Education Research and Perspectives
An international journal

Volume 42, 2015, Pages 25-64
© The Graduate School of Education
The University of Western Australia

Status of Tamil Language in Singapore: An Analysis of Family Domain

Shanmugam Kadakara†

University of Western Australia
SIM University

This paper addresses the phenomenon of Language Maintenance and Language Shift through a qualitative study of Tamil language in the family domain in Singapore. The influence of Singapore's bilingual policy and the institutional support offered for maintenance of Tamil language provide the context in which the central research problem of the status of Tamil language in the family domain is addressed. Discussion of the findings considers the pressure on the Tamil language and possible consequences of continued language shift for the future of Tamil language in Singapore.

Introduction

Studies of Language Maintenance and Language Shift (LMLS) reflect a global trend for mother-tongue language of minority ethnic groups to be supplanted by dominant and widely-used languages of the majority community Minority groups tend to replace their own languages with dominant languages, on the premise that they are more powerful, prestigious and, most importantly, of more commercial value. Community organisations and/or governments attempt to contain the shift, but with limited success. The Tamil community in Singapore typifies this process, though many choose not to acknowledge this reality.

† Address for correspondence: Shanmugam Kadakara, SIM University, 461 Clementi Rd, Singapore 599491. Email: Shanmugam.Kadakara@graduate.uwa.edu.au.

Singapore is a multiethnic and multilingual country with a population of 5.08 million (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). Its ethnic groups are classified as Chinese, Malay, Indian, and "Others" (Eurasian, European, Filipino, Arab, etc). The four official languages - English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil - are weighted equally. For historical and policy reasons, Malay, used widely as an interethnic language during colonial rule, remains the national language, English and Mandarin are the most commonly used languages in day-to-day discourse, and Tamil is used by a small sub-group within the diverse minority Indian community. This paper examines the status of Tamil language in the family domain in Singapore.

Chew (1999, cited in Rubdy, 2005), argued that the early spread of the English language in Singapore resulted from deliberate policy decisions, even though it meant the loss of ethnic identity. Singapore was not ambivalent about continued use of English in the post-colonial period, but wholeheartedly embraced it as the cornerstone of its bilingual policy (Rubdy, 2005). Pakir (1993) defined bilingualism in Singapore as "English-knowing" bilingualism (p. 234), with English as the common language for all alongside some knowledge of the mother tongue. Undoubtedly, this makes sense in a globalised world, where language proficiency—especially in English—is invaluable. Investment in English medium education offered a favourable return in a world where commerce was largely English-centred. Subsequently, English has become a household language for all ethnic groups, especially among those born after independence in 1965, and remains the language of power and prestige (James, 1998).

Of the four official languages, Mandarin ranks second to English as the language of the Chinese, the numerically dominant ethnic group in the country. Since 1978, when China opened itself to the world, the Singapore government has urged its citizens to learn Mandarin. The annual "Speak Mandarin Campaign" continues to promote Mandarin over Chinese dialects. The "linguistic instrumentalism" (Wee, 2003, p. 211), of Mandarin facilitates

commerce and networking with China, enhancing its economic value. The Tamil language, without numeric strength, symbolic status or economic power, is recognised in Singapore only because of governmental multilingual policy (Jeganathan, 1993). Despite the regional diaspora of Tamils, Singapore is the only country, apart from Sri Lanka, to recognise Tamil as an official language, reinforced through bilingual language-in-education policies.

Singapore's bilingualism policy, introduced after 1959, derives from the 1956 All Party Report, regarded as "a milestone in the social construction of language meanings in Singapore" (Puru Shotam 1987, p. 80). The Report was significant for education. It tackled the major issue of the relevance of language in the curriculum; addressed discrimination based on medium of instruction and responded with the "equality of treatment" for all four languages; and set in motion the harmonisation of curriculum requirements in the four language streams. These principles, particularly the parity principle, remain in place (Soon & Gopinathan, 1990). The policy of full recognition and government support has ensured the continuance of Tamil language in Singapore.

Ironically, compulsory bilingualism slowed the trend of language loss occasioned by decline of vernacular schools, as English-medium schools preserve Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as second languages. De Souza (1980) however, pointed out that Tamil language education has never been a major concern to the Singapore government because of the relatively small population and political insignificance of the Tamil community. Fluency in Tamil does not enhance employment opportunities, other than in relatively limited Tamil-related fields such as language teaching, court interpreters, translation, and media. The government's intention was to realise bilingualism with diglossia, with English as the working language, and mother tongues as intra-ethnic languages. That has not been realised. Instead, Singaporeans, particularly the Tamils, continue to move towards bilingualism without diglossia, where English has penetrated all domains, including the family (Vaish: 2007).

Institutional Support for Tamil Language

Institutional support variables refer to an ethnic group's degree of control and extent of representativeness in the various institutions of a nation (e.g., media, education, government services, industry, religion, and culture). Ethnolinguistic groups that enjoy strong institutional control within state and private institutions are better placed to safeguard and enhance their vitality than distinctive collective entity groups which lack such institutional control.

The Teaching and Learning of Tamil

Tamil language is offered from pre-primary to university, customised to reflect a Singaporean identity within a multilingual and a multiracial society, and differs from Tamil Nadu, where the language originated. Previously, Singapore schools used Tamil language textbooks from Tamil Nadu or Malaysia. Since 1980, instructional materials including multimedia resources for primary and secondary schools have been developed locally to meet Ministry of Education (MOE) requirements that periodic curriculum reviews customise teaching to local requirements.

In Singapore, approximately 600 teachers, many locally trained at the National Institute of Education (NIE), teach Tamil. Tamil language teachers' salaries are comparable with their counterparts in other language media, and they enjoy good prospects for career advancement and promotion. Government support for "lifelong learning" increased the subsidy, from 40% to 55%, for working adults enrolled locally in tertiary education (The Straits Times, March 8, 2011) including those enrolled in Tamil language and literature degree programs offered at SIM University.

Media and Other Language Related Activities

Multiple commercial, government and community organisations in Singapore support Tamil language and culture. One radio station broadcasts 24 hours a day in Tamil and a television station telecasts a variety of programs in Tamil for 65 hours weekly. Cinemas screen Tamil films daily. Tamil Murasu, a Tamil newspaper, caters mainly to migrant workers from Tamil Nadu and a handful of local Tamils. Bookstalls in the Little India

commercial enclave are flooded with weekly, or monthly magazines and newspapers in Tamil and other Indian languages from India. The National Library Board (NLB) has Tamil books in all 25 branch libraries. During the NLB's annual reading month, prominent short story writers from Tamil Nadu are invited to share their experiences.

Government notices and announcements, signboards and street names use all four official languages. Banknotes feature a Tamil word to reflect its official status. Government agencies and community organisations contribute to Tamil language activities. In 2007, a government committee was established to promote the use of spoken Tamil among the young. At the launch of the annual Tamil Language Festival (2011), the government announced up to $1 million over five years (a grant and matching funds raised by the community) to promote learning and use of Tamil (The Straits Times, April 1, 2011). Ethnic community organisations hold annual literary competitions, and local writers launch their books periodically. At the national level, short story and poetry writing competitions honour talented writers. Drama, storytelling, debates, oratorical contests, talent competitions, and cultural shows involving local and foreign artistes are staged regularly. Indian fine arts schools teach Indian classical music and dances, and the National Arts Council provides grants to promote Indian classical arts.

The 24 Hindu temples conduct a variety of religious activities, such as street chariot processions, some, like the Thaipusam Festival and Fire Walking are large scale public events, while others are confined to the respective temple's premises. Deepavali, a Hindu festival, is a national holiday. To commemorate the occasion, the streets of Little India are decorated with festive lights. Political leaders attend these events to show their support for the community.

India/Singapore Tamil relationships

Cultural and familial relationships between the Singapore Tamil community and India thrive. Several 24-hour cable television

networks from Southern India provide transmission in Tamil for local viewers. Periodically, South Indian film stars are invited to perform and Tamil scholars are invited to deliver discourses during religious festivals and literary functions. Singaporean Tamils visit friends and family in India, especially Tamil Nadu, where, following Indian tradition, both male and female seek prospective spouses. Trade between the two countries flourishes and Singapore companies frequently collaborate with Indian companies on joint projects in India. Currently, about 4,000 Indian companies operate in Singapore. There is an influx of skilled and unskilled workers from India into Singapore. Indian professionals have obtained permanent residency and, subsequently, have become Singapore citizens.

Singapore's reputation as an educational hub brought students from India to its schools and institutes of higher learning. Singapore government departments approach the Indian institutes of higher learning directly to identify potential students for local universities. Scholarships encourage talented Indian students to study in Singapore. Recently, Singapore schools have organised trips to Tamil Nadu to immerse students in Tamil culture and language. The MOE sponsors Tamil language teachers to attend conferences, or for short work attachments, although previously Tamil language teachers pursued their degree programs in Tamil language and literature at Tamil Nadu's colleges.

Political Representation

In 1988, the government introduced group representation constituencies (GRCs), to ensure minority representation in Parliament. Despite its relatively small community in 2013, there were 11 ethnic Tamils in the Singapore Parliament, several at Ministerial level. The sixth President, the highest-ranked political officer in the country, is an ethnic Tamil; the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, the Minister of Law and Foreign Affairs, the Minister in Prime Minister's Office, the Second Minister for Home Affairs and Second Minister for Trade and Industry, the Minister for Environment and Water Resources and Senior Minister of State, and the Ministry of Law and

Ministry of Education are all of ethnic Tamils/South Indian origins. In the past, one or two Indian MPs spoke Tamil in Parliament, which was simultaneously translated into the other three languages. Currently, the number of Indian, and in particular Tamil, politicians, including Cabinet Ministers, is highly disproportionate to the actual number of ethnic Tamils in the country. Unlike previous generations, many of them are not conversant in Tamil, although Tamils regard them as representatives of the Indian (Tamil) community.

Language Shift among Singapore Tamils

Despite strong institutional support from the government and ethnic organisations, Census and other data (Schiffman, 2007), indicate that the younger generation seems reluctant to speak Tamil (Tables 1 and 2). A language can survive only when there is a community of speakers to transmit the language to the next generation. As Baker (1992) pointed out, language engineering can flourish or fail, depending on attitudes of the community. A favourable attitude towards the language becomes important for a successful bilingual policy and practice. Thus, it remains the responsibility of the family and community to preserve the language for intra-ethnic communication and intergenerational language transmission. The death of a language is inevitable when another language, such as English, takes over its entire functional range and parents no longer transmit the language to their children.

Table 1. Resident (Indian) Population by Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home and by Age

Ethnic Group/Language	**5-14**		**15-24**		**25-39**		**40-54**		**55 & Over**	
	1990	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**	**1990**	**2000**
Indians	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	39.6	43.6	37.0	37.9	36.3	35.5	25.7	35.5	13.4	20.5
Malay	18.4	12.9	15.6	14.7	14.5	9.6	13.7	12.5	9.4	9.2
Tamil	35.6	36.3	41.0	40.6	41.3	43.0	47.5	43.6	56.2	54.6
Others	6.3	7.2	6.9	6.7	8.0	11.9	13.0	8.4	21.1	15.7

Source: Census of Population: 1990 & 2000

Table 2. Percentage of Indian Population Aged 5 and Above Who Spoke English Most Frequently at Home

5-14		15-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55 & Over	
2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
43.6	50.3	37.9	52.3	34.5	34.3	37.0	37.4	34.5	43.8	20.5	34.4

Source: Census of Population: 2000 & 2010

Since English became the main medium of instruction in Singapore schools (1979), massive language shifts have affected all ethnic groups, particularly the small Tamil community. As reflected in the Singapore Census Reports on language use in the home (General Household Survey, 2005) (Table 3), the use of English across all ethnic groups, had risen considerably beyond the formal domain of work and into societal spheres.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech on recruiting foreign talents to Singapore to compensate for declining birth rates, assured Chinese and Malay communities that their current population percentages would be safeguarded. He did not give a similar guarantee to the Tamil community (Tamil Murasu, 7 February, 2013). Since the early 1990s, the open door policy for foreign talent and Indian expatriates has increased Tamil apprehension that North Indian numbers have over taken the local population and that non-Tamil Indian languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Gujerati, Urdu, Bengali and Malayalam will affect the status of Tamil language in the future.

Language Maintenance and Language Shift (LMLS)

Fishman's (1966) concept of language maintenance and language shift (LMLS), concerns "the relationship between change or stability in habitual language use… when populations differing in language are in contact with each other" (p. 424). Studies have shown that, even in bilingual or multilingual families, there is a tendency to gravitate towards the dominant language, although the reasons are not clear.

Table 3. Resident Population Aged 5 Years and Over, by Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home

Ethnic Group/Language	1980*	1990+	2000+	2010+
Chinese	100	100.0	100.0	100
English	7.9	19.3	23.9	32.6
Mandarin	10.2	30.1	45.1	47.7
Chinese Dialects	81.4	50.3	30.7	19.2
Others	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.4
Malays	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	1.5	6.1	7.9	17.0
Malay	97.7	93.7	91.6	82.7
Others	0.6	0.1	0.5	0.3
Indians	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	21.1	32.3	35.6	41.6
Malay	9.3	14.5	11.6	7.9
Tamil	54.0	43.2	42.9	36.7
Others	15.3	10.0	9.9	13.8

*Source: Computed from Khoo, 1981, p. 92, cited in Kuo, 1985b, p. 28.
+ Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, 1990, 2000, & 2010.

Language shift is "the process of a community giving up a language completely in favour of another one" (Fasold, 1984 p. 207). As the linguistic repertoire becomes less compartmentalised, the language used at work and/or school is brought into the home domain. Language shift is often a slow and cumulative process, which makes "before versus after" data difficult to obtain or ascertain (Fishman, 1991).

Research has identified various factors leading to language shift, mostly related to economic and social change and to politics and power. Gal (1979) asserted that sociopolitical and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in language shift. De Klerk (2002) affirmed other factors not easily identifiable have a bearing on language behaviour. On the other hand, Lieberson (1980) pointed out bilingual ability, increasing among Singaporeans, was a major precursor of language shift. Language shift often reflects a pragmatic desire for social and vocational mobility, improved standards of living, and is based primarily on a cost-benefit (Paulston, 1994; Edwards, 2004).

Coulmas (2005) defined language maintenance as a situation in which a speech community holds on to its language, despite circumstances that would seem to favour language shift. Relative language stability can be observed in the number and distribution of its speakers, proficient usage by children and adults, and retention in specific domains such as the home, school, or place of worship (Baker, 2006). The health of a language is determined by how widely the speech community uses the language, and for what purposes.

Additive and Subtractive Bilingualism

In a bilingual or multilingual context, an additive or subtractive bilingual situation is possible. Additive bilingualism occurs when the addition of a second language is unlikely to replace or displace the first language and culture (Lambert, 1967, 1972, 1980; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), although "value added" benefits could also include the social and economic (Baker 2006, p. 74). Similarly, Fishman, Cooper, and Conrad (1977) pointed out that languages are acquired as keys to other desires in life, such as access to coveted positions in organisations which require a sound knowledge of English. In additive bilingualism, language minority members are proficient (or becoming proficient) in both languages, and have positive attitudes to the first and second language (Landry, Allard & Theberge, 1991).

Subtractive bilingualism may occur when a second language and culture is acquired because of pressure to replace or sideline the first language. This may lead to the potential loss of language, culture, and identity. In some contexts, alienation and marginalisation also may occur. Wong Fillmore (2000) noted that in subtractive bilingualism, by middle- to late-childhood, children from a wide variety of backgrounds most typically become English-dominant or English monolingual. Even within families adhering to the so-called "One Person, One Language" strategy, children often become passive (receptive) rather than active (productive) bilinguals (Döpke, 1992, 1998; Yamamoto, 1995, cited in King & Fogle, 2006). In explaining this, researchers

pointed to the high status of English, among other factors (Tuominen, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 2000).

In many postcolonial contexts, English has become the "sole open sesame by means of which the adults and their children in particular can achieve unlimited vertical social mobility" (Kamwangamalu, 2003, p. 236). Baker (2006) pointed out that ethnic languages could be threatened in situations where the dominant language was viewed as prestigious and powerful, and used regularly in mainstream education and in the job market, and where the minority language is perceived as of lower status and value. Instead of addition, there is a subtraction. Wei (1994), in investigating LMLS amongst a Chinese community in the North-East of England, hypothesised English dominant bilingualism as the transitional midpoint between Chinese monolingualism and English monolingualism.

Bilingualism with diglossia refers to speech communities in which both bilingualism and diglossia are present (Fishman, 2007). This was the situation the Singapore government envisaged 40 years ago, with English (High) used in education, government, workplace, and for inter-group and interracial communication. Within each ethnic group, the minority language (Low) would be used, among family members, to establish intimacy, for intra-ethnic communication and to understand and appreciate one's culture and tradition.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Tamil Language in Singapore

Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) predicted that continued use of a minority language would depend, in part, on its ethnolinguistic vitality as a distinct and collective inter-ethnic group. In particular, three socio-cultural factors are influential in determining ethnolinguistic vitality: demography, institutional support, and social status.

Demography refers to the number of ethnolinguistic group members and their proportion relative to the total population. Demographic factors constitute the most fundamental asset of an

ethnolinguistic group, since strength in numbers can sometimes be a legitimising force to empower groups to shape their collective destiny within the inter-group structure (Bourhis, 1984; Wardhaugh, 1987). In the study discussed here, "demography" refers to the total number of Tamil speakers compared with other Indian ethnic groups and the general population.

In Singapore, Indians are a minority group, accounting for only 9% of the population. Culturally, the Indians are a fragmented community, with variations in languages, religious beliefs, caste hierarchy, and cultural practices. North Indian expatriates exhibit a preference for Hindi and the proportion of Tamil speakers among the Indian population has been dramatically reduced (James, 1998).

Institutional support variables refer to the ethnic group's amount of control and extent of representativeness in national institutions (e.g., media, education, government services, industry, religion, and culture). As discussed earlier, in Singapore, there is strong institutional support in education, religion, and the media. Between 1950 and the 1970s, there was strong community support for the Tamil language, as Tamil organisations and community leaders, such as G. Sarangapani[1], championed the cause of the community and language. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, several Indian Members of Parliament chose to speak Tamil in Parliamentary proceedings, but, unlike in earlier representatives, few current Indian Members are conversant in Tamil.

Social Status refers to the perceived prestige of the ethnic group, from several perspectives: socio-historical, social, economic, and linguistic. Status also encompasses language attitudes. However,

---

[1] G Sarangapany strongly opposed the colonial government's move to introduce Sanskrit as the language for Indians in Singapore, negotiating instead with the government to recognise Tamil as an official language. He established the Tamil-language newspaper, Tamil Murasu, still published today, and founded the Tamil Representative Council, organising annual Tamil literary competitions, sports activities and various cultural activities; many Tamils participated in the Tamil Festivals, setting aside any differences in religion, castes or values.

attitudes are latent, not easily measurable, and are often inferred from the direction and persistence of external behaviour (Baker, 1992). Thus far, studies have not examined the attitudes of the Tamils towards their language, making it difficult to assess the status of the language, other than to gauge vaguely the usage of the language in the various domains.

Platt's study (1980), examined attitudes and preferences among various ethnic communities, and found that pragmatism and the usefulness of one language over another had led to English and Mandarin replacing Chinese dialects in the home. Hoffman (1991) argued that the most powerful cause of language shift could be seen in areas where the school language was that of the high status group. As Phillipson (1994) pointed out "English is by no means a second language in countries in which it is used as the dominant language of education, government, and the 'modern' economy. It effectively replaces and marginalises other languages" (p. 20). Second- and third-generations of Tamils in Singapore, born after independence, are in their 30s and 40s, and are more highly educated and proficient in English than previous generations.

Sociolinguists (Dorian, 1981; Edwards, 2004; Fishman, 1991) contend that language practice in the home is the most critical factor in predicting whether a language would be maintained across generations. Canagarajah (2008) argued that the family's role is limited, in that it has no power to act independently, especially in a multiracial and multilingual context, where the speech community is a minority. The family as a social unit is, therefore, not autonomous or completely free to take responsibility to ensure the language is preserved and transmitted to future generations. As early as 1983, Mani and Gopinathan (1983) predicted that the spread of English within the Tamil community, particularly among the school-going population, was so extensive that English could emerge, as a medium of intra-ethnic communication.

By 2000, literacy levels in English continued to rise for all ethnic groups (Table 4). Notably, Tamils demonstrated the highest levels

of English literacy and the lowest levels of mother tongue literacy of the three ethnic groups.

Table 4. Literacy among Singapore's Resident Population between 1990 and 2000, classified by Official Languages and Ethnic Groups

Official language	Total		Chinese		Malay		Indian	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
English	62.8	70.9	59.2	67.6	72.0	79.7	80.2	87.0
Chinese	62.2	64.7	79.1	82.2	0.5	0.3	1.0	0.7
Malay	16.3	16.8	1.6	2.8	95.9	97.3	27.1	24.9
Tamil	3.7	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	50.5	51.3

Note: Numbers are in percentages

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics.

Tamil Language in the Family Domain

This study assumed that Tamil language shift was already present in Singapore, with a strong preference toward English, especially among the young. As a researcher, my interest was in understanding the status of Tamil language and the actuality of Tamil families' language use in Singapore. What most interested me was why the Tamil community continues to marginalise and shun their ethnic language despite strong institutional support for the language. What socio-economic and political factors underpin the shift?

Research Design and Methodology

Researchers use a wide variety of instruments to capture the status of a language in a particular ethnic group: case studies (Deuchar & Quay, 2000), sociolinguistic surveys with and without interviews (Sun, 1999), and participant observation (Wei, 1994). My research focused on Singapore parents of Tamil preschool students as a collective case study in which each family unit is a sub-group. Case study offers rich possibilities for understanding the micro-level, and the opportunity to undertake a more holistic approach to the research question(s) to explain why certain outcomes may happen, rather than just what those outcomes are (Dencome,

1998). I chose a mix of interviews, questionnaire surveys and non-participant observations.

Selection of Respondents for the Study

Respondents were members of one of three categories based on their preferred language(s) in the home domain: Tamil-speaking; English-speaking; and Tamil-English speaking. I approached two preschools with a high concentration of Tamil children, where English and Tamil languages were taught concurrently. Through personal contacts in primary schools, I recruited other English-speaking or Tamil-English speaking Indian families, using a snowballing strategy.

The families had to comprise father and mother who were second- or third-generation Tamils born in Singapore; that is, they had been educated under Singapore's bilingual policy system. Permanent residents and Tamils born overseas were excluded on grounds that they came from different language backgrounds where Tamil may have been their first language from birth. Single-parent families were intentionally omitted, as the aim was to observe differences in perception between fathers and mothers in language usage. The family had to have at least one preschool child.

I selected 60 respondents—30 fathers and 30 mothers—who were born and raised in Singapore and had studied English as their first language. Three fathers had studied Malay as their second language, but the remaining 27 had studied Tamil, even though several were either Malayalees or Telegus. Of the 30 mothers, 27 had studied Tamil as a second language; two chose Malay, and one chose Mandarin (Table 5). The parents who had studied Tamil as a second language had 6 -12 years of formal schooling in the language, from primary, to secondary and, in some cases, pre-university.

Table 5. Summary of Respondent Parents' Second Language at School.

	Tamil	Malay	Mandarin
Mothers	27	2	1
Fathers	27	3	0
Total	54	5	1

Source: Kadakara (2011)

During interviews, I found that, despite respondents' self-assessed delineation between Tamil-speaking and English-speaking, in reality, a number of families used English and Tamil interchangeably at home or claimed to adopt the One Parent-One Language (OPOL) strategy. Because of that, I added a third category—mixed Tamil- and English-speaking—to the data collection. In fact, I had difficulty identifying families that spoke only Tamil, as many said they spoke either predominantly English or mix of English and Tamil. Respondents were distributed as follows: Tamil only 5; English only 13; and Tamil and English 12.

I also took care to ensure representation by religion, so as to reflect the diverse Indian community as well as Singapore's multi-religious society (Table 6).

Data Collection Methods

I used three data collection approaches, taking a synchronic approach to investigate the language patterns and interaction at a particular moment of time, of second- and third-generation Tamil parents with their preschool children. Data collection followed an integrated macro and micro approach of language use: a closed-ended questionnaire; face-to -face interviews; and non-participant observation.

Table 6. Number of Respondents by Religion, Ethnicity and Second Languages.

	Tamil –Speakers (Total: 10)									
	Hindu	**Muslim**	**Christian**		**Tamil**	**Malayalee**	**Telegu**	**Tamil 2nd Lang**	**Malay 2nd Lang**	**Mandarin 2nd Lang**
	10	0	0		9	0	1	8	2	0
	English-Speakers (Total: 26)									
	16	4	6		21	5	0	23	2	1
	Tamil –English Speakers (Total: 24)									
	21	3	0		21	3	0	23	1	0
Tot	**47**	**7**	**6**		**51**	**8**	**1**	**54**	**5**	**1**

Questionnaire. I developed the two-part questionnaire specifically for the present study based on current academic literature on LMLS. The 32-item questionnaire, intentionally close-ended using check-box responses, required 10 to 15 minutes to complete, leaving open-ended questions to the face-to-face interviews. Part A of the questionnaire comprised 22 items on the antecedents of the respondents, to be completed separately by both the father and mother (Table 7).

Table 7. Demographic and Background Information of Respondents

Category	Detailed questions
Family structure	Respondent's relationship to the child; gender and number of children in the family; age(s) of the children; number of preschool or school-going children; whether other family members were living with them
Social and cultural background	the age of the respondent; religious affiliation; second or third generation; educational qualification and the medium of instruction at school; current occupation; monthly salary; the type of residence, owner occupied or rented
Family background	Respondent's parents' birthplace; parents' educational qualification and medium of education ; parents' last-known occupation ; parents' last earned salary; type of residence and ownership during childhood

Part B (Table 8) elicited information about respondents' linguistic backgrounds and primary language preferences in their interactions with family members and those from the same ethnic group.

Table 8. Language Background and Practice of Respondents

Category	Detailed questions
Languages learnt in school	first and second languages studied in school; highest level of second language studied in school
Language(s) able to understand/speak	language(s) understood; languages spoken at home during childhood; languages spoken at home during their school years
Language(s) used for various activities	language(s) used for different activities: praying, counting, dreaming, self-talking, scolding children, cursing, showing anger, gossiping, discussing personal/family matters and discussing local and national matters
Language(s) spoken with family members	languages normally used with father, mother, spouse, siblings, grand-parents, children, domestic helper, friends, and relatives
Preferred language for communication	most preferred language(s) for communication

Interview Method. As a compromise between structured and unstructured interviews (Dörnyei, 2007) semi-structured interviews required all respondents to answer some standard questions specifically related to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews give the interviewer "a clear picture of the topics to be covered" and at the same time, "allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas" (Heigham and Croker, 2009, p. 186). I started with a list of open-ended questions related to the research questions, intending to tease out respondents' language perspectives; as other questions arose they were asked as a follow-up or clarification. This provided a certain richness and depth beyond the usual "yes" or "no."

Questionnaires were completed separately prior to the interviews, which occurred mostly at weekends. Respondents had the option to use Tamil or English in the interviews, as I am comfortable conversing in both. Husband and wife were interviewed in the same session, as many did not have time and/or were not comfortable to be interviewed separately. The interviews were

audio-recorded and transcribed. These in-depth interviews, conducted mostly in English, except for the parents who claimed they spoke to their children in Tamil, were the primary means of data collection. In some cases, English and Tamil were used interchangeably. It was evident from the interviews that the parents, including those who chose to speak in Tamil, often code mixed and code switched with English. Similarly, those who chose to speak in English also used some Tamil words and sentences. Of the 30 interviews, 11 were conducted in English, with occasional Tamil words; nine were in Tamil, but interspersed with English; 10 were in a mix of English and Tamil. One respondent said he spoke exclusively in Tamil, yet used a number of Malay words interchangeably during the interview.

Although I had asked respondents to take turns offering their views, I noted that, as was the norm, the women in Indian Muslim families tended to defer to their husbands. The only exception was a respondent who knew me, and was comfortable speaking her views, as was a colleague I interviewed. By contrast, women in the three Indian Christian families were not conservative, shared their views openly, and spoke only in English.

Non-Participant Observation Procedure. I took a non-participant observation approach to gauge the normal language pattern between parents and child(ren) in their daily home life without any outside interference.

Participating families had one or two preschool children, and a number had older children in primary school. One family had four children; the other 29 had one or two. Preschool children were aged between two and six, and their language skills were not fully developed. My initial belief that children in this age group might be inhibited in the presence of a stranger was quickly dispelled; many were comfortable to come to talk with their parents, even though I was there. This enabled me to observe and make notes on their facility and skill in the language. Non-participant observation in their homes also gave me the opportunity to observe the parent-child and child-parent interactions and language patterns during

the two-hour interview. In some homes, I was also able to observe the interaction between child and grandmother, and between child and domestic helper. Some observations were at places other than their homes, for example, at a Residents' Committee centre where the child attended language classes and at the preschool at the university where I worked.

Conversations were recorded as they were naturalistic moments that exposed language choice between parents and children. Even if the child spoke in a specific language only because their parents had told them to, I felt these were critical moments to understand the actual language used in their natural environments. Often, interviews were conducted in the respondents' living room within earshot of the child(ren), who took the opportunity to come to one of the parents for attention. Despite the frequent interruptions, I welcomed the chance to witness the spontaneous language choice of parents as well as the child. I found that, even where the parents claimed to adhere strictly to the One Parent-One Language strategy, often children answered predominantly in English.

Rather than returning a second time to observe the language pattern, I chose to stay on for 15 to 30 minutes after the interview to observe the parent-child, grandparent(s)-child, or domestic helper-child interactions. I was able to witness, firsthand, the children's language choice, especially relevant in households with domestic helpers, regardless of whether they were Tamil-speakers or non-Tamil-speakers such as Filipinos or Indonesians.

Data Analysis and Findings

I based much of my analysis on nine families: three each from Tamil-only; English-only; and English-and-Tamil speaking families. From this, I identified eight main themes that extended across the nine families: choice of home language, status of language, attitudes of Indian expatriates, Indian politicians and Indian community organisations, effects of bilingualism, spoken Tamil, Tamil in media, and language and culture.

Tamil-Speaking Families

Of the 30 families, only one-sixth (five families, or 10 respondents) claimed to use Tamil predominantly in the home domain. Six respondents from this group spoke Tamil at home in their youth, and their parents were not formally educated or had only attended primary school. As adults, they continue to speak Tamil with their parents and siblings, and English later with their spouse and children. All six attended English-medium schools (Table 9).

Findings of Tamil-Speaking Parents. All of the families claimed they spoke predominantly Tamil at home, but used English to scold their child(ren). From the interviews, it was clear that this could not be so, as the parents had a tendency to code switch or code mix with English. One family used Malay as a "secret code" between husband and wife. Thus, the language chosen depended on the interlocutor, the topic, and the circumstances: with whom, when, and where. This was evident from both the self-reported questionnaire and their interviews. These respondents said they had made a conscious decision, from the time their child(ren) were born, to communicate with them only in Tamil.

A common theme emerging from this research was the respondents' rationale or justification for choosing Tamil: (1) monolingual grandparents who could speak only Tamil; (2) a Tamil-speaking domestic helper; (3) consideration of the children's mother tongue second language requirement; (4) a sense of allegiance or loyalty to the ethic language; and (5) preservation of ethnic identity and culture.

The Tamil-speaking group believed that the Tamil language was not prestigious or "educated." Nevertheless, they demonstrated strong allegiance to the language and defended it vehemently, despite its perceived low economic value. They felt that ethnic Tamils should be exposed to the spoken language early by speaking it at home, and that it was the steppingstone to the written form taught in schools. Although few preschools offered Tamil with English, all five Tamil-speaking families enrolled their

children in preschools where both English and Tamil were taught. The respondents believed that Indian expatriates, politicians and organisations were neglecting and sidelining rather than protecting the language. They asked that Indian politicians in Singapore set an example by speaking Tamil at official events.

These participants perceived that as a consequence of the growing numbers of North Indian expatriates in Singapore, Hindi posed a threat to Tamil and they worried that Hindi might replace Tamil as official language. Generally, the respondents felt that the Tamil community itself had shunned the language, but were satisfied that it was still taught in school, believing that its position was secure because of the country's bilingual policy. On the diglossic nature of Tamil, they said Tamil was useful; nevertheless, they exhibited tendencies to code switch and code mix Tamil and English.

All 10 respondents in this category were Hindu, celebrating Hindu religious festivals and going to temples to pray. It seemed, however, that their children's depth of cultural practices was likely limited to the ability to address family members by Tamil kinship terms, to identify and name various food ingredients in Tamil, and not much more. The respondents maintained Tamil culture at home by listening to Tamil radio and watching Tamil TV channels.

Of the 30 families interviewed, 13 families claimed to speak English predominantly at home. Of these, eight families were Hindus, three Christians, and two Muslims. Several chose to speak in Tamil during the interview. One participant had studied Mandarin as second language, two studied Malay; and the remainder, Tamil. I noted that the non-Hindus preferred English. Table 10 summarises the characteristics of the English-speaking respondents interviewed.

Table 9. Summary Profile of Tamil-Speaking Respondents.

No.	Respondents	Religion	Ethnic group	Age Group	Medium of Education	Education	Second Language
1	Cheran(Father)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
	Gowri(Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Primary	Malay
2	Raj(Father)	Hindu	Telegu	31-40	English	GCE A-level/ Diploma	Tamil
	Amutha(Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Bachelor'sdegree	Tamil
3	Loga(Father)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Primary	Tamil
	Malika (Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Primary	Malay
4	Kanan(Father)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Bachelor'sdegree	Tamil
	Vimala(Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	Tamil	Bachelor'sdegree	English
5	Lingam(Father)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE 0-level	Tamil
	Arasi(Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level/ Diploma	Tamil

Table 10. Summary Profile of English-Speaking Respondents

No.	Respondents	Religion	Ethnic Group	Age Group	Medium of Education	Education	2nd Language
1	Padman (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level	Tamil
	Padmini (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
2	Rama (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Graduate Degree	Tamil
	Parvathy (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Graduate Degree	Tamil
3	Vijayan (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Graduate Degree	Tamil
	Devi (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Graduate Degree	Tamil
4	Murugesh (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
	Kavitha (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
5	Ravi (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	GCE O-level	Malay
	Sujatha (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level	Mandarin
6	Venu (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
	Mala (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
7	Param (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level/Diploma	Tamil
	Pallavi (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level/Diploma	Tamil
8	Arvind (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
	Deepa (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level/Diploma	Tamil
9	Hussain (Husband)	Muslim	Tamil	21-30	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
	Jamila (Wife)	Muslim	Tamil	21-30	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
10	Naseer (Husband)	Muslim	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-level/Diploma	Tamil
	Mehraj (Wife)	Muslim	Tamil	21-30	English	GCE A	Tamil
11	Jacob (Husband)	Christian	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil
	Samantha (Wife)	Christian	Tamil	21-30	English	GCE N-level	Tamil
12	George (Husband)	Christian	Malayalee	41-50	English	Bachelor’s degree	Malay
	Melisa (Wife)	Christian	Malayalee	31-40	English	Post-Grad Degree	Tamil
13	Edward (Husband)	Christian	Tamil	41-50	English	GCE A-level/Diploma	Tamil
	Monica (Wife)	Christian	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-level	Tamil

English-Speaking Families

Findings on English Speaking Respondents. A consequence of increased globalisation is the spread of English as a world language. In Singapore, many of the English-speaking respondents realised they had to master English or Mandarin to seek jobs, as there is little economic value to Tamil language fluency. They believe English language fluency helps them climb the social and economic ladder. They are painfully aware that Tamil has to compete not only with English and Mandarin, but also with Hindi, the preferred language of recent Indian expatriates. The Tamil community is mindful of their surroundings and intent on blending in with the mainstream, which explains why many have chosen to adopt English as their language.

Mixed, Tamil/English Speaking Families

Families in this category used Tamil and English interchangeably at home with their children, without particular concern about proficiency in either language. From observation of the parent-child interactions, it was clear that English language was predominant, and Tamil use was sporadic. One family chose to use both English and Tamil because they believed it would help the child learn both; another did so because the child had difficulty understanding Tamil, as it was not taught at her preschool. In a third family, one of their twins had difficulty communicating in Tamil, even though both were enrolled at a preschool where the language was taught. Several respondents claimed to adopt the “one parent, one language” method, but had to switch between languages to accommodate their child(ren). Moreover, it was unclear how much time or effort was spent on each language separately.

Table 11. Summary Profile of Mixed, Tamil-English Respondents

No.	Respondents	Religion	Ethnic group	Age Group	Medium of Education	Education	SecondLangua ge
1	Muthu(Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE A-Level	Tamil
	Kumari (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE O-Level	Tamil
2	Kanth (Husband)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Post Grad Degree	Tamil
	Padma (Wife)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Post Grad Degree	Tamil
3	Balu (Husband)	Hindu	Sri LankanTamil	31-40	English	Post Grad Degree	Tamil
	Shanthi (Wife)	Hindu	Sri Lankan Tamil	31-40	English	Post Grad Degree	Tamil
4	Indran(Father)	Hindu	Sri Lankan Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Grad	Tamil
	Malar (Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
5	Indrajit (Father)	Hindu	Sri Lankan Tamil	41-50	English	Post-Grad	Malay
	Usha (Mother)	Hindu	Sri Lankan Tamil	31-40	English	Post-Grad	Tamil
6	Gopal (Father)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Post-Grad	Tamil
	Meera (Mother)	Hindu	Malayalee	31-40	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
7	Hamzah (Father)	Muslim	Tamil	31-40	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
	Kala (Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	GCE ‘A’/Diploma	Tamil
8	Suresh (Father)	Hindu	Malayalee	41-50	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
	Latha (Mother)	Hindu	Malayalee	31-40	English	GCE ‘A’/Diploma	Tamil
9	Vanan (Father)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Secondary Two	Tamil
	Mythili (Mother)	Tamil	Tamil	31-40	English	GCE ‘A’/Diploma	Tamil
10	Sekaran (Father)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	GCE ‘O’	Tamil
	Bama (Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	GCE ‘O’	Tamil
11	Abdullah (Father)	Muslim	Tamil	31-40	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
	Mariam (Mother)	Muslim	Tamil	21-30	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil
12	Velu (Father)	Hindu	Tamil	41-50	English	Post-Grad	Tamil
	Sheela (Mother)	Hindu	Tamil	31-40	English	Bachelor’s degree	Tamil

Findings of Mixed, Tamil/English–Speaking Families. The respondents cited varied reasons for using both English and Tamil as their home languages: ensuring effective bilingualism, having to correct language deficiencies, for example. The respondents' experience also showed that a diglossia or "one parent, one language" strategy did not work. Respondents in this group insisted on their children speaking Tamil, as it was their ethnic language. The Tamil-English respondents emphasised that they considered the home domain was crucial to the intergenerational transmission of language, such that Tamil usage at home would continue, even if no longer actively used in other domains. However, although the respondents said they used both languages at home, it was clear that there was a natural and unconscious tendency to gravitate towards English more than Tamil.

Interestingly, some respondents were more conflicted about the Hindi vs. Tamil issue, and the possibility that Hindi could replace Tamil as an official language, and less concerned that Mandarin was the preferred ethnic language in Singapore. All expressed their disappointment of Indian politicians who refused to speak Tamil, and read this as rejection and marginalisation by those who wield influential power on the community. All agreed that the Tamil language was well maintained in the mass media, but less so in Tamil community, even among those who organised cultural events. Also relevant is the fact that in the minds of many local Tamils, the Tamil language seems intertwined with Hindu culture and religion, even though not all ethnic Tamils are Hindus.

Discussion

All respondents expressed positive attitudes toward the Tamil language; all wanted their children to study Tamil instead of another second language. Several said they would ensure their children learned their ethnic language, even if second language was not required, although the interview and observational data cast doubt on this claim. Many Singapore Tamil parents chose to make their homes English-speaking as they want their children to

excel in English. Hence, many Singapore Tamil children struggled to learn the language in school. The monolingual, English-only Tamil elites in Singapore, though small in number, nevertheless are very vocal and in positions of power. For whatever reason—either because they did not study Tamil as a second language, or their parents also had enforced English-only in the home domain—this group continues to perpetuate the belief that Tamil is difficult to acquire and bilingualism is impossible.

All except six respondents had studied Tamil for six to 12 years and considered themselves bilingual in English and Tamil. Because Tamil was made available to them during their childhood years, including the six who studied Malay/Mandarin as second language, all were able to converse in Tamil. No respondents, other than the Tamil-speaking families, chose to speak solely Tamil within their nuclear family.

The English-speaking and mixed language respondents, while clearly understanding the importance in reinforcing their ethnic language in the home domain, had failed to implement this. They seemed content to leave the teaching of Tamil to the school. Their main concern was that their children must pass the subject in school; they were less concerned that their children were not speaking the language. Because many believed that there was no economic value to the learning of Tamil, they focused their time and effort on English. Nevertheless, the loss of ethnic values and beliefs are closely linked with the better educated in Singapore, as they have "that degree of biculturalism where they are more Western than Eastern" (Lee, The Straits Times, August 30, 1988).

With English medium of instruction in all schools, it is envisaged that future generations will become even more Westernised and monolingual in English. Lee, who in the 1960s, strongly advocated bilingualism for all children, later changed his views and regarded it as achievable only for "the exceptionally able and very determined" (The Straits Times, June 24, 2004). However, in India, where there are thousands of languages and dialects, it is the norm even for auto rickshaw drivers to be able to speak three four

languages interchangeably with passengers. Likewise, even though the majority of people in Tamil Nadu are Tamils, substantial numbers of Telegus, Malayalees, Marathis and Sowrastras, preserve their ethnic languages at home, while speaking largely Tamil outside the home. The non-Tamils' fluency in the language is so advanced that it is difficult to identify their ethnicity based only on their spoken Tamil.

What policy makers had hoped for Singapore was a bilingual society with stable diglossia and widespread bilingualism, where English and the respective mother tongues would be used in different domains (as in diglossic situations). Contrary to expectations, Singapore's sociolinguistic landscape is bilingualism without diglossia, or the exact opposite on the continuum. Thus, Fishman's prediction (1980) of diglossia as a stable linguistic environment does not hold true for Singapore's Tamil community. Researchers (Eckert, 1980; Roberts, 1987, cited in de Mejia, 2002) suggested that categorisation of one language as high (prestigious) and the other as low (less prestigious) would create conflict between them, such that speakers of these languages are perceived to be unequal in status. Since bilingualism without diglossia is transitional and viewed as failure to maintain the functional use of the two languages by separating them, any contact between the two languages tends to result in language mixing and, later, to language loss of the less prestigious language with limited perceived market value.

All Singaporeans born after independence in 1965 are effectively bilingual in English and an ethnic language. Tamils, being a minority group, believe that English can replace Tamil in all domains, even in temples where Sanskrit is used. As the lingua franca in Singapore, English is used in most of the domains. Within their homes, it is natural for both parents and children to speak in English merely as an extension of the language spoken throughout the day, instead of switching (artificially) to Tamil. Wong Fillmore's (1991) study confirmed that once children learned English and spoke it at home, it would be a matter of time before the bilingual parents also spoke English with their children.

In the Tamil community, parents have initiated the use of English in the family domain. Noro's study (1990) of Japanese immigrants in Toronto found that "the children's home language use is proportional to the parental language use… children whose parents use more Japanese tend to maintain their Japanese language better than the children whose parents use Japanese less often" (p. 61). Language learning is a social activity that is acquired in social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978); this applies to the acquisition of spoken Tamil. In Singapore, the Tamils have few opportunities to congregate and use the language outside their homes as there are no longer any ethnic enclaves except Little India. The tendency is to use English rather than Tamil as an intra-ethnic communicative language, even at Tamil social gatherings such as weddings, funerals, birthday parties, and religious events at the temples, makes parental neglect of the language in the home domain an especially painful issue for Tamil sociolinguists.

Implications of the Study

My analysis of 30 families of ethnic Tamil origin—the minority choosing to speak only Tamil in the home domain, others preferring English-only or mixed English and Tamil—suggests that the majority would like to maintain Tamil language in Singapore, even though they consider that there is no economic advantages to speaking the language.

Apart from the five Tamil-speaking families, other respondents classified either as English-speaking or mixed language families had transferred the responsibility of teaching and acquiring Tamil to the schools. Intergenerational language transmission was absent in these families. As the domains for Tamil use continue to shrink, the home is one of the few domains remaining where native speakers of the language are found. Sadly, many of these families did not realise that it was necessary to reinforce the ethnic language at home. Wong Fillmore's observation (1991) suggests it is incumbent on parents to continue to speak the ethnic language at home if their children are not to eventually lose facility and interest. Although parents seemed oblivious to, or unconcerned

about the language shift within the community, each family was contributing to the trend. Left unaddressed by government and community, this trend could quickly become irreversible, at which point it would be difficult to revitalise the language. As Wong Fillmore (1991, p. 333) put it: “bilingual education does not appear to offer children enough protection from language shift”.

If the Tamil community continues its present disregard for Tamil in intra-ethnic communication and within the family, the language may disappear from Singapore’s language landscape within the next 20 to 30 years. Alternatively, Tamil may remain a school subject important only for the sake of passing the examination, if the second language requirement continues to be enforced. Future generations may become passive bilinguals, but without the productive skill needed to speak the language. A language has to continue to be spoken by the community or it will become “dead.”

The community appears to have become complacent about the status of Tamil language. The government’s pragmatic approach in its language policies has helped maintain the Tamil language. As the government is always concerned about facts and figures, the number of Tamil speakers may become a major concern, which could lead to Tamil losing its official language status. The consequences of language shift within the community might wake the Tamil community from its slumber. If that were to happen, would the Tamil community come together to protest the move? I doubt so. In all likelihood, they would blame each other, but not take personal responsibility for such a consequence. Unlike in the past, where there were strong community leaders such as G Sarangapany who championed the cause of the Tamils, there is no one currently who would assume the role.

Assuming Tamil does lose its official recognition, what then? One possibility is that Hindi could replace Tamil. Hindi, like English, Mandarin, Spanish and Arabic, has spread throughout the world, not only because of the large number of speakers, but also because of its highly acclaimed cinematography, which unlike Tamil movies, do not have English subtitles. Economically, the North

Indian community is wealthier than the South Indian. Hindi, as India's de facto national language, has considerable economic power.

The number of Hindi-speaking North Indians in Singapore has increased substantially over the years. As demand for Hindi grows, more schools in Singapore will offer Hindi as a second language, while Tamil enrolment is expected to drop. This is a likely scenario, as there are currently more expatriate Indians than locals; still more are expected to arrive from India. If the number of students studying Tamil shrinks, the teaching of Tamil may be removed from the curriculum, and those wishing to study it may have to take classes at a language centre outside school time.

Unlike Tamil communities in Malaysia, Sri Lanka or Tamil Nadu, the Singapore government has given the Tamil community institutional support to maintain their language. Thus, it would be a shame if the Tamil language were lost because of the community's reluctance to speak it. Despite widespread availability of Tamil books and magazines, many Singaporean Tamils do not read them because the themes and issues discussed are not relevant to their lives. If the Tamil language eventually is lost, it is unlikely the Singapore government would provide further institutional or financial support to revitalise it. Currently, even though it is not financially viable to print instructional materials or official information in Tamil because of its limited market, the government has absorbed the cost. This may not be the case in future.

Future Research

As with all studies, this study is limited in a number of ways. It involved only 30 families and their perspectives on the use or non-use of Tamil language in the family domain in Singapore. Only Singapore-born, second- and third-generation parents were included. A broader participant base including two other groups: first-generation Tamil Indians who immigrated to Singapore in the last 15 years; and the older generation, likely monolingual Tamils,

might offer a different picture of the robustness of Tamil language in Singapore.

It is recommended that, in future research on language use within the home domain should include:

- A larger sample size that includes both Singapore-born and foreign-born Tamils;
- Interracial Tamil-and-other families, to obtain views of Tamil vs. Mandarin, Tamil vs. Hindi and Tamil vs. Malay preferences;
- Grandparents, especially monolingual Tamils;
- Children, on their language choice and preferences, at home, in school, and at play;
- Non-participant observations of the dyadic interactions between children and their grandparents, domestic helpers and other primary caregivers.

Conclusion

Schiffman (1995) aptly posited that the future of Singapore Indians is more secure than the language spoken by this community. The fate of the Tamil Language is precariously balanced. I agree with Chrisp's assertion (1997) that "the place of the minority language in these domains (home and community) is determined by the decisions of the target population" (p. 1); in the absence of participation by the family, schools, authority, and the speech community, it would be an uphill task to sustain a minority language, particularly one that held little perceived social status. A confluence of factors is needed: the government's continued institutional support in maintaining the Tamil language at its present official level and mandatory bilingualism policy, along with cooperation from Tamil politicians and support from Tamil organisations and cultural groups, and conscious effort by Singapore-born and foreign-born Tamil families. Only then can the language be revitalised and continue into the next generation; the absence of any of the factors, in particular, continued use within the home domain, will lead to language loss and, ultimately, sound the death knell for the Tamil language in Singapore.

References

All Party Report. (1956). Report of the All-Party Singapore: Committee of the Singapore Legislative Assembly on Chinese Education, Government Publication Bureau.

Baker, C. (1992). *Attitudes and language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Baker, C. (2006). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism.* (4th ed.). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Bourhis, R. Y. (1984). *Conflict and language planning in Quebec*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2008). Language shift and the family: Question from the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 12*(2), 143-176.

Census of Population. (1980). Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry.

Census of Population. (1990). Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry.

Census of Population. (2000). Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry.

Census of Population. (2010). Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry.

Chrisp, S. (1997). Home and community language revitalization. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics, 3*, 1-20.

Coulmas, F. (2005). *Sociolinguistics: The study of speakers' choices*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

de Klerk, V. (2002). Xhosa as a "home appliance"? A case study of language shift in Grahamstown. In L. Wei, J.-M. Dewaele & A. Housen (Eds.), *Opportunities and challenges of bilingualism* (221-248). Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.

de Mejia, A.-M. (2002). *Power, prestige and bilingualism: International perspective on elite bilingual education*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

de Souza, D. (1980).The politics of language: Language planning in Singapore. In E. A. Afendras & E. C. Y. Kuo (Eds.),

Language and society in Singapore (203-232). Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Dencombe, M. (1998). *The good research guide*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Deuchar, M., & Quay, S. (2000). *Bilingual acquisition: Theoretical acquisition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Döpke, S. (1992). *One parent one language: An international approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Döpke, S. (1998). Can the principle of "one person-one language" be disregarded as unrealistically elitist? *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*(1), 41-56.

Dorian, N. C. (1981). *Language death: The life cycle of a Scottish dialect*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Dorian, N. C. (1978).The dying dialect and the role of the schools: East Sutherland Gaelic and Pennsylvania Dutch. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), *International dimension of bilingual education* (646-656). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Eckert, P. (1980). Diglossia: Separate and Unequal. *Linguistics, 18*, 1053-1064.

Edwards, V. (2004). *Multilingualism in the English speaking world*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Fasold, R. W. (1984). The sociolinguistics of society: Introduction to sociolinguistics. Oxford, UK: England, Basil Blackwell.

Fishman, J. A. (1966). Language maintenance and language shift as a field of inquiry. In J. A. Fishman, V. C. Nahirny, J. E. Hofman & R. C. Hayden (Eds.), *Language loyalty in the United States* (. 424-457). London, UK: Mouton.

Fishman, A. J. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturalism as individual and as societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,1*(1), 3-15.

Fishman, A.J. (1985). 'Nothing new under the sun': a case study of alternatives in language and ethnocultural identity. In

J. A. Fishman, M. H. Gertner, E. G. Lowy & W. G. Milan (Eds.), *The rise and fall of the ethnic revival: Perspective on language and ethnicity* (77-103). Berlin, Germany: Mouton.

Fishman, A. J. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, A. J. (2007). Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism. In L. Wei (Ed.), *The bilingualism reader* (47-54). London, UK: Routledge.

Fishman, A. J., Cooper, L., & A. W. Conrad. (1977). *The spread of English: The sociology of English as an additional language.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Gal, S. (1979). *Language shift: social determinants of linguistic change in bilingual Austria*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Gardner, R. C. and Lambert, W. E. (1972). Attitudes and motivation in second language learning. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

General Household Survey. (2005). Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y., & Taylor, D. M. (1977). Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In H. Giles, R. (Ed.), *Language ethnicity and intergroup relations* (307-348). London, UK: Academic Press.

Heighman, J., & Croker, R. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoffman, C. (1991). *An Introduction to bilingualism*. London, UK: Longman.

James. J. (1998). Linguistic realities and pedagogical practices in Singapore: Another perspective. In S. Gopinathan, A. Pakir, W. K. Ho, & Vanithamani, S. (Eds.), *Language, society and education in Singapore: Issues and trends* (99-116). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic.

Jeganathan, M. (1993).The development of Tamil language education in Singapore. Master's thesis, Department of

English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

Kadakara, S. (2011), *Status of Tamil Language in Singapore: An Analysis of Family Domain*. Doctoral Thesis. Graduate School of Education, The University of Western Australia, Perth.

Kamwanganalu, M. N. (2003). Social change and language shift: South Africa. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *23*, 225-242.

King, K., & Fogle, L. (2006). Bilingual parenting as good parenting: parents' perspectives on family language policy for additive bilingualism. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(6), 695-712.

Kuo, E. C. Y. (1985b). Language in the family domain in Singapore: An analysis of the 1980. Census Statistics. *Singapore Journal of Education*, *7*(1), 27-39.

Lambert, W. E. (1967). A Social Psychology of Bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues, 23*(2), 91-110.

Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Language, psychology and culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lambert, W. E. (1980). Cognitive, attitudinal and social consequences of bilingualism. In Afendras, E. A. (Ed.). *Patterns of bilingualism* (3-24). Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Landry, R., Allard, R., & Theberge, R. (1991). School and family: French ambience and the bilingual development of Francophone Western Canadians. In *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *47*(5), 878-915.

Lieberson, S. (1980). Investigating the role of social networks in language maintenance and shift. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *25*, 11-27.

Mani, A., & Gopinathan, S. (1983). Changes in Tamil language acquisition and usage in Singapore: A case study of subtractive bilingualism. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, 11*(1). 104-117.

Ministry of Education Report. (2005). *Report of the Tamil Language curriculum and pedagogy review committee*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

Noro, H. (1990). Family and language maintenance: An exploratory study of Japanese language maintenance among children of post-war Japanese immigrants in Toronto. *Journal of the Sociology of Language, 86*, 57-68.

Pakir, A. (1993). Two tongue tied: bilingualism in Singapore. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *14*(1&2), 73-90.

Paulston, C. B. (1994). Linguistic minorities in multilingual settings: Implications for language policies, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Phillipson. R. (1994). English language spread policy. International Journal of the *Sociology of Language, 107*, 7-24.

Platt, J. T. (1980). Multilingualism, polyglossia, and code selection in Singapore. In A. A. Evangelos & C. Y. E. Kuo (Eds.), *Language and society* (63-86). Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Puru Shotam, N. S. (1989). Language and linguistics policies. In S. K. Sandhu & P. Wheatley (Eds.), *Management of success: The moulding of modern Singapore* (503-522). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Rubdy, R. (2005). Remaking Singapore for the new age: Official ideology and the realities of practice in language-in-education. In L. M. Y. Angel & P. W. Martin (Eds.), *Decolonization, globalization language-in-education policy and practice* (25-73). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Schiffman, H. (1995). Language shift in the Tamil communities of Malaysia & Singapore. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics, 14, 1-2, 151-165.*

Schiffman, H. (2007). Tamil language policy. In V. Vaish, S. Gopinathan & Y. Liu (Eds.), *Language, capital, culture: Critical studies of language and education in Singapore* (211-226). Rotterdam, Amsterdam: Sense Publishers.

Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011.

Soon, T. L., & Gopinathan, S. (1990). 25 years of curriculum planning. In T. L. Soon, Y. J. Kwong & K. S. Wong

(Eds.), *Evolution of educational excellence: 25 years of education in the Republic of Singapore* (59-80). Singapore: Longman.

Sun, S. (1999). The New Zealand-born community of Auckland: Aspects of language maintenance and shift. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4,* 1-14.

Tuominen, A. (1999). Who decides the home language? A look at multilingual families. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 140*, 59-76.

Vaish, V. (2007). Bilingualism without diglossia: the Indian community in Singapore. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, *10*(2), 171-187.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. (Edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wardhaugh, R. (1987). *Languages in competition: Dominance, diversity and decline*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Wee, Lionel. (2003). Linguistic instrumentalism in Singapore. *Journal of Multi-lingual and Multicultural Development, 24*(3), 211-225.

Wei, L. (1994). *Three generations, two languages, one family: language choice and language shift in a Chinese community in Britain*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6*, 323-346.

Wong Filmore, L. (2000). Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned? *Theory Into Practice, 39*(4), 203-210.