

# Language proficiency and usage among the fujianese hoa community in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam



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**Abstract** Hoa people, originally Chinese people, have been coexisting with Kinh (Vietnamese) people in various cities throughout Binh Duong Province. As a result of this coexistence, their mother tongue could be much less affected by Vietnamese, Vietnam's national language. Therefore, investigating their language proficiency and usage is essential, as the findings will significantly contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of language communication in a multicultural society like Vietnam. To achieve this objective, this study investigates language proficiency and usage among the Fujianese Hoa community. Specifically, it assesses their proficiency in Vietnamese, their mother tongue, and Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, the study explores the contexts in which the Fujianese Hoa people use these languages—Vietnamese, their mother tongue, and Mandarin Chinese—and the extent to which these languages are employed in their daily communication. This investigation was conducted through observations and questionnaires involving 160 Fujianese Hoa participants in Binh Duong Province, Southeast Vietnam. The findings reveal that 93.8% of respondents are fluent in Vietnamese, largely due to their long-term residence in Vietnam. Consequently, a significant portion of the Fujianese Hoa community now self-identifies Vietnamese as their mother tongue, indicating a language shift from Chinese dialects to Vietnamese. Further analysis demonstrates that the Fujianese Hoa community in Binh Duong generally exhibits strong proficiency in Vietnamese, often accompanied by bilingualism in both Vietnamese and their native Chinese dialect. Gender differences are evident in language skills, with men typically showing greater proficiency in Chinese dialects compared to women. Additionally, age correlates with proficiency in Chinese, as older individuals generally exhibit higher levels of fluency than younger generations.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistic, language competence, language use, Hoa people, Southeast Vietnam

## 1. Introduction

According to the 2019 Vietnam Population and Housing Census, the population of the Hoa (Chinese local people) community in Vietnam stands at 749,466, which represents a decrease of 73,605 people compared with the 2009 census. The majority of this population is concentrated in Southern Vietnam, with 506,947 people in the Southeast and 149,449 in the Mekong Delta. Ho Chi Minh City has the largest Hoa community, with 382,825 individuals, making up 4.25% of the city's total population of 8,993,082. In contrast, Dong Thap Province has the smallest Hoa population, with just 971 people. Owing to the long history of migration, influenced by various political changes in China, the Hoa community in Vietnam now lives intermingled with the Kinh people and other ethnic groups. While there are some neighborhoods and villages with relatively high concentrations of Hoa residents, they are generally dispersed and live alongside other ethnic groups. As a result of this residential pattern, a natural state of bilingualism has emerged and developed, while the role of the Chinese dialects has diminished (Hoang, 2015). Currently, dialectal Chinese, the mother tongue of the Hoa community, plays a much smaller role in most southern provinces and cities (Hoang, 2017). The phenomenon of mother tongue death becomes more evident because of the small and dispersed Hoa population. On the other hand, provinces and cities with large Hoa populations provide favourable conditions for maintaining and promoting the use of the mother tongue (Hoang, 2017). For example, in Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Soc Trang, and Binh Duong, the Hoa community uses not only their mother tongue for communication within their families and their own community but also entertainment venues, community festivals, public places, and even workplaces, especially in private Chinese businesses.

Like many other provinces and cities in Vietnam, Binh Duong is a multiethnic and multilingual province. According to 2019 statistics, the province is home to 54 different ethnic groups. In addition to the Kinh (Vietnamese) people, which constitute the majority with 2,306,193 out of 2,426,561 people (95.04% of the population), Binh Duong is also home to many ethnic groups with populations of over 2,000, including Khmer (65,233 people), Hoa (17,993 people), Muong (9,021 people), Thai (6,672 people), Tay (5,619 people), Nung (5,178 people) and Cham (2,358 people). The Hoa community in Binh Duong



Province is primarily concentrated in Thu Dau Mot city, Di An city, Thuan An city, and several other districts and towns. According to the 2014 statistics from the Hoa Mutual Aid Association and the People's Committee of Thu Dau Mot City, there are approximately 1,229 Hoa households (approximately 6,100 people). These households are divided into four main local groups: the Fujianese Hoa group with 500 households (approximately 3,000 people), the Guangdong Hoa group with 270 households (approximately 1,500 people), the Chaozhou Hoa group with 284 households (approximately 1,200 people), and the He Hoa group, also known as Hakka, Sung Chinh, or Khach Gia, which is the smallest, with 75 households (approximately 400 people). Despite their relatively small population, the Hoa community is spread across all wards in the city, coexisting with the Kinh (Vietnamese) people.

This study focuses on the language proficiency of Fujianese Hoa people and the characteristics of their language usage in both the family and social communication domains. Specifically, it examines their proficiency in Vietnamese, their mother tongue, and Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, the study explores the contexts in which the Fujianese Hoa people use these languages—Vietnamese, their mother tongue, and Mandarin Chinese—and the extent to which these languages are used in their daily communication. Therefore, the article highlights the factors affecting their language proficiency (both in their mother tongue and Vietnamese) and the reasons behind their language choices in various communication settings.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Bilingualism or multilingualism is a common phenomenon worldwide. This is not only a purely linguistic phenomenon but also a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon. As a linguistic phenomenon, multilingualism introduces various issues, such as the contact between languages in a multilingual society and the effects of that contact. From a functional perspective, multilingualism involves how communicative roles and functions are distributed among languages in a multilingual context. As a social phenomenon, multilingualism is closely linked to the sociopolitical life of each nation within a multilingual society. It affects social development and can even influence the destiny of the nation. This explains why social multilingualism is of interest not only to scholars but also to national governments. Consequently, research on multilingualism not only advances linguistic knowledge but also provides a crucial scientific foundation for countries to develop effective language policies tailored to the language situation of that country.

In general, studies on bilingualism or multilingualism in the world have two main directions: (1) studies on theoretical issues related to bilingualism or multilingualism and (2) case studies. For example, the work *"language contact and bilingualism"* by Appel and Muysken (1987) is a theoretical study on bilingualism, which, according to this study, is attributed to a consequence of language contact. Alternatively, the work *"the handbook of bilingualism"* by Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) addresses core issues related to multilingualism across different regions of the world. It presents various perspectives and approaches to understanding the phenomenon of multilingualism.

The first large-scale study on language use patterns was conducted by Gal (1979) in a Hungarian–German bilingual community in Oberwart, Austria. To collect data, Gal (1979) used observation and interview methods, which revealed patterns of language choice within the bilingual community in Oberwart. Her study revealed that age was a significant factor influencing whether individuals chose to speak German or Hungarian.

Misra and Dua (1980) conducted a comprehensive study on multilingual status and language use in the state of Himachal Pradesh (India). The results revealed that Himachal Pradesh is characterized by a rich diversity of languages and language varieties. These languages and varieties are employed in different communication domains. The study also offers perspectives for examining the characteristics of multilingual individuals' language usage in India.

Krueger (1986) investigated language attitudes on the basis of the following criteria: (1) domains of language use; (2) ways of language use; (3) language attitudes towards Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, English; and (4) attitudes towards speakers of these languages. The study focused on language attitudes and the characteristics of multilingual people's language usage in India. The study concluded that native Gujarati speakers held negative attitudes towards Urdu, whereas Hindi and English were more accepted. Gujarati, however, remained the preferred language for religious and other activities at the village and government levels.

Anonby (2004) conducted in-depth observations and interviews with the Xokleng people to examine their language use and attitudes towards multilingualism to evaluate the vitality of the Xokleng language in Santa Catarina, Brazil. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the Xokleng language is still maintained and whether language promotion is necessary. The results of the study revealed that the Xokleng people have a positive attitude towards their language. People aged 35 and over often use Xokleng to communicate with each other, whereas those under 35 years old communicate with each other in Portuguese.

Nahhas's (2007) study of Mpi speakers in Thailand also revealed that factors related to language vitality include language use, language attitudes, language identity and bilingual competence.

In China, many case studies on multilingualism have also been conducted, such as Zhuofu Zhang's (2001) study in Macao, Hongyan Yang's (2013) study in Lijiang, and a synthesis studies on language attitudes and multilingualism in China by Sihua Liang (2014).

Some scientists, in their studies on language choice in bilingual or multilingual societies, have divided communication domains into different groups in interaction with the used language. According to Schmidt-Rohr (1936), the communication domain is categorized into several groups: family domain, entertainment domain or street, school, church, text domain, press, military, court, and government domains. The communication domain in Barker and Barker's (1952) study on Mexican Americans and American Indians (Yaquii) was divided into four domains: familiar domains (family, friends); informal domains (church); formal domains (government); and close domains such as groups. Mackey (1962) divided the communication domains into five groups: family, community, school, press, and correspondence, whereas Fishman (1971) divided the communication domains into home, school, church and neighborhood.

Fishman (1971) proposed the concept of "domain" in communication, similar to Fasold. He believes that "domains" include the communication topic, the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the communication space and the impact of social and cultural rules. Nguyen (1999) suggested that the communication domain is formed from three factors: (1) context (time, place and culture-related occasions), (2) topic (communication topic and content), and (3) participants (participants in communication, including the speaker and listener). Holmes (1992) suggested that, for participants, the social setting between the speaker and listener, such as the husband and wife, buyer and seller, employer and employee, is an important factor, whereas the social context of the communication activity, such as family, workplace, and school, is a background factor.

Holmes (1992) also asserts that minority migrants are often pressured by the behavior of the majority native population due to differences in language, customs, and other cultural factors between the two communities. For example, in countries where English is the native language (such as the UK, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand), migrants who can speak English are likely to receive support from native speakers. In contrast, those who cannot speak English may face different pressures from the native community. English proficiency is often seen as a mark of success, which can lead to the gradual erosion of a migrant's mother tongue over time.

The primary research methods used by researchers include surveys conducted through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. According to Agheyesi and Fishman (1970), social scientists frequently use questionnaires and conduct interviews to collect data. These methods have been employed in various studies on language use, language attitudes, language vitality, language shift, bilingualism, language proficiency, language preservation, and language policy (Otanes & Sibayan, 1969; Gal, 1978; Krueger, 1986; Fishman, 1971; Fuentes & Mojica, 1999; Anonby, 2004; Mann & Markowski, 2005; Nahhas, 2007; Hoang, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021).

After a period in the early 20th century when linguists focused primarily on structural issues and studied language "for itself and only in itself," the field began to shift its attention to the social aspects of language from the 1960s onwards. This shift emphasized the relationship between society and language and the influence of society on language. Notable works in this area include those by William Labov (1972), Ronald Wardhaugh (1986), Peter Trudgill (2000), Janet Holmes (2001), and Miriam Meyerhoff (2006). These works, in addition to providing case study results for specific language communities, have also contributed to the development of sociolinguistic theory. They have established a solid theoretical framework in sociolinguistics, which can be divided into two main areas: macrosociolinguistics and microsociolinguistics. Macrosociolinguistics addresses issues such as language planning, language policy, and language education. In contrast, microsociolinguistics focuses on topics such as bilingualism, multilingualism, language contact and shift, and language variation.

When many different ethnic groups live together in one area, contact and relationships among them are inevitable. As such, to interact and communicate with each other, how will residents of different ethnic groups use their mother tongue and other languages? Therefore, this study focuses on the language proficiency and usage characteristics of the Hoa people in the family domain and social communication domain. Specifically, the study examines their language proficiency in Vietnamese, mother tongue, and Mandarin Chinese. It investigates which of these languages the Fujianese people in Binh Duong Province commonly use in various domains, including family, society, and others. The article also explores the extent to which these languages are used in their daily communication. Therefore, the article highlights the factors affecting their language proficiency (both in their mother tongue and Vietnamese) and the reasons behind their language choices in various communication settings.

### 3. Methodology

In this study, various research methods were employed. However, the main research method is sociolinguistics. Specifically, this study conducts field surveys via questionnaires, complemented by observations and in-depth interviews, to examine the social stratification of language use within the Fujianese Hoa group in Binh Duong according to factors such as gender, age, place of residence, place of birth, education level, and occupation.

The data comprise 160 questionnaires focused on the language proficiency and language use characteristics of the Fujianese Hoa people. These samples were collected between July 2024 and August 2024 from 160 Fujianese Hoa participants residing in Thu Dau Mot city, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam. The participants currently live in different wards,

including Phu Cuong (90 people), Hiep Thanh (20 people), and Chanh Nghia (50 people) (see Table 1). The total number of participants included 90 men and 70 women (see Table 2).

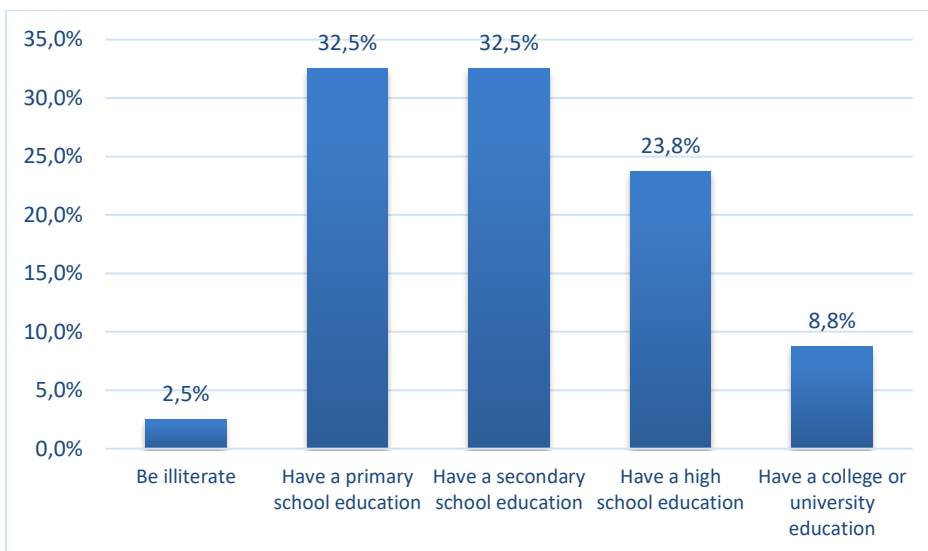
**Table 1** Participants' living place.

Participant's living place	No.	%
Phu Cuong	90	56.3%
Hiep Thanh	20	12.5%
Chanh Nghia	50	31.3%

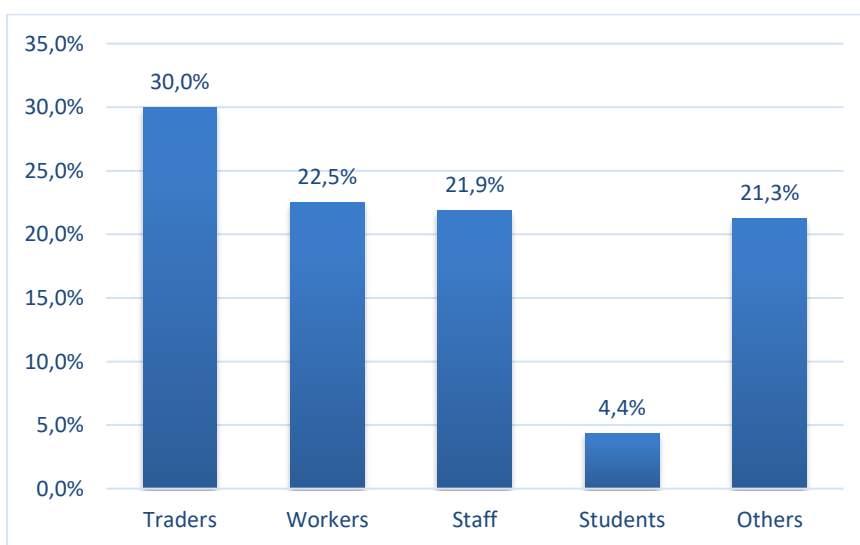
**Table 2** Participants' gender.

	No.	%
Male	90	56.3%
Female	70	43.8%

In terms of social characteristics, the participants are Fujianese Hoa people currently living in Thu Dau Mot City, Binh Duong Province. Most were born in Vietnam, specifically in Binh Duong Province, Dong Nai Province, and Ho Chi Minh City. Among the 160 participants, the majority have an education level ranging from primary school to university. Specifically, 4 participants (2.5%) are illiterate, 52 participants (32.5%) have a primary school education, 52 participants (32.5%) have a secondary school education, 38 participants (23.8%) have a high school education, and 14 participants (8.8%) have a college or university education degree (see Figure 1). The participants are employed in a variety of occupations: 30% are traders, 22.5% are workers, 21.9% are staff members, 4.4% are students, and 21.3% have other types of jobs (see Figure 2).



**Figure 1** Participants' education level.



**Figure 2** Participants' education level.



Additionally, 80.0% of Fujianese families live in households with three generations, whereas 20.0% live in those with two generations (see Table 3). A total of 16.3% of the participants were aged 30 years or younger, 30% were aged 31--50 years, and 53.7% were over 50 years (see Table 4).

**Table 3** Participants' family patterns.

	No.	%
Live in households with three generations	128	80%
Live in ones with two generations	32	20%

**Table 4** Participants' ages.

	No.	%
aged 30 or younger	26	16.3%
aged 31-50	48	30.0%
over 50 years old	86	53.7%

In terms of marital status, Table 5 shows that 64.4% (103/160 people) are in same-ethnic marriages, whereas 21.9% are in mixed-ethnic marriages, including 15.6% (25 people) between Fujianese men and Vietnamese women and 6.3% (10 people) between Vietnamese men and Fujianese women. Additionally, 13.8% of the participants were unmarried.

**Table 5** Participants' marital status.

	No.	%
In same-ethnic marriages	103	64.4%
In mixed-ethnic marriages between Fujianese men and Vietnamese women	25	15.6%
In mixed-ethnic marriages between Vietnamese men and Fujianese women	10	6.3%
Unmarried	22	13.8%

The abovementioned social characteristics of the participants, in our opinion, have an impact on their language proficiency and language usage in their communication domains.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1. Self-identification of the mother tongue among Fujianese Hoa people

First, the results of the investigation into the self-identification of the mother tongue among 160 participants reveal that 51.3% (82 out of 160) of the participants self-identify Hokkien Chinese, a local language belonging to the Minnan dialect group, as their mother tongue (see Table 6, 'total' column). Among these participants, the percentage of men who self-identify Hokkien Chinese as their mother tongue is greater than that of women (53.7% of men vs. 46.3% of women) (see Table 6, 'gender' column). The highest percentages of these participants have primary and secondary education (39% with primary school education and 31.7% with secondary school education) (see Table 6, 'education level' column). In terms of occupation, traders are more likely to self-identify Hokkien Chinese as their mother tongue than those with other professions. The survey results also reveal that the number of people who self-identify Hokkien Chinese as their mother tongue decreases with age. These findings are similar to those of Hoang (2015). Specifically, among the 82 people who self-identified Hokkien Chinese as their mother tongue, 66 were over 50 years old, accounting for 80.5%. The age group of 31--50 years includes 12 people, accounting for 14.6%, whereas the number of those aged 30 years or younger is 4, accounting for 4.9% (see Table 6, 'ages' column).

Second, the results of the investigation revealed that nearly half of the participants self-identify Vietnamese as their mother tongue. Specifically, 71 out of 160 participants, accounting for 44.4%, self-identify Vietnamese as their mother tongue (see Table 6, 'total' column). Among these, a greater percentage of men (59.2%) identify Vietnamese as their mother tongue, compared to women (40.8%) (see Table 6, 'gender' column). The quantitative data also revealed that the 31--50 years age group has a higher rate of self-identification with Vietnamese as their mother tongue (47.9%) than did the 30 years or younger age groups (29.6%) and those over 50 years (22.5%) (see Table 6, 'ages' column). The majority of participants who self-identify Vietnamese as their mother tongue have educational levels ranging from primary to university, with a notable proportion having completed secondary school (23 out of 71 people, accounting for 32.4%) (see Table 6, 'education level' column).

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that among the 160 participants, 4.3% (7 people) self-identify Mandarin Chinese as their mother tongue (see Table 6, 'total' column). These participants have educational levels ranging from primary school to university. Their proficiency in Mandarin Chinese comes from having studied in Chinese schools before 1975 (for the elderly), having majored in the Chinese language and Chinese pedagogy at universities, or studying Chinese at language centers. These findings are similar to those of Hoang (2015).



**Table 6** Participants' self-identification of their mother tongue by age, gender, and education level.

Mother tongue	Total	Ages			Gender			Education level				
		<=30	31-50	>50	Male	Female	Illiterate	Primary school	Secondary school	High school	University	
Vietnamese	No.	71	21	34	16	42	29	0	19	23	18	11
	%	44.4%	29.6%	47.9%	22.5%	59.2%	40.8%	0.0%	26.8%	32.4%	25.4%	15.5%
Hokkien Chinese	No.	82	4	12	66	44	38	3	32	26	19	2
	%	51.3%	4.9%	14.6%	80.5%	53.7%	46.3%	3.7%	39.0%	31.7%	23.2%	2.4%
Mandarin Chinese	No.	7	1	2	4	4	3	1	1	3	1	1
	%	4.3%	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%	57.1%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%	42.9%	14.3%	14.3%
Total	No.	160	26	48	86	90	70	4	52	52	38	14
	%	100%	16.3%	30.0%	53.8%	56.3%	43.8%	2.5%	32.5%	32.5%	23.8%	8.8%

#### 4.2. Fujianese people's language proficiency

We assessed language proficiency according to 5 levels: *do not know, listen comprehensively but cannot speak, can communicate but have difficulty, can communicate with everyone, and are proficient*. To conduct a survey on language proficiency, we focused on proficiency in Vietnamese and Hokkien Chinese. The reason is that Hokkien Chinese is the mother tongue of the majority of Fujianese Hoa people, whereas Vietnamese is the national language, the common language of all ethnic groups in Vietnam. The survey method also comes from the perspectives of gender, age, and occupation. The results are presented below.

**Table 7** Participants' proficiency in Hokkien Chinese by age, gender, and occupation.

Self-assessment of proficiency in Hokkien Chinese	Total	Ages			Gender			Occupation				
		<=30	31-50	>50	Male	Female	Traders	Workers	Staff	Students	Others	
Do not know	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Listen comprehensively but cannot speak	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Can communicate but have difficulty	No.	4	0	1	3	3	1	0	0	0	4	0
	%	2.5%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Can communicate with everyone	No.	32	0	12	20	14	18	10	8	5	3	6
	%	20.0%	0.0%	37.5%	62.5%	43.8%	56.3%	31.3%	25.0%	15.6%	9.4%	18.8%
Proficient	No.	124	26	35	63	73	51	38	28	30	0	28
	%	77.5%	21.0%	28.2%	50.8%	58.9%	41.1%	30.6%	22.6%	24.2%	0.0%	22.6%
Total	No.	160	26	48	86	90	70	48	36	35	7	34
	%	100%	16.3%	30.0%	53.8%	56.3%	43.8%	30.0%	22.5%	21.9%	4.4%	21.3%

**Table 8** Participants' proficiency in Vietnamese language by age, gender, and occupation.

Self-assessment of proficiency in Vietnamese	Total	Ages			Gender			Occupation				
		<=30	31-50	>50	Male	Female	Traders	Workers	Staff	Students	Others	
Do not know	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Listen comprehensively but cannot speak	No.	10	0	0	10	3	7	0	0	0	0	10
	%	6%	0%	0%	6%	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%
Can communicate but have difficulty	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Can communicate with everyone	No.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Proficient	No.	150	26	48	76	87	63	48	36	35	7	24
	%	93.8%	21.0%	38.7%	61.3%	70.2%	50.8%	38.7%	29.0%	28.2%	5.6%	19.4%
Total	No.	160	26	48	86	90	70	48	36	35	7	34
	%	100%	16.3%	30.0%	53.8%	56.3%	43.8%	30.0%	22.5%	21.9%	4.4%	21.3%



#### 4.2.1. From the perspective of gender

*With respect to proficiency in Hokkien Chinese*, the survey results (see Table 7) show that no participant answered that he does not know Hokkien Chinese or listen comprehensively but cannot speak. Four out of the 160 participants answered that they can communicate but have difficulty (accounting for 2.5%), and the proportion of men who can communicate but have difficulty is greater than that of women. These participants only know common greeting utterances and family addressing terms (Hoang, 2015). There are 32 people (20.0% of the total) who can use Hokkien Chinese to communicate with people in their local group. Among them, there are more women than men. Specifically, 18 out of 160 people (11.3%) are women, whereas 14 out of 160 people (8.8%) are men (see Table 7). However, the proportion of men who are fluent in Hokkien Chinese is much greater than that of women. Specifically, among the 82 out of 160 people (51.3%) who identify Hokkien Chinese as their mother tongue, there are more men than women (see Table 6). This is because men tend to communicate more widely within the community of the same local group or ethnicity, whereas women are often more reserved in communication (Hoang, 2015), mainly using Hokkien Chinese within the family.

*With respect to proficiency in Vietnamese*, 100% of Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong know Vietnamese at different levels. Among them, 93.8% (150/160 participants) are highly proficient in all Vietnamese language skills (see Table 8). Among those who are highly proficient, men's proficiency in all Vietnamese skills tends to be greater than women's proficiency, as men often receive more educational support from their families and have greater contact with society, leading to better Vietnamese language skills. Only 10 out of 160 participants, all over 50 years old, can listen comprehensively but cannot speak Vietnamese (see Table 8). These participants were born in Vietnam but have little contact with Kinh people and did not learn Vietnamese through formal education but through natural communication environments. Among these participants, more women than men can listen comprehensively but cannot speak Vietnamese. Specifically, 7 out of 160 people (4.4%) are women, whereas 3 out of 160 people (1.9%) are men (see Table 8).

#### 4.2.2. From the perspective of age

The surveyed Fujianese Hoa people were categorized into three age groups: under 30, 31--50, and over 50 years old. *With respect to proficiency in Hokkien Chinese*, 100% of the surveyed people reported knowing Hokkien Chinese at various levels; equivalently, no one indicated that they do not know the language. Among the 124 out of 160 people (77.5%) who said they were fluent in listening and speaking Hokkien Chinese, 50.8% were over 50 years old, 28.2% were aged 31--50 years, and 21.0% were aged 30 years or younger (see Table 7). Proficiency in Hokkien Chinese varies by age, with the highest percentage of those who are proficient in all Hokkien skills being among people over 50 years old. This percentage gradually decreases with decreasing age. This result is consistent with the findings of Hoang (2017) and aligns closely with the conclusions drawn in his study. This finding reinforces the patterns observed in previous research and further validates the methodology used, providing additional support for Hoang's conclusions. Thus, in the Hoa community in Southern Vietnam, specifically within the Fujianese Hoa group, younger individuals generally have declining proficiency in the Chinese dialect (Hoang, 2017). Moreover, Hoa youth in general and Fujianese Hoa adults in particular are currently uninterested in learning Chinese and Chinese characters, viewing them as 'meaningless or even useless' beyond preserving the traditional culture of their community and nation. This is partly because they are busy with business, they do not have time to study, or even Chinese characters are thought to be difficult to remember and easy to forget. On the other hand, young Fujianese Hoa people are rarely taught the Hokkien dialect by their grandparents or parents, as most older people in the family are not fluent in the language. However, in families where parents are older, highly educated, and interested in the language and writing of their nation, they actively try to communicate with their children and grandchildren in the Hokkien dialect in all possible communication situations (Hoang, 2017). Therefore, within the Hoa community, particularly among the Fujianese Hoa community, the older the individuals are, the more proficient they tend to be in Chinese dialects. This proficiency gradually decreases with age. The reason, according to the participants, is "gradually forgetting because of little use". Those who claim to know Chinese dialects know mainly listening and speaking skills. This also means that they are illiterate in Chinese.

*Towards proficiency in Vietnamese*, the majority of Hoa people in Southern Vietnam in general and Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong in particular are fluent in Vietnamese, even more fluent in Vietnamese than the Chinese dialect spoken by Hoa people in Southern Vietnam. In terms of language proficiency, the majority of Hoa people are much more proficient in Vietnamese than in Chinese (including both dialects and Mandarin), particularly in reading and writing. These findings are similar to those reported by Hoang (2027), reflecting a strong alignment with the results of his research. This consistency further strengthens the validity of both studies and highlights shared patterns across different contexts. The survey results of the Fujianese Hoa people revealed that 93.8% of the participants are fluent in Vietnamese (see Table 8). Among them, 10 out of 160 people (6%), all over 50 years old, listen comprehensively but cannot speak Vietnamese or can speak only a few simple sentences (see Table 8). This is because they primarily communicate with their children and grandchildren within the family and have little contact with society.

#### 4.2.3. From the perspective of occupation

With respect to proficiency in Hokkien Chinese, compared with people in other professions, no participant who is a student reported being fluent in speaking and listening to Hokkien. The reason is that they study the Vietnamese curriculum in school, leaving them with little time to learn Chinese at language centers (Hoang, 2021). Additionally, they often feel that learning the Chinese dialect (the Hokkien dialect) is not essential; if they do have time, they usually choose to learn Mandarin instead. The data show that 28 participants who are workers and 30 who are staff (who are also active members of the Chinese Mutual Aid Association) are proficient in all Hokkien Chinese language skills (see Table 7). In terms of oral communication skills, Fujianese Hoa people who work in business and housework are more proficient in listening skill and speaking the Chinese dialect than those in other professions.

With respect to proficiency in Vietnamese, 100% of staff/workers and students/pupils are surveyed to be proficient in all Vietnamese skills (see Table 8). These two groups benefit most from the Vietnamese language. The survey results show that the percentage of Fujianese Hoa people who know their mother tongue is quite high because most Hoa families in Binh Duong are highly aware of maintaining their mother tongue in communication with family members. However, from any perspective, the Hoa community in Binh Duong Province, especially those of Fujianese group, demonstrates significantly higher proficiency in Vietnamese than in their Chinese dialects (Hoang, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021). This is because the Hoa community and the Fujianese Hoa group have long recognized the importance of Vietnamese as the national language. They not only speak Vietnamese fluently but also place great emphasis on their children's education. For them, mastering Vietnamese first involves integrating with local ethnic communities and, on the other hand, facilitating their business and trade.

#### 4.3. Characteristics of language usage among the Fujianese Hoa group

##### 4.3.1. Language usage in family communication

The outstanding feature of language usage in family communication among Fujianese Hoa people is the use of both dialectal Chinese and Vietnamese, with Vietnamese being the primary means of communication. This contrasts with previous studies in Vietnam, which reported that in contexts involving Vietnamese and ethnic minority languages, the minority language—often the participants' mother tongue—was typically the dominant language within families (Hoang, 2021; Nguyen, 1999). However, for Hoa groups in Southern Vietnam, specifically the Fujianese Hoa group in Binh Duong, the situation is different. On average, the frequency of using dialectal Chinese is less than 30%, whereas Vietnamese accounts for approximately 60%. The alternating use of both Vietnamese and ethnic minority languages occurs approximately 10% of the time.

In general, the choice between dialectal Chinese and Vietnamese, as well as the alternating use of both languages in family communication, depends on the participants' language proficiency and factors such as gender, age, education level, and occupation. These findings are quite similar to those reported by Hoang in both 2021 and 2017, demonstrating a consistent alignment with the results of their previous research. This finding reinforces the credibility of the observed patterns across multiple studies. For example, the proportion of Fujianese Hoa women using Teochew Chinese to communicate with grandparents, parents, and children is consistently lower than that of men. Additionally, individuals over 50 years of age tend to use Hokkien Chinese more frequently for family communication than younger individuals do. In contrast, those under 50 rarely use, or almost never uses, Hokkien Chinese when communicating with their children within the family. The number of illiterate individuals who often use dialectal Chinese to communicate with their grandparents is greater than that of those with primary-to-university education. The data also indicate that no university-educated Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong use dialectal Chinese to communicate with their grandparents, parents, or children, whereas 100% of university-educated Hoa people consider Hokkien Chinese to be their mother tongue. This situation is related to issues of ethnic self-awareness and the recognition of their mother tongue. These findings raise important questions that warrant further research, such as the concepts of 'mother tongue,' 'first language,' and 'second language,' etc.

In terms of occupation, the majority of Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong, regardless of their job, primarily use Vietnamese to communicate with relatives across all generations in the family. In particular, students rarely use dialectal Chinese in family communication. In contrast, owing to the nature of their work, those who work in trade often use dialectal Chinese more frequently when interacting with others from the same local group than those in other occupations do. They also tend to have relatively strong skills in both Hokkien Chinese and Vietnamese, owing to their extensive communication environment and frequent interactions with both Kinh people and other Hoa individuals from the same local group.

When communicating with acquaintances from the same local group, the proportion of men using Hokkien Chinese is consistently greater than that of women. This may be because Hoa men often have a stronger sense of preserving ethnic traditions, including the language and writing of their community. As a result, men are more likely to use Hokkien, or both Vietnamese and Hokkien, when interacting with regular customers, strangers from the same local group, and members of

their ethnic group, leading to a higher usage rate than women are. Nonetheless, Vietnamese remains the primary means of communication within the Hoa community in general and the Fujianese Hoa group in particular.

In terms of age, Fujianese Hoa people aged 50 years and above tend to use dialectal Chinese more frequently to communicate with their local acquaintances than do those aged 50 years and younger. This is largely because individuals over 50 years of age generally have stronger language skills in Hokkien, and their close relationships within the local Hoa community provide them with more opportunities to further enhance their proficiency in dialectal Chinese. In contrast, Hoa youth tend to communicate with their ethnic acquaintances, primarily in Vietnamese language, as they know very little or no dialectal Chinese. The current generation of young Hoa individuals is even less familiar with dialectal Chinese, particularly Hokkien. Many of them believe it is unnecessary to speak Hokkien with their local acquaintances since everyone speaks fluent Vietnamese. As a result, Vietnamese has become the common language of communication among Hoa groups and is the most frequently used language among the Fujianese group in Binh Duong today.

Therefore, when interacting with regular guests who are Kinh or from other ethnic groups, the Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong tend to use Vietnamese, regardless of age or education level. They communicate in Vietnamese with Kinh people and other ethnic people, whether they are regular guests or strangers. Their proficiency in Vietnamese significantly exceeds their skills in Hokkien, making them feel more comfortable and confident when communicating with Kinh individuals, both regular guests and strangers. Only a few individuals know the Chinese dialect (Hokkien) because their grandparents and parents taught them. As a result, their proficiency in Hokkien is often insufficient for communicating on a variety of topics. The majority of the younger generation of Hoa people in Binh Duong, such as those in other provinces and cities in Southern Vietnam, primarily use Vietnamese. They only know a few words of address in the Chinese dialect used within the family and a handful of simple greetings.

However, from the perspective of occupation, there are differences in the choice of communication language. For example, students and pupils never use Hokkien to communicate with others from the same local group or ethnicity, regardless of whether they are regulars or strangers. They have the best Vietnamese language skills but very limited communication ability in Hokkien; over 80% of them rarely communicate in Hokkien at all, as most Fujianese Hoa families in Binh Duong today speak Vietnamese fluently and have gradually forgotten their mother tongue. In contrast, officials, workers, and businesspeople can communicate by switching between Vietnamese, Chinese dialect, and Mandarin Chinese with others from the same local group, although few individuals have a high level of proficiency in either of these two languages.

Elderly individuals (over 50 years old) in families operating businesses at Thu Dau Mot market use Hokkien to communicate within family domains more frequently than Hoa families in other areas of Binh Duong province, primarily because they live in closer proximity to one another. These Hoa families also encourage their children to learn Mandarin, believing that despite the differences in dialects, all Hoa people worldwide use the same writing system—Chinese characters.

#### 4.3.2. *Social communication language usage*

All Fujianese Hoa people, regardless of gender or education level—including those who are illiterate—use Vietnamese for communication at meetings in neighborhoods and wards, as do Hoa people, who are illiterate in both Chinese characters and Vietnamese script. This reflects the common situation among local Hoa groups in Southern Vietnam today (Hoang, 2021; Nguyen, 1999). Most Hoa people in these local groups speak Vietnamese fluently, demonstrating strong proficiency in the language. In contrast, their ability to speak Chinese dialects is weak, with many young people lacking knowledge of the dialects that constitute their parents' mother tongue. Hokkien Chinese is used to some extent only in meetings of Fujianese hometown associations. However, when meeting with mutual aid associations or religious groups, participants primarily use Vietnamese or common Chinese, translating it into Vietnamese for everyone's understanding, rather than using local dialects such as Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, or Hakka. Hokkien serves a communication function primarily within a narrow context, such as family or among people from the same local group. However, its usage is quite limited due to varying levels of Hokkien proficiency among family members. For example, if both the speaker and listener are from the first generation in a three-generation family, they are likely to use Hokkien more frequently. In contrast, when the speaker and listener belong to the second or third generations, their use of Hokkien is often very limited or even nonexistent, as their proficiency in the language may not be sufficient for effective communication.

In informal communication domains—particularly when interacting privately with individuals from the same local group, ethnic group, or other ethnic groups during meetings at various levels of government—the majority of Hoa people, especially those in the Fujianese Hoa group, regardless of gender or age, predominantly use Vietnamese. The use of the Chinese dialect for private communication in these meetings is rare. Among them, individuals with primary to high school education are the most likely to use Hokkien Chinese for private conversations with others from the same local group, whereas no university-educated individuals communicate in Hokkien Chinese in such settings, whether with people from their local group or other ethnic groups. For most Hoa people in Binh Duong, and specifically within the Fujianese Hoa group, Vietnamese remains the primary means of daily communication.

### 4.3.3. Language usage in other communication domains

The ability to use language in various contexts—such as talking on the phone, taking notes, reading books and newspapers, listening to the radio, watching television, praying, and participating in cultural activities—also reflects the language proficiency of the Hoa people. Therefore, this survey is essential for providing insights into the language usage situation of the Fujianese Hoa group in Binh Duong.

In examining the language usage characteristics of Fujianese Hoa people—particularly their ability to communicate by phone, understand television programs, and read books and newspapers—we also pay attention to their writing ability. Specifically, we focus on their ability to read customary worship scripts and private records, as well as their use of language in personal cultural activities, such as singing folk songs in Chinese, Vietnamese, or other languages. The findings of this study are as follows:

First, when speaking on the phone with people of the same ethnic group, very few Fujianese Hoa people use their Chinese dialect. If they do, it is usually those aged 50 and above. Even in communication within the same local group, Hokkien is rarely spoken. When talking on the phone with Hoa people of other local groups or with Kinh people, Fujianese individuals almost never use their Chinese dialect. These findings are quite similar to those reported by Hoang (2017). The only exception is when a Vietnamese speaker who knows Hokkien initiates the conversation in Hokkien.

Additionally, in regard to private records, most Fujianese Hoa people use Vietnamese script because of their limited knowledge of Chinese characters. However, statistics indicate that some older Hoa individuals still know Chinese characters and prefer to use them for private records, such as accounting books, to keep information confidential. Furthermore, some Hoa people over 50 years old (27 out of 86 people, accounting for 31.4%) use Chinese characters to write diaries. These diaries often document life events and memories of their homeland in China. They believe that writing in Chinese characters evokes a deeper connection to their roots and emotions. Importantly, although the Hoa people in Vietnam, especially in Southern Vietnam, speak different dialects, they all use the same Chinese characters. These characters are read by the Hoa people according to the tones of Cantonese, Hokkien, or Chaozhou.

Moreover, in cultural activities or when lulling their children to sleep, the Hoa people often sing in Vietnamese. This is partly due to their limited knowledge of Chinese characters. This finding is quite similar to those reported by Hoang (2021). Currently, only approximately 15% of the Fujianese Hoa people in Binh Duong can read Chinese characters, so few are able to sing folk songs or other traditional songs in Hokkien.

When praying and performing rituals, some Fujianese Hoa people who are fluent in both Hokkien and Vietnamese demonstrate flexibility in their language use. They tend to use Vietnamese when praying for business success but switch to the Hokkien dialect when praying to ancestors and grandparents. However, this use of Hokkien in prayers and rituals is mostly observed among those aged 50 and older. People under 50 years of age rarely use Hokkien for these purposes, preferring Vietnamese instead. This shift indicates that Vietnamese has deeply penetrated the spiritual life of local Hoa groups in general and Fujianese Hoa groups in particular. The language used in festivals, particularly the Thien Hau festival in Thu Dau Mot City, is Mandarin Chinese. Overall, in the realm of spiritual activities, Hoa groups in Binh Duong prioritize the use of Chinese, including both Chinese dialects and Mandarin.

When reading books and newspapers, most Hoa people (with the exception of illiterate people) read in Vietnamese. This is understandable, as the percentage of Hoa people who can read and write Chinese characters is quite low. Only a few Hoa individuals born in Vietnam can read Chinese books and newspapers, such as the Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper in Chinese, owing to their education in Chinese-language schools in the past.

Overall, the Vietnamese proficiency of the Hoa people in Binh Duong, particularly among the Fujianese Hoa group, is quite high. Nearly 90% of those surveyed reported that they clearly understand Vietnamese broadcasts on television. In contrast, students and people with other professions generally struggle to comprehend Chinese (Mandarin) broadcasts because of their limited Chinese skills or lack of knowledge of the language. However, some Hoa officials and employees, particularly those in positions related to the Chinese community, possess good Vietnamese and Chinese language skills, allowing them to understand Chinese television broadcasts relatively well.

Thus, the local language of the Fujianese Hoa group is primarily used in informal communication domains, such as family communication and daily conversations among Hoa people of the same local group. In contrast, Vietnamese is not only used in official communication domains—such as education and administrative communication—but is also prevalent in family communication, community engagement, and spiritual and cultural activities, making up a significant portion of their communication. The Fujianese Hoa people demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in Vietnamese, while their ability to speak their mother tongue is limited to listening and speaking skills. The number of individuals who can read and write Chinese characters is relatively low.

## 5. Conclusion

The Fujianese Hoa group in Binh Duong has traditional regulations regarding marriage customs—such as the practice of Hoa people marrying other Hoa people or individuals from the same local group marrying one another. However, in

reality, there are instances of Hoa individuals marrying people from other ethnic groups as well. For example, in the practice of Hoa people marrying Kinh people, it is more common for Hoa men to marry Kinh (Vietnamese) women than for Hoa women to marry Vietnamese men. This may be due to cultural beliefs or simply because there are fewer Hoa women. Such mixed-ethnic marriages, as well as same-ethnic marriages, can lead to communication challenges, particularly within the family. For example, in families with mixed marriages between Hoa husbands and Vietnamese wives, the husband often takes the initiative to teach his wife greetings in the Chinese dialect so that she can communicate with relatives on his side. Research indicates that in families of Vietnamese husbands and Hoa wives, the use of the Chinese dialect tends to fade and is often no longer spoken in the next generation. Conversely, when Hoa men marry Vietnamese women, they make an effort to maintain the Chinese dialect in family communication, resulting in the preservation of their mother tongue in the second generation.

In general, the language proficiency of the Fujianese Hoa group in Binh Duong is characterized by a strong command of Vietnamese, followed by a degree of bilingualism in Vietnamese and Chinese. From a gender perspective, men tend to have better Chinese language skills than women do. In terms of age, older individuals generally exhibit greater Chinese proficiency, which gradually decreases with age.

Thus, the Hoa people, regardless of which local group they belong to, on the one hand, are aware of their ethnic community and, on the other hand, want to preserve their local cultural identity. As a result, the Hoa people in Southern Vietnam, particularly Binh Duong, seldom claim that Mandarin Chinese is their mother tongue. Although a significant number of individuals are familiar with Mandarin, they primarily identify their mother tongues as the Chinese dialect and Vietnamese. Among these, many claim Vietnamese as their mother tongue, reflecting a language shift from dialectal Chinese to Vietnamese.

The social relationships of the Hoa people in Southern Vietnam, particularly Binh Duong, are established on the basis of local language connections, social organizational structures, and blood ties. The local language serves as a particularly important connecting factor. In addition to functioning as a vital means of communication within the community, the local language of each group helps to connect, maintain, and develop relationships among groups. It promotes communication and bonding among family members and individuals of the same local group, significantly contributing to the preservation of traditional local culture.

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### Ethical Considerations

All the Fujianese Hoa participants provided informed consent to take part in the research, acknowledging that their involvement would contribute to the study's completion. They received comprehensive information regarding the study's purpose and procedures, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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