

THE REQUIREMENT OF HOKKIEN LANGUAGE IN THE FIELD OF WORK

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to find out the requirement of Hokkien language in the field of work in Medan at present. The data were from three sources: job advertisements advertised in Analisa daily newspaper in January and March 2004, interviews to Tionghoa people and questionnaires sent to companies by their PO BOX number. The results showed that there were 242 positions requiring Hokkien language offered in the two months. They were categorized into 14 types. Out of all the positions, Marketing/Sales seized the biggest portion, with the total number 90 or 37.19%. The second position was Bookkeeping & Accounting reaching 44 positions or 18.18%, and the third top was Administration, 24 positions or 9.92%. The three positions, in fact, were typical jobs of the Tionghoa. However, Education had also become an interesting business for them, as it took the fourth position. The reasons for requiring the language, according to two informants, were first because it was the language of social relations which might help with business relation, and second because business in Medan was dominated by the Tionghoa. The two reasons were actually to show their intimacy or closeness. Despite the fact that such requirement could cause discrimination, companies or business people did not want to take a chance for hiring those who were unable to speak the language. Both informants agreed that the language would only be useful in Medan but for international business affairs they suggested Mandarin Language. No results were found from questionnaires as no companies sent them back.

Kata Kunci : requirement, HOKKIEN LANGUAGE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language is an essential need in human lives, by which meanings are expressed and transferred from one to another. Language is regarded as one of the tools for people to reach to the commodity they are attempting to get in order to survive in one community. Therefore, it has become a social message carrier and, at the same time, bound people into an exclusive way of thinking. It is usually the agreement among the speakers of a language that determines the word and the referent of a particular object; this is what is commonly known as convention.

The agreement does not occur only in the level of viewing an object but also of the choice of language used in a community when several languages exist. Bahasa Indonesia, for example, was decided to be the uniting language throughout the country. Nationally speaking, it is the only language to identify Indonesia in the eyes of other countries in the world. As a matter of fact, hundreds of ethnic languages are available and spoken by the citizens, which have shown how diverse

the country is in terms of cultures and languages. Despite its amalgamating function, Bahasa Indonesia has become a “threat” to the maintenance of all ethnic languages and makes such ethnic languages no longer of use by the speakers. Therefore, there has been an attempt of preventing this from happening among concerned speakers of ethnic languages.

The facts about language maintenance have been occurring in any multi-language speaking society since each ethnic group usually keeps on preserving their ethnic language along with the process of cultural assimilation with others. They prefer not to give up their own culture and language and shift to the new one as they always use them, for instance, in their group gatherings.

The Indonesian Chinese (Tionghoa) as one of ethnic groups in North Sumatra attempt to survive amongst the heterogeneity of ethnics coming not only from North Sumatra Province but also other areas in Indonesia, such as West Sumatra and Java. Like other ethnic groups, they also try to preserve their own language despite the pressure of Bahasa Indonesia. Common Tionghoa here speak Hokkien in their ordinary interaction; some have forgotten and abandoned it, though. Historically, this language was once forbidden by the regime of the New Order for the Tionghoa people were accused of being involved in the Communist Party's *coupe de tat* – the 1965's terror that brought Indonesia into practically the psychological war between the West and East alignment, the truth about which has not yet been fully proven. That tragic incident put the Tionghoa into such a fragile position that many of them were then massacred. (Tan in <http://www.ashoka.org>). Since then, they were appealed to use Indonesian language to reveal their intention to merge and integrate with the country and to show their patriotic spirit. Not only the Tionghoa but also other citizens were urged to speak Indonesian. In fact, it was so difficult to apply particularly in Medan that the government then decided to socialize it by campaigning the use of good and correct Bahasa Indonesia. Medan citizens certainly still remember a public notice 'PAKAILAH BAHASA INDONESIA YANG BAIK DAN BENAR' read in one or more of the downtown billboards with capital letters and large font size.

Now, years have passed and such notice is no longer found, disappearing like *gone with the wind*. The awareness of using Bahasa Indonesia can be said to become a little bit worst for the toppling of the New Order regime and the coming of the Reform Era. The euphoria for this new era has brought a brand new highlight to the life of Indonesian people in general as they can freely express themselves in anything, including choosing language. In spite of Bahasa Indonesia's status as the formal and national language, ethnic language has a more important role in particular group interactions.

Making the most of such momentum when the government started to open the door, the Tionghoa people have been attempting to rebuild and re-exploit their cultural values and language. *Barongsai*, *Feng Shui*, and other kinds of cultural arts and beliefs have been given a space to perform in public, not secretly anymore. Hokkien language is then used not only for the sake of daily interaction but also in business matters. Like many Chinese descendants in other countries, the Tionghoa people in Indonesia also take economy as an important and integral sphere of their lives. It is recorded that 60 percent of the country's economy is controlled by them.

(Saraswati,...). It can be understood since there is hardly a sector but economy that they can participate in greatly. It is a fact that Indonesian economy is dominantly run by the Tionghoa especially the private business sector. Property, consumer goods, services, and other sectors have been firmly established, which makes the Tionghoa ethnic gain a particular position in the social relations. Historically speaking, the Tionghoa have been of strategic and special position in Indonesia's economic development since several decades ago. A more extreme view says that the curse of the Chinese in Indonesia has been their success in business, which often has caused jealousy and bad feelings amongst other ethnic groups. They have often become a target in times of social unrest. (<http://www.info-indo.com>)

As they have to struggle and maintain their social position, some Tionghoa-owned companies in Medan obviously employ only those who are able to speak Hokkien for particular positions. Often it is found in job opportunities in newspapers or other mass media requiring an ability of speaking the language, although some state it is just a preferable advantage. This may indicate the importance of such language in business. The issue has certainly become a social and linguistic phenomenon because the language, as well as Mandarin, has been in the second line after English in the workers' employment.

One thing that cannot be disregarded is that common people tend to be a priori to the request of the language in employment as many native Indonesians are not able to speak it. They believe that the Tionghoa people in Medan are not willing to post Indonesians in certain positions and they are very exclusive for this matter. They assume that the Tionghoa companies are to protect the people of their ethnic and to ensure that they are well posted and can live prosperously. This action may also happen in other countries where a certain ethnic group is a minority. However, those thoughts have to be warily proven as many Tionghoa mingle in the society.

The fact that some companies in Medan have been considering Hokkien language as one of the job requirements has raised several questions such as for what reasons it is actually required and what sociolinguistic implications it consequently brings about. English literacy has so far been much required in many job vacancies, so will Hokkien be of the second priority and be a necessary language in the field of work?

LANGUAGE SHIFT AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Shifting from one language to another is natural and usual process in this current increasingly interconnected modern world. Giving up using an ethnic language has been occurring sporadically amongst speakers. We can notice how parents today prefer to speak Indonesian language to their children at home rather than the ethnic language, or even some speak a foreign language like English. This intensive shifting consequently weakens the position of ethnic language and it could possibly be facing the danger of being abandoned and extinct.

Language shift according to Fasold (1984) happens when a community gives up a language completely in favor of another one. Often a small number of speakers of a language who are oppressed by the government's policy or by the power of a governing party will find it difficult to have a bargaining position to fight against it.

For example, in the past the Afro-Americans who were brought from Africa did not speak English. Being slaves who lived in the English-Americans' houses and farms, they felt forced to speak English and at the same time began to leave their own language. They could have thought that speaking their language could not help them survive under that particular situation. This then led to the abandonment of African language among the Afro-American people. Therefore, such sociopolitical influence contributes to the choice of language or linguistic variant, and this becomes an indicator of the power relationships and social domains ascribed to language or language varieties in any society. Look also at the German and Hungarian in the Austrian village of Oberwart. Villagers, who were formerly Hungarian monolinguals, have over the past few hundred years become increasingly bilingual, and now the community is in the process of a shift to German. In 1920 Hungarian was spoken by three-quarters of the population, but by 1971 only one-quarter of the population could speak the language. (Romaine, 2000:51)

Fasold (1984:213) asserts that language shift is sometimes referred to, somewhat dramatically, as *language death*. It happens when a community shifts to a new language totally so that the old language is no longer used. However, a controversy arises for there is an ambiguity in the level of definition. Some believe that a language is dead only when the last speaker of it dies, so there are no more speakers of it. Others say that as long as speakers of a language in a society shift to another, the language is consequently dead. The latter opinion can be true when they maintain it contextually or refer to one single society only.

On the contrary, language maintenance, which is also called language loyalty, is the continued use of a language by its speakers, especially in circumstances in which it is under pressure from another language. (Trask, 1997:126). It occurs because the community collectively decides to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used. (Fasold, 1984). Maintaining a language in a multilingual community may be encountering changes in terms of number of speakers and frequency. The languages can be of the first position in a time and then after a period of time another language supersedes it. In the United States of America, for instance, the numerically strongest mother tongues in 1940 were German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Yiddish, and French. But in 1960, the order had changed to Italian, Spanish, German, Polish, French, and Yiddish. (Fishman, 1972:109). In other words, the status of a language in terms of speakers continues to change across time. This type of phenomenon, according to Fishman (1972:110), takes place for three main reasons:

1. Habitual language use at more than one point in time or space. This is related to the degree of bilingualism, how much and how frequent a person uses a particular language.
2. Antecedent, concurrent, or consequent psychological, social, and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use.
3. Behavior toward language. This is concerned with behavior toward language (rather than with language behavior or behavior through language), particularly with more focused and conscious behaviors on behalf of either maintenance or shift per se.

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Attitudes are necessary in language development or death, restoration or destruction: the status and importance of a language in a society and within an individual derives largely from adopted to learnt attitudes. An attitude is individual, but it has origins in collective behavior. Attitude is something an individual has which defines or promotes certain behaviors. Although an attitude is a hypothetical psychological construct, it touches the reality of language life. Baker (1988:112-115) stresses the importance of attitude in the discussion of bilingualism. Attitudes are learned predispositions, not inherited, and are likely to be relatively stable; they have a tendency to persist. However, attitudes are affected by experience, thus, attitude change is an important notion in bilingualism. Attitudes vary from favorability to unfavorability. Attitudes are complex constructs; e.g. there may be both positive and negative feelings attached to, for example, a language situation.

The major dimensions along which views about languages can vary are social status and group solidarity. (Edwards, 1982:20). The distinction of standard or nonstandard reflects the relative social status or power of the groups of speakers, and the forces held responsible for vitality of a language can be contributed to the solidarity value of it. When a language is considered consistently able to establish togetherness and solidarity among its speakers, it will have a high social status and the members of the society will keep on maintaining it even though there are no pressures on it. Another dimension, called in-group solidarity or language loyalty, reflects the social pressures to maintain language or language varieties, even one without social prestige.

Fishman and Agheyisi (1970) in Fasold (1984:147) suggest that there are two viewpoints towards language attitudes, i.e. mentalist and behaviorist. According to the mentalist view, attitudes are a mental and neutral state of readiness which cannot be observed directly, but must be inferred from the subject's introspection. Difficulties arising from this viewpoint include the question that from what data attitudes can be derived, and in what way they are quantifiable. According to behaviorism, attitudes are a dependent variable that can be statistically determined by observing actual behavior in social situations, and thus, someone can just easily observe and analyze them.

THE INDONESIAN TIONGHOA AND HOKKIEN LANGUAGE

The Tionghoa people in Indonesia are one of the "Peranakan" groups. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica 2004, there are several kinds of Peranakans in Indonesia, namely Peranakan Chinese, Peranakan Arabs, Peranakan Dutch, and Peranakan Indians. The Peranakan Chinese form the largest and the most important group, and for this reason many scholars use "Peranakan" to refer to the Chinese group.

Until the end of the 19th century, the immigration of Chinese was limited because of difficulties in transportation. Most of those who reached Java, mainly from the southern provinces of China, married indigenous women, usually nominal Muslims or non-Muslims.

In time they formed a stable Peranakan Chinese community. Peranakans partly adopted the indigenous way of life and generally spoke the local native tongue rather than Chinese. Along the northern coast of Java, where most of the Chinese lived, a combination of Bazaar Malay and Hokkien dialect was used as a common language, and this language was later known as Bahasa Melaju Tionghoa (Chinese Malay). The Peranakan Chinese community was firmly established by the mid-19th century and had become self-contained with a decline in intermarriage. New immigrants continued to be rapidly assimilated into the Peranakan community because there was no mass immigration.

In the early 20th century a great increase in the number of Chinese immigrants (including women) in Java, the dynamics of Chinese nationalism, and the development of Chinese medium schools contributed to the shaping of a Totok (an Indonesian term for foreign-born people) Chinese community. Unlike the Peranakan Chinese, the Totok Chinese were born in China, still spoke Mandarin or another Chinese dialect, and were frequently strongly China-oriented.

Despite the rapid growth of the Totok community, they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Peranakan Chinese. In 1930, for example, Indonesian-born Chinese constituted more than 79 percent of all the Chinese in Java, and about 53 percent of the total were at least third generation. But they were by no means a homogeneous political group. Before World War II there were three political streams in the Peranakan Chinese community—the Sin Po group, which was China-oriented; the Chung Hwa Hui, which was Dutch East Indies-oriented; and the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia, which was Indonesia-oriented. These three groups were dissolved during the Japanese occupation (1942–45).

In North Sumatra province, there are approximately 20 tribes with a hundreds of surnames of Tionghoa people, most of whom are Buddhists. (Tan, 2003:69). He adds that in this area they are grouped into five main tribes, namely: (1) Hokkien, (2) Teochiu, (3) Khe (Hakka), (4) Canton (Kong Hu), and (5) Liok Hong. The Hokkien people are the dominant group in Medan and they are mostly involved trading, while other tribes like the Teochiu, who are known as 'Cina Kebun Sayur' for most of them work as farmers, live in the suburban areas.

All the tribes speak in different dialects. Because many of the Hokkien people live in Medan, the one often heard is the Hokkien (generally spoken in trading). Hokkien language is very different from Mandarin, which is chosen to be the national language of the People's Republic of China. The Tionghoa people in North Sumatra also have different organizations or foundations depending on their surnames. The 'EUI' surname, for instance, is under a social foundation called 'Wijaya', and 'Tan' under 'Lautan Timur'.

FINDINGS

Applying the qualitative design, this study collected the data from all job advertisements published in *Analisa* daily. This daily was chosen because there are always more advertisements of job opportunities in it than in other local dailies. And, the Tionghoa people in Medan mostly advertise products, services, or opportunities in it. 57 editions of the daily were taken from January and March

2004; different months were taken to make sure that different advertisements would be obtained. Besides the advertisements, interviews to some Chinese descendants and questionnaires were used.

From all the editions, as many as 143 advertisements were found, 59 in January and 84 in March respectively. There were 92 opportunities offered in January 2004, all of which were classified into 14 categories, namely Marketing/Sales, Bookkeeping & Accounting, Administration, Education, Cash & Credit, Finance, Secretarial/Clerical, Public Relations, Technical, Purchasing, and Miscellaneous. The last category was made for two reasons: (1) the jobs appeared only either of the months, and (2) the number of jobs of such types was relatively low such as beautician, salon, driver, computer rental assistant, etc.

The type of jobs which highly required Hokkien language was Marketing/Sales with the total number 38 (41.30%), which was then followed by Bookkeeping & Accounting with 14 opportunities or similar to 15.22%. The third highest type was Administration with 10 opportunities (10.87%). The other types of jobs were far below 10%. Even though Marketing/Sales was not dominant, its number was far higher than the lowest ones (Education, Cash & Credit, and Purchasing).

The number of opportunities of March 2004 revealed an increase, which indicated that Hokkien language was more and more necessary in the field of work. There were 150 opportunities offered, which appeared in 29 editions of the daily.

As the total number of opportunities increased, the number of Marketing/Sales positions also underwent a hike. This type of job reached until 52, however, the percentage was lower than it was in January. The deficit between the two percentages was approximately 6.5%. Bookkeeping & Accounting position was significantly to gain higher number of opportunities. In this month, there were 30 opportunities or similar to 20.00% or almost 5% higher. An interesting trend occurred to Education. In January there was only one opportunity, but in this month it rose to 11 opportunities (7.33%). This significant increase made it stand on the big four, which was only a little bit lower than Administration. Administration itself underwent a slight increase in number but lower in percentage than it was in January.

The increasing number of opportunities in Education could be an indicator that the need for the language gets higher and higher. In January there were only three fields requiring it most but in March Education added up the number. A possible reason for this might be the start of the second semester of the academic year. There will, however, be a time someday that this field requires it more intensively.

The table below provides information on the whole opportunities according to their classifications.

Table 1
The Classification of Types of Jobs in Both Months

No.	Types of Jobs	Number	%	Remark
1.	Marketing / Sales	90	37.19	
2.	Bookkeeping & Accounting	44	18.18	
3.	Administration	24	9.92	
4.	Education	12	4.96	
5.	Cash & Credit	10	4.13	
6.	Finance	8	3.30	
7.	Secretarial / Clerical	6	2.48	
8.	Public Relations	6	2.48	
9.	Technical	6	2.48	
10.	Purchasing	4	1.65	
11.	Warehousing	4	1.65	
12.	Production	4	1.65	
13.	Operational	4	1.65	
14.	Miscellaneous	20	8.26	
	Total	242	100%	

The above table shows that Marketing/Sales remained to be a position which required the language most greatly and Bookkeeping & Accounting was right below it in the second row. Administration and Education were at the third and fourth position with much lower percentage than the highest one even though they, like other types of jobs, are potentially, in terms of number, to become as high as Bookkeeping & Accounting. The situation will of course change across time.

From the interviews with the informants, the reasons for requiring Hokkien language were obtained. Some other related information was also collected.

The two informants were basically to have the same views that Hokkien language could help with job responsibilities. The first informant believed that Hokkien language was particularly necessary for social relations amongst the Tionghoa people, and thus in doing the jobs they could feel comfortable and intimate to each other.

Social relations in this context can be understood as closeness or brotherhood that might raise sympathy, in which circumstance business relations can be established on this basis. He added that this language was mingled with the society in Medan, as the majority of Tionghoa people here were of Hokkien ethnic, which is relevant to Tan's statement. However, for the sake of business or working in general, he tended to suggest Mandarin since it could be understood by most of Chinese people in China, who had begun to open themselves for foreign investment and business people.

The second informant was more direct and straight to the fact that business or economic cycling in Medan was dominated by the Tionghoa. She was able to give a considerable reason as she said that in the areas besides Medan such as Bangka, Belitung, Batam, Singapore, and Malaysia, the language was still in use, even though she believed that Mandarin was more international. Almost similar to the

first informant, she suggested Mandarin language be put in the first place before Hokkien for the sake of international business. In conclusion, both informants tried to say that Hokkien language should only be used and required in Medan-based companies.

Responding to the second third question about exclusivity for requiring the language, both informants gave different answers. The first one did not agree to such opinion because one could not generalize in such a way. What was occurring did not reflect the whole society of Tionghoa people. On the contrary, the second informant admitted that the requirement could cause discrimination amongst job seekers. She, however, confirmed that it was because of the company's wish to go directly to those who were ready with the language. Although she mentioned the word 'keturunan' (maybe she wanted to say that companies usually looked for the Tionghoa) she managed to correct it by saying: "bukan, mungkin menurut saya pekerjaannya itu sangat berhubungan dengan bahasa." (No, maybe, in my opinion, the job is related to language). Further, she added that all of those who were able to speak the language shared the same chance without looking at their ethnic background. Her last opinion was similar to the first informant's as he emphasized on skill, experience, and good relation to the company. He was more market oriented; if the market required Hokkien language, then prospective workers should be competent in it.

Answering the last question about the future of Hokkien language in Medan, the first informant again stressed that the language was better only for social relations not job matters, and instead Mandarin should be prioritized. Differently, the second informant still believed that the language would still be useful in the field of work in Medan.

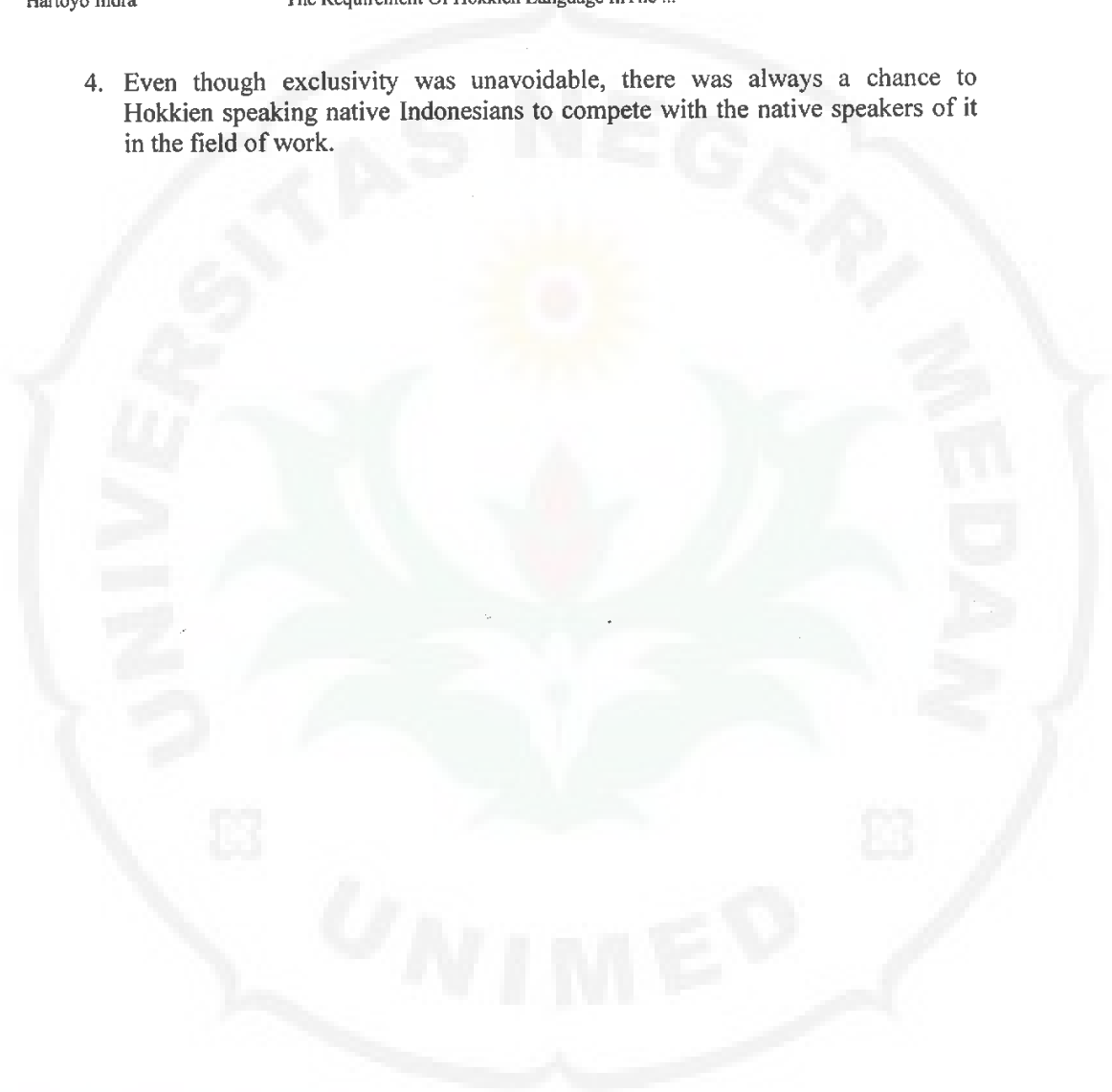
Unfortunately no data from questionnaires were collected as no responses were given. Even though the writer enclosed a stamp to each questionnaire sent to P.O boxes, no replies were ever received.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that can subsequently be drawn from the research findings are as follows:

1. Hokkien language is increasingly needed in the field of work, especially in the positions such as Marketing/Sales, Bookkeeping & Accounting, and Administration.
2. Besides these three, a position taking care of education matters has become an interesting business so that such kind of job is beginning to require the language.
3. The two informants interviewed implied slightly different reasons why Hokkien language was required in the field of work. First, the language was used to build social relations in order to help with business operation. Second, since business and economy in Medan were run mostly by the Tionghoa, the language was consequently required. Mandarin was not so much in need in the city because not many people were able to speak it and it would only be in need for international business affairs.

4. Even though exclusivity was unavoidable, there was always a chance to Hokkien speaking native Indonesians to compete with the native speakers of it in the field of work.



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