right?” (Intan, i3, 29-32).

The fact that most customers spoke in the Penang Hokkien (Chinese) dialect did not help Intan as she could only understand part of what customers said. She reported that sometimes, when she failed to calm a frustrated or angry customer, she would run to her on-site mentor for help. She felt inadequate whenever the communication process broke down. She admits: “Seriously, I have much to learn here. Sometimes, I think this is the wrong job line for me because it’s very stressing. ... But, my mentor always said in this line we learn many things, especially about other people’s personalities” (Intan, n5, 16-21).

It was not easy for Intan to come to terms with episodes of communication breakdown in the early weeks of her attachment. She found it hard to deal with extremely difficult customers who did not want to cooperate with her no matter what she did. However, in time she learned to better control her emotions. At the same time, Intan said that she was proud of herself because she was able to keep calm and not exchange angry words with this type of customer (even when they shouted at her and used harsh words). I suggested to her that that this was a sign that she had acquired some of the critical skills of a customer services professional, but she said she had mixed feelings on this matter. Though she was happy with this aspect of her professional self (i.e., not to respond to difficult customers in a provocative manner), she felt

disadvantaged when facing customers who mainly spoke Hokkien, as she had limited knowledge of the dialect. Nevertheless, as it is the dominant Chinese dialect in Penang, Intan felt compelled to continue to adapt and learn from her experience.

As for Syful, working in a predominantly Chinese environment presented him with many opportunities to learn about the world of business. Being the only Bumiputera Malay in his department at T-Realties was also not a problem for Syful and he said that he thrived within this environment. As a young professional who was highly proficient in both English and Bahasa Melayu, other staff members looked up to him, and his co-workers appreciated the input that he provided. At the same time, Syful managed to acquire many business skills from his co-workers within a short space of time. These were on-the-job skills that Syful had wanted to learn that originally led him to the real estate industry. By observing his colleagues and assisting them with the day-to-day running of T-Realties, Syful was able to see “real business in action”, the type of action that helped his company to become one of the leaders in the real estate market in the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) region.

Syful admitted, however, that he felt disadvantaged in some ways when it came to Mandarin. Much of the time he would feel out of place when his co-workers communicated in Mandarin, especially through writing. He said:

That feeling you get when you feel people are excluding you though they aren't, I really feel that ... like when colleagues share an inside joke or things [in Mandarin]. Like I told you, my Mandarin isn't great. ... Also, here, they normally send memos and communiqués in that language especially from HQ [in Singapore], which is doubly worse because my *Hanyu Pinyin* is horrendous. (Syful, i3, 123-128)

Syful was always quick to add that this was just “a fleeting feeling”. To lessen this negative feeling, he tried as much as possible to join “informal social chats” around his workspace. By so doing, he was able to re-learn Mandarin skills that he largely ignored during his time on campus. That said, Syful reported feeling as though he was fighting a losing battle for one particular reason: whenever he was present, his co-workers would automatically revert back to English and sometimes even use Bahasa Melayu. Syful lamented, “you see, it's like ‘a lose and lose more’ situation. I'm not complaining really. But please, just tell me how can I ever develop my Mandarin this way?” (Syful, i3, 133-135). Whenever Syful touched on this particular issue in his interviews, his written reflective narratives and in our informal discussions, it was clear that he felt frustrated with his situation. His feeling of being

excluded would continue until the end of the attachment period, even if he felt happy with his working environment, and extremely satisfied with his performance as part of the T-Realties advertising and promotions team.

To summarise this section, learning through languages is another important aspect of the working lives of the participants. English and Mandarin were used as tools to help them to carry out their work productively. Lack of proficiency in certain English and Mandarin skills was often cited as a reason for their reduced work-rate, and was detrimental to their professional selves. Acquiring new skills and learning to become part of workplace communities presented challenges that differed from one workplace to the next depending on the nature of the business and/or the clients that the participants interacted with. Languages like English and Mandarin can clearly build bridges or erect barriers, depending on the workplace environment and community of practice. These findings are also linked to the identity act of ‘becoming’, as the next section illustrates.

7.2. Becoming professional and exploring life trajectories

The eight participants had different expectations of their working lives before the start of their attachments. They made plans to ensure that their experiences would be useful, and to provide the necessary push towards their successful graduation in the near future. Some of them, however, felt quite unsure about what to expect as they began this final leg of their diploma journey. These feelings are to be expected at such a critical juncture in the process of identity construction. As a group, they all had some exposure to the world of work. At the same time, they realised the importance of the attachment as the final assessment component of their diploma, and as their transit point into future employment. Focusing on the first half of the attachment period, I now present findings related to two themes in this section: changing from university student to young professional and exploring life trajectories through workplace participation.

The first theme explores historical and personal aspects of the process of identity construction through ‘felt changes’ in the working lives of the participants. As they crossed ideological (student to worker) and physical (campus to workplace) boundaries, they had to negotiate the new roles given to them, and also navigate their workplace language environments both at the individual and professional levels. My data revealed that feeling less student-like and

becoming more worker-like signalled identity changes in them. Wenger (1998, 2009) argues that the act of becoming is identity construction in action. My discussion of this theme also takes into account the roles that languages play as part of ‘becoming’. Before leaving campus, the eight participants said that they were preparing to become professionals, and wanted others to see and accept them as young professionals. Hence, their becoming was critical, especially when they had all made substantial investments in themselves (Block, 2007; Norton, 1997, 2000); investments that would enhance their communication and language abilities. Some even added that they tried to change the nature of their self (or what they referred to as their “personality”) towards these aims.

The second theme examines the experiences of some participants as they began to imagine and explore trajectories from their working lives into the future. For Wenger (1998, 2009), there are many trajectories that a person might take as identities are constructed, for instance through the world of work. A newcomer’s (i.e., young professional-in-training) active engagement within a community of practice opens up possible trajectories for future lives that might be useful for her or him; limited participation might hinder possibilities for the future. This theme also takes into account some of the professional and social aspects of language use in the workplace. These are important catalysts in the construction of ‘workplace identities’ (Holmes & Marra, 2005; Postmes, 2003). My data show that workplace identities were negotiated as the participants continued to adapt to their workplace communities, both to become and be seen as legitimate members.

7.2.1. Changing from university student to young professional

In this section, I highlight changes felt by the participants as they crossed two boundaries: campus to workplace and student to professional. I focus particularly on both the beginning and middle parts of the attachment.

As a group, the participants all wanted to make a positive impression in their places of work. Findings in the last section have already illustrated some aspects of this. Wanting to make a positive impression was not surprising, for two reasons. First, the attachment was a process of learning about the world of work; second, most participants were carrying out ‘pseudo’ work (i.e., not work in the fullest sense of the word). At the end of the attachment period, they had to report back to campus where their workplace performance would be assessed as either pass or fail. Kieyu’s comment summed up the general feeling within the group: “The thing is,

whatever it is, I'm still just a student. I'm just here to finish all my training before I must go back [to campus] for our final test [assessment]" (Kieyu, i3, 57-58). Even if they wanted to immerse themselves as much as possible in the world of work and try to become "a real professional", it was clear to me that the participants understood this caveat. In Kieyu's words:

So automatically, even before I come here I have to think like a worker, talk like a worker ... basically train myself to do many professional things. I must change to become the professional worker. ... I must prepare [finish] whatever work they give in corporate communications. If I be [act like] just a student, other workers will think maybe this guy don't know much about his work. (Kieyu, i2, 466-469)

It was not easy for them to come to terms with their hybrid student-worker identity as they tried to settle into their workplace routines. As a result, on some days they reported feeling "student-like", yet "worker-like" on other days. That said, for all but one of the participants (Fadil), the feeling of being like a real worker became stronger as the attachment progressed.

Two factors might be attributed to these feelings of change from student to worker. The first was the way they "carried" themselves (I noted this in the previous section as "*pandai bawa diri*"). My data suggest that the notion of carrying oneself is not just part of Bumiputera Malay identity on campus, it is also a key aspect of professional identity in the workplace for the participants. Learning how to carry oneself, or more accurately to project the best of one's abilities, is tied to the Malay constructs of *adat* and *jiwa*. Within the Malay community, it is common parting advice given to someone (normally a younger person) who is starting an ideological endeavour or making a physical journey. It is also a reminder to that person to learn and adapt quickly to her or his 'new world'. Fadil, as the participant who travelled the furthest for the attachment talks about his own journey: "My parents were not too worried about me going. But, my *Tok Uci* [grandmother] reminded me *mesti bawa diri elok-elok* [remember to carry yourself well]" (Fadil, n2, 8-10). But, even with his preparations, years spent in the world of work and professional demeanour, it was Fadil who was made to feel very much student-like for the duration of the attachment. He believed that he was excluded by his professional community and he had to work on tasks that did not reflect his role as an intern for the legal department of his company (subsequent chapters will provide details regarding this).

Interestingly, many participants were given similar advice, if not by their parents or elder family members, by their own lecturers at the end of their final semester on campus. For Ckina, the best advice for the attachment came from Madam Indra, her English lecturer. She wrote:

On the last day, her PowerPoint presentation was inspiring us. She said to be humble, ready to learn new things during our training. She also said, we must use it [English] confidently and don't be scared of mistakes. ... The way she advised us, like my mother talks to me. It's so touching. (Ckina, n2, 20-26)

Being reminded to carry oneself successfully in the workplace, to adapt quickly and to be open to new experiences, whilst maintaining Malay community values like humility and deference to authority, signalled the end of one journey (as university student) and the beginning of a new one (as young professional). In sum, the experiences of Kieyu, Fadil and Ckina reflect how aspects of their Bumiputera Malay selves paved the way for them to start changing from student to professional. The experiences of Eizat and Agnes will illustrate this further. They reveal how carrying oneself well not only helped them to successfully change from student to worker but also to become (and feel) professional.

Eizat, like Agnes, realised the importance of projecting the best of one's abilities as a sign of professionalism. Both of them always talked about showing "a good image" to make a positive impression on others. They said that thinking like a professional was not enough, because a young professional's self must be clearly projected to superiors, co-workers and clients. In other words, the professional self must be demonstrated, and to do this they turned to their communication and language abilities. Eizat, who was always conscious about carrying himself appropriately, said that he made a conscious effort to project his professional image from the first day of his attachment at P-Hospital. Given the role of assistant project coordinator in the community outreach and corporate social responsibility [CSR] unit of P-Hospital, Eizat was required to constantly liaise with the public, the Malaysian media and community leaders in Penang. He initially felt scared and lacked confidence. Moreover, he did not want to let the CSR team down. But as the attachment rapidly progressed, he learned many important lessons about projecting a professional image in relation to his attachment role. In Eizat's view:

To be professional, I must talk like the professional people talk. To start, with our manager, everyone, including me, we always speak in formal English to show respect. During meetings, when visitors come, I also use formal English. Even if I use BM for normal communication, actually not many staff here speak BM fluently. Majority are

non-Malays, mostly Chinese. They are more comfortable using Mandarin. So, I try to use it too ... depending on situation. (Eizat, i2, 130-136)

He added that focusing on his communication and language abilities was not really difficult, because he had learned so much on campus. He was happy with the outcome of his work and felt sure that he was carrying himself in a manner expected of him by his workplace mentor and P-Hospital. At one point or another during the attachment period, other participants reported doing many of the things that Eizat did (e.g., speaking in a formal and business-like manner to project a professional image in their respective workplaces).

As the PR intern for B-Media, Agnes very soon learned the importance of projecting a positive image by the professional use of her communication and language skills. On the second day of work, she was sent with her mentor to prepare for a PR event the following weekend. She became excited when she was asked to supervise the setting up of exhibition booths in a hotel where the event would be held. She recounted:

I was so scared. It was just second day. I was like, I'll follow Miss Sheila [the Senior PR Executive, her designated mentor] and observe. Then, she asked me to settle the booths ... she got urgent things. I became her. I made sure they [hotel personnel] followed our specs, decorations, everything. I give instructions in English fully, like Miss Sheila. Their workers all listened to Boss Agnes [laughs]. (Agnes, i2, 260-265)

By the end of the attachment, Agnes was arguably one of the most successful young professionals in the group. She loved to use this phrase to explain her attitude towards her working life: "Don't think, jump into it!" (Agnes, n2, 30). In other words, when faced with a challenge, a young professional-in-training should not think too much about potential problems, but face them head-on. Consequently, projecting an image of a professional was "absolutely important" for her. She shared many stories about performing different roles at work. One role she loved the most was becoming a 'PR Executive' with her mentor as her role model (i.e., "*I became her*"). She shared these thoughts on her performance at the end of the second day:

I was so professional ... when we finished it was 8 pm. Then, the event manager [of the hotel] gave me his card. He said, when you grad come back to talk. I smiled. I played cool but my heart's jumping. It's just second day. I guess it's the way you carry yourself, you talk to people, not just what language you use, also your style, the pro image. ... So do it, don't think, just be the PR. (Agnes, i2, 269-273)

Agnes noticed that by using English, she was able to further strengthen her image as a PR professional, although depending on the context using Bahasa Melayu was also acceptable in

her line of work. To carry herself well, there were more important factors to take into account, such as being confident and taking charge of the situation, communicating like a real professional and being proactive in performing her role as intern. Together with her language ability, these helped her to project “Agnes [the] PR Exec” (Agnes, n2, 36) to others from the early days of her attachment.

The second factor that helped the participants to feel more worker-like was their actions to increase their work rate and show their potential to others. My data show that all of them adopted a positive ‘can-do’ attitude from the start of their working lives. Some participants made the transition from campus to workplace smoothly and were able to promptly settle into their new professional roles, while others needed more time. Those who said that they needed more time often felt as if their fellow workers were not taking them seriously. These participants had to work hard to prove to their superiors and colleagues that they were capable of doing what was required of them. As Ckina sees it, “they are testing me. The first week I was at the main counter, answer the phone, handle walk-in customers, do this, do that. ... It’s very, very tiring. But, I’m so proud I showed them all [my capabilities]” (Ckina, i2, 28-32). She was also proud of the fact that she was able to assist an elderly Indian lady who had trouble paying her telephone bill. The customer could not speak fluently in Bahasa Melayu or English so she took the initiative of calling the customer’s daughter who then acted as a Tamil language translator. The situation was resolved when she managed to get the customer to agree to pay off her bill in smaller instalments.

Intan is another example of someone who successfully adopted a can-do attitude to facilitate her transition from student to worker. Although she confessed that the demands of working for a Japanese company were a heavy burden to bear at the start of her attachment, she convinced herself of the importance of striving for personal and professional development. As she explained: “I have to come to work latest by 7.30 am ... work with 15 customers per day, sometimes more. It’s a really heavy pressure ... the earliest I can pack up is 7 pm. But I really did it!” (Intan, i2, 73-77). J-Automotive operates seven days a week which added to her time commitment. She was allowed to take one and a half day’s leave per week; however, most weeks Intan only managed to take one day’s leave due to her heavy workload. Being placed at the frontline in order to liaise with customers who wanted their automobiles serviced was hard for Intan, especially when she was only given the first week to learn how

to perform her duties. Intan shared her experience of handling a difficult customer on her fifth day at J-Automotive:

Mentor said, handle him. I was so scared but I just go. The uncle stared at me. He shouted, he said bad words in Hokkien. ... I just smiled. When he stopped, I greeted him in Mandarin, asked him to sit, relax and explain. The uncle was so shocked [laughs]. Then, he is cool. His pickup got a long scratch at the back. I helped him to claim free. Next day, he called our big boss to praise me. (Intan, i2, 137-143)

In all, Intan was happy and proud of the fact that she passed the initiation process into her workplace community. She was praised by her superiors for her ability to keep calm and respond kindly to angry customers on several occasions. After a few weeks, Intan felt that her ability as a customer services professional had improved tremendously.

Syful too took actions to demonstrate his abilities to members of his workplace community. He said that he performed multiple roles in T-Realties; for instance, as “Wordsmith and Ideacon [Idea Icon]” (Syful, n3, 11) who was tasked with assisting the advertising and promotions team. He actively drew on his expertise in Bahasa Melayu and English in order to project his professional image and also to become an invaluable team member. With his previous work experience, he did not face any obstacles coping with the demands of working in the advertising and promotions department. As a creative assistant with excellent proficiency in both written BM and English, he saw himself as an asset to the company. In his mind, he was not sent to T-Realties to undergo training as a university student but to work as a “real young urban professional”. Adopting a can-do attitude, from the first week Syful constantly looked for tasks to complete for the advertising and promotions team. He shared his experience:

It was like, what can I do? Can I work on this? That one? Alice, my manager [and mentor] said, “Relax Syful, we’re not on fire yet!” [laughs]. ... Just in the first week, I finished nearly a dozen pending news and magazines write-ups. Their English stuff are so-so, but the BM stuff were seriously horrible. I didn’t say anything. I think they knew that. Well, that’s why I’m here, right? (Syful, i2, 462-467)

As a result of his good performance in the first week, Syful was given another important role the following week: to become the in-house trainer for the T-Realties advertising and promotions team. He was extremely happy with this additional role. In his words: “Now, every week the SVP [Senior Vice President] said Syful must do working lunch sessions with the team. Give them refreshers on visual writing, ad works and stuff. Hell yeah! I’m the man” (Syful, i3, 64-68). From the way he explained the “working lunch sessions” with his

colleagues (frequently referring to them as “training sessions for *my* creative team”) it is easy to see that Syful really appreciated being given the opportunity to share his knowledge with his team members.

As a final example of Syful’s transition from student to professional and his can-do attitude towards his working life, he shared another “success story” from week three. Syful was called to the SVP’s office to give his feedback on a brochure that was printed (by an outside company) to promote a T-Realties project at the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia. As the target market is made up of affluent Malaysian, Bruneian, Indonesian and Singaporean investors, the brochures were written in both Bahasa Melayu and English. After looking at the brochures:

She asked, “So? Your input?” I was, “It’s okay-*lah*”. I noticed mistakes but kept my mouth shut. Then she said, “The truth now, can people get the message?” I reluctantly explained all the mistakes I saw. Long story short, boxes of brochures were thrown away that day ‘cause of me [laughs]. Our team were asked to redo. ... They originally outsourced to a *Bumi* [Bumiputera] company. Waste of money only. (Syful, i2, 476-481)

I asked Syful what he meant when he said that it is a “waste of money” to work with a Bumiputera company. He explained that in the world of business some members of his ethnic group normally looked for “easy and quick profit”. This was also a personal reason why he targeted non-Malay companies for his attachment experience. He admitted feeling happy that the original company failed to deliver. The company’s failure presented him and his small creative team with a chance to successfully present a better end-result to T-Realties, due in no small part to his personal input and superior writing skills in both Bahasa Melayu and English.

This section has highlighted perceived changes in the working lives of the participants as they continued to draw on the languages they know to become professional and feel more worker-like within their workplace communities. Although they realised that the attachment was really a process of learning about the world of work, they all wanted to make a positive impression. They soon understood that it was not just the languages that they used that were important, but also the way they communicated and performed their work roles. These contributed to the transition from university student to young professional in two distinct but overlapping ways. Firstly, was the way the participants carried themselves in front of their superiors, co-workers and clients. Carrying oneself or projecting the best of one’s abilities is

strongly linked to the Malay constructs of *adat* and *jiwa*. Secondly, was their actions to increase their productivity and to demonstrate to others their potential as young professionals. They reported adopting a can-do attitude right from the start of their work experience. Once these changes were felt, new identity trajectories materialised in the lives of a number of participants, as the final section will show.

7.2.2. Exploring life trajectories through workplace participation

Wenger (1998) argues that “identities form trajectories, both within and across communities” (p. 154). In this section, I extend the notion of life trajectory for the eight participants to take into account possibilities for the future. As they completed more than half of their attachment, they started to explore identity trajectories drawing on their workplace experiences and their imagining of future possibilities. Two factors made it possible for them to create and explore these trajectories: achieving personal work-related targets, and feeling the genuine acceptance of members of their workplace communities.

As each week passed, Ckina became more comfortable in carrying out her work as assistant in the administration division of M-Telecoms. The tasks that she was expected to carry out were in line with her own expectations. As a result, she felt that even the smallest things that she did contributed directly to her company. Ckina penned in one of her narratives:

I feel more positive in this choice. I love to work [in this field]. Seniors are kind and supportive although they always play jokes on me. ... I feel, really, that I work here because I contribute all my efforts. We wear the same uniform, we all are the same. I am so sure I want to work in this area. My mentor said, why not do customer services or management for your degree? ... Truly many doors are opening now. (Ckina, n5, 61-66)

Ckina’s statement that “many doors are opening now” summed up not only her own feelings, but also those of most of the participants as they crossed the middle point of the attachment period. Her active participation in M-Telecoms meant that she was able to imagine possible identity trajectories; for instance, studying about customer services or the field of management. As part of her own “*projek kerjaya impian* [dream career project]” (Ckina, n5, 69), she planned to return to the telecommunications sector after finishing her diploma. Ckina said that this sector is a really challenging but “fun business” to work in. Indeed, Ckina’s typical working day was always busy, as she helped her mentor to prepare and manage business documents, attended to walk-in customers at the help desk (to cover for senior staff

on sick leave and during their break hours), answered telephone calls, and performed other important tasks related to the daily running of her branch office.

For another participant, Teeya, her role as assistant to the chief secretary of L-Engineering (who was also her appointed on-site mentor) meant that she was always busy working on management-related tasks. This made her realise the importance of management work in running a private business organisation. Like Ckina, Teeya too felt a genuine sense of acceptance and trust from others within her workplace. According to her, becoming an important member of the management team at L-Engineering helped to empower her professional self, so much so that she started imagining new possibilities for her future life. Teeya wrote about her experience:

My achievement is now I feel that I fully know what to do for my future life. Seriously, looking at Madam Kit [her mentor] multitasking is amazing. She can talk on the phone, take notes, proofread, everything at one go. She is calm and composed. To me, the most coolest thing is she speaks in many languages fluently. She is super professional when she talks to you. ... She is my Malaysian Idol. I want to be like her. (Teeya, n5, 5-12)

Teeya's statement that "I want to be like her" reflects the strong influence that her mentor had made on her future outlook. Her strong bond with her workplace mentor was not only professional, but also personal. For instance, she reported going out for "all-girls lunch dates" with Madam Kit, and spending teatimes together at the end of their long working day. This bond became stronger as weeks passed and it helped Teeya to start imagining and planning for her own future with her mentor as her role model.

The genuine acceptance of others within their workplace communities was a powerful influence in the process of identity construction for the participants. For participants like Intan and Ckina, they had to work hard in the early weeks to prove themselves to their colleagues before they felt this acceptance. Once they did, Intan and Ckina became empowered and their professional selves became clearer within their minds. For other participants, like Eizat and Agnes, their entrance into their respective workplaces came with high expectations of their professional abilities (Eizat was hand-picked to join P-Hospital whilst Agnes' application was supported by recommendations from senior workers in the industry). Both of them did not have to go through a period of informal initiation (like Intan and Ckina). They felt that they were inducted and somewhat 'pushed' to become important members of their workplace teams almost immediately. To be fair, Eizat was not a newcomer

to the world of work, as he had already spent a significant amount of time gaining work experience after secondary school. Agnes, too, had informal exposure to the kind of work expected from a PR intern; for instance, helping to negotiate business contracts for her father who owns a large building and renovating company in northern Peninsular Malaysia. Only Fadil, the eldest participant and the most experienced worker in the group, felt that his workplace participation was limited and that he was constantly excluded by others within his department. He highlighted the many steps that he had taken to be seen as a member of the legal department at J-Incorporated. Sadly, Fadil felt that he was stonewalled at every juncture and he did not feel any kind of satisfaction from working in that organisation.

Once he had gone through more than half of the attachment period, another participant, Eizat, felt that the choice he had made to join P-Hospital was paying dividends on many fronts. Whenever we discussed his work, he would repeatedly mention “*nada-nada positif* [the positive tones]” (Eizat, n4, 16) that he felt for all the effort that he put into his role as assistant project coordinator for the community outreach unit. Most importantly, Eizat believed that he was able to carry out his tasks successfully because he had the support of his colleagues and the full trust of his manager. Being a Bumiputera Malay person working in a predominantly Chinese private health organisation, he admitted that he felt out of place in the early days of the attachment. Nevertheless, after a time he grew fond of his co-workers and they of him. In Eizat’s words:

When they talk to me ... I feel they’re talking to another worker. Not student, a new worker and new in this field. They help me understand all the job tasks I have to do. I never feel they’re looking down or don’t trust me. They don’t make fun of me. In our office, everyone makes fun of everyone [laughs]. It’s a good place to work, really good. Seriously, even on campus I never feel like this positive feeling inside me now. (Eizat, i3, 325-330)

Eizat became more convinced that he had “a real future” in the health industry or applied social work, which were career lines that he admitted he had previously never imagined entering. At the same time, Eizat reported that his administration and management skills were quite valuable in his line of work (i.e., corporate social responsibility) and he believed that these skills would be beneficial for his future life. Comparing his own experience with other undergraduates from the A&M Faculty, Eizat wrote: “Before, friends said I made a mad man choice, *Eizat orang gila* [Eizat is a crazy guy] ... now when we chit-chat, I show them all my work projects. They become so jealous of me. They do so little work, not important job tasks, not like me” (Eizat, n5, 29-31).

Like Eizat, Agnes thoroughly enjoyed her own attachment experience. Working at B-Media was challenging, but Agnes was thoroughly happy to be part of the team. She always made a conscious effort to be in the middle of activities in the public relations department. In her words: “Me, I truly don’t want to be just a furniture here. I want to expose myself, like [on] campus. I can’t sit down quiet and hope my colleagues notice me. ... I’m nice to the others so they’re nice to me also” (Agnes, i3, 105-108). As a result of her efforts to ‘expose’ herself, Agnes reported that seniors in her department began to notice her abilities and accept her both professionally and personally. Her good relationship with her on-site mentor, Miss Sheila, also contributed to her feeling more like a PR professional as the weeks passed. In her own words:

Last meeting, *Kak* Linda [Sis Linda, Managing Director of B-Media] praised me in front of everyone. Really! She said B-Media must get more dynamic young staff who got new ideas but know how to co-operate with seniors. Must be Miss Sheila said nice things about my job. I’m so proud and so happy. ... Also, I think she [Kak Linda] is unhappy with some of the new staff. ... So, now maybe I’m their role model [laughs]. (Agnes, i3, 128-136)

Her capacity to work without constant supervision, her high productivity and her efforts to learn as much as possible from the industrial attachment meant that Agnes was well on her way to becoming a PR professional, something that she could only dream about up to this point. At the same time, she began to explore other career possibilities, for example, to work in electronic media (i.e., for Malaysian television or radio broadcasters) or professional events organisation in the ASEAN region. As she put it: “Seriously, I really feel this work internship is bombing me with so many options. I think all the many, many options are all so great for me ... for future Miss Agnes” (Agnes, i4, 38-41).

There were times that Agnes would refer back to her earlier experiences, such as when she failed her scholarship interview and when she could not get into the PR diploma programme that she wanted. However, as she continued to make very good progress in her attachment, I could see that she began to feel a kind of acceptance of her previous failings. She started to imagine possible trajectories for her future life. The extract below, from one of her reflective narratives, is particularly illuminating and serves as a good example of the positive impact the attachment can make in the process of identity construction for university undergraduates. Agnes wrote:

When I think about the past time, I sometimes I really cry. I never tell anyone. ... not coz of what happened, but that time I was totally a failure. "Now, look at Agnes" I try to psycho myself. I worked so hard. Now, people see me as a PR person. Of course, I'm still learning. I get critics from seniors when I make mistakes. But I realize also, many chances are in front ... no need to jump into the darkness. Now I can fly to anywhere! (Agnes, n5, 49-55)

A summary of this section is as follows. By the middle of the attachment, the participants started to talk more regularly about their future lives and possible life trajectories they hoped to explore (e.g., careers, studies, personal life, etc.). The feeling of being more worker-like was strongly felt within the group except for one participant, Fadil. For the other seven participants, as time passed they settled into their work-related routines and continued their efforts to become, and be seen, as legitimate members of their workplace communities. Two factors contributed to the opening up of possible identity trajectories. The first was their achievements in realising their personal and professional goals. The second was the genuine professional and personal acceptance of 'old-timers' or senior members within their communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Overview of Chapter 7

In this chapter, I have discussed findings from the actual places of work of the eight main participants. These highlighted their lived experiences and felt changes from the early days of the industrial attachment until the attachment passed its middle mark. Chapter 7 answered the second research question: What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates during their industrial attachments? In order to answer this research question, I divided the discussion in this chapter into two major sections where I addressed four salient themes identified in the data. In the first section, through two of these I examined findings related to languages as part of life in Malaysian workplace communities: adapting to the workplace language environment, and learning through languages in workplace communities. In the second section, I examined the notion of becoming professional and exploring life trajectories, as the participants became more proficient in performing their work-related roles and as they became legitimate members of their communities of practice. Two themes were discussed: changing from university student to young professional and exploring life trajectories through workplace participation. There were several common themes in the experiences and identity-related changes in the working lives of the participants. At the same

time, however, I noticed that their life journeys became more personalised as the attachment period passed its middle mark. Individual stories of their working lives will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 8. Stories of working life

This chapter centres on the individual life journey of the participants as they began their working lives and as they crossed over the middle mark of the attachment period (between late February/early March 2011). Chapter 8 also answers the second research question: What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates during their industrial attachments? Chapter 7 examined common themes for them as a group. In this chapter, the findings presented are related to each participant's own working life (in terms of her or his feelings, experiences and aspirations). In general, once they completed more than half of the attachment period, seven of the participants said that they were becoming more professional and feeling more worker-like. Nevertheless, not all of them felt positive about the attachment. For the eighth participant, his working life was making him feel both disillusioned about his actual role in the attachment and frustrated in terms of being treated very much as a peripheral member of his community of practice. In reality, the distinctiveness of the life journey of each participant became more manifest as the attachment progressed. At the same time, the participants constantly reflected on their campus lives and actively imagined their future lives as they shared stories about their working lives. Possible reasons behind these observations are also highlighted in this chapter.

8.1. Stories of the lives of the eight participants in their workplaces

Although points of convergence were apparent in the working lives of the participants (as illustrated by several themes in the preceding chapter), they had different stories that they wanted to tell about their working lives. It is important that I try to highlight particularly illuminating episodes of these stories as the participants moved through to complete more than half of their compulsory workplace attachments. As explained in Chapter 6, these stories formed an integral part of the process of identity construction for the eight participants. In the subsections below, I present a case-by-case summary of each participant's working life as part of her or his continuing life journey that is realised through the industrial attachment. Where appropriate, I link these individual stories to the roles of languages in constructing the working life identities of the participants. Due to the distinct difficulties that he faced during

the attachment period, Fadil's extended story will close the discussion in this chapter. His working life is unlike the other participants for reasons that will become clearer by the end of this chapter.

8.1.1. Eizat

Continuing his life journey as a Bumiputera Malay with an expanding worldview and as a Malaysian “*warga dunia* [global citizen]” (Eizat, n1, 42), Eizat told me that he thoroughly enjoyed his working life. Most days he felt “breathless” with the amount of work given to him. At the same time, he was proud of the level of trust put on him by his superiors and members of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit at P-Hospital. He also said that he felt he had become a ‘real’ member of the CSR team from the early weeks of the attachment. His successful integration into the CSR unit together with his high productivity in the workplace helped him to imagine future life trajectories, for instance, as a social work professional or a social scientist specialising in health-based research. He acknowledged that compared to some of his friends from the A&M Faculty, he had entered a tough working environment. As a result, he was able to further improve his abilities in different professional capacities, especially in languages and communication skills. “Even on campus I never feel ... this positive feeling” (Eizat, i3, 330) is a statement which reflects Eizat's successful transition into the world of work and the positive impact this had had on him.

Before he left campus, Eizat had really wanted to broaden his Bumiputera Malay mindset by learning from members of the Malaysian Chinese community, who he felt had much to teach him both personally and professionally. Indeed, after a number of weeks working in an environment dominated by Malaysians who are not Bumiputera Malays, he was experiencing many changes. In his words:

Do I feel like the professional? Very strongly! I do so many things to professionalize myself. ... Here also, the Chinese staff are very hardworking. You *miànzi* [lose face] if you're lazy. It's *guanxi* tradition my mentor said – when you help me I help you, together we all get success. Now I know how the Chinese get success in business. *Sayang, orang Melayu kita tiada semangat ini* [It is a shame us Malays do not possess this spirit]. (Eizat, n6, 27-34)

He treasured the tips on how to become a better worker (based on Chinese philosophy) given to him by his mentor. Accordingly, the teachings of his mentor and his exposure to the Chinese work ethic forced him to readjust aspects of his worldview. He wrote, “*Selama ini, saya kuat semangat Melayu tapi semangat buta* [All this while, my Malay spirit is strong but

I follow it blindly]. ... For my future I'll mix the Malay spirit with Chinese tradition, European and everything. Only this can make us a global worker" (Eizat, n6, 34-36).

8.1.2. Intan

Intan's attachment was part of her journey "to show [others] I'm not this passive girl" (Intan, n1, 35) and to change her personality based on her aspirations for the future. Therefore, when she was thrown into the deep end from the start of her attachment, she welcomed this as a challenge. This experience strengthened her resolve to explore customer relations as a possible career path. Her successful integration into her workplace community, and her professional communication and language skills when dealing with customers (mostly non-Malays), added to the satisfaction that she felt with her working life. Though she was one of the quietest and most shy students in the A&M Faculty, she remarked, "Now, I'm much more confident" (Intan, i2, 193-194). As explained in the last chapter, it was due to her perceived weaknesses that she chose the field of customer relations for her attachment at J-Automotive. She saw the attachment as a chance to become an active and sociable person. During the seventh week of her attachment, she reported that she had been selected to attend J-Automotive's 'Level 1 CSP' [Customer Services Professional] course in Kuala Lumpur. This was the first step to becoming a full-time customer services executive for this Japanese company, and it was a great achievement for someone who considered herself to be too reserved and unassertive. Intan knew that soon she would have to make critical choices that would impact her future life. She wrote:

After GM [the General Manager] gave the letter, I run to the toilet to cry so hard. I'm so happy I called my mother, also you. From Penang, I'm the only student for this course. ... My mother said "*Alhamdulillah, hang cepat dapat kerja.*" [Praise to God, you managed to find a job quickly]. But I am very scared also. If I go? They'll ask if I want the permanent job. It's great but I want a degree. How, sir? (Intan, n5, 31-38)

I resisted giving advice and/or personal suggestions to the eight participants. But in this particular instance, I told Intan to keep her options open and attend the course. I convinced her that choosing a career did not mean that she had to forgo her dream of obtaining a degree. She agreed and said that she would only make her career decision after getting her diploma.

8.1.3. Ckina

On her quest to become a "top level professional manager" (Ckina, i3, 193), Ckina reported that her working life had been very productive. As one of the few participants who chose to

focus exclusively on administration and management during the attachment, she was able to successfully apply her diploma skills as an intern at M-Telecoms. At the same time, she enjoyed her daily on-the-job learning experiences at her workplace. These helped to shape her working life and to imagine her professional self in the future. Ckina explained:

Lecturers said [be] ready to learn. I understand now. When we work, we learn all the professional things, how to talk to people, what to talk, the teamwork, everything. ... Also, we Malaysian peoples have many languages. When I become manager [laughs], I must know all languages of my workers and the public so I can be the top level professional manager. (Ckina, i3, 188-193)

On a personal level, Ckina was making steady progress to solidify her position within her workplace community. But, even if she said that she was happy with the overall support of colleagues in her division, she was disturbed about the existence of two opposing subgroups at M-Telecoms: the Bumiputera Malays and the non-Malays. In her reflective narratives, she made negative remarks about this social tension within her working environment. Although she hailed from a Bumiputera-only university, she believed that, for the good of the organisation, the workplace should never be socially organised based on ethnic grounds. Furthermore, to broaden her horizons as an intern, she wanted to be part of both groups. Ckina did not appreciate being forced to pick one group over the other. She wrote:

I'm from a Malay campus. So, to me, it's not good they always group with each other. I just don't care. Morning I join this group then afternoon different group. Seriously, I want to learn from everyone, share about each other's expertise and have great teamwork. (Ckina, n5, 30-34)

Miss Pillay, as the chief clerk of her department and her workplace mentor, noticed what Ckina was doing and commended her for taking the initiative to socialise with all staff members regardless of ethnic background. As a result, at the end of her attachment her dedication and her forward thinking (in line with her views on how a “top level professional manager” should behave) helped her to win the A&M Faculty's Best Intern award for excellent performance during the attachment. This was due, in no small part, to the glowing appraisal written by her non-Bumiputera mentor.

8.1.4. Teeya

Teeya's life journey was tied to her love of languages. She wanted her dream career to be closely linked to languages no matter where she ended up in the future. On the one hand, being able to forge a good relationship with her workplace mentor and actively contribute to the day-to-day running of the management department at L-Engineering meant that she

enjoyed participating in her attachment. But, on the other, she also felt that something was amiss. At the end of each day, she would reflect on her working life and future life. She strongly believed that her experiences were leading her to a different field: to languages rather than administration and management Teeya wrote:

You are the one person I am sharing this feeling, even thinking makes me guilty. L-Engineering is a great place. Madam Kit, the GM, the staff are superb. But inside me, now I feel stronger than ever this diploma is just a stepping stone. Working here I see what I can do and I know what I can be ... everything leads back to my first love – the languages. Are you smiling right now, Sir? (Teeya, n5, 66-74)

I was not surprised with the turn that Teeya's working life had taken. Her love of languages was hard to miss and it remained one of her favourite topics in her reflective narratives and during our interview sessions. I would later learn what she meant when she said that the attachment was leading her "back to languages". For her, every work-related task had a language component to it. Small tasks like grammar checking and report writing, to bigger tasks like meeting clients and finalising business deals, all involved "the art of language" (Teeya, n5, 75). This was what she really wanted to do: to learn about languages and to become a multilingual professional who uses languages as "a professional asset to make money" (Teeya, n5, 76). As I stated previously, she was accepted by two companies in Kuala Lumpur for the attachment (both offered her internship positions related to languages) but her family wanted her to stay closer to home. She also shared two of her 'secrets' with me. First, that she had submitted an application to Malaysia's top university to do a degree in professional language studies; and second, that she had applied for a student exchange programme to Japan to do a gap year before pursuing her first degree. Apparently, Teeya had been making plans for the future even before she started her diploma.

8.1.5. Agnes

Agnes' passage into the world of work was centred on a single undertaking: "when people look at me, they see Agnes this PR Exec" (Agnes, n2, 35-36). Having had a bad experience in the past due to her inability to use English and communicate confidently, she aggressively carried out her PR work for B-Media. Some weeks she would also work on Saturday and Sunday (on a volunteer basis, for the most part) to gain wider exposure to the world of public relations and events management. Hence, even from the early days of the attachment, she showed great potential when she immersed herself in her work and became part of the public

relations team at B-Media. When asked to talk about her working life, Agnes excitedly explained:

Seriously this working life is just superb! I'm enjoying myself. Like I say, jump into it, do it. So to do PR, just be the PR person. I copy Miss Sheila's style but I also do my style. I talk in English even if my grammar is broken [laughs], follow the business etiquette and I show the professional PR image of B-Media. I carry so much in myself, *untuk buka semangat baru* [to psych myself up]. (Agnes, i4, 6-13)

Without a doubt, Agnes' philosophy towards her working life, "Don't think, jump into it!" (Agnes, n2, 30), is a piece of advice that is useful for undergraduates who have to undergo a period of industrial attachment or those who are joining the world of work after graduation. That said, it might not be easy for others to emulate her positive outlook on her professional self and her seemingly endless amount of energy to carry out her work beyond what was expected. Listening and talking to her, I sometimes forgot that this was a young professional-in-training who, in the past, failed to realise her own potential due to her limited language and communication abilities, and her lack of confidence. Personal agency and the human imagination are undoubtedly powerful catalysts in the process of identity construction, as her stories demonstrate. At the end of the attachment period, Agnes became one of the most successful undergraduates, not just in this group but also the A&M Faculty.

8.1.6. Kieyu

Like most participants in this group, Kieyu's life journey involved going after his "target job". Even when he was back on campus, he had his mind set on the Malaysian automotive industry so as to follow in his father's footsteps. He originally thought that the field of corporate communications is related merely to the skill of speaking, which he loved. However, he soon realised that writing is just as important. As the attachment progressed, his writing ability improved greatly through hard work and dedication (even to the point of taking company documents home to work on them). Once his communication and language abilities improved, his working life became more enjoyable. Still, he preferred 'meet and greet sessions' with visitors to the automotive plant to preparing documents for corporate events. He also assisted the CSR team whenever P-Industries was involved in community outreach social programmes. Even though he sometimes had to sacrifice his weekends, he loved working with the public and helping to promote a positive image of P-Industries. In addition, his working life gave him the opportunity to gradually gain the approval of his father, a senior officer at P-Industries (Kieyu was the only participant who worked in the

same place as an immediate family member). He confessed that his father had not been very keen on him joining P-Industries for his attachment. As such, he constantly felt the “pressure to perform like his [father’s] high standards because here actually I am not only Kieyu ... I carry his name in me” (Kieyu, n5, 2-3). Nevertheless, as the attachment progressed, Kieyu’s new professional self caught his father’s eye:

He’s so quiet, a disciplined person. So, I was so surprised when mentor said he always asked about me. I said, really? In the car, home, he never say anything. Nothing! No advice or something like that. But mentor said, everyday they discuss about me at lunch or *Zohor* [Muslim noon prayer]. ... He said my father was so proud because I have very good job performance. When he said this, I got tears into my eyes. (Kieyu, i3, 241-249)

Gaining the approval of his father became an important milestone in Kieyu’s working life. Although his father never talked to him directly about the attachment, knowing that his father was watching over him encouraged him to work even harder. His hard work paid off when his high productivity was praised by his superiors. Kieyu’s growing sense of professionalism also made him confident that he would soon be appointed to his target job at P-Industries.

8.1.7. Syful

Syful’s journey was related to continuing the working life that he had given up in order to study for the diploma. He had one of the most successful working lives within this group for two reasons. First, his earlier exposure to the world of work; and second, the fact that he knew exactly what he wanted to achieve from the attachment by drawing on his personal strengths and professional abilities. He was also amongst the few who felt a “fantabulous match between what I do [his work] and my inner me” (Syful, n5, 31). In other words, his role at T-Realties was compatible with his “idea of my ideal working life” (Syful, n5, 33). He was a symbol of how communication and language abilities could lead to a promising career and open up multiple identity trajectories that could be beneficial at the individual, social and professional levels. I asked him to summarise his working life as he passed the middle mark. Syful exclaimed:

I so love this job! You give the option to go back to campus, that place I supposedly belong or stay here, I choose this company every time. Apart from the environment, perks are great as well. I really get taken care of over here and I get money too. Well, it’s not much, but some students from my faculty don’t get paid a cent, especially the *gomen* [government or public sector] gang. My life’s bloody great! (Syful, i4, 3-11)

At the personal level, Syful still felt a bit alienated along ethnic lines when his co-workers communicated in Mandarin or their own Chinese dialects. Nevertheless, he refused to be excluded by those around him, partly because he had had to endure the same negative experiences on campus. One of the strategies he adopted to become part of his non-Malay workplace community was: “*I redah saja* [I just do it/push myself]” (Syful, n5, 52). He said that he felt really offended when others around him did not include him in the conversation. However, compared to his time on campus, he writes, “people here are more friendly and open with me, compared to the oh-so high and mighty *Melayu-Islam* [Malay-Muslims] back on campus who all just hated my guts” (Syful, n5, 52-53). His successful working life during the attachment later led to quite a surprising decision for his future life.

8.1.8. Fadil

Amongst the participants in this group, Fadil was professionally the most experienced, having worked in the public sector for more than three years before deciding to return to study. Academically, he was also the most able. He had already completed a vocational Certificate in Business Studies. Sadly, it was Fadil who felt that his working life was “just so full of failures for me” (Fadil, n5, 1). He also felt like an outsider every day that he worked for J-Incorporated. To a large extent, Fadil’s industrial attachment failed him and made him feel that his working life was not successful. To begin, on the first day he reported for duty at J-Incorporated, he looked forward to the experience:

27 levels building ... Royal Family sharing [shares], international biz, first time for me in the private sector. So exciting! Faculty friends are jealous, they said “*Abang Fadil otai, jadi senang apply*” [You, brother Fadil, are an old-timer so it was easy to get accepted]. In reality? *Indah khabar dari rupa* [Things are not as pleasant as they seem]. (Fadil, n5, 5-9)

After being welcomed by a senior human resources (HR) executive, Fadil was taken on a typical walkabout session to show him the main departments of J-Incorporated. During the session, he met another student (from the same university system) who was attached to the logistics department. The other student, Aswad, was in logistics as part of his MBA research. Aswad gave Fadil his number and insisted that Fadil call him to discuss the attachment (Aswad would later explain to him that J-Incorporated was a “totally bad place” for industrial training, especially for undergraduates). At the end of the walkabout, he was taken to the HR department and enjoyed lunch with the senior executive. He recalled:

That time, I feel it’s so exciting. The exec and all the workers here also looked so nice and professional. Then he said, “You are good in English, right? So, you must work

for legal [department].” I just said thank you to him. Then, after lunch I reported to legal ... my working hell starts there. (Fadil, i3, 16-21)

Fadil saw the first signs of his “working hell” when he was assigned a workspace at the far end of the department where “they put the legal files like mountains and mountains of files ... and also very dusty” (Fadil, i3, 31-32). To his surprise, there was no computer on his desk and he could not access the internet. He could only access these basic facilities, albeit intermittently, when he was tasked with filling in at the receptionist’s desk each time she took a break. Later that afternoon, he was introduced to the head of the department, a senior lawyer who was also a graduate from the same university system. According to him:

She asked what I can do. I have my CV ready, I pass to her ... she just put in a file. I told everything, where I worked, working experience, basically everything. She used BM and she said, “HR said your English is good? Maybe you can check the legal agreements, do the copies.” I said, sure I can. Then I said, other than that? Then she said, if okay you must handle the Singapore side [documents] also. I was happy ... but that time, I don’t know what ‘check’ means. Now, I know. (Fadil, i3, 49-59)

Fadil’s typical working day would be spent mostly on checking the grammar and spelling of legal documentation and ensuring that things were in order. His work also involved a considerable amount of time preparing photocopies of legal documents for other staff members and carrying heavy bundles of legal documents to other departments in the same building. When I asked him to talk about his work, in frustration he replied, “My role is a *kuli* [coolie]. Call me office boy is also okay, really no difference. ... I was thinking coming to *JB* [Johor Baru, the state capital] is my *hijrah*, the sacrifice for new experience. Now? Well, what can I say?” (Fadil, i3, 339-343). The only break from the monotony of his working life was when he was asked to take over the reception desk during the receptionist’s break time, from the second week onwards.

Unsurprisingly, Fadil strongly felt that his professional abilities and past experience did not carry any weight in his attachment. To exacerbate matters, he added that his department was “typical *stail Melayu* [Malay style] ... much drama and office politics, like people in the same department sitting in side by side table but they never talked to each other! ... How can I join them?” (Fadil, n6, 7-11). As a result, he just focused on his own tasks and took his breaks alone or with Aswad, if Aswad was available. He was ignored by most of the other thirty or so members of the department. Fadil shared a particular episode that depicted his sense of isolation from his workplace community:

One day, I was shocked when I come to office. Everyone got very nice clothes. Then, the HoD said like, “It’s good you’re here. You can take care of the reception for us.” I don’t know they all have special lunch with the Sultan, even Aswad went. I was left alone. ... After the glamour lunch they come back like I’m invisible. They got many goodies bags to take home ... no one even think to give me one. (Fadil, n7, 13-22)

In week three, Fadil reported being shouted at by the chief clerk (with the whole department watching) when a bundle of documents that he had sent to the wrong department went missing for several days. It was later revealed to him by staff in the other department that the chief clerk had written the wrong instructions on the bundle, but had blamed Fadil to cover up her mistake. In his words, “I swear sir, my hand was so shaking at that time. *Konon pakai tudung labuh macam ustazah, dia maki saya macam dungu* [She wore her headscarf like an Islamic religious teacher, but she scolded me like I was a moron]. I just looked down, remember my mother, father, *Allah* [God] ... if not, I swear surely I slap that woman” (Fadil, n7, 28-31). After that episode, the chief clerk tried to be nice to him but he kept away from her and maintained only professional contact with her and other workers. As a direct result, most days Fadil felt as if he was working “in a bubble”: alone in his own world and separate from the other personnel in the legal department.

I empathised with Fadil. Every time we met it was difficult to ignore the frustration he felt even though he continued to put on a brave face and worked as he always did to complete his tasks. He acknowledged, whether he liked it or not, his future (i.e., his diploma) depended on the evaluation of his mentor. Therefore, open conflict or protest would not have been in his best interest, and that was the main reason why he chose to “just be low-profile and keep professional” (Fadil, n6, 5). As a small consolation, his perseverance helped him to learn about legal English. He even invested in a legal English dictionary and a few legal books to help him complete his tasks, sometimes to the point of ‘smuggling’ confidential files to his rented flat to check his work and free himself up the next day. Another point that he raised was his growing annoyance with “your English is good” being used as an excuse by other staff in the legal department to dump all their work on him. Tasks like proofreading non-legal documents written in English which he said could easily be done using word processing software, to compiling J-Incorporated’s confidential legal documents in English that he said he should not even be reading, slowly became part of Fadil’s daily work routine. From his observations, other staff members were quite reluctant to work on documents in English because their English proficiency was not sufficient. He saw, on many occasions, these staff

members using internet tools (most commonly ‘Google Translate’) to translate documents that they had to prepare. Fadil found this amusing, but it raised questions in his mind regarding the honesty and integrity of some of the workers in his department.

Fadil’s comment below serves as a reminder of some of the real challenges that young undergraduates need to overcome during the attachment period. Indeed, their working lives are in the hands of others at their workplaces, not just their own. In Fadil’s opinion:

If people say we must do it [the attachment], I agree. But, if people say it is important, now, how can I say it’s important? To me, all depends on luck. You have expert skills ... language skills, PC skills, expert whatever but if that company won’t let you use [your skills], how? ... Seriously, how can I become professional if I work in the place that is totally not professional to me? *Tapi sir, saya tetap syukur* [But sir, I am still grateful]. At least, I already got work experience. What if my experience now happens to the real juniors who do not experience anything yet? (Fadil, i5, 139-148)

Fadil tried to look on the brighter side of his experience at J-Incorporated, even with the odds stacked against him. Making the sacrifice to move to a new city for the attachment was not easy for him, but struggling to maintain a degree of professionalism within a non-conducive working environment was even harder. There were days when he felt like not going to work and packing up his bags to return to his hometown. Instead, he kept pushing himself so that he could fulfil his final diploma requirement. I asked Fadil what helped to keep him going. He explained: “*Saya tak mau hampakan keluarga. Biasalah adat dagang anak Melayu orang perantau. Mana pernah senang, betul tak?* [I do not want to let my family down. This is the custom for a Malay youngster on his journey to prove himself. It’s never easy, right?] ... Everyone has their test from God, this is my test. *Insya Allah* [God willing], I will still pass it” (Fadil, i5, 167-174).

Overview of Chapter 8

In this chapter, I presented stories of the working lives of the participants as they continued their life journey, as linked to the attachment. Each of them had personal stories to share about their feelings, experiences and aspirations as they completed more than half of the attachment period. Nearly all of them enjoyed their working lives and they felt changes happening in their communication and language skills as well as in their professional selves. They became noticeably more worker-like and less student-like. For Fadil, however, this was not the case. He had no choice but to soldier on because his graduation depended on the report provided by his workplace mentor. His perseverance shows a worker-like maturity. A

'student' might have given up or make strong complaints. His experience was clearly not as satisfactory but his response to it was equally mature as any of the other participants. A final observation was the way participants drew on their campus lives and imagined their future lives as they shared stories about their working lives. The next chapter presents findings relating to the future lives of the eight participants.

Chapter 9. Future life

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with the experiences, hopes and dreams of the participants as they start to plan for their future lives and to decide on life trajectories to be explored as their attachments draw to a close. ‘Future life’ refers to two notions: the way the attachment experience was shaping the imagined futures of the participants, and the way the participants imagined their own lives after the attachment period comes to a close. As illustrated in earlier chapters, the participants envisioned their possible ‘future selves’ in different ways. Some discussed strong links between their future lives and their campus and working lives; others even referred back to their lives in school to make sense of their selves in the present. Chapter 9 is an attempt to answer the third research question: In what ways do Bumiputera Malay undergraduates use the languages that they know during their industrial attachments to invest in their future individual and social identities, and shape their future life trajectories? To answer this final question, two themes will be examined: looking at the past and present to move forward, and the attachment as a crossroads for future identities. Together, these themes outline the preparations the participants were making to move from the attachment into the future. Both themes also consider how they made sense of their attachment experience to complete their transition from university undergraduate to young professional.

9.1. From the attachment into the future

As the attachment crossed its middle mark and moved towards its conclusion, the eight participants reported how they felt more self-assured having performed their work-related roles efficiently and productively. Most of them said that their professional selves were now “more real” as they became legitimate members of their communities of practice. For such participants, the work they did was not ‘pseudo’ work but real work; their work counted as much as (and sometimes more than) the efforts of their full-time colleagues. Their successful engagement with their community members and positive experiences within their workplaces led to what Wenger (1998, 2009) refers to as ‘alignment’: a sense of being genuinely accepted by others around them and becoming an authentic professional through workplace participation. As a reflection of their new sense of self, a few participants, for example, stopped referring to themselves as university students. In their eyes, they were now ‘yuppies’

(young urban professionals or young upwardly-mobile professionals). According to them, becoming a yuppie is the dream of all undergraduates from the A&M Faculty (as a kind of informal tradition within that faculty, those who successfully completed their attachments would be called yuppies by their juniors).

Nevertheless, moving from the attachment into the future was not limited to assuming new identity labels or preparing to clear workspaces and to return to campus for graduation. In the final weeks of the attachment, the participants shared their mixed feelings as they began to take stock of their achievements and disappointments in relation to their work roles, and as they arrived at a critical juncture in their life journeys where it was time to make definite decisions regarding their future lives. Drawing on representative cases below, I present findings related to two themes: looking at the past and present to move forward, and the attachment as a crossroads for future identities.

9.1.1. Looking at the past and present to move forward

My coverage of this theme attempts to relate the past and present to the future as the participants made conscious connections between their campus, working and future lives. As part of their diploma studies, they were exposed to Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin for two and a half years. One purpose of the extensive language and communication training they received was to fully prepare them for a period of industrial attachment in the ‘working world’.

After months of living their working lives, the eight participants reported that they could now see the relevance of their campus-based learning, particularly the learning of Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin. Most of them also said that they now understood the implications of workplace-based communication for different aspects of their working lives, both at the personal and professional levels. In view of that, they shared moments of alignment as they became full-fledged workers; these were moments where they linked the past to the present and imagined future selves that were strongly aligned to their own aspirations. For the participants, these aspirations started to take shape on campus and became more focused near the end of the attachment period. As the survey illustrated in Chapter 5, students from the A&M Faculty strongly felt that the languages they know and their professional selves were interconnected. High percentages, ranging from 67.6% to 92.2% for survey items relating to professional identity, suggest that they were linking language use to professional ability, even

before their attachments commenced (see Table 5-7). In the eyes of the eight participants, these connections were indeed becoming stronger and more real as the attachment period neared its completion.

Arriving at this critical moment in their individual life journeys, for participants like Ckina, Intan, Kieyu and Eizat, the final weeks of the attachment marked the end of the transition period from university student to young professional. The four of them shared many stories about how they were consciously planning for their future lives during this period and contemplating the next steps to take in their continuing life journeys. On the other hand, linking the past to the present created a sense of ambivalence for other participants like Agnes, Syful, Teeya and Fadil. At one end of the spectrum, Agnes and Syful reported that the attachment had turned them into the persons that they were “already ready” to become. Due to this fact, they both had mixed feelings about having to return to campus in the coming weeks. They felt as if they really belonged within their respective workplace communities and having to go back to campus would be like moving “a step behind ... also, actually something which is for me in the wrong direction” (Agnes, i5, 23-24). Whilst most of the participants in this group shared many stories about their work-related accomplishments and the excitement they felt in anticipation of their graduation day, at the other end of the spectrum, Teeya and Fadil described their workplace experience as merely “okay” and somewhat satisfactory. They were concerned with the contribution that the attachment had made as part of their life journeys; although their individual attachments were satisfactory, they somehow felt that they should have benefitted more from their experience. Below, I detail some of the common experiences and feelings within the group.

9.1.1.1. From passive and pathetic to active and popular

By the end of the attachment, Ckina, as an intern in the administration division of M-Telecoms, had applied “nearly everything possible” that was related to her administration and management skills whilst ensuring that she also acquired different “professional things” (Ckina, i3, 189) to help her become a manager in the near future. She reported that in the final weeks:

I am very tired always but not negative but tired positive. How to say this? Like I'm very tired but I'm very happy also proud. Every day I do not sit and relax. Always, I move from this workstation go to that one and next one to help the seniors. I teach them DP [document processing], KB [keyboard] skills, everything I know. They said they will cry when I finish. (Ckina, n7, 16-22)

Ckina was happy and proud of the fact that her colleagues, who were more senior in age and experience, appreciated her expertise. By assisting them with their work, she strongly felt that her administration and management skills had made her “quite popular” compared to her life on campus, which was not as exciting. She added that by helping others in her department, she was actually “practising [to become] a top level professional manager” (Ckina, i3, 193) who leads by example and is always ready to lend a helping hand to other staff members.

Ckina repeatedly compared herself in the present with her life back on campus and gave examples of many positive changes that she felt. In terms of her language and communication ability, for instance, she constantly referred back to her experience with Madam Indra (her English lecturer in later semesters). Ckina wrote:

Before she taught me I'm no good in English. For part [semester] 4 final presentation, I present this topic – ‘Why managers must be cool communicators’. Madam called me to give this book ‘Art of Managing’. Free! Do you believe it? On the cover she put – FOR FUTURE MANAGER CKINA. ... Now, I look at myself, all coz of her I will become Manager! (Ckina, n6, 27-31)

Indeed, by the end of the attachment I noticed that Ckina was becoming more aware of her own potential and more confident in her own administration and management abilities. In the opening weeks of the attachment, she would talk about herself as a person with “low quality” and used words like “passive” and “pathetic” to refer to herself (even though in reality she was a good student). It was clear that she tried hard to push herself to do things that she was afraid to do. Each day, she reported investing a lot of time and effort in her work so as to be seen as an indispensable member of her workplace community. She admitted that she had always wanted to be confident to communicate when working with others and not “let the better people take over for me and I just listen to them” (Ckina, i4, 180). However, she always felt frightened and ended up being “just normal”, especially on campus where there were many outstanding students. It was only by seeing herself in the workplace context that Ckina was able to link her past to the present and imagine her future life as a manager.

Seeing themselves in action helped all the participants in this group to start linking their past to the present and to start imagining their future selves based on the multiple work roles that they carried out during the attachment period. In addition, when they linked the past to the present, the participants were reminded of the positive changes that they must continue to

make so that their future aspirations will become reality. Although many encouraging changes were already happening by the closing weeks, these changes differed from one participant to the next. Intan, for example, admitted that on campus she was passive and quiet. Nonetheless, like Ckina, she too had a dream career that was strongly linked to her own hopes and dreams. However, whereas Ckina wanted to become a top level professional manager, Intan wanted to learn to become the person in charge of customer relations in an international company. With the full support of senior members in the customer relations team at J-Automotive and their acceptance of her as a colleague, she was also able to realise her own potential and mould her professional self in line with her dream career.

Intan often told me that she was really pleased with the changes that she saw in herself. She strongly believes that her “old passive and shy personality” was slowly changing into a more active and sociable one. As an example of this, she was not only becoming a respectable young executive at J-Automotive, but also enthusiastically engaging in other workplace activities by joining, for example, their netball team and the company’s community welfare volunteer group. Intan valued opportunities like these for three reasons. First, she was able to build stronger friendship bonds with her colleagues that would extend outside of office hours. Second, she could mix with colleagues who were mainly Malaysians who are not Bumiputera Malays and learn more about their way of life. And third, she had the contact time that she needed to continue practising her Hokkien with her colleagues in “a more fun way” and relaxed manner. Without a doubt, by the closing weeks of the attachment, Ckina, Intan, and other participants like Kieyu and Eizat, were inching closer towards their shared objective to become a young professional in the truest sense.

9.1.1.2. From pro-Malay to ‘glocal’ Malay and global citizen

For Kieyu, although he believed that he was becoming a good worker and an important asset to P-Industries, he still expressed his regrets for “not sharpening” some of the work-related skills that he needed to become a “great corp comm [corporate communications] practitioner, like my mentor. ... He’s my one inspiration here, everyday he will advise me that if I work very hard and learn and don’t stop struggling, I will have my future in this field” (Kieyu, i4, 44-48). By the end of his internship, when he looked back on his campus life he realised the significance of acquiring not just general management skills but also communication and language skills in the process of becoming a good practitioner in this field. Still, he was satisfied with the overall progress he had made in terms of sharpening his writing and

speaking skills in professional English and Bahasa Melayu with some help from his mentor and senior staff members in his department. He also made a promise to himself to concentrate on these important skills when he begins his corporate communications degree in the future. His constructive experience at P-Industries had opened his eyes to the world of corporate communications, a career trajectory that he never would have imagined before leaving campus.

Like Kieyu, Eizat's positive experience at P-Hospital's corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit had opened his eyes to the potential of this field to become part of his future self. Before starting his attachment within the Malaysian health and welfare industry, he never imagined becoming a young professional in this field. At the same time, Eizat and the other participants in this group were already exposed to different aspects of the world of work through their diploma studies. Indeed, in the beginning, it was their broad training in administration and management that opened career opportunities for Eizat and the other participants. These new career lines also create new options to be explored as the eight participants prepared to move into their future lives. By the closing weeks of the attachment, they reported that their past academic training not only helped them to imagine their dream careers, but also allowed them access to future career options. One clear example is their extensive exposure to Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin on campus that had allowed them to be perceived as effective communicators and efficient young professionals within their communities of practice.

Looking back at their time on campus, however, both of them confessed that they learned English mostly because it was compulsory for them to do so. The same applied to Mandarin as their third language. This attitude was prevalent within the A&M Faculty and learning three languages was merely perceived to be part of their diploma programme, so much so that Kieyu and his close friends "never seriously thought about this topic" (Kieyu, i1, 38). For Eizat, as long as he gained good grades for his language papers he was happy. He too never really cared about learning to use English and Mandarin for the real world. Kieyu and Eizat preferred Bahasa Melayu to the other languages that they had to learn, and disapproved of Bumiputera Malay individuals who preferred English to their own mother tongue. Nevertheless, they never expressed these feelings to anyone as they were afraid other students might call them hypocrites because they still tried to use English (and Mandarin) on campus and at work.

So as not to be seen as an outsider, Kieyu tried to project a “pro-Malay image” as part of his campus and working lives. However, in the concluding weeks of the attachment, Kieyu felt that a contemporary image would be more beneficial for his future life:

In English class, I make jokes when lecturers say English is important in the job field. I joke are we under the Queen? ... Now is a totally different story for me. This is why PM said we must be *Melayu glocal* [‘glocal’ Malays], *fikiran global tapi akar umbi adat Melayu kita* [global in thinking but locally rooted in our Malay adat]. Seriously, when I go back to campus I’ll kiss the lecturers’ shoes to say sorry [laughs]. (Kieyu, i4, 69-74)

Kieyu realised that even a large national company must adopt a more global outlook to stay competitive. Only through his workplace exposure did he realise that he too needed to adopt a global worldview. In fact, when his father heard that he was accepted to carry out his internship at P-Industries, he told Kieyu “to brush up [my] English” (Kieyu, i4, 83). Having been exposed to the kind of work that corporate communications involved, he added: “If I can repeat campus life I’ll learn more seriously. ... But, if I never come here, I’ll also never know these things to change my personality. Today, I can be Kieyu *glocal*, no more Kieyu *mat rempit* [motorcycle gang member]” (Kieyu, i4, 88-93).

I found Kieyu’s comment about becoming a ‘glocal Malay’ interesting and asked him to explain his rationale for adopting this identity label. He said that assuming a glocal Malay identity was his new “life project” so that he could become like his mentor and be accepted for a full-time position at P-Industries in the future. His work as assistant in the corporate communications and social responsibility unit made him aware of personal aspects that needed to be changed or improved in order to become a glocal professional (e.g., his ability to use business English and Bahasa Melayu). He was confident that by becoming a glocal Bumiputera Malay professional he would be able to make his career in the automotive industry a reality: “If I become the *Melayu glocal* surely my dream career will become the real future for me. ... I must learn so much more but it’s okay coz now I’m ready to go” (Kieyu, n6, 56-59).

Eizat similarly realised that he had to “shift gear” and construct a more progressive image for his future life compared to his campus and working lives. Whereas Kieyu wanted to become a glocal Malay as a result of his attachment experience, Eizat planned to turn into a ‘global citizen’ who contributes directly towards the welfare of Malaysian society as a whole. He felt that the months he spent working with non-Malays at P-Hospital had taught him to be more

open in his thoughts and actions. His attachment experience had opened his eyes to future possibilities, for example, where he could work hand-in-hand with Malaysians from all walks of life, not just with members of Bumiputera Malay communities. This was also one of the main reasons why he worked tirelessly to improve his Mandarin language ability during the attachment period, thus making up for his indifference regarding the language on campus. Another reason was the need for him to constantly liaise with prominent members of the Chinese community in Penang and to convince them to donate their time and money towards charitable causes for all members of the local community. The only way he could achieve this according to Eizat, was to turn himself into a more global individual who is able to mingle easily with the crowd yet carry himself well enough to gain the respect and trust of important individuals.

9.1.1.3. From university student to young urban professional

Actively connecting between the past and the present also created a sense of anxiety in the lives of a few participants who strongly felt that they were now “real yuppies” rather than university students. Agnes and Syful, for instance, believed that their workplace exposures had turned them into the young professionals that they were “already ready” to become. Both had mixed feelings about returning to campus for different reasons. According to Agnes, she was still not satisfied with her contributions to the B-Media public relations team. She felt that “it’s a tragedy I can’t stay a few more weeks. Yes, I want to grad quickly but if I go now, I feel not satisfied with my own level of commitment ... I really, really want to do more” (Agnes, i5, 34-38). I told her that she could always continue her work at B-Media after submitting her formal attachment report to the faculty and after presenting her report orally to the faculty examiners. However, she said that even a day’s break from her routine as a public relations practitioner would be a “major waste” and she was scared that she might not find the momentum to start working again if she were to leave B-Media. All the same, she conceded that she had no choice. She had already made other plans for her future life including starting her degree in mass communication and public relations immediately after graduation.

Compared to Agnes, Syful felt that he truly belonged within his workplace community at T-Realities. But whilst both of them felt that going back to campus was a step in the wrong direction, Agnes accepted this fact as part of her life journey. For Syful, however, his campus life was becoming less relevant the longer he spent in the world of work. He confessed to me that he had already begun losing interest in his diploma studies long before the attachment

period had started. In fact, whenever he looked back at the past he felt that he should just move quickly into the future and start an actual career as soon as possible. Furthermore, his excellent work performance at T-Realties proved to himself and others around him that he was more than ready to assume and project the identity of a young urban professional. In his words:

This very second, just when you asked me just now ... I can't find reasons in my deepest of hearts to go back. Why should I end this prematurely when everything is going my way right now? Who in his right mind would choose the ordinary over the extraordinary? Plus, why shouldn't I be just what I am meant to be? (Syful, i5, 19-24)

Agnes and Syful had different reasons for not wanting the attachment to end, but they both shared somewhat similar feelings and opinions when asked to talk about their future lives. In general, both of them felt as though they were already living in the future. In their minds, they had already grown into the future selves that they wanted to become. These notions became even stronger when they made comparisons between their lives in the past and the present. They felt as if what they see in the present is more aligned to their hopes and dreams compared to the 'old Agnes' and 'old Syful' that existed in the past.

9.1.1.4. The attachment and a sense of 'what might have been'

Finally, not all participants in this group were as enthusiastic about the attachment and excited to move into the future as the six that I have mentioned. Unlike Agnes and Syful who were fully engrossed in their various attachment roles, Teeya and Fadil described their experience as merely okay and somewhat satisfactory. Teeya suggested on a number of occasions that she might have enjoyed her attachment even more if she had accepted the position she had originally applied for in Kuala Lumpur (that was closely linked to her passion for language learning and use). Whilst she loved working for L-Engineering and she felt the acceptance of members of her workplace community, Teeya could not stop herself from imagining things that could have been if she was allowed by her family to complete her attachment in Kuala Lumpur. As for Fadil, even though he never described his attachment as a complete failure, he made it clear to me that he should have benefitted more from his internship at J-Incorporated, especially since he had several years of real working experience under his belt. Some days, he would send me text messages sharing his boredom and frustration. Things did not get better for him as the attachment slowly drew to a close. In fact, most days he felt as if he were trapped in a "deep hole" from which he could not escape. To

draw a simple comparison, Fadil's experience at J-Incorporated was the direct opposite of Syful's experience at T-Realties.

Teeya often talked about the way she felt "internal and external changes" during the final weeks of her attachment and summed up her feelings in a single word: "satisfied". On the one hand, she was happy that she had made it to the end of the attachment and had contributed her efforts toward the day-to-day running of L-Engineering. Her good rapport with her on-site mentor, both at the personal and professional levels, also meant that she enjoyed doing her work. But on the other, Teeya could not help but wonder how she would have fared had she worked in Kuala Lumpur (at either of the two international firms that offered her attachment roles linked to languages). She tried to keep an open mind, however, and said she had gained "positive exposure" from her attachment experience. In addition, her mentor became her role model and a professional whom she aspired to emulate. Still, there was a sense of ambivalence about what could have been for Teeya. Both Teeya and Fadil raised this same issue by the end of their placements: they wondered whether a different position at a different organisation would have better aligned their attachment experience to their own aspirations for the future.

Comparing her campus life to her working life, however, Teeya clearly favoured the latter. She cited several reasons, such as getting practical workplace experience, being exposed to a "professional culture" and seeing the interconnections between business, communication and language skills in the world of work. At the same time, she strongly believed that campus life had helped her to become a yuppie, and to finish the attachment satisfactorily. She was disappointed, however, that not all of her close friends (i.e., 'sisters' from her friendship group in the A&M Faculty) shared the same views. Teeya wrote in her later narrative entries about the "identity crisis" her friends were going through, and how they were distancing themselves from their campus lives to feel more worker-like. In her words:

It was so strange this identity crisis. For me, we are what we are. ... Why suddenly you girls say you hate campus life so much? What happened to you all? Without that life we won't be here! My life was hard but because of that life you girls are now my lifetime buddies. Work life is also not all peachy. We must appreciate the past first so that we can create our amazing futures. (Teeya, n7, 36-43)

In Teeya's view, the past and the present are intertwined. So, when her sisters started to make negative comments about their campus lives because they now felt that they had achieved a

degree of success in the world of work, she considers that “they are becoming quite arrogant, *kacang lupakan kulit* [literally: peanuts forgetting their skins, a Malay idiom meaning individuals who have forgotten their roots]” (Teeya, n7, 53). For Teeya, changes that were happening to her by the end of the attachment were related to the process of “becoming a little matured and hopefully a bit wise” (Teeya, n7, 89). In her mind, being ‘wise’ relates to the ability to constantly connect the past, present and future to construct a more complete version of herself.

Fadil was another participant who had negative feelings with regards to the attachment. He reported that his attachment experience was “not bad”, but would often express his regrets for choosing to work at J-Incorporated. During the latter half of the attachment, Fadil declared that he would have preferred to return to the government sector instead of working for a business organisation like J-Incorporated with its “typical *stail Melayu* [Malay style] ... drama and office politics” (Fadil, n6, 7). He was also envious of some of his friends who seemed to revel in their workplace experience. He would, from time to time, compare the three years of experience he had (as an accounts assistant before returning to full-time study) with the three short months of his attachment. Even though his life as a full-time accounts assistant was quite dull, he really enjoyed being part of that workplace community. At J-Incorporated, however, Fadil felt that he was isolated and thus could not fully benefit from his exposure to the Malaysian private sector. Above all, it was this sense of social isolation that made him regret his decision to travel hundreds of kilometres to Johor Bahru for his attachment at J-Incorporated. He remarked:

Accept you as a member of your workplace community? Sir, easy, my answer is NO! *Bukan saya nak burukkan orang Melayu kita* [it is not that I want to badmouth us Malays] but these people are not good people. But what can I do? I just perform all the duties they give me to the best. Like I always tell you, my future is in their hands ... I cannot complain and must only accept this. (Fadil, n7, 1-9)

On particularly taxing days in his office, Fadil acknowledged that given the choice, he might even have elected to do the ‘pseudo attachment’ on campus which was reserved for students from the A&M Faculty who failed their core diploma subject papers. Making photocopies of legal documents, moving bundles of documents around the office and spending hours checking the same documents for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes was not how Fadil imagined his attachment would turn out to be. That said, he endeavoured to complete all the tasks given to him to the best of his ability so that his on-site mentor would write a

good exit report for him (which she eventually did). At the same time, he took the initiative to increase his knowledge of legal English and to learn about the legal systems of South East Asian countries. Whenever he had free time at work, he would read up on these matters. He admitted that he sometimes felt guilty about reading on the job, but that this was his only escape from the isolation he felt. It was thus not surprising that Fadil was the only participant in this group who could not wait for the attachment to be over and to return to campus to prepare for his graduation.

In summary, this section indicates that by the end of the attachment period, the participants were actively making connections between the past and the present so that they could move forward and prepare for their future lives. For the majority, this latter period marked the completion of the transition from university students to young urban professionals or yuppies. Becoming yuppies meant that they could now focus on making decisions for the sake of their future selves and they were all excited about their future prospects. For a small minority, however, the final weeks of the attachment also brought a sense of ambivalence as these participants tried to make sense of their work experience. They pondered, for example, whether a different role in a different business entity would have more successfully aligned the attachment to their actual hopes and dreams for the future. Though they were pleased with the contributions that they made to their respective workplaces, they questioned the value of the attachment as part of their individual life journeys. These final weeks clearly point to the significance of the industrial attachment as part of the process of identity construction, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

9.1.2. The attachment as a crossroads for future identities

Focusing on the final weeks and the end of the industrial attachment, this section depicts the overall attachment experience as a bridge that leads into the future, and as an imaginary crossroads for the construction of future identities. The attachment was not just a physical journey for the participants (from the campus grounds to the world of work), it was also a voyage of identity development (from university student to young urban professional). During this period of their lives, the eight participants had to make critical decisions about their futures. In other words, they had finally arrived at the crossroad that would lead them to their future selves. Below, I present findings to illustrate the different ways that the participants prepared themselves to make these difficult decisions linked to their university studies, professional training and overall self-growth.

For participants like Ckina, Kieyu, Teeya and Fadil, their attachments were closely linked to their university studies. In fact, they chose their places of work based mainly on these considerations. Having nearly completed the whole attachment, the four of them began to actively imagine and construct future selves that they perceived to be valuable for the future. Ckina and Kieyu, for example, made sense of the whole attachment as a way to apply the knowledge that they had acquired on campus whilst learning how to carry out their given work effectively and efficiently.

They both made it clear that their exposure to the world of work was meant to better prepare them for their planned degree studies after graduation. As Ckina puts it, when she completes her attachment at M-Telecoms she will change into a “matured degree student” who is more than ready to apply her knowledge at a higher level. Likewise, Kieyu told me that when he finishes his attachment at P-Industries he will have “fresh energy” to study for his degree. At the same time, as they were now perceived to be part of their communities of practice, Ckina and Kieyu were able to picture themselves as future general manager and future corporate communications executive respectively. By performing the duties they had been entrusted with to the best of their abilities, both of them had acquired many of the skills connected to these professional careers. In addition, when they made the extra effort to increase their communication and language abilities, they further enhanced the professional selves that they were actively constructing. All of these factors suggest that the attachment experience had allowed them the opportunity to not only receive professional training but also prepare themselves to go further with their university studies.

Teeya and Fadil also drew directly on their attachment experience to prepare for their future lives, although their workplace experience was not as educationally and professionally satisfying as both of them had imagined. For Teeya, coming to the final days of her attachment was a good feeling because she could now focus on her other dreams; for instance, doing her gap year abroad and applying to do her degree at a top public university. Having seen the strong connections between language/communication abilities and leadership/managerial abilities, Teeya reaffirmed her aspiration to choose a future career line that is connected to communication and languages. She argued that in the modern world of business, the ability to communicate effectively was essential for both acting professionally and for projecting a professional self. This further strengthened her resolve to do a degree in

the field of language and communication, with the ultimate aim of becoming a future young professional able to use these skills directly in her line of work. The way she put it was simple but very meaningful: as long as she was able to use language and communication skills in her future career, that career would become her dream career.

As for Fadil, although his workplace experience left a lot to be desired compared to the other participants, he believed that he had to continue his studies to the highest level to ensure that he would never have to work as “a low member” of his future workplace community. His negative experience at J-Incorporated also opened his eyes to the importance of having good leadership skills to run a department and the significance of training a group of workers who could work together as a unit, both at personal and professional levels. In his final written narrative, he even listed some of the things he would do differently if he were given a mentorship position in the future. He also wrote about the different ways his university might ensure that other students would really benefit from their industrial attachments, unlike his own experience. Fadil explained to me that he did not regret his decision to come to Johor Bahru because, at the very least, he now knows what not to expect when dealing with government-linked companies and working exclusively with Bumiputera Malay workers in the private sector. Whenever he thought about the people in J-Incorporated, he became even more convinced that he did not want to end up like them in his future career line.

The experiences of Eizat, Intan, Agnes and Syful, on the other hand, illustrate the different ways the attachment contributed towards their overall self-growth and helped them to imagine and start constructing their future selves. For these more ‘successful’ participants (in terms of participating actively in the workplace and becoming an asset to their business organisations), they argued that their communication and language abilities became tangible currencies that could be used to realise their dream careers. As they performed their work-related roles in the final days of their attachments, they said that they could see how communication and language abilities were closely linked to the image of a young urban professional. Indeed, they argued that these abilities allowed them to grow and change from student to worker, and to open up real career opportunities. At the end of their internships, a number of participants took the opportunity to start actual professional careers using their attachments as stepping stones to move forward (as the next chapter will show). These careers were not only aligned to their personal aspirations, they were also career trajectories that took shape as a result of the attachment.

9.1.2.1. Eizat as Hang Tuah

For Eizat, he started his attachment at P-Hospital knowing that he would be working mostly with the Penang Chinese community. He realised that his Mandarin proficiency was not up to the level he wanted but this ability became one of the primary reasons for his success in securing his attachment role as assistant project coordinator. Being able to use English well gave Eizat an added advantage, since he worked in an environment where English was widely used by Malaysians who are not Bumiputera Malays. As the attachment drew closer to completion, he was very happy that he could carry out his work productively and simultaneously project “the true positive image” of a young professional. He explained:

Sekarang saya yakin dengan diri dan kerja saya [Now I am confident with myself and my work]. ... I think about it, it's because now when I communicate I easily can make people to trust me. This is very, very important for my job scope as I must find funds for all our community under-21 projects. But I am not scared anymore, I just do it. When I am alone, I smile at myself. They say “*Eizat gila*” [Eizat is mad] when I come here but I achieved many superb things for this place and myself. (Eizat, n8, 12-20)

Eizat admitted that getting funds for community outreach projects was a difficult task because “even if these people got money, they don't easily give money ... I must make them. *Saya mesti betul-betul yakinkan depa* [I must really convince them]. I must show them so they know we really use the money for our Penang community” (Eizat, i4, 236-240).

At the end of the attachment and as proof of his newly acquired abilities, Eizat was able to get funding for five large community outreach projects (he worked alone on most of them) and several smaller ones. For the biggest project that he handled, he managed to find Malaysian Ringgit \$90,000 for a state-level ‘jog-a-thon’ event for breast and prostate cancer awareness. He telephoned me to share this achievement because the money was donated by the deputy president of a Malaysian Chinese opposition party who was known for his anti-Bumiputera ideas. In what must have been one of his greatest challenges, Eizat was directed by his boss to meet the political leader on behalf of P-Hospital. He said that he felt “*macam Hang Tuah disuruh jumpa Maharaja China*⁹ [like Hang Tuah who was sent to meet with the Emperor of China]” (Eizat, n8, 34). Eizat prevailed and he spent nearly an hour with the politician “chatting using charming words ... be very humble but firm” (Eizat, i5, 57-58). He gave details about the significance of this episode:

⁹ Hang Tuah, as explained in Chapter 3, embodies the image of the Malay ‘Renaissance Man’. In one of several versions of his tales, this admiral of the Melaka Malay Sultanate was sent to China as an emissary of peace.

Saya peluh dingin masa tu [I was having cold sweats at that point]. I can't even think what we talked about. He talked in Mandarin then in English, I replied. We discussed so many things and he asked many sensitive questions. Then, I also asked questions about his ideology [laughs]. Finally, I convinced him to give us the money. When we finished, he even shake both my hands. He said you're a good Malaysian. ... Truly this practical [attachment] gave me amazing adventure in my life. (Eizat, i5, 72-81)

The image that Eizat portrayed, like Hang Tuah who was sent to meet with the Emperor of China, captured the momentous impact of that experience on him. It was memorable episodes like these that made the attachment worthwhile, not just for Eizat but the other participants as well. Near the end of the attachment period, they all pointed out the impact of these special instances in terms of their personal growth.

9.1.2.2. Intan the customer services professional

Another participant who frequently mentioned the significance of the attachment as a catalyst for her future career was Intan. Eizat and Intan were both given real work to carry out from the beginning of the attachment period. In addition, both of them were not given much time to learn how to carry out these important duties. Their difficult struggles, however, allowed them to become capable young professionals by the end of the attachment. Having been hurriedly pushed to participate in her community of practice, Intan, in turn, pushed herself to become more active to perform her role as customer relations intern at J-Automotive. In the early weeks she conceded that customer relations was an extremely challenging field. As the attachment drew to a close, however, her self-belief grew even more, especially when she was nominated to attend the 'Level 1 Customer Services Professional' [Level 1 CSP] course. She had apparently received considerable positive feedback from clients of J-Automotive even though she was just an intern. According to her, it is the policy of the company to share feedback from customers (both negative and positive) with employees as part of the company's 'kaizen' or continuous improvement ethos. Intan shared her thoughts about some of the feedback:

First, I can't believe it! They comment ... "caring person and always smiling", "she's expert also very fluent in languages." One person put "her good communication make me VERY satisfied with your company." The VERY is all in big letters! Of course, I also got negative feedback but just a few and mostly about slow to respond. This is a great performance to me and not bad at all because people always say I'm so passive. Because of this [attachment] I finished all my personal targets. (Intan, n8, 11-21)

Intan adopted a simple philosophy in carrying out her work: "treat customers like I want them to treat me". In addition, she made sure that she tried to be patient and never took a hostile

stance, even when her customers were angry or less than polite. As explained in previous chapters, she felt that her professionalism was not just reflected by what she said but, more importantly in the field of customer relations, by what she chose not to say when faced with open hostility. At the end of her internship, she was also fairly proficient in conversational Hokkien, which she had learned informally from her colleagues, mostly the male automotive technicians, who also taught her about the more technical side of her work (Intan referred to each of them as *ā-koû* or brother in Hokkien).

I could clearly see that Intan was happy and proud to be part of the team at J-Automotive. She was appreciative of the fact that the attachment had opened up a space for her to become “that Intan” that she had always wanted to be. In a sense, whilst a number of participants were only talking about starting their future lives, Intan was already becoming part of her future self as an able and dynamic young professional. Unsurprisingly, she completed the Level 1 CSP course with flying colours. Her test scores even surpassed many full-time employees for the customer relations and professional communication components of the course. Nevertheless, she admitted that for the automotive science and technical knowledge components, her final scores were “just more than average”. The completion of this course also meant that she had fulfilled the main requirement to become a permanent staff member at J-Automotive (I will share Intan’s decision in the next chapter).

9.1.2.3. Agnes the public relations practitioner

As one of the most successful participants in this group, Agnes acknowledged that it was due to her attachment that she was able to project images of herself as a PR (public relations) practitioner and to ensure that this line of work would become part of her future life. At the end of the attachment, she had successfully handled three major PR events for B-Media where she held the post of project leader. She had also worked on several smaller PR projects where she assisted her mentor Miss Sheila and other seniors in her department. Without a doubt, the accomplishment of her work role contributed directly to her becoming a PR practitioner. In her words:

This moment, well, actually I feel so satisfied with this training [attachment]. Even, you know, when I meet our clients they all said that I look like the PR Exec. When I said “I’m just an intern”, they’ll all look very surprised. I really like it when I get to surprise my contacts. ... Or is it, I’m a good actress? [laughs] But seriously, to me this is already my own fabulous achievement. I’m feeling very happy right now. If I can, I don’t want to go back to campus. This is all I want for [my] future. (Agnes, i5, 10-21)

Agnes' comment exemplifies one of the greatest feelings the participants seemed to share with regard to their attachment experience: when others around them could not differentiate between them (as university students) and their full-time colleagues (as actual professionals). In fact, most participants adopted this as a benchmark of their work performance when they shared their stories with other students from the A&M Faculty, and when they prepared their formal attachment reports for the faculty.

To be perceived by outsiders as authentic members of their workplace communities was an outstanding feat (Bucholtz, 2003) for all eight participants, for two reasons. Firstly, it was concrete evidence that they were able to project an image that mirrored the collective image of their colleagues. All participants, other than Fadil, reported experiencing these positive episodes at different moments and in various situations during the attachment period, especially during the final weeks. For Agnes, to be perceived as a full-time PR practitioner from B-Media demonstrated to herself that she was able to pull off this image, which was as equally important to her as the ability to carry out her PR work productively.

Secondly, the fact that others could not differentiate between the participants and their colleagues suggested to the participants that they had successfully integrated into their communities of practice as full-fledged members. Interestingly, all of the participants (including Fadil) reported such occurrences when they met members of the public or staff members from other departments within the same business organisation. In Agnes' case, she not only assisted her mentor and others in the B-Media public relations team, but was also given the chance to work on a number of projects on her own, with direct control over support staff and resources. This degree of trust convinced her that she was now an important team member and one who was shouldering "actual real work responsibilities, not just here to do the internship training" (Agnes, i5, 31-32).

9.1.2.4. Syful the wordsmith and 'idea icon'

A different participant who was actively shouldering real work responsibilities and taking pleasure in performing his work roles was Syful. Even before the attachment started he told other students from the A&M Faculty that he was "returning to work" as opposed to going for his industrial attachment. Hence, I was not surprised when he declared during the concluding weeks of the attachment: "If my lecturers or my family members all want to take me back to campus ... they all can walk over my dead body first. Damn it, they'll never take

me back alive [laughs]” (Syful, i5, 12-15). Although he was joking when he made that statement, he obviously did not like the fact that his attachment had to end. He wrote in his final reflective narrative that the knowledge he acquired on campus was mostly irrelevant in his line of work as a creative assistant. Furthermore, at T-Realties he strongly felt that he was able to project “a professional’s professional image” (Syful, n8, 5) to others and to be accepted as an equal by his colleagues. With reference to his future life, Syful added:

I would not say this is the perfect place for me for the distant future, rather this is the place for me for the near future. Mr-Now-Syful is enjoying working here and does not want to go back to campus. Campus life is a distant memory and campus people can all go back to that deep dark hole they came from. Mr-Future-Syful is preparing to drop a bomb and soon. ... Whatever it is, this time round I’ll be doing things *pour moi* [for me]. (Syful, n8, 7-16)

I found it interesting that Syful constantly mentioned people on campus, especially those from the A&M Faculty, in a negative light (both directly and indirectly during my fieldwork). I asked him whether he would have achieved so much during the attachment if it were not for his previous learning experience on campus. He acknowledged that he sometimes missed the academic debates with his lecturers and the times he spent with his intimate group of friends from the Arts and Design Faculty. These experiences contributed in some ways to his professional self at T-Realties. However, according to Syful, everything else “is a distant memory” because most episodes of his campus life caused emotional hurt and psychological pain. Consequently, he was glad to leave the campus grounds and return to the world of work. He added that life in a Bumiputera-only campus not only stifled his view of the world but it also stopped him from doing “concrete things” (e.g., working for an international real estate firm and learning about business from the ethnic Chinese business community). In this sense, the attachment (or returning to the workplace in Syful’s point of view) was his opportunity to resume the life he had left behind or as he aptly put it: “In a strange and twisted kind of way, I’m really going back to the future” (Syful, i5, 78-79).

Most significantly for this study, the languages that Syful knew became his currency in the business world. He was not only able to apply his advanced knowledge of English and Bahasa Melayu to complete his given tasks in the advertising and promotions department of T-Realties, he was also able to use his excellent writing ability in both languages to fully assume the roles of “Wordsmith and Ideacon [Idea Icon]” (Syful, n3, 11). Having had earlier exposure to the world of work after completing his secondary education helped Syful to become an important member of his team. His experience of working within the local print

media industry and his high productivity and exceptional ability to regularly come up with fresh ideas for the company made him an asset for T-Realties. In his words:

In this business, what you write becomes money. But only if you write well and not full of rubbish like my campus 'friends'. For me, it IS simple. When our team put ideas into our clients' heads they become excited. When they become excited they procure our properties. ... Therefore, my ideas and words are really [Malaysian] Ringgit, [Indonesian] Rupiah, Sing [Singaporean] dollars and Brunei dollars for this company. (Syful, n7, 29-37)

These factors, in turn, made Syful feel that his working life at T-Realties was more enjoyable compared to his campus life that he frequently described as a "living nightmare with bird brained peeps". Consequently, whenever I mentioned the notion of future life to him in the final weeks of the attachment, he would quickly retort: "What future? This is already the future for me. Can't you see? But just wait. See, another future will be arriving very, very soon. When that one arrives, I'll be going and swear to God, I'll never ever look back" (Syful, i5, 73-76). Two weeks before the end of the attachment, Syful was asked to travel to Singapore with his mentor to attend a 'soft launch' event for one of T-Realties' biggest projects in Johor Bahru. He was asked to become the co-emcee with a colleague from T-Realties headquarters in Singapore. Perhaps as a testament to his personal belief that his ideas and words can generate money, this experience later presented Syful with a new career trajectory, as the next chapter highlights.

A summary of this section is as follows. The industrial attachment became a bridge from campus to working to future lives for the participants in this group, in relation to their positions within their communities of practice and the various work-related roles that they performed. The end of the attachment also became a crossroad for the construction of their future identities. This crossroad created the space they needed to realise their potential, and it was the place where they experienced their becoming as young professionals. Even if their experiences became more individualised by the concluding weeks of the attachment, this section has highlighted how their overlapping workplace experiences contributed to the actual makings of their future selves. With direct reference to this study, several participants experienced first-hand the different ways in which their communication and language abilities became valuable assets which enabled them to realise their dream careers and, in turn, turned them into valuable assets for their organisations.

Overview of Chapter 9

This chapter has examined the experiences and aspirations of the eight participants, focusing on the concluding weeks and the completion of their industrial attachments. Although they frequently made references to their future lives and dream careers now and again throughout my fieldwork, it was during this period that ‘the future’ featured most saliently. Chapter 9 answered the third research question: In what ways do Bumiputera Malay undergraduates use the languages that they know during their industrial attachments to invest in their future individual and social identities, and shape their future life trajectories? With the intention of answering this research question, I concentrated on two broad themes: looking at the past and present to move forward, and the attachment as crossroad of future identities. Both themes dealt with the plans the participants made as they moved onwards from the attachment into the future, and as they ended the passage from university undergraduate to young professional. At the end of the attachment period, the life journey of each participant led to personal decisions based on her or his hopes and dreams for the future. The next chapter will present the individual stories of each participant’s future life.

Chapter 10. Stories of future life

This chapter presents stories of the individual life journeys of the eight participants as they moved into and completed the final weeks of the industrial attachment. Chapter 10 searches for answers to the third and final research question: In what ways do Bumiputera Malay undergraduates use the languages that they know during their industrial attachments to invest in their future individual and social identities, and shape their future life trajectories? Chapter 9 focused on collective themes related to this question. This chapter examines not just each participant's individual plans but also her or his actual decisions at the end of the attachment period. Due to the fact that each participant imagined his or her possible futures in unique ways, decisions that were made became significant life choices that impacted (and will continue to shape) each participant's life journey beyond the attachment. As they arrived at the final transit point from university student to young professional, most decisions that they made reflected typical life trajectories of students from the A&M Faculty; for instance, to study for a degree or to find a full-time job in their field of expertise. As a whole, their plans and decisions revealed the different ways that the participants were actively 'selecting' their life trajectories based on their hopes for the future selves that they dreamed about during their campus and working lives.

10.1. Stories of the plans and choices of the participants for the future

In the final weeks of the attachment and by the time the eight participants ended their compulsory engagement within their respective workplace communities, arguably all of them were set on their future lives, or were at least aware that the time had come for critical decisions to be made. Unsurprisingly, every participant was excited to share her or his plans for the future. Stories of their future lives reveal their actual feelings, experiences and aspirations at the end of one of the most challenging yet meaningful periods of their young lives. The completion of the attachment signified not just the end, but the start of a new life for each participant. Due to the fact that language use is central to this thesis, I also relate these stories to the role of languages in shaping their future selves. In the paragraphs below, I present a case-by-case summary of the participants' stories of future life.

10.1.1. Eizat

From being labelled as a quiet, religious person on campus, Eizat was slowly becoming a “*warga dunia* [global citizen]” (Eizat, n1, 42). As a key team member in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit of P-Hospital, Eizat confessed that he was not ready to leave his workplace at the end of the attachment, for two reasons. Firstly, he felt that he had not learned everything that he wanted from the attachment. The short time frame meant that he could not achieve all of his personal objectives to make him a global citizen and worker. Secondly, as he frequently mentioned, being part of the CSR team at P-Hospital was in line with his own aspirations. For the choices that he made, his friends from the A&M Faculty ridiculed him and even labelled him “*Eizat gila*” [Eizat is mad] (Eizat, n8, 19). At the end of the attachment, Eizat wrote:

This is the real closing time. Beginning, everyone they don't support me and don't understand. *Ini ibadah saya untuk Tuhan* [This is my religious deed for God]. I'm so happy when I see I can really help the others. ... I work to get salaries but really I help people. And? They're not our race and our religion – we don't know even what each other talk about. But I learned from them so much, they learn from me too. Now to go? Maybe my heart will not be peaceful anymore. (Eizat, n8, 2-11)

In truth, Eizat did not just learn from the working environment of P-Hospital, he thrived within it. As he puts it, the attachment became an “amazing adventure in my life” (Eizat, i5, 81). He was now confident in his abilities as a CSR personnel and he was not daunted by the prospect of working alone on new community projects. Most notable was the fact that he felt “peaceful” during the attachment, reflecting the alignment he felt between his work and personal aspirations.

The feeling of peace that Eizat experienced was not just linked to his central role within his community of practice, it was also tied to his future life. He was convinced that his future should commence with a full-time position at P-Hospital. At the end of the attachment, he decided to continue working after the management offered him a two year contract. He explained, “Actually, I'm not surprised, my boss hint about this offer. Maybe they love me? [laughs] ... Like you know, not many practical students get this offer, right? Must be that I do something very good for them” (Eizat, i5, 410-415). His first reaction was to ask for blessings from his parents to accept that job offer, which they promptly gave. He then met his manager (who was also his assigned mentor) to convey his gratitude. In Eizat's words:

He smiled, shake my hand. He said I'm good, *rajin* [hardworking] everyone upstairs liked it. Also they want a full-timer coordinator that can work with Malay youths,

Indian, all youths in Penang not Chinese only. Seriously now I feel I can work with everyone. All job tasks they give, I automatically say yes. I give 110% to it. One great thing for me, this 2 years contract is on degree payscale not diploma. God is great ... when you work you help people, God helps you 1000 times! (Eizat, n8, 54-64)

Eizat's strong desire to widen his worldview led him from campus to P-Hospital, and from a Bumiputera-only to a Chinese-majority environment. Though some around him originally questioned his decision, he thrived in his workplace and felt satisfied on many levels. One of the reasons why he was so pleased with his attachment was that his role in P-Hospital was strongly aligned to his personal values and ideals, for example, helping people in need and educating the public on social issues. Not only was he able to perform his work industriously, he became a vital member of the CSR team, and was well-liked by members of his workplace community. His communication and language abilities contributed to his success, especially his knowledge of Mandarin, which he actively worked on during the course of the attachment. Not only did he use Mandarin to carry out his work, he also drew on Mandarin to learn more about the business philosophy and unique work ethics of the Malaysian Chinese community, which was incidentally one of his personal targets even when he was still studying on campus. At the end of his attachment, Eizat was ready to graduate, and at the same time continue on a life trajectory that offered him a secure career and made him feel at peace with himself.

10.1.2. Intan

Intan's internship was linked to her journey to show others that "I'm not [a] passive girl" (Intan, n1, 35). Having been labelled "passive" and "too shy and quiet" by others on campus, Intan was determined to prove to herself and others around her that she had the potential to be just as good or even better than other students in the A&M Faculty. With this in mind, she chose an attachment role that was the opposite of what people expected and became a customer services intern. Working at the frontline even from the early days of the attachment was not easy, but she prevailed and propelled herself from the periphery to the centre of J-Automotive's workplace community. She very soon learned about the core skills of customer service professionals and applied these skills accordingly. As a result, she frequently received positive feedback from her clients and her superiors.

Her on-site mentor, for instance, praised her for her ability to keep calm even when facing difficult customers. These customers sometimes resorted to profanity to express their anger

(mostly in the Hokkien dialect that Intan was not familiar with). Such difficult episodes taught her that being a professional was not just linked to her communication and language abilities, but also her ability to not respond even when she was provoked. By the end of the attachment, she made it a point to learn the basics of this local dialect (i.e., Hokkien) from her Chinese colleagues both as a way to improve her professional image as a customer services professional and to increase her productivity at the frontline of J-Automotive, Penang. At the same time, Intan said that she had the opportunity to apply other “interacting skills” when dealing with customers using the three languages in her repertoire. Regardless of whether she was using Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin or English, Intan was always conscious of showing positive regard to her customers, giving them her total focus when listening to their complaints and making sure that she made the customers feel that they received the best service from the company.

In the final weeks, Intan felt sad that she had to leave her workplace as she fully enjoyed working in customer services. She was convinced that this career trajectory “fits with myself and my own personality. Not the one that people talked about me but how I am inside actually. Like that song ‘This is me’. So, for me now, this is me” (Intan, i5, 31-35). In addition, she had made many new friends from other races who respected her and treated her like another full-time staff member. Intan wrote about some of her “sweet memories” in this narrative:

Sometimes I want to go back and see my old self and change myself. Now everything is like my sweet dreams with the sweet memories. The customers give me breakfast when they send their cars, customers send Thank You cards, my team members that I love so much, my boss gave me praise in meetings, so many more things. Imagine? I’m just this student I don’t even graduate yet. I love this work so much ... this life gave me challenges with full satisfaction. (Intan, n8, 28-37)

All of these factors made it hard for Intan to choose between continuing her working life or returning to campus life (for her first degree). Having successfully completed J-Automotive’s Level 1 Customer Services Professional course also meant that she had the option to continue working full-time. This, without a doubt, was a great achievement for a soft spoken university student who had not even completed her diploma programme. After weeks of seriously thinking about her future, she finally decided to go for a full-time position and formally start her life as a J-Automotive customer services executive. In her words:

My parents, my family, all my friends, the lecturers also support me. Also, like you said, *saya boleh buat ijazah PLK* [I can still do an out-campus degree]. Actually sir,

another special reason is you [laughs]. When I do this research for you, like you opened my eyes and make me see everything. Pray for me, okay sir? *Alhamdulillah* [God be praised], now I can start this life with my big smile and full of heart. (Intan, i5, 367-373)

10.1.3. Ckina

From a campus life that was “simple ... just normal and actually nothing special (Ckina, n1, 9), Ckina moved into the field of multimedia telecommunications as part of her working life. As an intern for the administration division at a branch office of M-Telecoms, Malaysia’s largest telecoms provider, she started her life journey to become a “top level professional manager” (Ckina, i3, 193). Focusing primarily on administration and management duties during the attachment, she successfully applied her diploma skills and was able to acquire additional ones that made her an important member of her workplace community. At the personal level, she was able to go beyond ethnic boundaries and engage with all full-time staff members in her department irrespective of ethnic and language differences. Her ability to switch from English to Bahasa Melayu, and vice versa, as she engaged with staff members from different ethnic backgrounds made her more self-assured compared to her time on campus. Ckina strongly felt that she was able to become “BFFs” (Best Friends Forever) with her full-time colleagues when she communicated with them in their language of choice, even more so for female colleagues who loved to chat and share their personal stories with her. Her ability to endear herself to others around her was one of the many reasons why she received frequent praise from her appointed mentor, Miss Pillay, who saw that she made a lot of effort to learn about becoming a good leader. Another reason was her high activity level; she was always ready to assist other staff members on tasks like translating letters and processing business communication, to giving others pointers on using computer software and applying the right keyboarding skills.

Consequently, Ckina became well-liked in her department, so much so that her colleagues “said they will cry when I finish” (Ckina, n7, 22). Although they were obviously joking, she had indeed become an important member of her professional community. She was constantly involved in the goings-on within her department to the point that she could not “just sit and relax”. In the final weeks of the attachment, under the directive of her mentor she even assisted colleagues in other departments. Miss Pillay wanted her to become familiar with different aspects of business operations as a way to help her prepare for her future life as a

manager. She thoroughly enjoyed this additional role and was thankful for the opportunity. In our final interview session, Ckina shared her plans for the immediate future:

It's so good for me here. This is a great industry, for me this place is a fantastic place for working. Maybe I'll come back one day, who knows. ... Miss Pillay she said I must continue to degree level before I start working. I agree because I need higher knowledge in this area. I also like HR [human resources] plus our uni got this new international business degree. You know what? I already apply for them all [laughs]. (Ckina, i5, 115-123)

As a testament to her hard work and the positive impact the attachment had made on her professional self, Ckina was conferred the Best Intern award by the A&M Faculty, partly due to the glowing exit report written by Miss Pillay. About two months after her internship ended, Ckina emailed a scanned copy of her degree acceptance letter to her mentor and to me. She was accepted to be part of the pioneer cohort for the international business degree that she mentioned, near the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. She was very excited and could not wait to start her studies. She gave three reasons. First, she would be studying for a degree in International Business Operations. Second, she would be moving to the main campus of her university. Third, in her words, "I always say I want to be the top professional manager, finally the future is becoming true for me" (Ckina, personal communication, June 6, 2011). Her attachment experience not only helped Ckina to imagine herself as a future manager, it also gave her the chance to discover her potential as a leader and to reaffirm her commitment to study for a degree that would lead her closer to her dream career.

10.1.4. Teeya

Being a 'hybrid' was not easy for Teeya and she created "invisible walls" to survive her campus life. She did not have to build walls around herself at L-Engineering, but I could sense that she wanted more from the attachment than what she experienced. That said, her professional self benefitted greatly from the excellent bond between her mentor and herself. Her mentor, Madam Kit, became her idol and the symbol of a professional worker that she wanted to emulate in the future. One of the "marvellous experience[s]" that she learned from Madam Kit was how language and communication abilities are linked to the professional image of a modern worker. In her final report to the faculty, Teeya made several mentions of this fact and she related her own experience in completing her many day-to-day office tasks by drawing on her Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin abilities. Her ability to write in these languages also meant that she could take over some of Madam Kit's tasks on a regular

basis. This made her an important part of her workplace community and she contributed in many ways to L-Engineering's daily operations.

Still, as highlighted in the previous chapter, her inner self (or what she normally refers to as the "inside me") was becoming more aware that administration and management was not truly aligned to her own aspirations. Teeya wrote in her final reflective narrative:

I was kinda displeased having to perform my training at this organization – it wasn't in my list of choices. Yes, I feel the warmth of the employees. Yes, the positive surroundings captured my interest. Pity for myself inside me, coz I don't possess the passion to focus on this line exclusively. (Teeya, n8, 14-19)

Perhaps as an indirect result of her feelings during the attachment period "everything leads back to my first love – the languages" (Teeya, n5, 73-74). In addition, even though she had no dream careers in mind, she always professed that the best job for her would be closely related to the languages that she knows, and a career opportunity that would let her travel to faraway lands like China or Japan. In other words, although Teeya gained useful exposure to the world of work at L-Engineering, her attachment was not completely satisfying as part of her life journey to explore "the art of language" (Teeya, n5, 75).

However, far from ignoring the "inside me", before the attachment period ended Teeya was already making critical decisions about her future life. She applied to study for a degree in professional language studies, and submitted her application for a fully-funded student exchange programme (i.e., 'gap year') in Japan. According to her, she had her mind set on these well before entering the A&M Faculty. Once the attachment came to its close, her application to do a degree in professional language studies was sadly rejected as the university she had applied to could not see the relevance of her diploma for the proposed degree. Nevertheless, she was successful in gaining entry to the student exchange programme to Japan with full sponsorship from the Malaysian Ministry for Youth and Sports Development. From thousands of undergraduates across the country who applied she was amongst the select few who were able to impress the selection committee, due in no small part to her excellent communication and language abilities (particularly her Japanese language ability). When I received a telephone call from her to share this great news, she confessed that she was upset that she could not get a place to do her degree. She added, however, that she would apply to other local universities, this time with a letter of support from the Ministry. About three months into her gap year, she was offered a place to do a

degree in professional language studies by her old university, and this she happily accepted. The closing lines of her final narrative sum up the attachment experience as part of the process of identity construction for everyone in this select group:

Life is just an empty paper and I'm still writing my own story. I'll finish this course then *Insha Allah* [God willing] I can do something new again. The end is always a new beginning for this old me. And, with that again there'll always be things to experience by the new me. (Teeya, n8, 75-79)

10.1.5. Agnes

Despite finding it difficult to fit in at the start of her campus life, Agnes successfully pushed herself to the centre of her campus community and became the student leader for the A&M Faculty. She adopted, in many ways, the same attitude during her working life and even from the first week of the attachment her single-mindedness was hard to miss. She had her mind set on one primary objective: "I must work hard so when people look at me, they see Agnes this PR Exec" (Agnes, n2, 35-36). As an observer, I can confidently say that when the attachment period ended she had achieved this objective. During the 14 weeks of the attachment, she repeatedly said how she enjoyed her exposure to the world of work and she was fully convinced that she wanted to become a PR practitioner in the future. Agnes wrote:

I'm glad that with these few weeks, I experienced so many opportunities to gain so much PR knowledge and skills. This internship really changed myself and built up a maturity for myself. With all kinds of experience now I know that PR totally suits me. ... I am able to perform all my tasks with joy and success, I done it all with glory. (Agnes, n8, 20-27)

As evidence of her professional ability, at the end of the attachment she managed to handle several major events for B-Media together with a number of smaller PR projects. She was fully engrossed in her multiple attachment roles "to catch my dream job" (Agnes, n1, 30), even to the point of taking on additional work responsibilities outside of office hours especially during weekends (due to the fact that B-Media's PR events are normally conducted over weekends).

Agnes provides an example of a university student with the right mind set, positive attitude and complete package, as it were, to become a young urban professional. Her distinctive philosophy towards her working life, "Don't think, jump into it!" (Agnes, n2, 30), also meant that she was able to rapidly improve her communication and language abilities that had failed her in the past. With special reference to English, she always made a conscious decision to speak and write in this language when she handled the various PR projects of B-Media. She

loved the fact that people around her seemed to respect her more when she used English, to the extent that she felt English and PR skills are really part of “a package”; Agnes idolised her mentor Miss Sheila whom she felt possessed this package. At the same time, she also felt that her ability to switch from English to Bahasa Melayu helped her to become “more versatile” and more able to deal with B-Media’s customers and members of the public.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Agnes constantly drew on her communication and language abilities to project the image of a PR practitioner to others around her. Indeed, she was quite successful in ‘carrying’ herself, and most individuals that she encountered, including actual PR professionals, were convinced that she was a seasoned PR practitioner when in reality she was just an intern. At the same time, although she was confident that she was ready to become a public relations practitioner, she felt that she lacked formal knowledge of this professional discipline. Therefore, she decided to further her studies before returning to the world of work on a full-time basis. Agnes explained:

I still love admin management. But it’s time for me to move on, well actually to really go to the start of my ambition as you know. Now is the time for me to go further in PR, in communication plus media studies. I still must do my degree before I’m going to jump into it [full-time work]. ... Paper qualification is not really that important for this area but for myself it’s for learning more deeply and it’s quite excellent for my C.V. (Agnes, i5, 384-393)

At the end of the attachment, Agnes also became one of the most successful undergraduates within the A&M Faculty. After the attachment period ended and she had successfully passed the formal assessment component at her faculty, she returned to B-Media to continue working whilst waiting for her degree programme to begin.

10.1.6. Kieyu

On campus before the attachment began, Kieyu had already set his mind on the automotive industry for his future career. He wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps and he felt that the automotive industry is one of Malaysia’s strongest growth sectors. Moreover, he wanted to prove himself to his family due to problems that he had caused in the past. He spent the five semesters on campus gaining the necessary skills to become an intern and to carry out his attachment at P-Industries. However, he did not place much emphasis on communication and language skills, and so during the attachment he had to relearn these. He very soon realised that these skills were core skills needed to become a member of the corporate communications and social responsibility team at that automotive plant. He worked

religiously to improve these core skills, to the extent of taking his work home to check his writing ability. He also regularly asked colleagues in his department for help, for instance, about the right way to pronounce certain words in English and how best to explain technical details about automotive manufacturing to visitors who came to P-Industries (in both Bahasa Melayu and English). Needless to say, Kieyu's own language use became one of his primary learning focuses at P-Industries, as he began to realise how communication and language skills could be employed to enhance his professional image and make him more able to carry out his various workplace roles.

At the end of the attachment, he believed that he had achieved most of his personal and professional targets. Additionally, he felt that he had become part of the team based on his positive relationship with his workplace mentor and other senior staff members. In Kieyu's own words:

I see now that corp comm [corporate communications] is a great area for me. Even my mentor said I should do this for degree. I think, wait, I know I learned so much especially about communicating like the professional modern worker. I'm also very happy my family now they support me fully. Life is so great and I'm ready to become a yuppie. ... After I get my degree I'll come back here, I hope they'll wait for me. (Kieyu, i5, 364-373)

As the curtains closed on the attachment, Kieyu's life journey also changed from a primary concern with proving himself to his family members to becoming a 'glocal Malay' professional. Becoming a *glocal* Malay professional was important for him as part of his renewed "life project" to emulate his mentor and gain a full-time position at P-Industries. He admired and in the future, wanted to become like his mentor, for three reasons. First, his mentor became head of the department at quite a young age compared to the heads of the other departments. Second, he felt that his mentor possessed "extraordinary abilities" not just to lead other staff members, but more importantly, to lead by example. Third, he was proud of the fact that his mentor is the product of Malaysian higher education (compared to other heads that were mostly overseas educated). Kieyu's strong personal and professional bond with his mentor made him aware of aspects of himself that he needed to improve to truly become a glocal Malay professional in his future life (e.g., high proficiency in English and Bahasa Melayu, both spoken and written).

Kieyu was also given a lot of advice by his mentor with regard to his future career path. Although he wanted to start working as soon as possible after graduating, his mentor and his

father both felt that he would fare better with a degree. Their advice made him rethink his future life plans, and he finally decided to apply to do a degree in business and management. He said that by focusing on both areas simultaneously he would be able to gain the best of both worlds whilst improving his communication and language proficiencies up to the level expected of a corporate communications officer. In his final narrative, Kieyu wrote:

At first, I feel like I want to do corp comm or PR straight after this. But after thinking, listening to mentor and my father I think I must focus on my true interests. I actually like management and I also love to do business. Now, I decide to apply for this degree so I can study two areas together. ... I pray the future will be great. I hope it will be. (Kieyu, n8, 40-48)

10.1.7. Syful

Syful constantly said that he was never part of his campus community and that he preferred to distance himself from students in his own faculty. The focus of his life journey is very much about moving into the future. The way he perceived it: “I’m dedicated to the future. ... Despite a sombre past, my present will be colourful, my future illustrious” (Syful, n1, 72-75). At the end of the attachment, he felt that he had met the three targets he put on himself before working at T-Realties: he had acquired practical knowledge from the international Chinese business community; he managed to carry out different work roles related to advertising and promotions; and lastly, he was able to escape the confines of a Bumiputera-only environment that “suffocated” him.

Without a doubt, Syful’s earlier exposure to the world of work gave him a lot of advantages over the other participants in this focal group. His superior writing skills in both English and Bahasa Melayu also meant that he was able to contribute a lot to his workplace community. Using both English and Bahasa Melayu to project a professional image seemed quite easy for him compared to some of the other participants. When others, like Kieyu, had to focus on basic pronunciation and less complex language skills, Syful was working on perfecting his English and Bahasa Melayu abilities. Working on professional-level advertising write-ups for the ASEAN property market was a challenge that he very much appreciated. At the same time, he also tried to improve his spoken Mandarin ability as a way to connect, at the personal level, with his colleagues at T-Realties and as a means to communicate with the company’s majority clientele (i.e., members of the Malaysian and ASEAN-based ethnic Chinese community).

As a direct result, he became fully immersed in his work, so much so that he disliked the fact that I keep referring to it as part of his industrial attachment. In truth, Syful was actively distancing himself from his campus life and he felt that his diploma was now irrelevant because he never enjoyed it in the first place. In his words:

I'm terribly sorry. You keep referring to this as attachment and you keep asking me about my future. I beg your pardon these are moot points, seriously. Firstly, I'm not some practical student or intern from some backwater campus. I'm here to work and contribute my expertise. Secondly, you can't keep asking me about my future life or whatever coz I'm already here. Get it? This is the future and this is my life [laughs]. (Syful, i5, 333-340)

Syful's continued success at T-Realties and the fact that he strongly felt a "fantabulous match between what I do and my inner me" (Syful, n5, 31) presented him with a new career trajectory and a future life to explore immediately before the attachment ended. After successfully handling the 'soft-launch' event in Singapore and based on personal recommendations from Alice (his mentor) and the Senior Vice President in charge of advertising and promotions in Kuala Lumpur, T-Realties Singapore offered him a full-time position as creative consultant. The only caveat was that he had to start immediately, which effectively meant that he would have to forgo his diploma studies. When he shared this offer of a lifetime with me, I already knew of his decision. He actually accepted T-Realties' offer on the spot without even consulting his immediate family members. Even though I expressed my reservations about his decision because he was on the verge of completing his diploma studies, Syful said that he would regret not accepting the offer more than not completing a diploma that was never his choice from the outset. As he had imagined from the very beginning of his attachment, his future was becoming "illustrious". He had this to say to people from his past:

Remember on campus they're like so concerned about my soul, spirit whatever? ... Well, if you see any one of them, please tell them they needn't worry about my soul anymore. Please just tell them, Syful's soul has taken flight and gone global, baby! It's so quaint you know. In the end, small-minded people end up with kampung [village] souls but open-minded individuals can rejoice with their global souls. Merlion [Singapore's national icon] awaits me. Syful has arrived, back to the future that he had to leave. (Syful, i5, 426-435)

Such was the influence of the industrial attachment in creating opportunities for young professionals like Syful. Even if he ended up dropping out of his diploma course right before graduation, he managed to secure a high-flying position in one of South East Asia's leading

real estate firm. His ‘global soul’ was also finally free to take flight in South East Asia’s most developed and economically vibrant society.

10.1.8. Fadil

As one of the most able young professionals in this group, both career and academic-wise, Fadil made preparations for his industrial attachment the first day he started his studies at the A&M Faculty. In fact, he returned to study after three years of full-time work just so that he could create a better future for himself and enhance his career possibilities. Sadly, he felt that his attachment to J-Incorporated was “just so full of failures” (Fadil, n5, 1) both at the individual and professional levels. As I highlighted in Chapter 8, he struggled to become part of his workplace community and he was given responsibilities that were not relevant to his field of expertise.

As a result, some days he felt that he was an “invisible person” in the legal department where he interned. Not only did he feel unchallenged by the work assigned to him, he also said that his co-workers took advantage of him and asked him to work on tasks that they did not want to do, such as photocopying legal documents and moving them around the 27 level building. He felt that these negative experiences had contributed to making his workplace exposure a “working hell”. At the end of the attachment period, Fadil tried to rationalise his experience as part of his life journey:

I can say I’m fed up or don’t want to talk about it. But for me, I accept this as part of my future life. Why? Because not everything in life is positive totally, right? Like I said, this is my test from God or maybe to make me stronger and more better as a professional worker. ... Actually sir, I’ve learned so much about what not to do in a business organisation, all the bad practices. This is extremely useful for my future. (Fadil, i5, 293-302)

Fadil added that he did not want his physical journey or his “*hijrah*” (approximately 573 km from his home state Perak to Johor) to become a waste by just languishing at his work desk. He therefore spent nearly all of his free time studying legal English and trying to understand different aspects of the law in the Malaysian and ASEAN contexts. He also invested in law books written in English and advanced-level bilingual dictionaries (Bahasa Melayu – English) to help him carry out his main task of inspecting and correcting legal contracts that passed through his department. Although he realised that most of the time other staff members just wanted to take advantage of his English language ability by “dumping work” on him, Fadil saw this as a professional development opportunity. Still, he felt quite sad that

he did not get much opportunity to speak to others around him because his workplace community members effectively shunned him, to the point that some staff members did not even know who he was on the last week of his internship at J-Incorporated. He repeatedly mentioned his frustrations with regard to this situation because he really wanted to apply some of the speaking skills that he had learned on campus in both English and Bahasa Melayu. Being a quiet and soft-spoken person, he also hoped that an opportunity to work in such a company would allow him to become more confident and more able to socialise with his colleagues at both personal and professional levels. It was not surprising that for Fadil this became one of his biggest failures during the attachment period.

From the opposite angle, Fadil managed to maintain his professional demeanour and pleasant disposition despite the negative atmosphere in his workplace, and he accepted his experience in the best possible light (i.e., as a preparation for his future dream career). When the attachment ended, his negative experience only strengthened his resolve to study for his first degree and to ensure that he does not start at a lower position on the career ladder; the way he puts it, “to never again become bullied like that, like what I’m going through in that hell place” (Fadil, i5, 412-413). Partly due to the internal problems he saw in his department, he applied to do a degree in human resource development (HRD). He wanted to become an HRD professional who was able to select the best staff members for his organisation and provide training on communication skills and professionalism within the company. In the end, Fadil was accepted into the HRD degree programme at a reputable public university in the north of Peninsular Malaysia.

Overview of Chapter 10

In this chapter, I shared stories of the future lives of the participants as they finally completed their 14 weeks compulsory workplace placement. Although the focus of this chapter was on the future (as related to their individual life journey), I linked episodes from their campus and working lives to provide a sense of completion to their journey from campus to workplace and from student to professional. As such, this chapter examined not just the participants’ future life plans, but also their concrete decisions. Even before the attachment period began, the participants imagined their possible futures in unique ways. At the end of this important crossroad, the actual decisions that they made turned into major life choices that impacted (and will continue to impact) on their life journey beyond the attachment period. Most of the

decisions made by the participants led to life trajectories typical of students from the A&M Faculty. Some decisions, however, were as surprising and unique as the participants who made them. All in all, these reflected the various ways that the eight participants selected their life trajectories based on their hopes and desires, and the future selves that they always dreamed about. The next chapter will conclude my thesis.

Chapter 11. Conclusion

Three central concerns that bind this study together are language use, workplace participation and the process of identity construction. Drawing on a part essentialist and part post-structuralist framework to make sense of identity, the study charted the collective and individual ‘life journeys’ of a group of young Bumiputera Malay undergraduates who lived and studied within a Bumiputera-only university system in Malaysia. Employing a mixed methods design, numerical and textual data were collected as these university students prepared for and embarked on their compulsory industrial attachment in the final semester of their administration and management diploma studies. Research literature on the Bumiputera Malays suggests that members of this ethnic group are protective of their mother tongue, Bahasa Melayu or Malay, and that the majority resist learning and using other languages, especially English. This is partly because Malay identity in the literature is often framed as a triadic bond between ethnicity (Bumiputera Malay), religion (Islam) and language (Bahasa Melayu). My study delivers a contemporary reading of Bumiputera Malay identity that goes beyond this bond by concentrating on language use (Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese) taking into account the intricate sociohistory of the Malays and the Malay ‘self’ in the present, as perceived and experienced by eight focal participants. Collective and individual stories of the campus, working and future lives of these participants not only answered the questions that guide this study, they illustrate, in context, the interrelationships between language use and workplace participation in the construction of the campus, working and future life identities of these Bumiputera Malay individuals. This led me to conceptualise the attachment period as a critical crossroad in the lives of the participants where their past, present and future, both real and imagined, converged. As they used the languages that they know to learn on campus, to carry out their attachment roles within their workplace communities of practice, and to prepare for their future lives, their identities were constructed and reconstructed in a number of ways.

This final chapter provides an overview of the study and presents its conclusions. The first section summarises the six preceding findings chapters, in light of the three research questions that guide this study. This is followed by a conceptual overview which frames this

study as a whole. The third section considers the implications of this study with reference to industrial attachments as a bridge between university campuses and the world of work, and outlines the contribution the study makes to current understanding of the process of identity construction. Limitations of the study are outlined in the fourth section followed by suggested future research pathways in the fifth. Chapter 11 ends with my concluding statements.

11.1. Overview of findings

Chapters 5 to 10 presented and analysed the findings of this study in light of three research questions. Chapters 5 and 6 focused on the campus life of 102 students from the A&M Faculty. Eight of them were then invited to participate in the extended cycle of data collection. Chapters 7 and 8 examined the working life of the eight participants relying mainly on data from the first to the closing weeks of the attachment period. Chapters 9 and 10 explored the future life of the eight participants drawing on their experiences and feelings during the latter weeks of their attachments. As a whole, their campus, working and future lives make up what I perceive to be their ‘life journey’. Their life journey is both the process and product of identity construction through language use and participation in communities, as I will elaborate in the following sections.

First research question: *What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of undergraduates in a Bumiputera-exclusive university community, and more particularly, as they prepare for their final semester industrial attachments?*

The notion of ‘campus life’ became the focus of Chapters 5 and 6 since they relate directly to the campus experience of participants and set the scene for an inquiry into the lives of young Bumiputera Malay undergraduates in a Bumiputera-exclusive university in Malaysia. Whilst the data collected echoed the findings of earlier work on the identities of Bumiputera Malays by S. K. Lee (2001, 2003), Mohd-Asraf (2004, 2005) and Rajadurai (2010a, 2010b), both chapters raised questions about the notion of an essentialised Malay identity that is prevalent within the literature. The findings with reference to 102 students from the A&M Faculty led to four significant observations. First, students from the faculty believed that using the languages they know did not change them. When asked to judge others on campus, however, the majority felt that they could see changes when other individuals used certain languages

(especially English). Second, the majority did not agree that using English or Mandarin was tantamount to showing off, a behaviour that might lead to negative labelling on campus. This contradicts one of the conclusions made by the three researchers above. They argue that when Malay individuals use a language like English, for example, this is usually perceived by other Malays in a negative light. Third, the students created domains for language use on campus. These include physical places (e.g., faculty, classrooms, cafeterias, etc.) and interactional spaces (e.g., ‘faculty friends’, friendship groups, etc.). The domains allowed them to learn about and freely use English and Mandarin. Lastly, within these domains, to help them adhere to the *adat* of their campus community, yet still explore identity trajectories through languages, these students formed small friendship groups that became safe havens for English and Mandarin. Members of these groups thus avoided some of the stigmas that might be linked to those perceived as rude by the majority (due to language choices and mainly to the anti-*adat* identities these minority individuals projected). In all, Chapter 5 revealed that it is necessary to learn the *adat* of living within a Malay community and to understand the shared culture of this community. That said, although the participants’ identities on campus were shaped by their experiences, these identities were not constricted by their campus life. They had the freedom and space to explore and create different identities, for instance, by using all the languages within their repertoire.

Chapter 6 extends the above findings by exploring the life journey of the eight participants on campus. As they made preparations to leave the campus grounds to venture into the world of work, stories of their campus life and earlier experiences bring to light how these participants were able to nourish their *jiwa* (i.e., self or soul) whilst living within a community that is tethered to its *adat*. Even from the start of their diploma studies (some even earlier), the participants were actively imagining their future careers and the ideal persons that they wanted to become. As they prepared for their industrial attachments, positive images of themselves were becoming stronger though not yet real. Therefore, the attachment became an important milestone in their lives as they prepared to change from university students to young professionals. Most importantly, they related stories of the sacrifices that they made to secure attachment positions and to enter workplace communities of practice using their communication and language abilities as their ‘passports’. The attachment was such a central part of life within the A&M Faculty that most felt their campus life was merely a lengthy preparation for it. This echoed the observations of language and identity researchers like Blommaert (2005), Rampton (1995, 1998, 2010), and Scollon and Scollon (2003). Rampton

(1998) calls this event (i.e., preparing to start the attachment) a ‘crossing’ similar to what Blommaert (2005) refers to as a momentous movement between identity spaces and places.

Second research question: *What roles do languages (Malay or Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin) play in constructing the identities of Bumiputera Malay undergraduates during their industrial attachments?*

Chapters 7 and 8 answered the second research question by focusing on the working life of the eight participants. As they crossed boundaries to make headway into the world of work, Chapter 7 revealed three noteworthy findings. First, the language repertoires of the participants helped them to adapt to their workplace environments and to carry out their work-related responsibilities. They adopted communication strategies linked to ethnicity in the process of becoming members of their professional communities and to enhance their professional image. Interestingly, even though English plays a key role within these communities, as David and Govindasamy (2007), Morais (1998), and Nair-Venugopal (2006) observe, my data showed that local languages like Bahasa Melayu and Mandarin are equally important in the Malaysian private sector. Second, the excellent communication and language abilities of the participants made them feel ‘worker-like’ as they continued learning about and contributing to their respective business organisations. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that workplace learning plays an integral part in the process of identity construction, a suggestion that finds support in the work of Cooke, Brown and Zhu (2007), Green and Evans (2000) and Myles (2009). Indeed, this was the experience of the participants as they learned through the languages that they know to become authentic members of their professional communities. Third, the working lives of the participants became tied to their ‘becoming’ (Wenger, 1998, 2009); a significant identity episode involving making major ‘investments’ (Block, 2007; Norton, 1997, 2000) to enhance their communication and language abilities. At the same time, they soon understood that it was not just the languages that they used that were important for their professional selves, but also how they communicated and performed their work. The way they communicated and ‘carried’ themselves in the presence of others projected images of their professional selves. Carrying oneself appropriately is tied to the Malay constructs of *adat* and *jiwa*. The way they performed their work industriously, on the other hand, demonstrated their potential as professionals. As a result, positive changes were felt and identity trajectories materialised in the lives of most participants in this study.

In Chapter 8, the participants shared stories of their working life as part of their continuing life journey into the future (e.g., careers, studies, personal life, etc.). Wenger (1998, 2009) states that there are many trajectories that a person might take as identities are constructed. Indeed, the participants were busy exploring future trajectories as they passed the middle mark of the attachment. They also drew on professional and social aspects of language use to actively construct their workplace-based identities (Holmes & Marra, 2005; Postmes, 2003). Nearly all of them enjoyed their working lives and they felt positive changes, for instance, in their communication and language skills, and in the professional selves that they projected to others. Simply put, they became more worker-like and less student-like. For one participant (Fadil), however, this was not the case as he was left at the periphery and not given the opportunity to become part of his community of practice. His stories illustrated some serious problems with reference to attachments and also to internships in general. Most interestingly, the participants always linked their campus lives and imaginary future lives when they shared stories about their working lives. The interconnectedness of these life phases in the process of identity construction became more evident as weeks turned to months (I focus on this central observation when discussing the conceptual map of this study below). The distinctiveness of the life journey of each participant became more manifest as the attachment moved forward. At the same time, an emphasis on the future became more apparent in their collective stories, perhaps signifying the culmination of this important period in their young lives.

Third research question: *In what ways do Bumiputera Malay undergraduates use the languages that they know during their industrial attachments to invest in their future individual and social identities, and shape their future life trajectories?*

Chapters 9 and 10 answered the third and final research question by examining the future lives of the eight participants, both imagined and real. As mentioned above, ‘the future’ became more noticeable in the data from the middle period of the attachment onwards. The notion of future life is linked to two points: how the attachment experience influenced the participants’ imagined future selves and the various ways they imagined their lives might take shape after the attachment ends. Chapter 9 highlighted these in three ways. First, towards the end of the attachment period, the participants believed that their professional selves were more ‘real’ as they gained legitimacy within their workplace communities. Wenger (1998, 2009) describes this identity concept as ‘alignment’ or a strong feeling of being accepted by others within a community of practice and becoming a true professional through workplace

participation. Second, in the closing weeks of the attachment, some participants now saw themselves as yuppies (young urban or upwardly-mobile professionals) and no longer merely university students. This signalled not just the successful completion of their internships but also their ‘becoming’; the eight university students who began their life journey from campus to workplace had now become young professionals. A few participants, however, wondered if they had made the right decisions with regard to their attachment roles and they were unconvinced of the real value of their attachments in relation to their individual life journeys. Lastly, as the attachment quickly drew to an end, its strong impact as part of the process of identity construction became clear. The attachment was not just the road from campus to workplace, it also served as a bridge from the past to the present and future. Arriving at the end of the attachment, a sense of urgency was felt by the participants, as they now had to make critical decisions that would carry real implications for their future selves. Some relied on the superior communication and language abilities that they exhibited during the attachment period to guide their decisions; others recalled their hopes and dreams to steer them into their future lives.

Chapter 10 examined how the life journey of the participants led to concrete decisions being made based on their hopes and dreams for the future. The stories of future life that they shared had a sense of closure, but at the same time, the completion of the attachment also signalled the next phase of their continuing life journey. Even before the attachment period began, all of the participants imagined their possible futures in unique ways. At the end of this major event in their lives, the decisions they made turned into significant life choices that impacted (and will carry on impacting) on their life journey beyond the attachment period. Most of their decisions followed trajectories typical of students from the A&M Faculty, for example, to study for a bachelor’s degree or to fill a permanent position in their field of expertise. Some life choices, on the other hand, were surprising and distinctive. All in all, no matter what choices were made, they reflected the different ways that the participants selected their own life trajectories based on their personal aspirations and beliefs. The life choices were also guided, in many ways, by their exposure to the world of work and how they made sense of their attachment experience as part of their life journey. For them, what seemed to matter most was the chance to bring into being the future selves that they had always imagined.

11.2. Conceptualising the study

In this section, I outline how, in this study as a whole, I made sense of language use and workplace participation in the process of identity construction. I begin with my critical reflection on how I have considered the lived experiences of young Bumiputera Malay individuals in Malaysia by drawing on both essentialist and post-structuralist notions of identity. Then, I conceptualise the study as the ‘life journey’ of individuals that is made up of day-to-day ‘life episodes’ as part of distinct but overlapping ‘life phases’. The life journey also opens up ‘vantage points’ as I will elaborate by the end of this section.

11.2.1. Essentialism, post-structuralism and the Bumiputera Malays

In his volume on second language identities, Block (2007) describes three different lenses under which identity can be observed. One manner to ‘see’ identity is to think of it as “how individuals are defined, contained and enabled ... as opposed to the actions they take” (p. 1). Another way to make sense of identity is to view it “as open-ended and unstable ... and the extent to which identity is a self-conscious and ongoing project” (Block, 2007, p. 2). Finally, citing the work of other linguists, he argues that identity is “an academic concept. ... examining how language learners position themselves and are positioned by others depending on where they are, who they are with and what they are doing” (Block, 2007, p. 2). My research on the Bumiputera Malays demonstrates how this ethno-political identity construct embodies and portrays these precepts. From the outset, I drew on both essentialist and post-structuralist notions of identity as I embarked on my own research on Bumiputera Malay undergraduates from a Bumiputera-only university in contemporary Malaysia.

Even though from the beginning of my journey it seemed as though I drew on opposite and incompatible ends of the identity spectrum, in truth, it was neither possible nor desirable to view Bumiputera Malay identity exclusively through essentialist or post-structuralist lenses. As I explained in Chapter 1, and elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3, Bumiputera Malay identity is rather complex as it is really a combination of two identity categories: Bumiputera and Malay. The problem is that in research literature, particularly from the Malaysian and ASEAN contexts, there has been a tendency to view Malay and Bumiputera as one and the same (see, for example, Mohd-Asraf, 2004, 2005; Rajadurai, 2010a, 2010b; S. K. Lee’s 2001, 2003). In building the theoretical framework of this study, I argued, on the one hand, that Malay identity illustrates aspects of an ethnic identity category based on historical accounts

intertwined with religious identity (i.e., Islam) and national identity (i.e., Malaysian). Bumiputera identity, on the other hand, is a more recent construct that came into existence at a time of crisis as the Malay elites struggled to stake a place in the makings of modern Malaysia (Andaya & Andaya, 1982; Harper, 1999; Reid, 2004). Once these distinctions are made clear, it is possible to show how Bumiputera Malay identity reflects both essentialist and post-structuralist views of identity.

According to Bucholtz (2003), it is possible to frame identity in essentialist terms due to the fact that:

attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited; and (2) that group members are more or less alike. (p. 400)

I concur with Bucholtz's proposal because there are two valid reasons why the Bumiputera Malay ethno-political identity should be viewed, at least partly, in essentialist terms. First, a 'Malay' person is well-defined in the highest laws of Malaysia. In Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia, a Malay person is legally defined as someone "who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language [and] conforms to Malay custom" (Government of Malaysia, 2009, p. 130). Second, when a person falls under the category of Malay, he or she is accorded with certain privileges as safeguarded by the Federal Constitution. Article 153, Clause (3) in particular, defines the many rights of a Malay person in terms of job positions in the public service, access to government scholarships and also access to further education and training opportunities (Government of Malaysia, 2009). The participants in my study represent a case of the real world implications of this legal framework because they are students at a public university that was purpose-built to safeguard the rights of the Bumiputera Malays as outlined by the Federal Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia. As a result of the Malaysian legal structure and the political agenda of the Malays in general, the experience of being Malay and characteristics of Malayness became more or less a fixed definition to this day.

As the concept of Bumiputera Malay is tied to the law and is clearly defined in such terms, it also carries strong implications in the real world due to prevailing government policies that began after the Independence of the Federation of Malaya from British rule. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine the experience of being Bumiputera Malay as being the same

for all members of this Malaysian majority group. It was due to this reason that I also had to rely on post-structuralist conceptions of identity to frame my study.

As aforementioned, being defined as Bumiputera Malay has implications beyond the law. It is at this point that it becomes more useful to draw on post-structuralist views of identity to make sense of the lived experiences of participants in this study. Indeed, it was only by taking on board post-structuralist notions of identity as an open-ended, self-conscious and ongoing project, and considering how individuals position themselves and are positioned by others around them depending on context, that the stories of the eight participants could be analysed in depth and be so richly described. An example of the multifaceted Bumiputera Malay experience is illustrated by Fadil who professed, “Well, Malay is race. Bumiputera is like a politics thing, like our university. They’re same but different. In Malaysia, Malays are Islam and use BM ... but not all Bumis are like us. It’s hard to talk about these” (Fadil, i1, 114-118). Another participant, Kieyu, strongly believes that using English did not make him ‘less Malay’ even though he actually preferred using Bahasa Melayu. For someone like Syful, he consciously avoided the Bumiputera Malay identity label and he was more proud to show to others that he had a strong English-based background (though in reality he went to normal government schools). These three identity-related examples and other salient findings in my study confirm that being Malay and becoming Bumiputera can only be satisfactorily examined and successfully explained by taking into consideration both essentialist and post-structuralist viewpoints.

In daily life, identity construction is a complex and multi-layered process that becomes even more difficult to account for when the ethnicity, religion and language of individuals come into play. It also becomes perplexing with the existence of legal definitions and ethno-political connotations of a person’s self, as in the case of the Bumiputera Malays in Malaysia. Still, the emancipatory potential of the process of identity construction can be seen from the overall findings of my study. By the end of this study, it became clear that Bumiputera Malay undergraduates were not merely passive observers who were positioned in given roles by others around them. They knew of ways of acting and being that helped them not only to live and prosper in a Bumiputera-exclusive university community but they also drew on their imagination to plan their own lives based on their own hopes and dreams. These in turn were never constrained by traditional categories like ethnicity and language, and they always tried to employ aspects of the Malay *adat* to enrich their *jiwa*, as part of their life journey.

11.2.2. The life journey and process of identity construction

Although the study as a whole can be conceptualised in different ways, it is most useful to view it as a life journey that was anchored to the attachment period. As I explained in Chapter 6 and elaborated in Chapters 8 and 10, the life journey of the eight participants intersected the past, present and the future. Their aspirations, beliefs and lived experiences through three distinct but closely linked phases (i.e., campus, working and future life) demonstrated how their life journeys came to be both the process and product of identity construction (through language use and participation in communities). Throughout this continuing journey, individual and social identities are constructed and reconstructed as individuals go through different life phases where they engage “with others [and] ... participate in their day-to-day activities” (Block, 2007, p. 18).

The concept of life journey is built, amongst others, on the collective applied linguistics work of Block (2007) and Norton (2000), and the learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2009). It takes into account that identities are personal and social constructs that are ever-changing, influenced by collective and individual sociohistories, yet limitless in potential due to the power of the human imagination (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & K. Hall, 2004, 2005). Considering that identity construction is a fluid concept, and in light of my most salient findings, instead of an all-encompassing conceptual framework on the life journey of the participants, I present their collective journeys as a graphical ‘map’ that is made up of five distinct but interconnected parts. Even before they left campus, the participants tried to make sense of their past, present and future through the attachment. As they went through three life phases linked to these time frames (i.e., campus, working and future), they traversed places and spaces both imagined and real. They were not merely passive observers of things that were happening around them; the participants took charge of their lives, they explored and created new identities that allowed them to successfully transit from the campus grounds to the world or work and effectively change from university students into young professionals. The final figure of the conceptual map (Figure 11-5) shows what was happening in ‘real time’ as the eight participants went through the attachment period as part of their continuing life journey.

I begin, in Figure 11-1, with the first characteristic of the life journey. The journey allows each individual the opportunity to figure out where she or he is coming from, and where he or

she should be heading. In this sense, each life journey opens up ‘vantage points’ at different phases (in this case from campus to working to future life). At these points, the eight participants were able to plan for, act on, and later critically reflect on day-to-day episodes of their campus, working and future lives. In this sense, vantage points within a life journey have a different connotation from the norm; they are not just points to observe, they really give an advantage to individuals who want to take control and try to influence the outcome of episodes within their life journey. The eight participants were not merely passive observers who were unable to influence their life journey; they were conscious of what was happening around them, to the extent that they tried to change themselves into the people that they wanted to become, to engage with others within their communities, and to actively participate in shared activities within these communities to enrich their *jiwa* (i.e., soul). Their actions, no matter how minor, allowed them to continue to imagine and explore identity trajectories that they deemed useful at the individual and social levels in the final part of this conceptual overview (represented by Figure 11-5).

In Figures 11-2 through 11-4, I draw on the post-structuralist metaphors of space, place and crossing to explore the situatedness of identity construction within their campus, working and future lives. Throughout this study, I emphasised how Bumiputera Malay undergraduates are obliged to cross physical and ideological boundaries to construct identities that are in line with their personal aspirations. Blommaert (2005) argues that spaces and places must play a central role in any discussions of identity through post-structuralist lenses. This is due to the fact that when individuals share stories of their lives, they constantly make references to spaces and places “in which meaningful social relationships and events can be anchored and against which a sense of community can be developed” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 221). The metaphors of place and space, in turn, help to contextualise the whole process of identity construction. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), places and spaces are marked by physical and imaginary boundaries that both exclude and include.

Being able to see and successfully cross these boundaries will not only result in personal satisfaction, but also lead to the construction of new individual and social identities and/or the reconstruction of old ones. ‘Crossing’ is a term I borrow from Rampton (1998) who explains that critical life episodes (e.g., preparing to begin the attachment, entering a workplace community, preparing to complete the attachment) will ultimately involve crossing frontiers of spaces and places. To demonstrate all the above, Figures 11-2 through 11-4 list some of

the significant identity-related notions from each life phase that the participants went through (from campus to working to future life) as they made physical crossings from the campus grounds into their places of work and ideological crossings from university students into young urban professionals.

The final part of my conceptual map, represented by Figure 11-5, focuses mainly on the self of each participant. It demonstrates how they imagined and constructed different identities in light of their individual life journeys and their hopes and dreams for the future, especially the 'dream careers' that they wanted. Findings from the study show how the participants constantly made connections between these different life phases, and moved back and forth fluidly as they constructed their individual and social identities before, during and after the attachment period. Put simply, their life journey led to different crossroads of identities at each turn. At this juncture, it is important to state that even though I have chosen to represent the life journeys of the participants as separate figures, in reality, all aspects within these figures are interconnected as part of the process and product of identity construction. Next, I present the first of the five-part conceptual map.

11.2.3. The life journey and vantage points

A vantage point is typically a physical place from which something can be viewed in detail. It can also be a situation that affords a unique advantage, for example, the opportunity to see the bigger picture and understand what is really happening. Figure 11-1 below symbolises what the self conceptualises as part of the life journey of that individual.

Within the life journey of individuals, vantage points carry a broad meaning. As the process and product of identity construction, the life journey opens up multiple vantage points for individuals as they traverse physical and ideological borders, and negotiate their individual and social identities. As their life journeys continue, they have the unique opportunity to step back and take stock of what is happening to them and around them. In other words, they have the chance to see life as it unfolds. However, they are not merely passive observers. As they view the unfolding of life, they also take direct action to influence what is happening so that the situation (or 'life episode') plays out to their advantage and helps them to realise their personal targets. This is often referred to as 'agency' in the literature on identity construction (see, for example, Block, 2007; Bucholtz, 2011; Norton, 2000; Wenger, 1998). Hence, the life journey is neither a static point nor a linear chronological construct; it is really the

opportunity to learn and experience new things, and to piece together different phases of one's life to create identities that align with one's hopes and dreams.

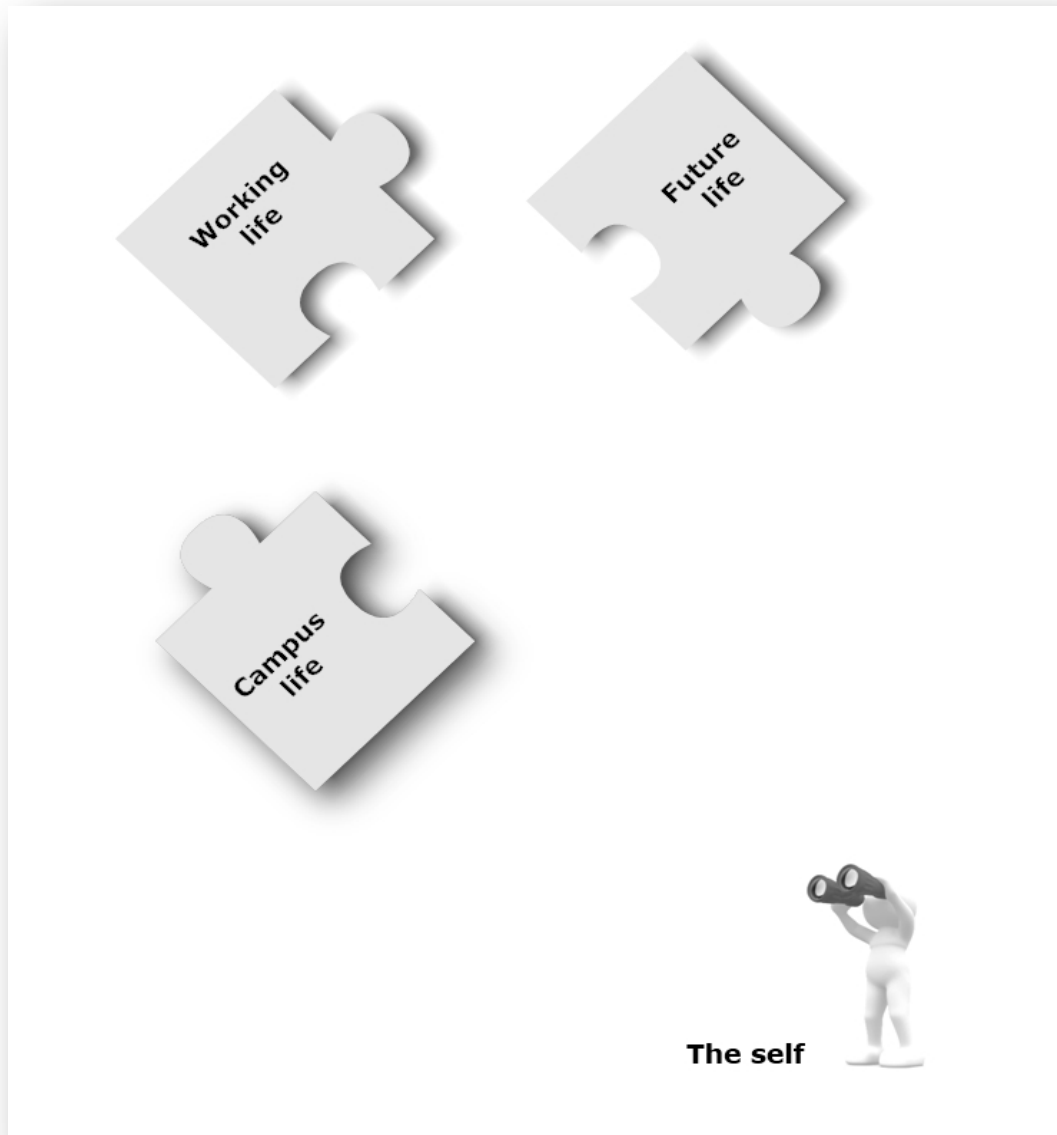


Figure 11-1. The life journey broadly conceptualised as 'vantage points'.

That their life journeys fed the *jiwa* of the eight participants cannot be easily refuted. Although they referred to this Malay identity construct in different terms, before, during and after the attachment, the participants were actively making sense of how their campus, working and future lives contributed to their *jiwa* and sense of self. At the same time, they made the effort to shape different episodes within their life phases to their advantage by drawing on their history and imagination. As a result, they were able to define themselves as

individuals and as parts of a larger whole (Joseph, 2004, 2010; Llamas & Watt, 2010). The life journey of two participants, Eizat and Intan, serve as representative examples.

Like the other participants, Eizat had a personal target to meet as part of his life journey. He wanted to become a 'global citizen' and he saw his attachment as the opportunity to make this dream come true. When he saw the bigger picture of his campus life, he questioned some of his naïve beliefs regarding the Bumiputera Malays. He became upset by the lack of competitiveness of some undergraduates on campus. To avoid becoming like them, Eizat applied to P-Hospital to do his attachment so that he could become a global citizen in the future by learning from the Malaysian Chinese community.

For Intan, once she reflected on her working life, she realised that she needed to take direct actions to prove to others that she was not as passive as her friends believed. On campus, she said that she tended to fade into the background not because she was passive but she felt that other students were more able than she was. When she examined her working life, she decided to turn things around and she so chose to become a customer services intern at J-Automotive. By choosing this line of work, Intan also wanted to ensure that her dream career in the automotive industry would become a reality.

Due to the fact that their life journeys opened up multiple vantage points for them, Eizat, Intan and others in this group were able to directly influence their campus, working and future lives in unique ways. Each of them mapped out their individual life phases and figured out what actions to take before, during and after each phase to ensure that their hopes and dreams will become reality, as part of their individual life journeys.

11.2.4. The life journey: places, spaces and crossings

Every journey affords new lessons to be learned and opportunities to be explored. This was certainly the case with the life journeys of the participants throughout their three life phases: campus, working and future. Extending the ideas in the first part of the conceptual map, below, I draw on the metaphors of place, space and crossing (Blommaert, 2005; Rampton, 1995, 1998, 2010; Scollon & Scollon, 2003) to contextualise the life journey as the process and product of identity construction.

When discussing everyday episodes of their lives, individuals frequently refer to places and spaces to anchor the stories that they share. These stories tell of their hopes, dreams and lived experiences, as they struggle to cross boundaries of places and spaces, and to construct and reconstruct identities that they deemed useful. In the following subsections, the campus, working and future lives of the eight participants are framed as places, spaces and crossings.

11.2.4.1. Campus life

The five semesters that they spent on campus affected the lives of the eight participants differently. For most, living on campus with other Bumiputera Malay undergraduates was a normal and unproblematic undertaking; for some, living on a campus that was strongly regulated by the Malay *adat* was not easy and these individuals felt constricted by their surroundings. No matter how they envisaged and experienced campus life, this life phase played several critical roles.

At one level, it was a place of learning where young undergraduates acquired the languages that they needed for future employment. For the participants, it was also the place for them to prepare for a major life event: the industrial attachment. At the same time, their campus provides the space to improve communication and language abilities, to imagine possible futures and, most importantly, to get ready to cross physical and ideological borders through the attachment. Figure 11-2 outlines the significance of campus life as a place and space where identities were constructed.

At a different level, it was during campus life that the ethnic and religious identities of the participants featured strongly as part of their life journey. This was perhaps due to the inseparability of the *adat* and *jiwa* on campus. With reference to language use, K. Abdullah and Ayyub (1998) believe that language use and the *adat* are interlinked with the *jiwa* of a Malay person. Indeed, local researchers like Burhanudeen (2006), S. C. Tham (1977) and others view language as the root of the *adat*. One of the main reasons why *adat*, *jiwa* and language use are inseparable is that language use involves *adat* and *jiwa* at the same time.

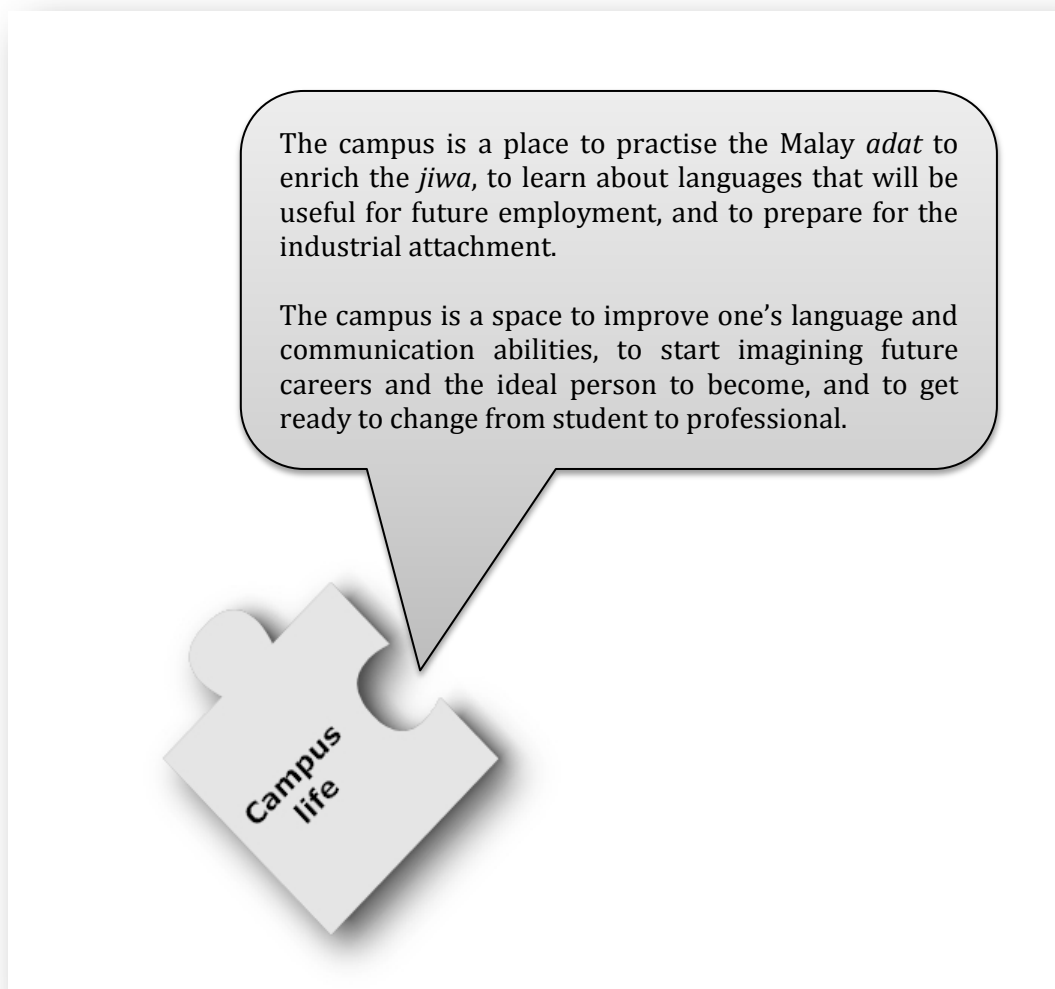


Figure 11-2. Campus life as place and space.

Within a typical Malay community, such as this particular campus, a person is not supposed to boast while communicating or to criticise others openly. These unwritten rules of conduct not only must be learned but they must be practised lest a person is negatively labelled by others. Campus life was also a place and space where ‘Malayness’ became a critical issue in the lives of the participants who had to make a great effort, for instance, to use English and Mandarin widely whilst still adhering to the shared *adat* on campus. In truth, all of them could not escape living a life on campus based on a strong sense of community. Being part of this wider Bumiputera Malay community was necessary and individuals who built walls around them (like Teeya) or those who chose to assert their individuality no matter what the cost (like Syful) found that campus life was not a pleasant place and space to be in.

11.2.4.2. Working life

As they crossed from campus to working life, most of the participants argued that they were quickly becoming more worker-like and less student-like. However, not everyone felt the same way and Fadil in particular, was not able to become a member of his workplace community. This demonstrates that even with the potential of the industrial attachment to construct positive identities for individuals, not all places of work were suitable for contributing positively to a person's life journey. I will return to this observation later in this chapter. Figure 11-3 illustrates some of the main features of working life (and the workplace) as places and spaces for identity construction.

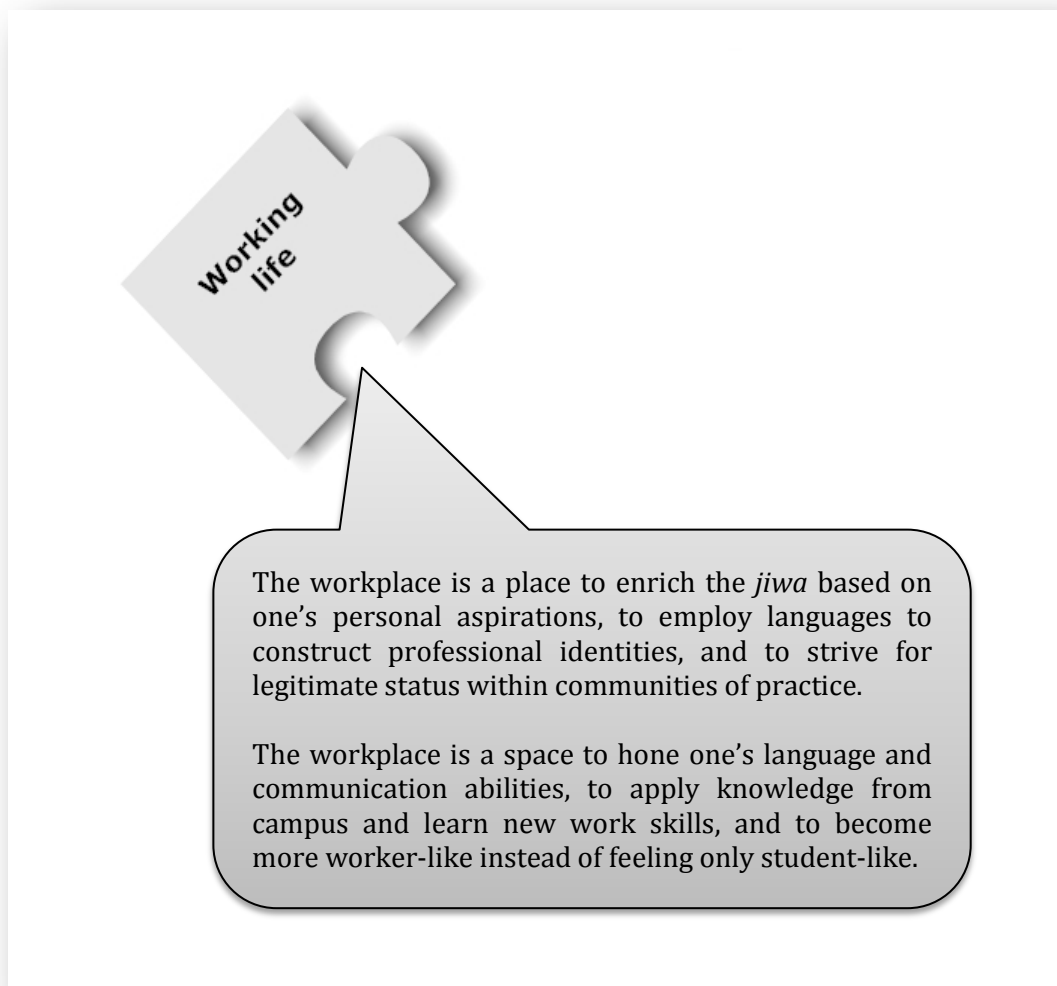


Figure 11-3. Working life as place and space.

Another noteworthy observation was the way participants constantly drew on their campus lives and imagined future lives to make sense of, and to negotiate, their working lives. This

shows how the life journey opens up multiple vantage points where individuals are able to piece together the past, present and future simultaneously and try to influence where they will figure in the bigger picture.

It is not surprising that this life phase played several vital roles as part of the life journey. At one level, it was a place to enrich the *jiwa* based on an individual's personal aspirations. As they employed the languages that they know to construct professional selves that helped them to carry out their work-related roles, the eight participants also drew on their individual agency (Block, 2007; Bucholtz, 2011; Norton, 2000; Wenger, 1998) to gain legitimate status within their communities of practice. In this sense, their places of work created the space for them to hone their language and communication abilities and to apply the knowledge that they had acquired on campus whilst learning new skills related to their internships. As a result, nearly all of the participants reported becoming more worker-like instead of feeling student-like in this life phase.

At another level, it was through working life that the professional selves and workplace identities of the participants were brought to the fore as they drew on their communication and language abilities to try to become legitimate members of their workplace communities. For Holmes and Marra (2005), formal and informal business communication contributes to the makings of a professional. Their observation has two implications. First, the journey to be perceived as a member of a workplace community involves the ability to demonstrate work-related skills, professionalism and productivity. Second, those who enter a workplace community must be able to talk like and with its members, and engage in "the different interactional practices and workplace cultures in which they are embedded and from which they emerge" (Holmes & Marra, 2005, p. 211). K. Richards (2006) adds that "what is professionally achieved is also linguistically achieved and the identities that emerge from engagements with daily business are as much linguistic as professional" (p. 219). In this sense, communication is simultaneously the process and product that leads to the construction of professional identities, as the participants experienced during this particular life phase.

11.2.4.3. Future life

The life journeys of the eight participants were all guided by the future. The plans they made and the actions they took were all meant to help them successfully move into the future. The future featured frequently in the stories shared by the participants even before they left the

campus grounds. Some even said that their ideal future selves were already at the back of their minds during their school years. These participants were engaged in an identity ‘master plan’ that started from the past, continued into the present and extended into the future. Figure 11-4 illustrates some of the main features of future life as imagined place and space.

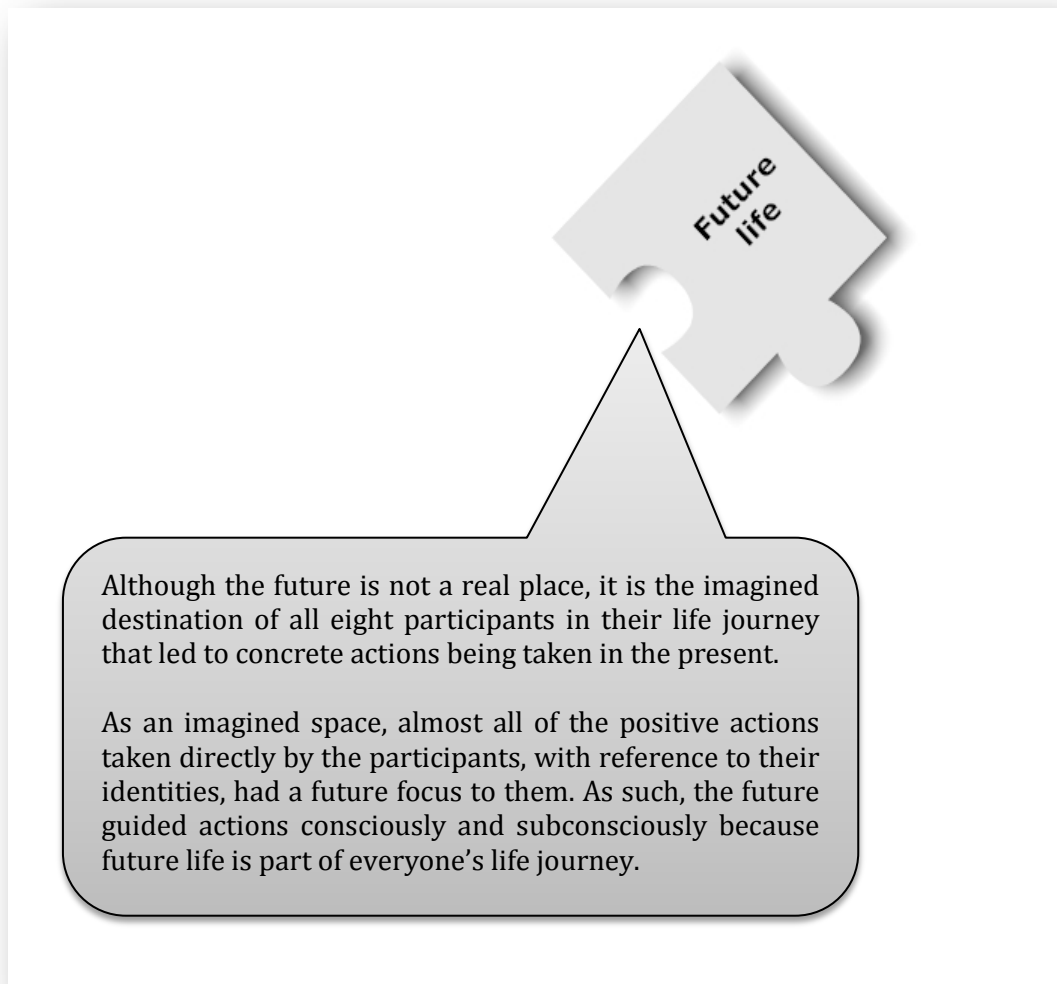


Figure 11-4. Future life as (imagined) place and space.

This final life phase, as observed in my study, played several key roles in the life journey of the eight participants. Firstly, even though the future is undoubtedly an imagined place, it was the collective destination of the participants in their life journeys. To reach this destination, the participants drew on everything that they knew to construct identities that they deemed useful during the attachment period. At the same time, some of them continued with identity projects that began in the past before these individuals entered the first phase of their life journey from campus to workplace (i.e., campus life). As Block (2006) writes, identity is

about “negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future. The individual is shaped by his/her sociohistory but also shapes his/her sociohistory as life goes on” (p. 39).

Thus, it was not surprising that almost all of the positive actions taken by the participants, with reference to their identities, had a future focus. Future life initially became the space for exploring identity trajectories without consequences in the here and now. However, as the participants arrived at their final destination (i.e., the completion of their industrial attachments), real life trajectories had to be chosen to open doors into the impending future. In their learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2009), Lave and Wenger suggest that identity is tied to the passage of time, and its construction is ongoing. Wenger (1998) adds that “as trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present” (p. 155). For this reason, in their life journey, individuals will always try to work on identities that they consider useful. These are identities that will help to propel them successfully into their imagined futures. The next section discusses the final part of my conceptual map.

11.2.5. The life journey as crossroads of identities

The previous section illustrates the three life phases of a journey from campus to workplace and from student to professional. In this section, I present the final part of the conceptual map to show how the life journey of individuals can lead to different crossroads of identities; these are crossroads that require real decisions to be made that will have an impact on their lives. At the same time, weighing the options in front of them involves the imagination, especially when decisions to be made are tied to their future selves. Figure 11-5 is an attempt to graphically capture these ideas.

When individuals are able to conceptualise the bigger picture and appreciate the links between different phases of their lives, they are also capable of carving a place for themselves in the crossroads between past, present and future. In other words, by conceptualising everything as a whole, individuals are able to start imagining future possibilities and to construct the future selves they have planned for. In Wenger’s (1998) view, this is only possible due to the power of imagination, and it involves “expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p. 176). Wenger’s viewpoint is not only applicable to this final part of the conceptual map, it is also relevant as

part of the future life phase. With reference to my study, the participants' imagination created mental images of themselves within their communities of practice. It also opened up possible identity trajectories within those professional communities that the participants wanted to further explore, to take them into the immediate future.

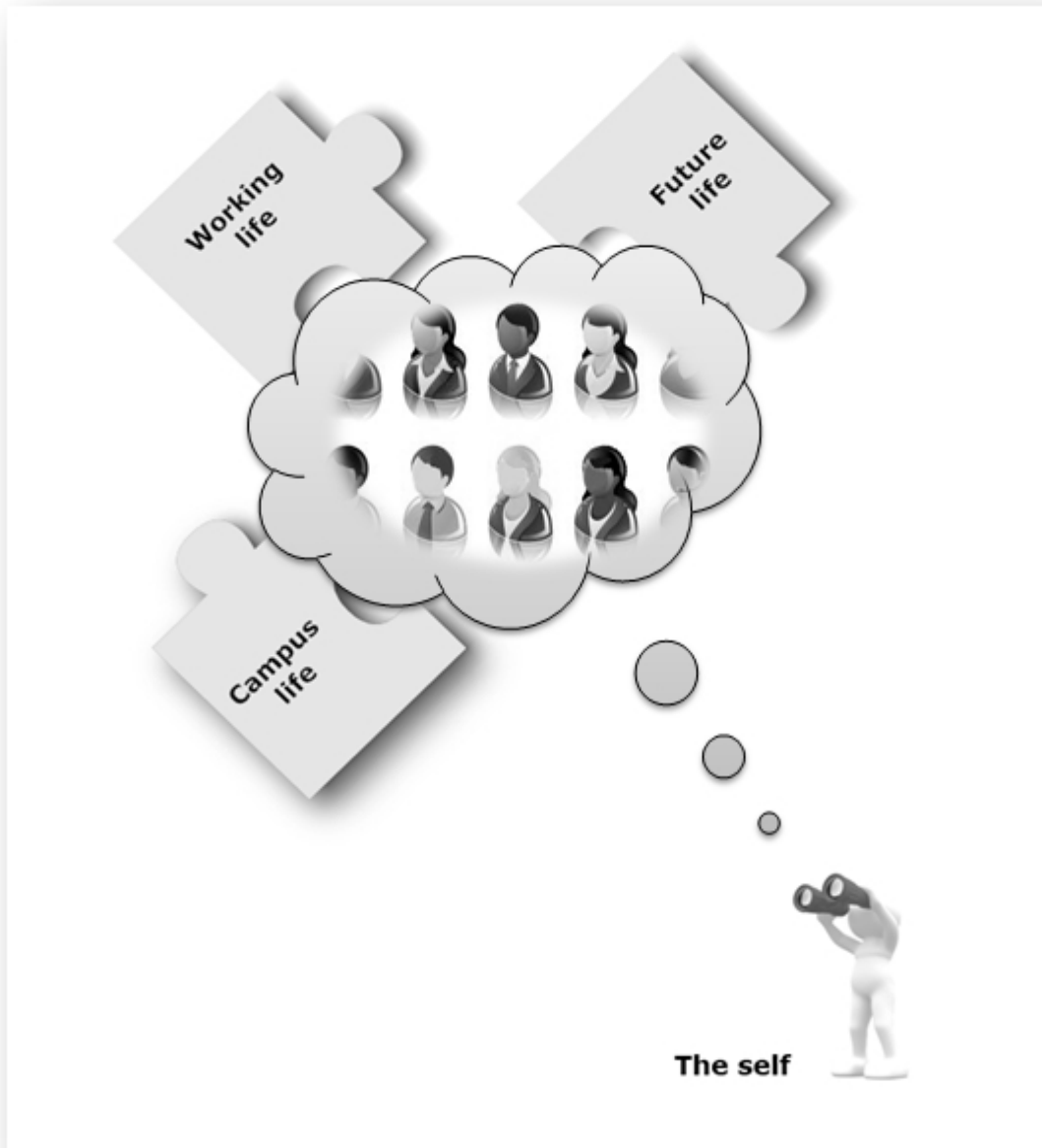


Figure 11-5. Life journey as crossroads of identities.

The attachment bridged the participants' campus, working and future lives and it gave them the opportunity to stake their place within their workplace communities. Their successes and failures in carrying out their work-related roles became crossroads of identity construction

where they had to readjust their mindsets and consider alternative actions to take so that their attachments would end productively. At the end of the attachment period, they came to the final major crossroad where they again had to make critical choices for the future lives they wanted and the future selves they aspired to. Crossroads like these within the life journeys of individuals propel them towards their becoming. These crossroads led them towards different trajectories and gave them opportunities to take charge of their lives. In a sense, this is what identity construction is all about. It is a process of learning about life and drawing on one's knowledge and strengths to ensure that one's future(s) will be full of exciting possibilities.

To summarise this section, the concept of life journey captures the changes felt by the participants as they proceeded through their campus, working and future lives. At the same time, these life phases are threaded together in the hearts and minds of the participants; they were able to make sense of the links between the past, present and future as they worked on constructing versions of themselves that truly reflected their deepest hopes and dreams. The usefulness of the life journey as the process and product of identity construction extends beyond the limits of this study. In the next section, I present some implications of the study and make recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders. I also consider the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge on identity construction.

11.3. Implications, recommendations and contributions

This section considers the implications of this study focusing on industrial attachments as a bridge between university campuses and the world of work. It also highlights the contribution the study makes to current understanding of the process of identity construction. Where relevant, I link the process with the notions of crossings (university to workplace), change and transition (university undergraduate to young urban professional), and sociohistory (*adat* and *jiwa* as significant aspects of Bumiputera Malay identities).

11.3.1. Implications for stakeholders and recommendations to policymakers

This study has implications for stakeholders that are involved in industrial attachments as part of the process of learning at the tertiary level. Other than raising some pertinent issues with reference to attachments and workplace internships, the study also highlights the significance of communication and language training for the future lives of undergraduates in the Malaysian setting and beyond. Below, I consider these implications, and make some

recommendations for policymakers in similar educational contexts. To begin, the study highlighted how attachments are not just part of the formal tertiary curriculum. They are, in reality, negotiated partnerships between the university, undergraduates and employers.

For the university, attachments extend the knowledge imparted by educators within the classroom (S. Y. Tham & Kam, 2008). Theories and abstract knowledge are brought to life as it were, as university undergraduates are given the chance to apply this knowledge as they make their way into the world of work. Although, as this study has shown, the work that they carried out might be perceived, in part, as pseudo work, these newcomers are normally supervised by oldtimers in the industry and exposed to real life work experiences that cannot be realistically taught within the confines of the classroom. As a result, connections are made between classroom learning and on-site learning in the hearts and minds of these newcomers. The university thus benefits at many levels, for instance, being able to create industry-ready undergraduates and demonstrating a commitment to build links between the campus and local business entities and industries. Based on these observations, the study recommends that the A&M Faculty's attachment model not only be emulated by other tertiary institutions but also extended to give young undergraduates the exposure they need to successfully cross the different boundaries from campus, working to future life. The opportunities thus given to the undergraduates to exert their agency during the period of their attachment allows these young professionals-in-training to create a sense of professional 'self' in their working lives. The result, as this study has illustrated, leads to self empowerment and readiness to face the future prior to graduation.

For university undergraduates like the eight that I have focused on in this study, positive implications of the attachment experience can be broken down into three broad dimensions: increasing their readiness to graduate, becoming young professionals, and preparing for the future. In terms of increasing their readiness to graduate, the attachment directly helps university students to gain the academic credits needed to graduate. The attachment is a real world proving ground for their academic competence within their areas of expertise. With reference to becoming young professionals, the attachment is an opportunity to create and enhance their professional selves by assessing their own strengths and weaknesses in their respective places of work. In the process, these university students also learn about their communities of practice and understand all the requirements to become part of these communities. Finally, in connection to preparing for the future, the attachment period is a

chance for young university students to critically reflect on and make concrete decisions about their dream careers. Those who are more future orientated, for instance, will be able to expand their social and professional networks as they make business contacts through the work that they do. All of the above will add to their résumés before actual graduation. Like M. N. Lee (2004) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (2010), the study thus recommends that industrial attachments be made a compulsory component of university study at diploma or degree level (where relevant), for instance for undergraduates who will become newcomers to the world of business.

For employers and industry players, while they might be motivated to accept interns as cheap or unpaid labour, in truth, attachments are an excellent avenue to recruit young talent before they are snapped up by other business entities. In addition, although there are costs involved in training and supervising young interns, these are negligible in the long run, especially if the university students selected to work in a particular company prove to make significant contributions to the company during the attachment period. That company might benefit from fresh insights and access to cutting-edge expertise from these young university students. As this study has highlighted, students on industrial attachments do not just possess positive mindsets when carrying out their work-related responsibilities, they are also potentially very productive with a high work rate. As newcomers, they usually try to work extra hard to show their professional abilities to their superiors, fellow workers and members of the public that they serve. They simultaneously apply their prior theoretical knowledge and acquire on-the-job practical knowledge as part of the attachment experience. The study therefore recommends that attachment opportunities be widened by business entities operating within local economies. Even though not all university students will automatically be able to carry out all the tasks given to them to a high standard, it is likely that over time, and with continued support from members of their professional working communities, they will begin to develop their skills and make valued contributions. Taking Malaysia as a case in point, accepting interns makes perfect business sense in most sectors (Pillai, Khan, Ibrahim & Raphael, 2012). At the end of the attachment period, job offers should also be given out to those interns who show great potential for the future.

Other than issues relating directly to industrial attachments and workplace internships, the study has shown the positive impact of communication and language training on the lives of young university undergraduates. Once again, the A&M Faculty's education model is worthy

of praise especially when other faculties in that particular university cease to focus on communication and language skills from halfway through their diploma programmes. Five semesters or two and a half years of extensive training in Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese not only helped the students in my study to become highly sought after young professionals by local and even international companies, their knowledge of these important languages helped them to develop a stronger sense of professionalism and inner-confidence to interact with their superiors, seniors and members of the public. The attachment experience naturally became the platform for these students to put their communication and language abilities to the test and portray their professional selves to others with confidence and vigour (for similar observations, see Lehtonen & Karjalainen, 2008; Wood, 2009). From campus to working to future life, communication and language abilities play various roles in the construction and reconstruction of personal and social identities. This is a fact that must be appreciated by policymakers in planning for tertiary education programmes at diploma and degree levels (and beyond) especially when they hope to increase the benefits of such programmes to all stakeholders involved.

11.3.2. Contribution to the body of knowledge on identity construction

In Chapters 2 and 3, through five claims I forwarded what I perceived to be the process of identity construction, based on current research in this field. I briefly restate those claims below, as they serve as a useful starting point for future researchers who are interested in the study of identities. Additionally, I highlight the significance of the study with reference to the notions of crossings, change and transition, and sociohistory.

In the first claim, I stated that identity construction is a personal journey of the self that takes place simultaneously in the company of others. This voyage of change leads to the emergence of multiple identities. My data showed that the self is not merely an imagined entity, but also a social construct that is situated within and emerges from engagement in communities. As Blommaert (2006) observes, there are two facets of identity: “the identity people themselves articulate and claim [and] the identity given to someone by someone else” (p. 238). This was reflected in my study in the three life phases of the participants; from campus to working to future life. It was the transition period from university undergraduate to young urban professional that afforded opportunities for empowerment and growth for the participants as they drew on their individual agency (Bucholtz, 2003, 2011) to construct identities. When

they successfully crossed ideological and physical boundaries they completed their becoming as members of communities of practice.

In the second claim, I indicated that identity construction is based on experience and feeds on the imagination due to the fact that identities are tied to the past, present and future. This is linked to the notion of sociohistory. Block (2007) writes, “individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on” (p. 27). I view the *adat* and *jiwa* as constituents of sociohistory in the lives of the Bumiputera Malay participants in this study. Even though some Malaysian scholars argue that the Malay self is highly resistant to change due to the essential bonds between ethnicity, religion and language, this study has illustrated how Bumiputera Malay undergraduates were able to contend with their strict Malay *adat* and feed their Malay *jiwa* with contemporary ideals (e.g., to become a ‘glocal’ Malay). Instead of resisting external influences, most of the participants embraced the values of others, most notably those shared within the Malaysian Chinese community. Therefore, when the past and present is combined, possibilities for the future can be imagined and acted upon. In Lave and Wenger’s theory (1991; Wenger, 1998, 2009), this is related to identity trajectory or a ‘coherence’ that cuts through different phases of life.

In the third claim, I asserted that identity construction might lead to conflicts both imagined and real but also bring opportunities and achievements. Norton (2010) argues that identity construction is a process that happens “in a frequently inequitable world” (p. 350). Access to certain identities is not available to everyone and difficulties arise when social institutions use identity “boundaries and contents to label, stereotype, and limit possibilities of groups ... to exclude them [and] deny their difference or existence and ignore their needs” (Lin, 2008a, p. 215). Taking campus life as a case in point, participants in this study turned to smaller friendship groups for emotional support and the place to be themselves. Canagarajah (2004) refers to this as an act of resistance where individuals construct ‘hidden spaces’ so that they can negotiate identities with positive outcomes. It was also interesting to discover how the participants dealt with campus life at both individual and social levels. Most of them were able to be part of their own in-groups (e.g., A&M Faculty undergraduates, *orang* KL, etc.) but still sustain the focus on their personal hopes and dreams, a strategy that Bucholtz (1999a, 2011) calls to re/do certain aspects of certain identities but not others. Even the minority (like Syful and Teeya, for instance) who clearly had trouble fitting in were able to find a sense of

belonging when they joined up with other groups of students on campus that were not necessarily from their own faculty.

In the fourth claim, I argued that identity construction is tied to language use and all forms of communication in everyday life. This is perhaps the most significant dimension of identity construction in my study. As Norton (2000) puts it, “language [is] constitutive of and constituted by ... identity” (p. 5). Data from the study demonstrated the reflexive relationship between languages and identities in the life journey of the eight participants. Their collective experiences of learning and using Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin showed how language shaped identity and identity shaped language in their three life phases (i.e., campus, working and future). There was always a rationale for their language choices, for example, to adhere to the shared *adat* within a Bumiputera Malay campus community. The participants also understood how their communication and language abilities came to define who they are, especially within their communities of practice. Some referred to this dimension as their ‘professional self’ but whatever label they used, the languages they know defined them so much so that language becomes their identity. As Llamas and Watt (2010) posit, “Language not only reflects who we are but in some sense it *is* who we are, and its use defines us both directly and indirectly” (p. 1).

In the final claim, I stated that identity construction is connected to established norms that classify social groups but the process is never limited by these social structures. Taking ethnicity as a case in point, although the eight participants lived and studied within a Bumiputera Malay campus community, their hopes and dreams go well beyond the campus grounds. Some of them insisted on carrying out their attachments at non-Malay majority business entities; others specifically chose to mix with individuals from other ethnic groups as a way to broaden their view of the world around them. This collective pragmatic stance was difficult to ignore in the data so much so that it became more productive to view the participants as unique individuals rather than to see them as members of a certain ethnic group. In truth, the ‘Malay’ identity category was neither constrictive nor essentialised, reflecting Norton and Toohey’s (2011) observation that traditional identity categories are not really variables but “socially and historically constructed processes within particular relations of power” (p. 424).

11.4. Limitations of the study

In the years taken to prepare for and conduct this study, and also to complete the writing up of this thesis, I am conscious of several limitations of my work related to the selection of participants and the methods employed to collect and analyse the data.

In terms of the participants, firstly, the experiences of the eight focal participants were limited to their own workplace community. As the study has illustrated, it is difficult to generalise these experiences to all undergraduates, Malaysian or otherwise, who undergo a comparable period of internship as part of their university education. Although there were similarities between one place of work and another, there were also many differences; in other words, each place of work was as unique as the participants who worked there. Secondly, the group of undergraduates I worked with might not constitute a typical sample of undergraduates from an administration and management faculty at a Malaysian university. For instance, out of the eight participants who agreed to provide data for the second longitudinal cycle, only one said that she clearly saw herself as a future manager. The other seven had different plans and did not see themselves as future administrators or managers. In fact, a few of them indicated from the outset that they had different aspirations for the future that were likely to take them on different career trajectories compared to their academic specialisation.

With reference to the methodology, firstly, the duration of time for collecting data in the second cycle (roughly 14 weeks) might have been too short to show significant changes or development of newcomer, professional and other identities. The process of legitimate peripheral participation is gradual and will take a long time to achieve as novices strive to become full-fledged members of their communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2009). It was impossible to overcome this constraint, however, because of the fixed duration of the industrial attachment. Secondly, employing a self-report questionnaire in the first cycle to collect data from 102 undergraduates from the A&M Faculty is a limitation because the data only reflected possible attitudes and feelings toward Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin, and represented only reported behaviour regarding language use on campus and beyond. Nevertheless, using a questionnaire was the most cost-effective and manageable mode of collecting quantitative data from a large sample. Data from the second cycle were also limited, as I again had to rely on whatever the participants reported feeling and doing. It was not possible to gain access to their workplaces and 'shadow' them

as they carried out their work roles. This ultimately meant that I could not observe their actual use of Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin within these communities.

Finally, referring again to the data I collected for the second longitudinal cycle, it was not possible to include many other interesting and relevant pieces of information without adding to the length of this document. The stories told by each participant could constitute a study of its own, given the personal nature of the qualitative data that I managed to collect before, during and after the attachment period. In this sense, wherever I may have sacrificed in terms of depth in my analysis and discussion of the data, I made up for it in terms of breadth. Hopefully, the overall tenet of the stories shared by the eight participants regarding their language use, workplace participation and their campus, working and future life identities is nevertheless evident within the pages of this thesis.

11.5. Directions for future research

Looking back at the work that I carried out, I can claim that identity research is a productive avenue for applied linguistics researchers to pursue. I outline three potential identity focus areas below.

Taking this study as an example, it presented a different reading to an already established body of literature on the Bumiputera Malays in Malaysia. It has brought into question the ideas of earlier researchers who considered the bond between ethnicity, religion and language to be essentialised and highly resistant to change. The data have shown that young Bumiputera Malays were adept at navigating these boundaries and they drew on strategic essentialism strategies (Bucholtz, 2003; Lin, 2008a, 2008b; Spivak, 1990) to adhere to their shared Malay *adat* (i.e., culture) whilst still nourishing their inner *jiwa* (i.e., soul). As such, the first potential avenue for future identity researchers is to revisit established ideas regarding certain ethnic or social groups in order to provide their own contemporary reading of the situation. Essentialised views of identity are worthy of further inquiry especially if future researchers employ several data collection methods over an extended period of time to provide a more encompassing view of identity in action.

The life journey as both process and product of identity construction is the second potential avenue for future research. An interesting focus area might be to look at the different vantage

points that the life journey opens up. For instance, at what points in their life journey do individuals try to take stock and piece together the past, present and future? Do they stop at each turn of their life journey or do they make a conscious decision to view the bigger picture and understand what is happening when they are faced with obstacles and presented with opportunities? Places, spaces and crossings also make for interesting research, especially when they are anchored to major life episodes (leaving campus for the world of work, for instance). Stories that individuals share as they cross physical and ideological places and spaces teach others not just what to do in similar circumstances, but more importantly, in what ways others can draw on their own strengths and knowledge (e.g., communication and language abilities) to successfully cross the frontiers of their own life journey. Additionally, what individuals 'see' when they try to connect the past, present and future is another potentially interesting focus area. For example, do they decide on different 'selves' that they want to become in each episode of their life journey or are these selves the reflection of a single identity project that began from birth and continues until death?

As mentioned in the last section, some of the limitations of my study were not having access to the actual workplaces of the participants, not being able to shadow them as they carried out their work roles, and not being able to observe language use, workplace participation and identity construction over a period longer than the 14-week attachment. Therefore, the final identity focus area that I suggest for future researchers is the industrial attachment. My work has shown the potential of the attachment not just as a catalyst for identity construction but also a place and space for learning and personal growth. As such, observing newcomers as they interact with more experienced colleagues and struggle to become part of the community of practice is an obvious opportunity for research (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2009). Their becoming and sense of alignment could be mapped during the period of their attachment to show how they construct and reconstruct their identities both at the individual and social levels. It would be useful to compare different educational contexts, university systems and societies to see whether a universal guideline for attachments and internships could be drawn. Lastly, extended internship models, in engineering and medicine for instance, would be worthy of study especially if they address language use and community participation. It would be interesting to know how traditional models differ from less rigid attachments in the construction of workplace and professional identities (see, for example, Holmes & Marra, 2005; K. Richards, 2006).

11.6. Concluding statements

As I arrive at the final vantage point of the work that I carried out, I am able to say that this has been part of my own life journey towards professional growth and to understand my own intricate heritage as a Bumiputera Malay living in multi-ethnic and multilingual Malaysia. The experiences of the 102 students from the A&M Faculty and later the stories of eight participants from this large group opened my eyes to the complexities of identity formation and the efforts related to constructing individual and social identities for campus, working and future lives. This study suggests that those who succeed in becoming young urban professionals are individuals who realise the importance of communication and language ability (i.e., Bahasa Melayu, English and Mandarin Chinese), possess vivid imaginations, feel an orientation towards the future, have a desire to enter the world of work, and possess a strong inner sense of selfhood within them.

At the same time, I now understand how the Malay *adat* and *jiwa* can be employed to ‘carry oneself successfully’ in the eyes of others. These uniquely Malay constructs empower individuals to assert their agency, to be successful in their becoming and to experience a strong sense of alignment at each juncture of their life journey. In addition, the opportunities that come with each day-to-day life episode from campus to working to future life (and beyond) always outnumber the conflicts, dilemmas and problems at each turn. Below is the essence of the process of identity construction as captured by Teeya. Not only is it relevant to her and the other seven participants, her words mirror my own life journey at the closing of this life phase that has taken four long years to complete:

Life is just an empty paper and I’m still writing my own story. I’ll finish this ... then *Insyah Allah* [God willing] I can do something new again. The end is always a new beginning for this old me. And, with that again there’ll always be things to experience by the new me. (Teeya, n8, 75-79)

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Appendix B: The originally planned timeframe for data collection

3-4 weeks before I.A. Questionnaire distributed to A&M Faculty undergrads	Week prior to actual I.A. Int. 1 Nar. 1
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I.A. week #01	I.A. week #02	I.A. week #03	I.A. week #04	I.A. week #05	I.A. week #06	I.A. week #07	I.A. week #08	I.A. week #09	I.A. week #10	I.A. week #11	I.A. week #12	I.A. week #13	I.A. week #14
Nar. 2	<i>free</i>	Nar. 3	Int. 2	Nar. 4	<i>free</i>	Nar. 5	Int. 3	Nar. 6	<i>free</i>	Nar. 7 F.g.d	<i>free</i>	Nar. 8	Int. 4 F.rep

** Legend*

I.A. = Industrial Attachment

Int. = Interview

Nar. = Narrative

F.g.d. = Focus group discussion

F.rep. = Formal report

Appendix C: Cycle 1 (quan) survey questionnaire

Questionnaire on language proficiency, identity change and language use

This questionnaire consists of four sections. Please read and follow the instructions for each section carefully.

This is not a test so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. The results of this survey will be used only for research purposes, so please provide your answers truthfully.

Thank you.

Section ONE

In this section, I would like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 6. Please make sure that you respond to all the items in this section.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

This just an example to help you:

0. *I love to learn this language.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Malay</i>						<i>English</i>						<i>Mandarin</i>					

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
-------------------------------	----------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------	----------------------------

Listening skill

1. I understand what others around me are talking about when they use this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. I can follow someone speaking in this language without asking for repetition.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. I can watch and follow television programmes in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

4. I can understand academic lectures delivered in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

5. I can understand formal spoken instructions given in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

6. I am able to follow important points made during formal meetings in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. I can understand questions asked in this language if I was carrying out a presentation.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

8. I understand and can follow this language in formal telephone conversations.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

Speaking skill

9. I can join everyday conversations when others around me are talking in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

10. I can speak clearly in this language without having to repeat myself frequently.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

11. I can tell others the storyline of a film that I have watched in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

12. I can give comments to the tutor during academic lectures delivered in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

13. I can give formal spoken instructions to other people in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

14. I can express my feelings and opinions during formal meetings in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. I can carry out a presentation in this language in front of a group of people.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. I can speak clearly during formal telephone conversations in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

Reading skill

17. I can read newspaper articles in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

18. I can understand personal writings like letters and weblog entries in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

19. I can understand the main points in short memos and notes in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

20. I can read academic texts in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

21. I can read business related documents like portfolios and reports.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

22. I can read formal emails and other online business communication.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

23. I can understand formal charts, graphs and tables related to the world of work.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

24. On the whole I am able to read and understand formal materials in this language.

Malay			English			Mandarin											
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

* 'Mandarin' here refers to simplified *Hanyu Pinyin* and **not** traditional *Hanzi* Chinese characters.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

Writing skill

25. I am able to write articles in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

26. I can write personal materials like letters and emails in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

27. I can write short memos and notes in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

28. I can write academic essays in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

29. I can write formal portfolios and business reports related to my area of study.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

30. I can write formal emails and other online business communication.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

31. I can prepare formal charts, graphs and tables related to my area of study.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

32. Generally I am able to structure and write formal materials in this language.

Malay						English						Mandarin					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

* 'Mandarin' here refers to simplified *Hanyu Pinyin* and **not** traditional *Hanzi* Chinese characters.

Section TWO

In this section, I would like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 6. Make sure you respond to all the items in this section.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
-------------------------------	----------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------	----------------------------

This just an example to help you:

0. I think all languages are fun to learn.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

33. My command of English is better than most of my friends in my own faculty.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

34. I am confident to start my attachment because I can use many languages proficiently.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

35. I am ready to become a professional because I am able to use English proficiently.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

36. My command of English makes me feel worried about looking for a job after graduating.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

37. I can easily switch between using Malay and other languages if there is a need to do so.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

38. I am able to deliver public presentations in both English and Malay if I want to.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

39. I usually stick to English when communicating with certain people that I know.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

40. I use both English and Malay for speaking and writing depending on the situation.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

41. I am trying to increase my use of English for everyday communication.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

42. I use a lot of English so I feel that I am capable of working overseas after graduating.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	Slightly agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

43. I use English frequently because I feel that this language is more versatile than Malay.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

44. I feel that I am more professional because I am able to use different languages to communicate.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

45. I feel that my language ability is generally rising for all the languages that I know.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

46. After learning languages at this university, I find myself more ready to enter the job market.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

47. I think I will be successful in my career because of my ability to use many languages.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

48. I feel attracted to learn other languages as my ability to use English increases.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

49. I feel weird because in my mind I am thinking in many languages at the same time.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

50. It is hard to use English or Mandarin outside of lectures as people will say I am showing off.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

51. I am easily confused nowadays between adopting the English or Malay mode of thinking.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

52. The languages that I use make it hard for me to fit in with other people everyday.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

53. In my opinion, whichever language I use does not affect me as an individual.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

54. I think it is a waste of time to talk about personal changes just because one learns a new language.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

55. I feel that a language is just a language and people should stop making a fuss about it.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

56. If a person changes after learning a language, I think that person just wants to be different.

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Section THREE

In this section, I would like you to share your experiences and opinions with me. Remember that there are no “wrong” or “right” answers. Please make sure that you try to respond to all the questions in this section (even short answers would be appreciated).

57. On campus, when and where would you use Malay, English and Mandarin?

Malay _____

English _____

Mandarin _____

58. After going through many semesters of learning Malay, English and Mandarin in your faculty, how has this experience affected you both negatively and positively?

Negative _____

Positive _____

59. Do you feel that you have had enough exposure to English on campus? Answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ and please elaborate.

60. Do you feel that you have had enough chances to use English on campus? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' and please elaborate.

61. Do you feel that you have had enough exposure to Mandarin on campus? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' and please elaborate.

62. Do you feel that you have had enough chances to use Mandarin on campus? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' and please elaborate.

63. As you prepare to start your industrial attachment, do you think that you now possess the language ability expected from an administration/management professional? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' and please elaborate.

64. Describe concrete actions that you have taken to make sure that your language ability is polished before you begin your industrial attachment.

Malay _____

English _____

Mandarin _____

65. Use the space below to add any further details that you think are relevant to the questions in this section.

Section FOUR

In this section, please provide some background information about yourself so that I can further analyse all your responses in the previous three sections.

Full name: _____

Gender: Female Male Age: _____ years old

Email address: _____

Mobile telephone number: (01) _____

Name of last primary school _____

Name of last secondary school _____

Other than Malay and English, did you sit for another language paper during SPM? Yes No

What was the additional language paper that you sat for? _____

Please write down the letter grade that you have obtained for the following subjects and courses:

Secondary level – Malaysian Certificate of Education (<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> or SPM)		
<i>Bahasa Malaysia/Malay</i> Grade:	English Grade:	Additional language (as above) Grade:

University level diploma		
<i>Bahasa Malaysia/Malay</i> Malay for Occupational Purposes Grade:	English English for Academic Purposes Grade: Intermediate Level English Grade: Advanced Level English Grade: English for Occupational Purposes Grade: Workplace and Business English Grade:	Mandarin Communicative Mandarin I Grade: Communicative Mandarin II Grade:

Did you apply to a company/private organization to do your industrial attachment? Yes No

Have you been accepted as a practical trainee/intern in that company/organization? Yes No

Where will you be doing your industrial attachment? (City, State) _____ , _____

What is the full name of the organization? _____

What type of organization is this? Government Private Internal

I may contact you and invite you to become one of my research participants for further stages of my study. If you DO NOT want to be contacted for this purpose, tick this box.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix D: Cycle 2 (QUAL) semi-structured interview protocols

Interview 1 (week prior to the industrial attachment, questions for this interview session are generally related to the first research question).

(*Theme* Language use, language domains)

1. Concrete lead off question

Take a look at your responses in Section Three of the questionnaire. For question 45, you explained when and where you would use Malay, English and Mandarin.

Why do you use these languages in different situations and at different times?

(*Theme* Language use, language domains)

2. Concrete lead off question:

Please tell me about the languages that you have learned at this university. In your opinion what is your current ability level for each language that you have mentioned?

2. Potential follow up queries:

Which language do you most often use to express yourself? In what ways do you express yourself in this language?

Which languages do you think will be most useful during your industrial attachment? Why is this so?

(*Theme* Language exposure, language skills)

3. Concrete lead off question:

Based on the questionnaire, you have learned [number of] languages. Did you enjoy learning these languages? Do you practise speaking and writing in these languages?

3. Potential follow up queries:

In your opinion, what are the advantages of knowing and being able to use more than one language for a Malaysian graduate?

Compared to your time in school, do you enjoy learning English on campus? At this point in time, do you use this language more than Malay? Why?

(*Theme* Language learning, language and identity)

4. Concrete lead off question:

Do you feel that the languages you know have changed your personality? Do you think that the languages you know have impacted your ability to think?

4. Potential follow up queries:

Does English influence your identity as a soon-to-be graduate in administration and management? How?

Imagine that you are recommending second and third languages for a close friend to learn. Which languages would you personally recommend? Why?

(Theme Workplace preparation, future life trajectory)

5. Concrete lead off question:

Take a look at your responses in Section Four of the questionnaire. Can you please share your experience in preparing for your industrial attachment right from the start?

5. Potential follow up queries:

Please tell me what made you choose to apply to that organization for your industrial attachment?

Do you think that you will enjoy doing your industrial attachment there? How are you preparing yourself mentally?

(Theme Language in the workplace, language and identity)

6. Concrete lead off question:

As you prepare to start your industrial attachment, do you feel that your ability to use different languages will give you an advantage in the workplace? How?

6. Potential follow up queries:

Have you had any working experience before? If you do, please share your experience with me.

In your opinion, will language ability affect someone's reputation as an administration or management professional? How?

7. Closing question: Would you like to add anything else, please?

Interview 2 (week four of the industrial attachment, questions for this interview session are generally related to the second research question).

1. Opening question: Based on the written transcript of our last interview session that I have given you, would you like to make any comments or corrections, please?

(Theme Job scope, language use)

2. Concrete lead off question:

Please describe your job scope to me and share with me your typical working day.

2. Potential follow up queries:

Do you feel that all the work you have to do is important for your company? Is the work challenging enough for you?

Which language do you most often use while working? In what ways do you express yourself in this language in your workplace?

(Theme Language exposure, language skills)

3. Concrete lead off question:

Do you use Malay, English and Mandarin for speaking and writing in the workplace? What for?

3. Potential follow up queries:

Compared to your time on campus, do you enjoy using English here? At this point in time do you use this language more than Malay? Why?

Do you often use your third language Mandarin? Why?

(Theme Language use, identity change)

4. Concrete lead off question:

In your place of work, do you feel that the languages you know make you a good administrative/managerial worker? Why do you say so?

4. Potential follow up queries:

In your place of work, do you feel that everyone around you is using English? If your answer is yes, how does this make you feel?

Do you plan to change yourself so that you will fit in better in your workplace? How?

(Theme Language in the workplace, communication patterns)

5. Concrete lead off question:

How often do other workers communicate with you? Who communicates with you and what for? What language do they use to communicate with you?

5. Potential follow up queries:

When workers from other races communicate with you what language do they normally use? What about workers from your own race? How do you feel about this?

So far, have you received negative or positive feedbacks about any work that you have done? Are any of the feedbacks related to your ability to use language?

6. Closing question: Would you like to add anything else, please?

Interview 3 (week eight of the industrial attachment, questions for this interview session are generally related to the second research question).

1. Opening question: Based on the written transcript of our last interview session that I have given you, would you like to make any comments or corrections, please?

(*Theme* Job scope, language use)

2. Concrete lead off question:

How are you coping with all your responsibilities in your place of work? How do you generally feel at this moment?

2. Potential follow up queries:

Have you faced any kind of problems related to your ability to do your work as an administrative and management personnel? Please elaborate.

So far, do you feel that you are doing a good job? How much is this related to your ability to use the languages that you know?

(*Theme* Language use, identity change)

3. Concrete lead off question:

When you compare yourself to other workers in your department, do you really feel that you belong here? What makes you say so?

3. Potential follow up queries:

Have you been doing anything to increase your ability as a worker in this department? What have you been doing?

Do you feel that you can communicate with the workers in your department? Why?

(*Theme* Identity change, workplace community)

4. Concrete lead off question:

Do you generally feel that you have adapted well to your working environment or do you think that you should be in a different place of work? Please explain.

4. Potential follow up queries:

How do you spend your lunch breaks? Do your co-workers frequently invite you to join them? If you do join them, what do you normally talk about?

On a normal working day, do you try to find time for 'small talk' with your co-workers? What would you chat about and in what language?

(*Theme* Workplace participation, communication patterns)

5. Concrete lead off question:

If a family member or a close friend were to ask you about your place of work, would you describe it as an ideal workplace for you? What makes you say so?

5. Potential follow up queries:

Does your workplace hold informal social events? Do you make an effort to join these events? If you do join the events, do you generally enjoy them?

When your co-workers communicate with you, how do they refer to you? Do you feel that they are talking to you as an equal or as a student?

6. Closing question: Would you like to add anything else, please?

Interview 4 (week fourteen of the industrial attachment, questions for this interview session are generally related to the third and final research question).

1. Opening question: Based on the written transcript of our last interview session that I have given you, would you like to make any comments or corrections, please?

(*Theme* Professional ability, language use)

2. Concrete lead off question:

This is the final week of your industrial attachment. If you were asked to evaluate yourself, what grade do you think you deserve? What makes you say so?

2. Potential follow up queries:

Have you been praised or criticized by your superiors? Generally do you think that you have been able to show them your true abilities? Why?

In terms of your language abilities, do you feel that you have shown your superiors your true abilities? Please explain your answer.

(Theme Workplace participation, professional ability)

3. Concrete lead off question:

Have you been asked to join programmes like seminars or external training? Have you been asked to represent your company in public relation events?

3. Potential follow up queries:

If a co-worker in your department is absent from work for a few days, do you think you will be able to replace that worker? Have you had this experience?

Are you always asked to attend department meetings? Have you been involved in decision making for the department and/or company? Please elaborate.

(Theme Communication patterns, workplace community)

4. Concrete lead off question:

At this point, when your co-workers talk to you what language do they normally use? Have you observed any changes in terms of their language preference with you?

4. Potential follow up queries:

How do you feel when your co-workers communicate with you in that language?

Has any co-worker approached you if she or he is having problems in writing or speaking in that language? What kind of help have you offered?

(Theme Language in the workplace, language and identity)

5. Potential follow up queries:

Is your office a good place to practice using all the languages that you know? Based on your working experience, do you want to learn other languages after this?

5. Potential follow up queries:

Personally, do you find yourself to be more shy or less shy to communicate at this point in time? Why?

How would you rate your abilities in giving an opinion critically, making a suggestion for improvement and sharing a new idea, as you prepare to leave this office?

(Theme Workplace experience, future life trajectory)

6. Concrete lead off question:

Do you feel satisfied with your level of contribution to this company? How much has this industrial attachment contributed to your personal development?

6. Potential follow up queries:

Looking back, do you think that you have made the right choices for your industrial attachment? Do you feel that you want to join this industry when you graduate? Why?

As you prepare to leave this place, do you feel that you have enjoyed doing your industrial attachment there? Will you consider reapplying as a permanent staff? Why?

7. Closing question: Would you like to add anything else, please?

Appendix E: Cycle 2 (QUAL) online reflective narrative prompts

Instructions and prompts for each reflective narrative:

You are invited to respond in about **250 words** although you can write longer should you wish to do so.

You can also add other details if you want, that might not be directly related to the instruction that I have given.

Narrative 1 (week prior to industrial attachment)

Describe how your experiences in learning and using different languages have made you into the person that you are today.

Narrative 2 (week one of industrial attachment)

What do you hope to achieve during your industrial attachment? Focus your response specifically on your professional and language targets.

Narrative 3 (week three of industrial attachment)

What is the general language environment in your workplace? What languages are used and what for? How do you feel being in this workplace environment?

Narrative 4 (week five of industrial attachment)

Describe a few situations in your workplace where your language ability shows others your ability as an administrative and management professional.

Narrative 5 (week seven of industrial attachment)

You are now nearly halfway through your industrial attachment. What do you consider to be your achievements? What do you see as your failures?

Narrative 6 (week nine of industrial attachment)

Do you *feel* like a real administrative and management professional? List the actions you have taken to enhance your professional image in the workplace.

Narrative 7 (week eleven of industrial attachment)

Have your co-workers *accepted* you as a member of your workplace community? List the actions you have taken to be an important part of this community.

Narrative 8 (week thirteen of industrial attachment)

You are nearing the end of your attachment. Have you managed to meet all your professional and language targets? Has your experience changed your ambition and career plans?

