

**Faculty of Humanities**

**School of Education**

**Tamil and Tamils: A Study of  
Language and Identity amongst the  
Indian Tamil Community in  
Singapore**

**Rajeni Rajan**

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Philosophy**

**of**

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## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number HR 154/2013.

Signature:



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Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018

## Abstract

This study investigates language shift in the Tamil community, a minority group in Singapore, and the maintenance of their mother tongue, Tamil, which is one of four official languages in the nation-state, the rest being English, Mandarin and Malay. A secondary component of the study seeks to examine notions of identity amongst young Tamils. Drawing on Edwards' (2010) typological framework to analyse a minority language situation and of its speakers, this study presents a comprehensive insight into the language maintenance and shift phenomenon under study.

The Tamil language situation has been of increasing concern, lately in terms of its usage, particularly amongst the young Tamils in Singapore. Previous research including census reports, have consistently pointed to a decline in the use of Tamil due to various reasons. Furthermore, the English-educated Tamil community has been reported to identify more with the wider English-speaking community due to the so-called higher socioeconomic status associated with this group.

This study sought to clarify if these 'past' conclusions remain relevant in present-day Singapore among young Tamils, in addition to ascertaining ways in which Tamil is maintained in Singapore. Using a mixed methods approach, data were collected from a questionnaire survey; a document survey consisting of curriculum reviews, speeches, and census reports; focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The sample (N=319) for the questionnaire and follow-up focus group discussions was drawn from secondary, pre-tertiary and tertiary institutions. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 key informants drawn from the education sector, the local Tamil media, and a Tamil organisation. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data whereas the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to provide a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

Contrary to previous studies, this study shows that the decline in Tamil language usage, in general, is not a consequence of the perceived low status reported, or of the attitudes towards the language; neither is the decline due to the stigma

attached to Tamil as a 'coolie' language. Rather, the decline in Tamil language usage in contemporary Singapore is a result of an interplay of challenges that include lack of fluency in Tamil, the predominance of English in schools, the economic viability of Mandarin, and the multi-racial dynamic in Singapore.

Findings also demonstrate that the most common language use pattern across the home, school and friendship domains is the use of both Tamil and English through strategies such as 'translanguaging'. Moreover, young Tamils, in contrast to earlier research, have adopted a positive attitude towards their mother tongue, and identify themselves with the language, indicating that speaking Tamil is an essential part of their identity. Ongoing institutional support, in addition to current initiatives undertaken by the local Tamil media and Tamil organisations to promote and maintain the language, indicate positive growth for the language.

This study takes a stance that there is a possibility for Tamil to be a living language in Singapore, and in light of the positive attitudes and growing support observed amongst young English-educated Tamils, the declining use in Tamil may be gradually averted.

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It will be an understatement to say my family has been a pillar of strength during this challenging, yet fulfilling journey. Words cannot emote the extent of their limitless love which has kept me afloat in every chapter of my life. My *amma*

(mother), who was Tamil-educated, and *appa* (father), who was English-educated, provided me with an enriching bilingual home environment, which not only cultivated an appreciation for the English language, but more important than that, for the Tamil language that I grew up speaking and writing as a mother tongue, and which I continue to do. I am also grateful to my parents for introducing me to the Tamil classical performing arts that largely define me. I am indebted to my mother for her unparalleled, selfless devotion to my well-being, especially during my Ph.D. study, and my beloved grandmother, to whom I owe my life for her unconditional love up to this day. My appreciation goes to my mother-in-law, who, despite her state of dementia, wished me well each time I reminded her of my ‘big degree’ whenever she walked into the study.

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I cannot thank enough the one person who believed in my capabilities more than I did, my husband and dearest friend, Rajan, who was the prime motivator for this doctoral endeavour. His cheer, smile and unwavering support never failed to lift me whenever I was overwhelmed during the course of study. His relieving me of my many responsibilities I had as a mother and daughter-in-law to ensure I had the space and time for my research study, far outweighed the challenges I faced in pursuing this study.

Finally, I dedicate this work on ‘Tamil and Tamils’ to my lovely children, Shaaliniy and Reshan, who acquired Tamil as their mother tongue during their early childhood while in Singapore, and who still continue to use it now in Australia. I trust their appreciation of, and engagement with Tamil and the Tamil culture will carry forth the language and values associated with it.

## Table of Contents

Declaration .....	2
Abstract .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	5
Table of Contents .....	7
List of Tables .....	12
List of Figures .....	13
List of Abbreviations .....	14
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	15
1.1 An Overview of the Tamil language: Its Roots .....	16
1.1.1 Tamil language across geographic spaces .....	17
1.1.2 The Indian-Tamil diaspora.....	17
1.2 Tamil and Singapore .....	18
1.3 Tamil in Schools: A Socio-Historical Perspective.....	19
1.3.1 The all Party-Report and Tamil .....	19
1.4 Situating English in Singapore’s Language Policy.....	21
1.5 Tamil in Singapore: Post-Independence .....	22
1.5.1 Voices of the South Asian minorities in Singapore .....	22
1.6 Census Figures and Tamil usage.....	23
1.7 Studies on Tamil and Tamils in Singapore: An Overview .....	24
1.8 Purpose of the study .....	25
1.9 Structure of the Study .....	27
Chapter 2 Theoretical Constructs.....	28
2.1 Introduction.....	28
2.2 Typological Approaches as Frameworks for LMLS .....	29
2.3 Edwards’ Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages .....	29
2.3.1 Strengths and limitations of the framework.....	30
2.4 The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory .....	31
2.4.1 Usefulness and limitations of the EVT .....	31
2.5 Fitting the Study into a Framework .....	32
2.6 Ethnolinguistic Identity theory.....	33
2.7 Concluding Remarks.....	34
Chapter 3 Literature Review .....	36
3.1 The Language-Identity Link .....	36
3.2 Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Diglossia in LMLS .....	37
3.2.1 Bilingualism and multilingualism.....	37

3.2.2 Interpretations of bilingualism .....	38
3.2.3 Diglossia .....	39
3.2.4 Deconstructing the diglossia-bilingualism link .....	40
3.3 Language Maintenance and Language Shift .....	42
3.4 The Tripartite Phenomena: Language Shift, Maintenance and Death .....	42
3.4.1 Defining language shift .....	44
3.4.2 Language attitude and language choice .....	47
3.5 Landmark LMLS Case Studies .....	49
3.5.1 Gaelic .....	49
3.5.2 German-Hungarian bilingual .....	50
3.5.3 Choice and shift: Chinese or English .....	51
3.5.4 The case of Welsh and Irish .....	52
3.6 Codeswitching .....	54
3.6.1 CS in contexts .....	54
3.7 Factoring in Identity in LMLS .....	56
3.7.1 Questions of identity in Singapore .....	57
3.7.2 Race and exogamous marriages .....	58
3.7.3 The Sindhi Hindu diaspora example .....	58
3.7.4 The Malaysian Tamil example .....	59
3.8 Tamil in the Wider Diaspora .....	60
3.8.1 Tamil in Australia .....	60
3.8.2 Tamil in South Africa .....	62
3.8.3 Tamil in Mauritius .....	63
3.8.4 Tamil and ethnic identity in the Sri Lankan diaspora .....	65
3.8.5 Sindhi and Tamil in Malaysia .....	66
3.9 The Singaporean Case of Tamil and Other Ethnic Languages .....	68
3.9.1 An alternate viewpoint: English as mother tongue .....	74
3.9.2 LMLS in the Chinese community .....	74
3.9.3 LMLS in the Malay community .....	75
3.10 Concluding Remarks .....	75
Chapter 4 Methodology .....	78
4.1 Research Methodologies: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods .....	78
4.2 Mixed Methods .....	79
4.3 Research Designs in Language Maintenance and Shift Studies .....	80
4.4 Situating the Study within the Mixed Methods Framework .....	81
4.4.1 Challenges in the mixed methods design and triangulation .....	83
4.5 Questions from the Theoretical Framework .....	84



4.6 Sampling .....	86
4.6.1 Student participants: questionnaire and focus groups.....	88
4.6.2 Key informants for interviews .....	89
4.7 Methods of Data Collection .....	90
4.7.1 Questionnaire .....	91
4.7.2 Types of questions and the Likert scale .....	93
4.7.3 Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaire as an instrument .....	94
4.7.4 Focus group discussions .....	95
4.7.5 Interviews.....	96
4.8 Data gathering .....	97
4.8.1 Questionnaire .....	97
4.8.2 Focus groups .....	99
4.8.3 Interviews.....	100
4.8.4 Census reports .....	101
4.8.5 Reports on Tamil language .....	102
4.9 Data Analysis .....	102
4.10 Challenges faced in the collection of data .....	103
4.11 Concluding Remarks.....	104
Chapter 5 Analysis of Questionnaire .....	105
5.1 Aims of the Quantitative Data Analysis .....	105
5.2 Statistical Approaches.....	106
5.2.1 Frequency and summary statistics .....	106
5.2.2 Reliability analysis.....	107
5.2.3 Test of normality .....	107
5.2.4 Multivariate analysis .....	107
5.3 Age and Gender Profile of the Survey Participants .....	107
5.4 Analysis of Results .....	108
5.4.1 Position of Tamil in terms of language use .....	109
5.4.2 Reliability analysis.....	111
5.4.3 Attitude towards Tamil language and identity .....	111
5.4.4 Correlation analysis .....	112
5.4.5 Chi-Square test of independence.....	116
5.5 Chi-square Test: Association between Language Use and Attitude towards Tamil Language, and Identity .....	116
5.6 Concluding Remarks.....	122
Chapter 6 Content Analysis: Focus Group and Survey data.....	124
6.1 Thematic Content Analysis as a Strategy .....	124

6.2 Validity and Reliability in Content Analysis .....	128
6.3 Theme 1: Language Choice and Codeswitching in Intra-ethnic Communication.....	128
6.3.1 Language choice .....	128
6.3.2 Codeswitching.....	130
6.4 Theme 2: Attitudes towards Tamil Language and Fluency .....	131
6.4.1 Attitudes .....	131
6.4.2 Fluency in Tamil .....	134
6.4.3 Attitudes towards Hindi .....	135
6.5 Theme 3: The Diglossic Dilemma .....	136
6.5.1 Literary Tamil .....	136
6.5.2 Spoken Tamil .....	137
6.6 Theme 4: Language Transmission and Predictions of Tamil Survivability ..	138
6.6.1 Learning Tamil: multiple perspectives .....	140
6.7 Theme 5: Making Sense of Identity.....	144
6.7.1 What are you: ethnic and national identity .....	144
6.7.2 The language-identity link .....	145
6.7.3 Fostering a sense of pride in the Tamil identity.....	146
6.7.4 The culture-identity link .....	147
6.7.5 Religion and other markers of identity .....	148
6.8 Theme 6: The Multiracial Strain: A Sense of togetherness and ‘otherness’..	149
6.9 Theme 7: The Economics of Languages.....	152
6.9.1 English in education.....	154
6.10 Theme 8: The Connect and Disconnect with India.....	155
6.11 Theme 9: Growing and Maintaining Tamil .....	157
6.12 Concluding Remarks.....	160
Chapter 7 Content Analysis: Interviews .....	161
7.1 The Informants .....	161
7.2 Transcribing Conventions .....	162
7.3 Major Themes .....	162
7.4 Theme 1: Language Choice, Fluency and Codeswitching.....	163
7.4.1 Language choice .....	163
7.4.2 Fluency.....	166
7.4.3 Codeswitching.....	167
7.5 Theme 2: Attitude towards Tamil .....	169
7.5.1 Parent .....	169
7.5.2 Students.....	170

7.5.3 Teachers .....	173
7.5.4 The Tamil community.....	174
7.6 Theme 3: The Diglossic Dilemma .....	175
7.7 Theme 4: Predictions of Tamil Survivability.....	178
7.8 Theme 5: Tamil Identity .....	181
7.9 Theme 6: The Multi-Racial Strain .....	181
7.10 Theme 7: The Economics of Language .....	183
7.11 Theme 8: The Connect and Disconnect with India.....	184
7.12 Theme 9: Growing and Maintaining Tamil .....	185
7.13 Concluding Remarks.....	188
Chapter 8 Discussions .....	191
8.1 General Discussion of the Findings .....	191
8.2 Limitations of the Study.....	235
8.3 Concluding Remarks.....	237
Chapter 9 Conclusion and Implications .....	240
9.1 Findings.....	240
9.2 Recommendations for the Maintenance of Tamil.....	247
9.2.1 Promoting Tamil learning .....	247
9.2.2 Bridging the gap.....	248
9.2.3 Taking Tamil beyond.....	249
9.3 Suggestions for Future Research .....	249
9.4 Conclusion and Implications.....	251
References .....	254
Appendices.....	274

### List of Tables

Table 1: Resident population aged 5 years and over by language most frequently spoken at home. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011) .....	24
Table 2: Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages..	30
Table 3: Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia.....	40
Table 4: Theoretical Framework for the study of Tamil and Tamils in contemporary Singapore .....	84
Table 5: Participants for the study .....	90
Table 6: Test of Normality for Age of Participants .....	108
Table 7: Age of the Survey Participants .....	108
Table 8: Gender of the Survey Participants .....	108
Table 9: Position of Tamil in terms of language use .....	110
Table 10: Reliability analysis.....	111
Table 11: Attitude towards Tamil Language and Identity .....	114
Table 12: Spearman's correlations between measures of Attitude towards Tamil Language and Identity.....	115
Table 13: Q13: Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another whenever there is an opportunity:.....	117
Table 14: Q15: Tamil is an important language in Singapore .....	118
Table 15: Q20: Being engaged with the Tamil entertainment media (e.g. radio, TV, cinema, stage shows) is part of my identity as a Tamil .....	119
Table 16: Q18: Following the Tamil customs (e.g. festivals, ceremonies, greetings) is important in being considered a Tamil .....	120
Table 17: Coding categories .....	127
Table 18: Section 1: Language choice, codeswitching and fluency .....	192
Table 19: Section 2: Attitudes towards Tamil .....	199
Table 20: Section 3: The multiracial strain.....	205
Table 21: Section 4: The economics of languages.....	210
Table 22: Section 5: Learning, growing and maintaining Tamil .....	215
Table 23: Section 6: Making sense of Identity .....	221
Table 24: Section 7: The connect and disconnect with India .....	225
Table 25: Section 8: The diglossic dilemma.....	228
Table 26: Section 9: Tamil survivability.....	231

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Patton's (1990) Mixed Paradigm.....	83
Figure 2: Adaptation of Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) procedure for identifying patterns and themes .....	126

## **List of Abbreviations**

CS: Codeswitching

CAT: Communication Accommodation Theory

EVT: Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

LMLS: Language Maintenance and Language Shift

LT: Literary Tamil

MOE: Ministry of Education

ST: Spoken Tamil

TLCPRC: Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee

## Chapter 1 Introduction

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

-Nelson Mandela, *At home in the world: the Peace Corps story*, 1996, p.vi

This study on ‘Tamil and Tamils’ focuses on language and identity amongst the Indian Tamil community in present-day Singapore. It seeks to present a comprehensive insight into the language maintenance and shift phenomenon, particularly amongst the younger generation of Tamils. The study was conceptualised primarily to address an increasing concern of a decline in Tamil language usage in its spoken form amongst young Tamils in recent years.

Adopting a sociolinguistic perspective to investigate the phenomenon, the study has incorporated eleven inter-related factors, for example, sociology, psychology and economics, to examine the interplay of such factors within the language maintenance and shift framework. A secondary aim of this study seeks to ascertain perceptions of identities amongst the young Tamils in view of the observed decline in the language reported in past studies, as well as to clarify previously reported notions of identity amongst the English-educated Tamils in Singapore.

Singapore became an independent nation after its separation from the Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia) in 1965 (de Souza, 1980). Its current population stands at 5.61 million, comprising of 74.3% Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9 % Indians, and 3% ‘others’ (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017a). These ethnic groups are described as racial categories or ‘races’ in Singapore. Four languages have been accorded official status since Singapore’s independence: English, which is the language of administration, and the three other ethnic languages, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, which are called ‘mother tongues’ in the Singaporean context. In schools, these mother tongue languages are allocated accordingly to the racial category one belongs to (e.g., Tamil for Indians) for the purpose of learning a second language. Therefore, mother tongue languages are learnt as second languages, while English, as the medium of instruction in all Singaporean schools, is learnt as the first language. Although not explicitly using the terms ‘first language’ or ‘second language’ to distinguish between English language and mother tongue languages respectively, the

Ministry of Education, Singapore (2008) states that “Pupils learn both English and their own Mother Tongue language in school. English is the medium of instruction in our schools as well as a subject of study for all primary and secondary school pupils” (p.6).

Tamil, as a designated mother tongue for Indians, is not straightforward. This is largely due to the various trajectories that the term ‘Indian’ extends to. For one, ‘Indian’ is not a homogenous term as it represents speakers of various Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages. Therefore, Tamil may not be the mother tongue to all ethnic Indians who may speak a different Indian language, such as Telegu, Malayalam (Dravidian languages), Hindi, or Gujerati (Indo-Aryan languages). However, Tamil speakers in Singapore have remained the majority within the minority Indian population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011); these Tamil speakers are referred to as ‘Tamils’ or ‘Tamilians’, drawing on their linguistic affiliation.

The chapter will begin by providing a brief overview of the Tamil language and the Tamil diaspora, before presenting a socio-historical perspective of the Tamil language and community within the context of Singapore. The chapter will conclude with the aims and research questions that underpin this study.

### **1.1 An Overview of the Tamil language: Its Roots**

Tamil language belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, and more specifically to the South Dravidian languages, which include Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu (Krishnamurti, 2009). Inscriptional evidence of Tamil language in the Brahmi script predates the Christian era with the first-recorded texts in Tamil believed to have been in existence between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE (Krishnamurti, 2009, 2017). Owing to its well-established antiquity and extensive literary tradition, the Tamil language was accorded classical language status in India, in 2004 (Krishnamurti, 2017), the first amongst other Indian languages that followed. It is believed that “Tamil was one of the languages of a great South Indian civilisation” (Shulman, 2016, p.3).

The etymology of the word *Tamil* and the origin of its speakers still remain unclear, and scholars have disagreed on this (Shulman, 2016). For example, while a medieval dictionary entry of the word, ‘Tamil’ is depicted as ‘sweetness’ or ‘coolness’, a renowned scholar of Tamil linguistics claims the word ‘Tamil’ developed from the word ‘taku’ as a result “of elision or of shifting” (Shulman, 2016,



p.4). On the other hand, the evolutionary process of the language is depicted as five varieties or styles: Old Tamil; Medieval Tamil; Older Modern Literary Tamil; Modern Literary Tamil; and Spoken Tamil (Schiffman, 2003). However, the existence of Pre-Tamil, which preceded Old Tamil (ca 450 BCE to 700 CE) is thought to have been around between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE (Krishnamurti, 2009, 2017).

### **1.1.1 Tamil language across geographic spaces**

At present, the Tamil language holds official status in its stronghold, the state of Tamil Nadu in South India, and the Indian Union Territory, Pondicherry, as well as being recognised as one of twenty-two scheduled languages in India. Of the polities, where Indian diasporic communities have settled, Tamil has gained official language status, alongside other languages in Singapore and Sri Lanka (previously Ceylon), although driven by unique circumstances and political visions. In Singapore, Tamil is recognised as an official language together with three other languages: Mandarin, Malay and English, as mentioned above. In Sri Lanka, however, Tamil and Sinhala co-exist as both official and national languages, whilst English has been designated as the link language (Department of Official Languages, 2015). Annamalai (1992) views the Tamil situation in Mauritius and South Africa as one that diverges from Singapore, Tamil Nadu or Sri Lanka in that it lacks “planned activity for its development” (p.94) or in other words, institutional support. On the other hand, it has been reported that in Guyana, Fiji and Trinidad, Tamil has slipped into obscurity (Moag, 1988, cited in Annamalai, 1992).

Currently, Tamil is said to have around eighty million speakers in the Tamil diaspora, and hence, “it’s perhaps the only case of a very ancient language that still survives as a vibrant mother-tongue for tens of millions of speakers” (Shulman, 2016, p.2).

### **1.1.2 The Indian-Tamil diaspora**

The first wave of Indian emigration from India between 1830 and 1920 is synonymous with indentured labour, which was akin to enslavement (Arasaratnam, 1970; Mesthrie, 2008). The dispersal of the indentured labourers from Northern and Southern India — the latter comprising of mainly Tamil speakers — saw the settling of the diaspora in Fiji, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, East Africa and the Caribbean (Jayaram, 2004; Mesthrie, 2008), as well as in South East Asia, namely Malaysia and

Singapore (Arasaratnam, 1970). Whilst the first group of Indians in colonial times were invariably identified with forced or indentured labour, subsequent batches of Indians that emigrated to West Asia, England, Australia, Canada, the USA, (Jayaram, 2004) and to Southeast Asia (Lal, 2007; Rai, 2009; Sandhu, 1993a, 1993b) typified the post-colonial or post (India) Independence diasporic communities; these communities comprised of predominantly upwardly mobile professionals, and to a lesser extent, unskilled workers from the Indian sub-continent (Jayaram, 2004).

## 1.2 Tamil and Singapore<sup>1</sup>

Tamil language took root in Singapore (then part of Malaya) with the arrival of the British in Singapore in 1819, which paved the way for the settling of the first Tamils, who were largely Hindus (Sandhu, 1969); these early settlers were primarily indentured labourers and convicts (Lal, 2007; Sandhu 1993a), although a section of them were educated (Lal, 2007). As Lal explains, these convicts, including ‘untouchables’ from the lower castes, were part of the forced labour responsible for the infrastructure of Singapore, from building bridges to constructing roads; the indentured labourers were contracted to work through an exploitative system, paid low wages and expected to meet the ‘extreme demands’ of their employers.

According to Sandhu (1969), the indentured migration was “essentially a South Indian phenomenon” in part due to the North Indians being largely “‘troublesome’, complaining of the conditions of service and refusing to work [and also because] the Indian government refused to sanction indentured emigration from any part of India, other than Madras” (p.82).

The negative stereotyping of the Indians as the “coolies and blackmen of Singapore” (Sandhu, 1993a, p. 779) not only marginalised the community, but also attached a stigma to the language spoken by majority of these labourers. Tamil was hence, considered a “coolie language” (Schiffman 2003, p. 105), which means ‘language of the labourers’.

<sup>1</sup> Sections 1.2 to 1.7 draw on Rajan’s published chapter as follows:

Rajan, R. (2014). Tamil Language in Multilingual Singapore: Key Issues in Teaching and Maintaining a Minority Language. In K. Dunworth & G. Zhang (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Language Education* (pp. 189-208): Springer International Publishing. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-06185-6\\_10](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-06185-6_10)

### **1.3 Tamil in Schools: A Socio-Historical Perspective**

Two significant events drove the Tamil language to the fore: the “politicisation of labour” (Rai, 2009, p. 147) in Singapore and the Dravidian movement in South India in the 1950s, which glorified the Tamil language and culture, “gave impetus to the development of a Tamil identity and significant meaning to the Tamil language” (PuruShotam, 2000, p. 46); its spread to Singapore led to the teaching of Tamil, as opposed to the other Indian languages in community schools there, which were founded before the self-governance of Singapore in 1959 (Chiew, 1980). Umar Pulavar (currently functioning as Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre) was the first Tamil language school established in Singapore in 1946; however, the school saw its closure after thirty-six years due to dwindling enrolments, as a result of the establishment and shift to English medium schools, which appeared to be a pragmatic choice for the purpose of employment (de Souza, 1980).

#### **1.3.1 The all Party-Report and Tamil**

The All-Party Report originated as a document that laid the foundations for a national education which saw the functioning of schools in four media of instruction in the 1950s: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil; however, the preference for English medium schools by the colonial government underscored the potential for economic growth as Singapore progressed towards self-governance (de Souza, 1980). Protests by the Chinese-educated students in relation to lack of employment opportunities led to the 1955 All-Party Report, which aimed to align national education with a broader agenda, representative of a “national identity within the larger framework of a Malaysian bond” (de Souza, 1980, p.206). Therefore, Malay became the National language, and was promoted as the lingua franca for the multilingual population of Singapore. To the Chinese-educated, Malay was hence learnt as a second language to “supplement” Chinese education (de Souza, 1980, p.208).

However, differences in educational ideologies between the Malayan and Singapore leaders gradually led to the emergence of English as the language of administration, and the receding of Malay into a ‘symbolic’ national language in Singapore, following its separation from the Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia) in

1965. This set the stage for a bilingual policy that was to promote the teaching of the mother tongues as second languages in Singapore.

The Tamil story, however, was less dramatic, as de Souza recounts:

The Tamil language, in line with Tamil education in Singapore, has never been of major concern to the Singapore Government. This is because, in terms of population size and the political significance, the Tamil community has never loomed as large as the Malay community with its backdrop of Malaysia and Indonesia or the Chinese community with its demographic and economic significance. It is, therefore, not surprising that there was never any educational or governmental agency established to pontificate on matters connected with the Tamil language. (1980, p.219)

The support for learning Tamil was lacking to such an extent that “several primary school principals [had] discouraged Indian parents from registering their children in certain schools because of the small enrolment of pupils who want[ed] to study Tamil as a second language” (de Souza, 1980, p. 228). Therefore, in the case of Tamil, even as the bilingual policy took form, it did not mean students had ready access to learning Tamil in the English-medium schools. As early as 1978, the Tamils’ Representative Council (TRC), established in 1951, pointed out that “fewer Indian students [were] opting for Tamil” (de Souza, 1980, p. 228) in schools. One reason for this could be that no aided mission schools offered Tamil as a second language, many government schools also did not, and those that did, were not evenly distributed across the nation. One significant initiative taken by the TRC was to lobby for the teaching of Tamil in all schools at primary, secondary and junior college levels. To encourage more students to learn Tamil, the TRC undertook a campaign that included mailing appeal letters to Indian parents and approaching the press to publish the list of schools that offered Tamil as a second language (Arasumani, 1987).

Although no data are available with respect to the outcome of the campaign, the actions taken by the TRC highlight the extent of challenges faced in offering Tamil in schools in the early years of the bilingual policy, and the likely repercussions of having no access to Tamil in schools: learning another mother tongue instead, for instance.

#### 1.4 Situating English in Singapore's Language Policy

Considering the heterogeneity of the population and the political ideology that was largely rooted in meritocracy, it became necessary on the grounds of pragmatism that English, a “world language and the language of science and technology” (Gopinathan, 1977, p. 55), be given official status. As Sharpe and Gopinathan (2002) note, when it gained self-governance in 1959, Singapore saw the potential of the English language to act as a springboard for success in life in terms of more job opportunities and better living standards. This political decision, part of the nation-building process, translated into a bilingual policy which was implemented in the 1970s. An important speech in 1986 by then Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister of Singapore Tony Tan underscores the intent, rationale and the so-called benefits of the bilingual policy:

that each child should learn English and his mother tongue I regard as a fundamental feature of our education system... Children must learn English so that they will have a window to the knowledge, technology and expertise of the modern world. They must know their mother tongues to enable them to know what makes us what we are.” (cited in Kwong, Peck, & Chin, 1997, p. 11)

The ideological concept that shaped the bilingual policy, also referred to (perhaps a little ironically) as ‘English-knowing bilingualism’, seemed to possess desirable qualities that would be bestowed upon the people through the passage of education, and gradually effected a shift towards English in all ethnic groups (Gupta & Yeok, 1995; Kuo, 1977; Wei, Saravanan, & Hoon, 1997). Hence, English became synonymous with prestige.

Language policies were refined in such a way that a divide was created between the now dominant language, English, and the ethnic mother tongues that were to be heritage languages for students (Gopinathan, 1998). In essence, the language policy has been prescriptivist in the management of mother tongue languages. To use Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997, p.269, emphasis in original) words, it “largely ignored the interaction of multiple languages in a community and multiple non-linguistic factors - that is, the total *ecology* of the linguistic environment”.

At the same time, the replacing of different Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese with Mandarin, and similarly, the Indian languages such as Malayalam, Telegu and Hindi with Tamil in schools, illustrates the complexities of the linguistic situation in Singapore. The challenges in planning and implementing the language policy became evident. In particular, sections of the non-Tamil speaking Indian population voiced their dissatisfaction concerning the institutionalising of Tamil in schools for all Indians, regardless of their ‘real’ mother tongue. On the other hand, the implementation of Mandarin for the ethnic Chinese and Malay for the ethnic Malays was not contested by the respective communities.

### **1.5 Tamil in Singapore: Post-Independence**

The Tamil language was accorded official status in 1965 following the independence of multilingual, multi-ethnic, multicultural Singapore, along with three other official languages, Mandarin, Malay and English as legislated by the Republic of Singapore Independence Act of 1965. Malay continued to be the national language, while “for all practical purposes, English [became] the de facto dominant working language” (Kuo, 1977, p. 11).

The emergence of a new political landscape following Singapore’s independence in 1965, together with a change in demographics, set in motion a complex dynamic of languages at work. Tamil, reportedly in low standing among the other languages current in Singapore, was threatened with further weakening as the new nation invented itself: its position within Singapore was to undergo renegotiation. First, it was a minority language among the four official languages. Second, it co-existed with other South Asian languages of Dravidian or Indo-Aryan roots and could not claim to be representative of the Indian population, in general. Third, it was so-called stigmatised as the ‘language of labourers’. Being situated in such a position in the process of nation-building proved to be a challenge to its survival.

#### **1.5.1 Voices of the South Asian minorities in Singapore**

In Singapore, the term ‘Indian’, which refers to both ethnicity and race, is complicated as it superficially homogenises the group, regardless of the origins of its members. The linguistic diversity is also downplayed by institutionalising Tamil as a mother tongue in schools. This problematic classification was exacerbated by the

official educational policy which determined that one's mother tongue was Tamil by default if one was categorised as 'Indian', based on the father's ethnicity (García, 2011). This resulted in Tamil being designated as the mother tongue, with the first language being English, for students who spoke other South Asian languages, including Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

Hence, this policy sparked criticism from the non-Tamil speaking South Asian minorities, primarily on the grounds of lack of recognition and linguistic differences (Rai, 2009). One of the key problems was that non-Tamil speaking students were constantly under pressure in having to learn two languages that were not their mother tongues (Rai, 2009). Eventually, the language problems encountered by the students paved the way for a series of fundamental changes that meant more language options for them. In 1991, the Ministry of Education recognised Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu as Non-Tamil Indian languages (Vaish, Bokhorst-Heng, Hogan, & Kang, 2010) at primary, secondary and pre-tertiary levels. However, the teaching of these languages had to be undertaken by the respective communities. The national language policy which recognised Tamil as an official language has not been altered.

### **1.6 Census Figures and Tamil usage**

Based on the 2010 census figures, Malay and Tamil use in the home domain, compared to Mandarin, seemed to be on the decline. Notwithstanding inherent problems such as instances of codeswitching and of perception versus reality, in using census data, one can roughly gauge the Tamil usage profile. Although statistics point to a decline in its use as a household language, this should not be interpreted as a definitive representation of the language losing its ground because of the shift towards English. As can be seen in Table 1 below, all ethnic groups showed varying degrees of increase in the use of English. Furthermore, a relatively smaller percentage of decline is seen in the use of Tamil compared to the dip in the use of Malay.

Although current statistics on the number of Tamil speakers are not available, according to the 2010 Census report, the Tamil population formed the majority in comparison to the other Indian dialect groups, with some 188, 000 Tamil speakers, while Hindi ranked third with about 13, 000 speakers.

*Table 1: Resident population aged 5 years and over by language most frequently spoken at home. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011)*

Ethnic group/language	2000	2010
Chinese	100.0	100.00
English	23.9	32.6
Mandarin	45.1	47.7
Chinese dialects	30.7	19.2
Others	0.4	0.4
Malays	100.0	100.00
English	7.9	17.0
Malay	91.6	82.7
Others	0.5	0.3
Indians	100.0	100.00
English	35.6	41.6
Malay	11.6	7.9
Tamil	42.6	36.7
Others <sup>a</sup>	9.9	13.8

Figures are in percentages

<sup>a</sup>It is not clear exactly what languages constitute 'others', particularly for the Indians; it may not necessarily illustrate an increase in other non-official Indian languages

### **1.7 Studies on Tamil and Tamils in Singapore: An Overview**

In a sociolinguistic study of the use of mother tongue in Tamil families, Saravanan (2001b) reports a preference for English over Tamil, particularly among parents who are educated and whose socioeconomic status is high. This phenomenon is reiterated in Schiffman's (2003) study, which observes that Tamil is not being maintained by the educated section of the Indian population. In an earlier study, Saravanan (1993) reports that the Tamil language is associated with low socioeconomic status by young Tamils themselves, in part due to the few career opportunities that it offers. As Mani and Gopinathan (1983) maintain with reference to secondary sources, the status of Tamil is lower than the other official languages in Singapore.

The declining use of Tamil in Singapore has also been associated with pedagogical approaches and curriculum planning (Lakshmi & Saravanan, 2011; Saravanan, 1998; Schiffman, 2003; Vaish, 2007a). Schiffman (2003) strongly criticizes the official emphasis on "hyperpuristic" (p. 109) Tamil by policy makers as opposed to Spoken Tamil in the teaching of Tamil. He further claims that the Tamils



themselves point to the Tamil teachers, parents, the young people, the Ministry of Education and the curriculum developers (p. 119) as forces that have worked against the growth of Tamil.

Sobrielo (1986) and Ramiah (1991) argue that the decline in the use of the language in the home and friendship domains can be attributed to the Tamil-English shift. This pattern is reflected in the 2010 census report which indicated that only about 41 % of ethnic Indians aged between 25 and 44 used Tamil most frequently in the home domain compared to 83 % aged between 60 and 69 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). The most recent study on the status of Tamil language by Kadakara (2011, 2015) presents yet another dismal picture of the Tamil language situation in Singapore; he sees the loss of the language a possibility if the language is not maintained by the various agents, which includes the government, schools and Tamil families. This will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.8 Purpose of the study**

Research that focussed on Tamil language or the Tamil community in Singapore, in the last thirty years or so, has been few and far between, although references to the language or the community have been made in the larger context of discourses relating to language policy or language shift. Based on census reports and other methods of investigation, these studies have repeatedly highlighted a decline in the use of Tamil in the community due to a shift to English, as well as the pedagogical issues in relation to the diglossic nature of Tamil.

While research to date has presented the ‘depth’ of the Tamil issue, it has lacked the ‘breadth’ that is necessary for a more comprehensive study of the present situation of Tamil and Tamils in Singapore. Moreover, there have been no studies that have incorporated a multi-disciplinary, typological framework to investigate language maintenance and shift amongst the Tamils in Singapore. Therefore, using a mixed methods approach, and drawing on a range of disciplines in the framework, this study will present the perspectives of secondary, pre-tertiary and tertiary students, as well as those from key Tamil representatives (e.g., Tamil language curriculum planners, Tamil teachers, Tamil media personnel) to examine the Tamil situation in Singapore.

A broad-based approach, as such, attempts to provide useful insights into the reasons for the apparent shift to English in young Tamils as well as the current attitudes towards Tamil amongst this group, who will be the next generation of parents. In addition, this study aims to examine notions of identity in young Tamils, in light of the so-called low socio-economic standing of their mother tongue. Next, the extent of agreement or disagreement between and within the different groups of Tamils surveyed in this study could also initiate further discussions on how to 'bridge the gap'.

Therefore, this study is a pioneering attempt at adding a broad, yet new dimension by addressing some of the salient points that have surfaced in earlier language or identity studies on the Tamils in Singapore. Moreover, the findings of this study may be points of reference for language planners, policy makers and individuals who are directly or indirectly involved in bringing the language forward in Singapore, or in the wider Tamil diaspora.

This, then, leads to the objectives of the research which are:

1. To analyse the position of Tamil in terms of language use (including codeswitching) across domains such as the home, public space, friendship, and school.
2. To examine the construction of identity or identities amongst young Tamils through their language choices as well as their attitudes towards Tamil or the dominant language, English (including the colloquial variety, Singlish).
3. To explore the attitudes of young Tamils (between the ages of 15 and 25) towards their mother tongue.
4. To review the current measures introduced by key authorities and consider the likelihood of these being able to help maintain the language in the foreseeable future in view of the dominance of English.

The following research questions will be addressed based on the above-mentioned objectives:

1. In which domains does the Tamil language remain vibrant, as opposed to those that indicate a decline in its usage and to what extent are these patterns and trends consistent with past research?

2. How is identity constructed in contemporary Singapore with regard to the use of Tamil or other languages, or both, in particular the vernacular varieties of Singaporean English?
3. What are the factors that influence a young Tamil's attitude towards his or her mother tongue, and what are the similarities or differences in terms of attitude and language use that emerge in the age group (15-25)?
4. How do some of the major initiatives by policy makers, language planners, media personnel and key stakeholders aim to maintain the language?

Therefore, the main research question of this study has two components. First, is the Tamil language in Singapore further declining in use, and if Tamil language use amongst the Tamils is declining, what are the possible reasons for this? Second, how do Tamils then mark their identity?

### **1.9 Structure of the Study**

This thesis consists of 9 chapters as outlined below: Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the theoretical concepts relevant to the study of language maintenance and shift, and also includes a section on identity construction, which forms a secondary component to this study. Chapter 3 reviews related literature pertaining to Tamil and the Tamil community in Singapore, and its wider diaspora, as well as landmark studies within the European context. Chapter 4 explains the rationale for a mixed methods approach for this study, and presents the details of the sample population and data collection methods. Chapter 5 presents the statistical analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire survey. Chapter 6 describes the first set of qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions, using a thematic approach. Chapter 7 continues with a description of the second data set obtained from interviews with key informants, based on similar themes. Chapter 8 discusses the findings by triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data sets, and outlines the limitations of the study. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the research questions, the implications of the findings, as well as a presentation of recommendations for the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore, and potential for future research.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical Constructs

All endeavours, after all, proceed from implicit assumptions, [...] a broader typology with many elements is more likely to be useful than a narrower approach.

- Edwards, 2010, p.75

### 2.1 Introduction

According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18), “frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal” in making sense of the factors or variables implicated, as well as their relationships, in the phenomenon under study. Preliminary work of scholars, for example, Fishman, Ferguson, Haugen, Kloss and Stewart in the 1960s and 70s attempted to describe language situations, in particular, of minority languages, through multi-dimensional typological models (Edwards, 2010). In his discussion of a typology towards minority language settings, Edwards (2010) underscores the essence of a typology as a fluid, versatile and adaptable theoretical construct.

This chapter aims to present the relevance of two complementary frameworks: (a) Edwards’ (1992, 2010) Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages, and (b) Giles, Bourhis and Taylor’s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality theory (hereafter EVT) for a broad, comprehensive study of language maintenance and shift in the Tamil community in Singapore. Edwards’ typological framework will be used as the primary lens to obtain the ‘breadth’ of the phenomenon under study, while Giles et al.’s EVT will be used as a ‘checklist’ to gauge and predict the vitality of the language and its speakers. Finally, the chapter will discuss the relevance of the ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles & Johnson, 1987) which incorporates the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1982) to examine the construction of identities amongst young Tamils in Singapore.

The following discussion will be guided by the two main research questions that underpin the language-identity link within the study of language maintenance and shift, as stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.8). First, is the Tamil language in Singapore further declining in use, and if Tamil language use amongst the Tamils is declining, what are the possible reasons for this? Second, how do the Tamils then mark their identity?

## 2.2 Typological Approaches as Frameworks for LMLS

Edwards (1992, 2010) draws and expands on the typological approaches conceptualised by scholars (e.g., Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981; Giles et al., 1977; Harmann, 1986; Haugen, 1972) to present a multidisciplinary dimension in investigating minority language situations within the context of LMLS. In other words, in attempting to ‘bridge the gaps’ evidenced in the above-mentioned works, Edward’s typology seeks to provide a more comprehensive framework for a study of LMLS. Nevertheless, as Edwards points out, these influential works have provided a meaningful foundation for research on language situations.

## 2.3 Edwards’ Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages

Edwards (1992) had initially suggested three broad areas of focus for minority language situations: (a) language; (b) speakers; (c) setting. This was further developed into a framework that resembled a matrix table (see Table 2 below). Eleven variables representing different disciplines or aspects that ranged from demography to the media formed the Y-axis, while the three broad areas of focus formed the X-axis. This meant a minimum of thirty-three questions could be formulated (as enumerated in Table 2) when examining each of the eleven variables within the areas of language, speakers, and setting (see Chapter 4, section 4.5 for the complete list of questions). This framework, as Edwards (1992, 2010) reminds, does not claim to be exhaustive, neither does it present cells that are exclusive. Examples of questions that correspond to the cell numbers for the demography dimension adapted for the study are as follows:

1. Number of speakers based on official records (e.g. census reports) over time?  
Birth rate? Marriages? Inter-racial marriages?
2. Any stronghold for language identified (e.g. ethnic enclave) Singapore?
3. Association between housing policy and concentration/distribution of Indians? (that includes Tamil speakers)

Building on his earlier work, Edwards (2010) refers to the eleven dimensions or variables used in the framework as the ‘disciplinary perspective’. Not only is incorporating the various dimensions necessary for a more complete understanding of LMLS, but also important in ascertaining the relationships between the

dimensions or variables, for example, between demography and sociology. On the other hand, a typological framework may be useful in illuminating the more salient variables that appear to influence LMLS in a particular context. Also, a typological framework may initiate further discussions of existing theories in light of the findings. Therefore, this framework could provide the ‘breadth’ as well as the ‘depth’ for the study of LMLS in the Tamil community in Singapore.

*Table 2: Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages*

	Disciplinary Perspective	Speaker	Language	Setting
1	Demography	1	2	3
2	Geography	4	5	6
3	Economics	7	8	9
4	Sociology	10	11	12
5	Linguistics	13	14	15
6	Psychology	16	17	18
7	History	19	20	21
8	Policy-Law-Government	22	23	24
9	Education	25	26	27
10	Religion	28	29	30
11	Media	31	32	33

Note. Retrieved from *Minority Languages and Group Identity: Cases and Categories*. (100), by J. Edwards, 2010, Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company. Copyright [2010] by the John Benjamin Publishing Company.

### **2.3.1 Strengths and limitations of the framework**

Drawing on the critical reviews of his typological framework by renowned scholars, for example, Clyne, Grenoble and Whaley, and Vail, Edwards (2010) lists the overall strengths of the framework as follows: (a) speakers and contexts are treated as substantive entities; (b) variables have been contextualised; (c) both macro and micro perspectives have been included in the study of the ecology of language; (d) the framework has been used as a point of reference or discussion in studies (e.g. Extra & Gorter, 2008; King, 2001; Vail, 2006; Yagmur & Kroon, 2003, 2006, cited in Edwards, 2010).

On the other hand, the limitations of Edwards' (2010) framework offer some useful insights into fine-tuning or clarifying variables relevant for an LMLS research. The first limitation pointed out by Grenoble and Whaley (cited in Edwards, 2010) refers to ambiguous terms such as 'region' and 'area' which fall under 'settings' in the category of linguistics and geography. Reflecting similar thoughts was Clyne's (cited in Edwards, 2010) suggestion for more well-defined variables. On another note, Vail (cited in Edwards, 2010) observed that the framework lacked the anthropological perspective; however, Edwards (2010) claims that this dimension is implied in the sociological and linguistics dimensions. Whilst these ambiguous areas cannot be completely refined or eliminated, they may be made more transparent by explicitly defining the variables according to specific contexts, or by including sub-questions to minimise multiple interpretations amongst scholars or researchers.

#### **2.4 The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory**

The EVT was originally put forth by Giles et al. (1977) to study the sociostructural and situational factors that influence intergroup relations of contrasting ethnolinguistic groups (Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 2009). Therefore, 'vitality' as an approximate definition within the field of ethnolinguistics meant "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and collective entity within the intergroup setting" (Giles et al., 1977, p.308). Three wide-ranging dimensions were drawn to illustrate the influence of sociostructural factors on a group's vitality: demography, institutional support and status; each of these factors was further de-constructed into sub-factors (see Bourhis & Barrette, 2006; Harwood et al., 2009). In sum, these factors aimed to present an objective assessment of the extent of a group's survivability with reference to "demographic, economic, sociological, and historical documents" (Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981, p. 147). A causal, linear relationship was therefore hypothesised: a group that demonstrated a high level of vitality should succeed as a collective community in an intergroup context (implying maintenance) and vice-versa (implying language shift) (cf. Yagmur, 2011).

##### **2.4.1 Usefulness and limitations of the EVT**

Ethnolinguistic vitality, whether conceptualised as a notion, a theoretical framework or as "a valuable heuristic in studies of language maintenance and shift" (McEntee-Atalianis, 2011, p.151), has been interwoven into studies relating to

diverse aspects of language (Yagmur & Kroon, 2003); however, this framework has had varying levels of criticisms (Husband & Saifullah Khan, 1982; McEntee-Atalianis 2011; Yagmur, 2011; Yagmur and Ehala, 2011). For example, Yagmur (2011) criticises the EVT's neglect of the "actual dynamics of language maintenance" (p.119) and that the results from the subjective vitality assessment are capable of inconsistency. However, the EVT has since evolved as a consequence of criticisms and recommendations put forth by scholars, and its usefulness is discussed as follows.

Several studies have used either the objective or subjective dimensions, or both dimensions of EVT as a primary or complementary theoretical framework to examine various aspects of language and its speakers. To illustrate, Sachdev (1995) drew on the demographic and socio-psychological perspectives of the EVT in his study of language and identity of the aboriginal peoples of Canada whereas Yagmur and Kroon (2003) complemented the EVT with Edwards' (1992) typology of minority language situations (Section 2.3) to examine the ethnolinguistic perceptions and language revitalisation in Bashkortostan. Further to this, Edwards (1985) demonstrates the eclectic but integrative features of the EVT as one that draws on Tajfel's intergroup relations in linguistic contexts, as well as Giles' accommodation theory in presenting a "unified model for understanding language and ethnic group relations" (p.153). McEntee-Atalianis (2011) proposes that the EVT could be complemented with ethnography in light of the emergence of hybrid identities in a globalising world.

As the literature reveals, ongoing revisions to, and debates on the EVT suggest that while the framework covers the fundamentals of a sociolinguistic study, it can be adapted accordingly or used complementarily for a more comprehensive study (e.g., McEntee-Atalianis, 2011; Sachdev 1995; Yagmoor and Kroon, 2003).

## **2.5 Fitting the Study into a Framework**

For this study, Edwards' (2010) Sociology-of-Language framework will be the primary framework to examine LMLS in the Tamil community in Singapore. This framework will be complemented with Giles et al.'s (1977) EVT theory for the purpose of using an objective 'vitality checklist' to ascertain whether the survivability of a linguistic group is contingent on the degree of its vitality (Harwood et al., 2009). Therefore, it will be helpful to 'test' whether a strong or medium



vitality of a group necessarily means no or minimal threat to its existence as a linguistic group, and to predict the ‘vitality’ of the mother tongue of this group, in this case, Tamil. On the other hand, Edwards’ (2010) framework not only foregrounds the language aspect (i.e. the ‘sociology of language’) necessary in LMLS research, but also attempts to capture language attitudes by incorporating the “psychological thrust” (p.99). The details of the adapted version of Edwards’ framework utilised for this study will be presented in Chapter 4.

## **2.6 Ethnolinguistic Identity theory**

A revised version of the ethnolinguistic identity theory was introduced by Giles and Johnson (1987) in an attempt to incorporate the social psychological dimension in the study of ethnic language maintenance in varying social contexts. As with the EVT, the ethnolinguistic identity theory has been significantly shaped by Tajfel and Turner’s (cited in Giles & Johnson, 1987) social identity theory that centres on individual perceptions of membership within the social world, and Giles’ (1984) speech accommodation theory. Such perceptions, according to Giles and Johnson (1987) could be either positive or negative.

Making sense of the influence of language(s), perceptions of power and social distance in a multi-ethnic context is central to the ethnolinguistic identity theory (Hildebrandt & Giles, 1983). In addition, it seeks to understand identity amongst individuals who may possess “multiple group memberships”, and hence, shed light on the overall perception of “ethnolinguistic distinctiveness” (Hildebrandt & Giles, p.438). Giles and Johnson (1987) further explain the theory by drawing on the experiences of individuals belonging to the so-called subordinate group, with other ethnicities, and the strategies employed by these individuals in maintaining their language, in this case, a minority language. The authors list five categories that may help in making sense of an individual’s ethnolinguistic identity, as follows: identification with the ethnic group; social comparisons with the ‘outgroup’; identification with other non-ethnic categories; perception of in-group boundaries; and perception of ethnic group’s vitality.

The ethnolinguistic theory will be particularly relevant when considering the relationship between ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ in the context of Singapore where group members could adopt strategies to either accentuate or attenuate the ethnic language accordingly when language becomes an index of identity in intergroup

relations (Giles & Johnson, 1987) or in intragroup communication. This may be useful in ascertaining any notions of ‘in-group’ or ‘out-group’ amongst the Tamils in the study.

Tajfel (1978)’s distinguished work on social identity, which has been incorporated into the ethnolinguistic identity theory as mentioned above, offers some helpful insights into the construction of, for example, positive or negative ‘psycholinguistic distinctiveness’ of members belonging to a particular ethnic group in relation to other ethnic group members. In addition, the theory can be utilised in studying strategies undertaken by individuals who demonstrate negative ethnic identity to ‘repair’ such perceptions held (Hildebrandt & Giles, 1983, p. 439). Therefore, the social identity theory is essentialised in group membership, revolving around concepts of ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ (Brunsma, Delgado, & Rockquemore, 2013). Whilst this theory seeks to examine intergroup relations, Hogg (2006) clarifies that the social identity approach is applicable to intragroup relations as well.

## **2.7 Concluding Remarks**

The proposed theoretical framework for the study, which draws heavily from Edwards’ (2010) *Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages*, aims to present a comprehensive sociolinguistic study of the Tamil language and of its speakers in contemporary Singapore. However, overlaps in questions across the disciplinary perspectives in the framework are inevitable, and cannot be avoided as these perspectives are bound to interact at various points due to their inter-relatedness. Further to this, the additional questions formulated for this study, guided by Edwards’ (2010) proposed 33 questions, are neither exhaustive nor are they completely explicit. On the other hand, the EVT will be useful to determine the strength of the Tamil community against an objective ‘checklist’ that the theory has proposed.

In sum, by adapting Edwards’ framework and factoring in Giles et al.’s EVT for the study, it is hoped that a holistic understanding of the LMLS phenomenon associated with the Tamils in Singapore can be achieved. That is, the multiple disciplinary perspectives that constitute the framework provide a broad lens through which the phenomenon can be investigated, as opposed to a narrower approach.

In relation to identity construction, the ethnolinguistic identity theory, which draws on the social identity theory, could provide some useful insights into notions of identity amongst the Tamils, particularly in a pluralistic society such as Singapore. In addition, concepts of 'in-group' or 'out-group' may reveal the vitality of the Tamil community, and the extent of their integration in the larger Singapore society.

The next chapter will present a review of the literature on LMLS by drawing on the works of prominent scholars, which include Joshua Fishman and Charles Ferguson. Following this, it will discuss the studies on the Tamil community in Singapore, in addition to those that relate to Tamil in the wider Tamil diaspora, such as South Africa, Mauritius and Malaysia, to name a few.

### Chapter 3 Literature Review

Except in the conceits of ‘pure’ linguistics, no analysis of language can rationally proceed from a ‘stand alone’ perspective.

- Edwards, 2009, p.1

First, this review will present the relevance of investigating language and identity framed within a sociolinguistic study. Second, it will include a discussion of theories related to LMLS, namely, bilingualism, multilingualism, diglossia and code-switching. Third, it will discuss interpretations amongst prominent scholars of related phenomena, that is, language shift, language maintenance and language death. Next, the chapter will present landmark LMLS studies, followed by a discussion of LMLS in the diasporic Indian or Tamil communities. It will then examine previously published studies on the Tamil community in Singapore, before concluding with a brief discussion of LMLS in two other ethnic groups in Singapore, the Chinese and Malays. This will allow for comparisons to be made or commonalities to be identified in the studies reviewed, and how these may compare to the study’s findings.

#### 3.1 The Language-Identity Link

Language and identity is an inter-connected, but complex duality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2007; Edwards, 2009; Norton, 2010; Quirk, 2000) that has been studied across disciplines. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2010) highlight that “linguistic research on identity has become increasingly central within sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis and social psychology” (p. 18), therefore, underscoring the influence of multiple interdisciplinary factors on language and identity. An example points to Mendoza-Denton and Osborne’s (2010) study of bilingualism and identity framed within sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

Edwards (2009) draws on the symbolism of language, or its “‘marking’ functions” (p.2) in relation to constructions of identity by individuals and communities. On the other hand, Bucholtz and Hall (2007), as well as Norton (2010) underscore power relation as a significant contributor in the language-identity link, whereas Reyes (2010) points to the influence of ethnolinguistic factors in one’s construction of identity.

Essentially, language can impact identity and vice-versa (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). Barker and Galasinski (2001, p.29) explain the language-identity duality as such: “Without language, not only would we not be persons as we commonly understand the concept, but the very concept of personhood and identity would be unintelligible to us”. However, if one’s mother tongue is relatively less dominant, particularly in a multilingual context, where English is widely used and spoken as a lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2008), the construction of identity or identities may be far from being straightforward. This will be an important consideration in relation to Tamil language in Singapore.

### **3.2 Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Diglossia in LMLS**

#### **3.2.1 Bilingualism and multilingualism**

The terms ‘bilingualism’ and ‘multilingualism’ have no clear-cut boundaries and hence, problematic to be seen as dichotomies. For example, Kachru (1980) points out that bilingualism has been used as a “cover term” (p. 2) to include both trilingualism and multilingualism to reflect language situations in some parts of the world, a view similarly held by Beardsmore (1986).

In her most recent discussion of key topics relating to LMLS, Pauwels (2016) explains that older definitions of bilingualism may not be relevant, or accurate in capturing the current linguistic repertoires that communities within and across national borders have access to, and use on a daily basis; thus, she posits that multilingualism, in comparison to bilingualism, has emerged as a more appropriate label that describes this diversity around the world, particularly in the 2010s. Further to this, Pauwels notes that both ‘bilingualism’ and ‘multilingualism’ are often used in the LMLS literature to refer to the use of two or more languages or language varieties. Pauwel’s conception of bilingualism parallels Wei’s (2000, p.7) in that the term is extended to include individuals who “interchangeably use three, four or even more languages” and with “varying degrees of proficiency”.

Edwards (2012), on the other hand, questions the usage of these terms. For example, while the label ‘multilingualism’ is attached to many communities around the world, in reality, it can be quite the contrary. In other words, a multilingual country does not automatically translate to mean that a large section of the population is able to communicate in two or more languages (Edwards, 2012).

Therefore, it is apparent that these terms lack precision in that they are interpreted according to different reference points (Bhatia, 2012) and definitions (Pauwels, 2016). In essence, be it bi- or multilingualism, it has come to be acknowledged that “bilingualism and multilingualism are a normal and unremarkable necessity of everyday life for the majority of the population” (Romaine, 2012, p.445).

### **3.2.2 Interpretations of bilingualism**

Bilingualism is typically discussed as a phenomenon occurring at a societal level (societal bilingualism), which includes the state and the community, or at an individual level (individual bilingualism) (Baker, 2001; Beardsmore, 1986; Sebba, 2011). However, definitions of bilingualism remain ambiguous, as Baker (2001) and Romaine (2012) contend, amongst others. For example, Baker (2006, p.3) draws attention to a host of overlapping variables that are used to define bilingualism in the literature: language ability, language achievement, language competence, language performance, language proficiency and language skills.

Beardsmore (1986) draws on Fishman’s (1965) exploratory question: “Who speaks what language to whom and when”, to point to the inter-relatedness of individual and societal bilingualism, where the language choices of an individual are likely to be influenced in some ways “by the larger stable patterns of choice” (p.6) within the larger societal context. This refers to the ‘stable’ nature of bilingualism which is evidenced by ongoing language contact, while another important consideration in discussing bilingualism within the LMLS framework is transitional bilingualism, which refers to an eventual language shift situation that may result in monolingualism (Pauwels, 2016).

Bloomfield’s (cited in Baker, 2001, p.15) largely unrealistic view of bilingualism is one of an idealised bilingual who has “native-like control of two or more languages”. Grosjean (2010, p. 19) has argued that the once dominant view of a bilingual as “two monolinguals in one person” which had attracted criticisms from other scholars, is not representative of a large number of bilinguals in the way they use languages at their disposal, and with varying competencies (García, 2006).

Therefore, as Grosjean (2010, p.29) explains, “bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life normally require different languages”. This

converges with Fishman's (1965) classic question of 'who speaks what language to whom and when'. This interpretation of bilinguals and their language choices is more realistic in that it acknowledges fluidity as opposed to rigidity in the way languages are used; however, to better understand the dynamic of language use, Fishman's question could be extended to read, "who speaks what language to whom and when" and *why*?

For the purpose of clarity, the term bilingualism in this study will refer to language competence, particularly in *speaking* the languages, as well as the use of English and another ethnic language (Malay, Mandarin or Tamil), which Kachru (1992, p. 59) termed as "English-knowing bilingualism", to describe the spread of the English language in contexts where it functions as a non-native variety.

### 3.2.3 Diglossia

Diglossia is a sociolinguistic phenomenon "where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play" (Ferguson, 1959, p.325). Ferguson labelled this dichotomy as the (H)igh, or the superposed variety, and the (L)ow or regional dialect variety, with specific references to languages such as Arabic, Modern Greek, and Swiss German (Ferguson, 1959). With reference to the diglossic nature of Tamil in India, Ferguson (1959, p. 337) admits that there "is no good description available of the precise relations of the two [i.e., literary and standard colloquial] varieties of Tamil" apart from the "structural differences". Although it is not clear what Ferguson meant by 'precise relations', it could refer to, but not be limited to, the ten variables which he had listed in his seminal article, to point to the H-L divide. These included both the 'contextual' (e.g., function and prestige) and 'linguistic' (e.g., phonology and grammar) forms of diglossia (Hudson, 2002, p.9).

Overall, Fishman's (1967, p.30) observation of Ferguson's binary usage of the H-L varieties as "complementary" or "nonconflictual" is by large restrictive. A more current perspective of diglossia by Coulmas (2013) aims to be less restrictive, and perhaps more representative of current multilingual societies: "The lesson to be remembered about diglossia, no matter how narrowly or broadly defined, is that speakers choose varieties, mainly to suit different contexts and social domains, thereby creating and perpetuating a verbal repertoire of asymmetrical allocation of codes" (p.15). In the Singaporean context, the use of varieties may mean, for

example, the choice of Standard Singapore English and colloquial Singapore English (Singlish); or, formal Tamil and spoken Tamil.

### 3.2.4 Deconstructing the diglossia-bilingualism link

At the core of the diglossia-bilingualism link remain the significant contributions of Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman whose combined seminal work has demonstrated the complementarity and extensions of diglossia and bilingualism. Fishman's (1967) advancement to Ferguson's case of diglossia in the traditional sense has addressed and included the alternation of genetically unrelated codes, as illustrated by Coulmas (2013). For example, what if speakers switched between unrelated codes, such as Singapore colloquial English and Spoken Tamil, rather than between formal Tamil and spoken Tamil?

Fishman (1967) conceptualised a four-cell matrix table (Table 3 below) that incorporated genetically unrelated codes into the concepts of diglossia and bilingualism. As well, he integrated "psychologically pertinent considerations" (Fishman, 1967, p.30) in the presentation of bilingualism. Therefore, diglossia is seen as a subset of societal bilingualism (Coulmas, 2013).

*Table 3: Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia*

		<u>DIGLOSSIA</u>	
		+	-
<u>BILINGUALISM</u>	+	1. Both diglossia and bilingualism	2. Bilingualism without diglossia
	-	3. Diglossia without bilingualism	4. Neither diglossia nor bilingualism

Source: Fishman, J. A. (1967). Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 23(2), 29-38.

Using Fishman's Matrix as a reference point, Kadakara (2011, 2015) reveals that bilingualism without diglossia (Cell 2) is evident in the different speech communities in contemporary Singapore. According to Fishman (1967), bilingualism



without diglossia may, in view of the rapidly changing circumstances in a given context, lead to a more dominant language displacing another: “that language or variety which is fortunate enough to be associated with the predominant drift of social forces tends to displace the other (s)” (Fishman, 1967, p. 36).

Drawing on a US example, García (2009, p.76) explains that this particular phenomenon is characteristic of a society where there are “very few societal arrangements for the protection or promotion of the bilingualism of its citizens”. However, this does not parallel Singapore’s Tamil situation for the following reasons: (a) Tamil has institutional support, along with the other ethnic languages; (b) it is one of four official languages; (c) Tamil is encouraged to be spoken by the speech community and policy makers.

Kadakara (2011) further explains that the Singapore government had anticipated a society in which both stable diglossia and bilingualism would exist, which, as he pinpoints, was not the case. In reality, as observed by Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon (2009, p.236), “the diglossic demarcations hardly hold true in the everyday linguistic lives of most Singaporeans”.

Therefore, in the contemporary globalised world defined by increased connectivity and mobility, Fishman’s conceptualisation of the bilingualism-diglossia relationship may appear to be out of context and biased, particularly with reference to compartmentalisation of languages through a “widely accepted social consensus” (Fishman, 1967, p. 34), or the underlying notion of preferred languages, as current understanding of linguistic practices amongst multilinguals presents a shift in the way diglossia is perceived (Jaspers, 2017). Important changes such as modernisation, urbanisation and blurred class distinctions have further called into question the so-called ‘stable’ nature of diglossia (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Hudson, 2002).

An important question to consider, in relation to Singapore’s language situation, with reference to Tamil, is what could have led to the apparent state of bilingualism without diglossia, or should such linguistic practices evidenced be re-defined under emerging concepts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as ‘translanguaging’, as posited by García (2009)?

Translanguaging, which includes code-switching, is defined from the perspective of the language user or bilingual, who translanguages “to *make sense of their bilingual worlds* ... across different modalities” (García, 2009, p. 45, emphasis

in original). In other words, varying linguistic practices need not be limited to Fishman's Matrix, as the concept of bilingualism in relation to diglossia seems to be phasing into obsolescence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.3 Language Maintenance and Language Shift**

Language maintenance and language shift (hereafter LMLS) has become associated with one of its pioneers, Joshua Fishman whose seminal work in 1964 is often quoted in this multifaceted area of language study. "That languages (or language variants) SOMETIMES replace each other, among SOME speakers, particularly in CERTAIN types or domains of language behaviour, under SOME conditions of intergroup contact..." (Fishman, 2009, p.32) offers a preliminary point of discussion of a language situation typical of a bi- or multilingual setting. He proposed the following three broad dimensions to measure the extent of maintenance or displacement of a language: (a) habitual language use at more than one point in time or space under conditions of intergroup contact; (b) antecedent, concurrent or consequent psychological, social and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use; and (c) behaviour toward language in the contact setting, including directed maintenance or shift efforts (Fishman, 2009, p. 33).

Fishman posits that "[t]he basic datum of the study of language maintenance and language shift is that two linguistically distinguishable populations are in contact" (p.33). Although the Singaporean context lends itself to an LMLS study in view of the pre-requisites mentioned above, it presents a unique case where the multi-ethnic populations use a neutral link language for both inter- or intra-ethnic communication. That is, English serves as a predominant link language, although it is not the mother tongue of the three main ethnic communities in Singapore.

### **3.4 The Tripartite Phenomena: Language Shift, Maintenance and Death**

LMLS studies are indicative of the push and pull factors of the language shifting and maintenance process (Clyne & Kipp, 1996; David, 2001; Gal, 1979; Lock & Detaramani, 2010; Saravanan, 1993; Wei, 1994); the dynamic of languages in a bi- or multilingual setting (Ansaldò, 2010; Kamwangamalu, 2007; Rubdy, McKay, Alsagoff, & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Sridhar, 1985); and also the 'losses' experienced, be it linguistic or cultural when a language gradually recedes. In

essence, language shift, maintenance and death are related phenomena where each has to be understood in relation to the other.

Other associated terminologies that aim to present fine-grained definitions to elucidate the extent, or type of language situations are namely language loss, language obsolescence, dormant language, language attrition or language decline (Pauwels, 2016). However, these terminological boundaries become fuzzy when overlaps occur or when used interchangeably as close approximates (e.g., language death and language loss), or when meanings accorded are drawn from different frames of reference.

With respect to language shift, death, and maintenance presented in the literature preceding the 2000s, Hornberger and King (1997) summarise language shift and death as a phenomenon that is typically placed opposite language revival (or reversal, or revitalisation) in that the former is “usually conceptualized as processes which ‘just happen’ to the speakers, the community, or the language” (p.301). On the other hand, language maintenance has been defined as a phenomenon that reflects both the ‘just happen’ element (mentioned above) as well as maintenance efforts consciously undertaken by the respective language communities (Hornberger & King, 1997). Insofar as language shift is concerned, ‘just happen’ appears to be too ambiguous or even inaccurate a term to be associated with a complex phenomenon as such, particularly when language planning, language policies or non- transmission of a language inter-generationally can be regarded as conscious efforts that may work against the maintenance of a language.

Language maintenance, contrary to language shift, indicates the thriving of a language in the presence of a more powerful language, and is, therefore, presented as a phenomenon that contrasts with language shift (Hornberger, 2012; Mesthrie & Leap, 2000; Pauwels, 2016). However, Pauwels (2004) maintains that language maintenance and language shift are not watertight definitions. Nonetheless, these related phenomena can be said to be “the outcome or consequence of a plethora of language contact situations” (Pauwels, 2016, p.17). As for language shift, it usually indicates a *gradual* change in the day- to-day use of a language where a dominant language gradually displaces the other language (Baker & Jones, 1998; Hornberger & King, 1997; Pauwels, 2016), for example, across domains (Fishman, 1965). However, an alternate perspective may hold that a language may be still maintained in the

absence of so-called powerful languages; and similarly, language shift may not be necessarily influenced by a more powerful competing language.

Since the conceptualisation of language shift and language maintenance by Fishman in 1964, this area of research has, more often than not, pointed to the tensions between English, typically categorised as the dominant language, and the relatively less dominant indigenous languages or mother tongues, particularly in polities that were once colonised. These ‘tensions’ have been presented through varying perspectives from researchers and scholars alike. In his foreword to the book *English Language as Hydra* by Rapatahana and Bunce (2012), Phillipson laments:

However, the extensive literature on English ...tends to be monopolized by Western researchers. Many of them are triumphalist, celebrating the global ‘success’ of English, whereas far fewer are critical and stress the injustices of imperial dominance, post-colonial privilege and the continued marginalisation of what are seen as ‘lesser’ languages. (p. xx)

Whilst Phillipson’s largely critical stance relating to the “injustices” and “marginalisation” (cf. Fishman, Conrad, & Rubal-Lopez, 1996) may be a contentious one, three salient aspects that have remained core in the study of LMLS emerge: marginalisation of ‘lesser’ languages; the relative position of English in bi- or multilingual communities; and attitudes towards the dominant and less dominant languages. The question of why (‘lesser’) languages are marginalised in favour of a more dominant one, in addition to language attitudes, form a common thread in the literature relating to LMLS. Relatedly, as Coulmas (2013) points out, investigating reasons that clarify the choice of English amongst speakers should be a focus of future sociolinguistics research.

### **3.4.1 Defining language shift**

Language shift has to be understood in relation to language choice as well as attitudes. An overview of the term ‘language shift’ as perceived by pioneering researchers in the field of sociolinguistics is as follows: a gradual displacement of one language by another, typically a more powerful or prestigious one, in an intergroup context within a bi- or multilingual setting, as well as in immigrant contexts. As noted by Mesthrie and Leap (2000, p.253), this process of language

‘shifting’ results in the dominant language functioning as “the primary means of communication and socialisation within a community”.

As with most sociolinguistic definitions, ‘language shift’ can present different dimensions owing to the contexts in which it is used. Language shift has been defined in the literature as follows:

1. A language shift can be described as a process which starts with monolingualism of some type and concludes with a new type of monolingualism after a period of bilingualism. (Haugen, 1972, p. 334)
2. The process of language decline and death may begin when two language communities come into contact. Gradually, more speakers of one language ‘shift’ to using the other language for an increasing number of functions. This is called language shift. (Baker & Jones, 1998, p.151)
3. The gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of the community members. This occurs most typically where there is a sharp difference in prestige and in the level of official support for the two (or more) languages concerned. (Dorian, 2014, p. 205)
4. In the case of LS [language shift], a speech community (gradually) gives up or loses the use of its language and/or of many functions of the language and shifts to the use of another language for most, if not all its communicative and other cultural, symbolic needs. The language itself, however, survives because it continues to be used in other contexts or communities. (Pauwels, 2004, p.720); [Therefore, it] results not in the complete disappearance or death of the former [i.e., the language in decline] but merely the disappearance of it in from the specific speech community (or part thereof) that finds itself in the contact situation. (Pauwels, 2016, p.18)

Therefore, by integrating the definitions of language shift above, one can make sense that although language shift is typically a gradual process that is a consequence of language contact, it may not totally lead to absolute loss of the less dominant language. This is the case of Tamil, where, while it continues to be a stronghold in Tamil Nadu in India, the language is close to extinction amongst the Tamil diaspora in a few polities such as Guyana and Trinidad in the Tamil diaspora.

If language shift is to be conceptualised as occurring in a continuum to include language death, the latter may then signify the extreme end-point of this

continuum when the last speaker of the less dominant language dies (Baker & Jones, 1998; Crystal, 2000), particularly in the case of endangered languages. However, in reality as Crystal (2000) had illustrated with the case of two endangered languages, Kasabe (language of the Adamawa province in Cameroon) and Ubykh (a West Caucasian language), this may not be true. These languages were reported to have been ‘dead’ before the demise of the last respective speakers. This scenario aligns to Sasse’s proposed definition of language death as occurring “when its use for regular communication has ceased” (Sasse, 1992, p.20).

Edwards (2009) notes that language shift is “most frequently” (p.258) a precursor to language death which, as Wurm (1991, pp. 2-4) describes, can occur as a consequence of “death of all speakers”; “changes in the ecology of languages”; and “culture contact and clash”. Wurm (1991) as well as Mesthrie and Leap (2000) have highlighted the ‘death’ and shift of the indigenous languages of the Americas and Australia, as well as a foreseeable extinction of other such languages over time. Therefore, important questions that can help clarify language shift across varying contexts are: Why does language shift occur? What are some measures undertaken for the maintenance of language X? What are some of the commonly cited causes for this phenomenon in research to date?

Nonetheless, it remains that the shift from one language to another stems from multiple factors and necessitates a range of investigative approaches. Accordingly, investigating LMLS can be problematic in part due to a multiplicity of variables linked to the phenomenon present in varying contexts. The following observation highlights one of the challenges in LMLS studies: “It is one of the few points of agreement in studies that there is no single set of factors that can be used to predict the outcome of language-maintenance efforts” (Mesthrie & Leap, 2000, p.255).

However, contrary to these viewpoints is one that proposes the “Universals of Language Contact and Conflict”, drawn from the works of Fishman, Haugen, Garvin and Wolck which reflect the commonalities present in LMLS in diverse communities (Wolck, 2004, p.6). Some of these ‘universals’ that Wolck (2004, p.6) claims are as follows: (a) a correlation exists between language attitudes and self-reports; (b) the apparent use of the minority language is observed to be typically at either ends of the socio-economic spectrum; (c) inter-generational language transfer

is critical in ensuring continuity of the minority language; (d) a co-existence of both minority and majority languages within a domain leads to linguistic vitality of the minority language as does the complementary function of both the languages across domains.

Wolck's (2004) above-mentioned 'universals', however, only describe the common strands that have been observed across minority language communities which were part of the European Union, the United States, and South America, with particular references to minority languages such as German in Hungary, Quechua in Peru, and Seneca in New York. Therefore, there seems to be a mismatch between the all-encompassing term, 'universals' and its points of reference, which, in effect, refers to certain contexts only. Although some of the 'universals' may apply to non-Western or non-European contexts, the terminology itself seems to be an ambitious attempt at homogenising language shift situations.

### **3.4.2 Language attitude and language choice**

Various factors (e.g., psychological, economic, political) may directly or indirectly influence a speaker's choice of language(s). Therefore, probing language choices of speakers is necessary for a critical understanding of codeswitching within the LMLS framework. For instance, one important observation made is that language attitudes can influence language choice (Baker, 1992), which in turn can be said to define the individual's motivation (or de-motivation) to be identified with a particular speech community, as seen in Susan Gal's landmark study (Section 3.5.2). This means a positive or negative attitude towards a language could be implicated in an individual's level of competence in speaking (and vice versa).

Although this may be true in some cases, it should not be generalised as such. For example, Edwards (2009) maintains that the symbolic function of a language can continue to exist even if the language is used minimally in communication, particularly in situations where the minority group faces the pressure of gravitating towards the use of a majority language. He cites a case study investigating the use of Irish in Ireland, where findings indicate that a lack of the communicative aspect of a language need not necessarily mean that the language ceases to be valued. Therefore, one's ability to speak a language, in this case, a minority language, may not be a true indicator of the attitude towards the language.

In his recent study on attitudes and motivation amongst students in multilingual Spain, Lasagabaster (2017), notes that home language use and the linguistic model used in schools can impact student attitudes towards their first language, in this case, Spanish, and the minority language learnt, for example, Catalan, Basque or Galician. The study also revealed that more negative attitudes were reported towards Basque amongst those who were schooled in the 'monolingual' model. This model had Spanish as the medium of instruction, while Basque was taught as a subject totalling between 3-4 hours a week. Moreover, research has also consistently indicated that proficiency of Basque when learnt as a subject is generally low (Lasagabaster, 2017). Students who were schooled in the other two models—partially or totally immersion programmes—displayed positive attitudes towards the minority language. The first language for these students was Spanish.

However, the issue that remains across all three models is the decreased minority language usage beyond the classroom, in the wider social context (Lasagabaster, 2017). In this case, it is not clear if low proficiency had contributed to the reported decreased language usage, or in the varying attitudes displayed. Nonetheless, Lasagabaster's (2017) study demonstrates that positive attitudes towards a minority language may not translate to increased use of the language for multiple reasons.

Letsholo (2009) discusses the attitudes of Bakalanga youth towards their mother tongue, Ikalanga in multilingual Botswana where English co-exists as an official language with Setswana, which is also the national language. The study, based on a questionnaire survey and interviews, provides some salient points in relation to attitudes towards a minority language, in this case, Ikalanga, and the possibility of language shift to either of the official languages. It also offers an insight into the implications of the education policy with regard to attitudes towards minority languages in Botswana.

Letsholo's (2009) study revealed that home language use and school language policy can influence attitudes and language choice, as did Lasagabaster's (2017) study. In the case of the Bakalanga youth, the use of their mother tongue in the family, as well as in peer and intra-ethnic communication, indicates that the shift towards English or Setswana is gradual. However, it has to be noted that use of



Ikalanga was minimal in the school domain as its usage was not promoted. Hence, school language policies can convey subtle or more obvious messages in relation to the value or status a language is given. Another point to note is that fluency was cited as a reason for the choice of English over Setswana or vice versa, while socio-economic mobility and utility surfaced as important reasons for English to be used in communication.

The vast literature on the association between attitudes and language use/ language learning (e.g., Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016; Vail, 2006) across different language situations are invariably influenced by notions of instrumentality and integrativeness, as explained in Gardner's and Lambert's motivation theory (1972). In other words, while a less dominant language may be valued for its link to one's ethnic and cultural identity (integrativeness), the more dominant language (be it English or another ethnic language) may be favoured for its economic advantages (instrumentality). However, the synergistic interplay of attitudes and language choice is far too complex to be generalised given the variance in macro and micro factors (e.g., socio-political settings, societal or individual perceptions of a language, and government policies in relation to languages) in any context.

### **3.5 Landmark LMLS Case Studies**

Nancy Dorian's study of the 'death' of East Sutherland Gaelic amongst the fisher folk community in north-east Scotland, and Susan Gal's study of the shift from Hungarian to German within the Oberwart community in Austria are an often-cited seminal research that illustrates the salient factors responsible for a shift to a more 'powerful' language. Another significant contribution to research on the LMLS phenomenon is Li Wei's (1994) study of the immigrant Chinese community in the United Kingdom. These will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **3.5.1 Gaelic**

Dorian's extensive, longitudinal study on the shift in structural aspects of the Gaelic variety (Dorian, 2014) highlights a few apparent forces that underpinned the gradual shift from Gaelic to English, and eventually, the death of Gaelic in the immigrant fisher folk community.

First, the involvement of prestige or status drove the shift from Gaelic to English, the dominant language. Second, the non-transmission of the stigmatised dialect inter-generationally, stemmed from its association with fishing and the socioeconomic status of the community; however, it was observed that the dialect was maintained intra-generationally. Third, the decline of Gaelic across three generations demonstrated a shift from monolingualism (in the immigrants) to skilled bilingualism (second generation) to a stage where the third generation had become “semi-speakers”, a term coined by Dorian to refer to the “imperfect Gaelic [they spoke] but [who] were very much more at home in English” (Dorian, 2014, p.138). Interestingly, these semi-speakers had “acquired a degree of Gaelic all the same, through their own interest and effort” (Dorian, 2014, p.5).

However, a recent criticism of Dorian’s investigation of the Gaelic dialect points to a narrow treatment of the “factors or forces that lead to LS” (Pauwels, 2016, p.14). Although a more detailed survey of the macro-sociolinguistic factors implicated in the shift from Gaelic to English would have been helpful for a more comprehensive insight, Dorian’s study nonetheless reveals the significance of the individual, family, community or societal factors (Potowski, 2013) in making sense of the LMLS situation.

### **3.5.2 German-Hungarian bilingual**

Susan Gal’s influential study of the German-Hungarian bilingual community in Oberwart that spanned a year (Gal, 1979) was based on interviews and participant observation. Key findings proved that age, as well as the extent of ‘peasantness’ were critical factors in language choice; whereas German remained a language that was identified with upward mobility, Hungarian was relegated to the position of a marginalised language in the shift from mainly Hungarian, to German-Hungarian, and eventually to German only (Gal, 1979). Further to this, the stigmatised aspect of ‘peasantness’ was also observed to have resulted in exogamous marriages, where Hungarian women, as opposed to the Hungarian men, avoided a peasant way of life by opting for an identity associated with the German work life (Gal, 1978). Overall, Gal’s findings demonstrate two fundamental aspects in examining language shift: first, the language-identity relatedness and second, the influence of social networks when making language choices.

A comparison of Dorian's and Gal's research findings discussed above converge in that (a) transmission or non-transmission of the home language across generations can be pivotal in language maintenance or shift; (b) the status of a less dominant language can influence the shift to a more prestigious language; (c) the younger generation tend to have demonstrated a most significant switch to the dominant or prestigious language; (d) the shift in language is invariably linked to pragmatic reasons which includes socio-economic mobility.

However, the case of the semi-speakers in East Sutherland appears to be an anomaly where the home language was consciously maintained by the younger speakers, although their parents chose to not transmit the language. This may be a case where an ethnic identity or cultural attachment is of significant symbolic value even if the language has receded substantially or totally disappeared from a community, as also seen in the English-speaking Welsh and Irish (Edwards, 2009, p. 251) However, it is not clear from Dorian's study what had motivated the 'semi-speakers' to continue using the language, although in an imperfect form.

### **3.5.3 Choice and shift: Chinese or English**

In his study of language choice and language shift amongst the Tyneside Chinese community across three generations in the United Kingdom, Li Wei (1994) maintains that language choice, whether inter- or intra-generational is determined by interlocutors to a large extent.

Furthermore, the younger generations may choose to not reciprocate in the home language spoken to them by their predecessors as demonstrated in instances of contrastive language choices, particularly at turn-taking junctures during interaction across generations. This means the choice of one language over another evidenced in codeswitching scenarios may indicate preference and competence (amongst other reasons) of the speaker (Wei, 1994). The choice of one language over another, in this case, Cantonese over English, which was observed in the older "monolingual" or "functionally monolingual", contrasted with the British-born Chinese, who were predominantly the "functionally monolingual 'host' language speaker" (Wei, 1994, pp. 181-183). Reasons for this shift were attributed primarily to age and social network. Li Wei concludes that English-dominant bilingualism — "through [sic]

various degrees of bilingualism” (p.179) — was apparent in the Tyneside Chinese community, a clear indication of language shift from Cantonese to English.

Li Wei’s (1994) study of language choice and language shift in the Chinese community, however, has its limitations as put forth by Canagarajah (1995): first, the choice of one language over another (English/Cantonese) in codeswitching was not sufficiently explored to ascertain if notions of inferiority or superiority underpinned the choices made; second, the question of whether status, economic advantage or disadvantage related to language choice amongst the Cantonese monolinguals and English-dominant bilinguals, was not explored; third, the fact that Li Wei’s research focussed on only the home domain in examining language choice precludes the use of language codes beyond the home setting. Hence, the ‘gap’ in this research points to the importance of investigating the social functions that underpin language choice beyond the home domain.

#### **4.5.4 The case of Welsh and Irish**

In their investigation of intergenerational transmission of Welsh in Wales, Edwards and Newcombe (2005) explores the sustainability of the school as a site of Welsh language transmission following legislation of the language in the midst of English. The study reveals that while school language policies and other community initiatives aim to grow Welsh in predominantly English-speaking Wales, the task remains an uphill one due to the “acquisition planning” (Edwards & Newcombe, 2005, p. 299) involved. In other words, the school is only part of the continuum of language learning or development. The study, therefore, reinforces that the role of the family, adult proficiency in the language, and confidence level in using the language are important to consider when making sense of overall language usage, which includes transmitting the language. That is, even if a bilingual education were to (superficially) increase the absolute figures in Welsh language proficiency, it may not translate to higher confidence level in using the language or predict adult proficiency past schooling.

However, an unusual initiative of partnering with healthcare providers to promote bilingualism in Wales among parents and prospective parents shows the extent to which Welsh language transmission is encouraged. This initiative may promote an awareness in addressing an uptake in Welsh language in Wales, but the feasibility of this in multilingual, multi-ethnic settings including Singapore may be

too complex and problematic, in light of the diverse ethnic or language profiles of healthcare workers, in addition to their language allegiances.

A more recent study by Jones, Cunliffe and Honeycutt (2013) discusses the use of Welsh language in the social networking site, Twitter as reported by young Welsh speakers aged between 25 and 34. The study, which utilised a questionnaire survey revealed that the minority language is now being perceived as contemporaneous by a fraction of the Twitter users in light of its usage in virtual space. The authors note that although the findings may suggest a strengthening of the Welsh community and the language, they are not proof that the language will be maintained in the social networking platform in the long term.

The Welsh situation illustrated in the two studies above is not uncommon in the context of minority languages where either the school language policy, governing bodies or external agencies attempt to bolster maintenance and usage of the languages in the presence of more dominant languages. However, despite efforts at revitalising the minority language, the future of the Welsh language, as it may be with other minority languages in other contexts, remains uncertain.

This perpetual state of uncertainty or vulnerability that minority languages seem to be predisposed to has been recently highlighted by Edwards (2017) in his review of Irish and other Celtic languages. In the case of Irish, it has become clear that schools alone were not going to be sufficient enough to revitalise the language, a similar predicament faced by the Welsh language, as mentioned above. The over-reliance on schools for the purpose of minority language maintenance or revitalisation has been criticised as placing “unreasonable demands on the education system” (Edwards, 2017, p.18). Edwards’ critical stance, although reasonable to a certain extent, would need further probing to make sense of reasons underlying such demands. Low levels of proficiency in the minority language amongst parents, for example, could contribute to behaviours that explain over-reliance on external agencies to maintain a minority language. Another important observation raised by Edwards is the general incongruence between positive attitudes demonstrated towards ‘small languages’ such as Irish, and the actual implementation of these attitudes in the social context over time.

Therefore, it appears that while it is important to demonstrate or nurture a positive attitude towards a minority language in the hope of raising its status or

revitalising it, the more critical thing to do is to translate that into an ongoing action. The Welsh and Irish examples discussed above may offer a good comparison with the Tamil situation in Singapore, particularly with reference to institutional support and attitudes towards the language. This shall be explored in Chapter 8 (Discussions).

### **3.6 Codeswitching**

As codeswitching is not a core aspect of this study, a brief discussion of the definitions that attempt to explain this phenomenon, as well as its association with language shift will be provided. Codeswitching (hereafter CS) is a broad-ranging term which includes “language-boundary crossing choices” (Coulmas, 2013, p. 124), and is commonplace in multilingual settings, where speakers of two or more languages shift between languages at their disposal (Coulmas, 2013). Code mixing has also been used in the literature in an attempt to draw distinctions between the two phenomena, however, the boundaries have remained fuzzy. Therefore, codeswitching remains a problematic term in the literature, as no definitive conceptual boundaries could be drawn to differentiate between codeswitching and codemixing (Ritchie & Bhatia, 2012). For example, Myers-Scotton (1993) prefers the term codeswitching on the premise that the two related phenomena “may have similar socio- psychological motivations” (p.1). On the other hand, Appel and Muysken (2006) amongst others, have classified codeswitching as intra-sentential, inter-sentential and emblematic (p. 118). For the purpose of clarity, this study will adopt Appel and Muysken’s (2006) definition of codeswitching, which will, therefore, function as an umbrella term to include ‘codemixing’ as well.

According to Coulmas (2013), the choice of language (or language variety) carries social meanings, and can be determined by a number of “language external” variables that range from fluency to prestige of languages in question, amongst others (Coulmas, 2013, p.135). Another important point that the author highlights is the relative position of the languages, for example, a dominant versus a subordinate one in instances of codeswitching. This may shed some light on how people identify themselves, in relation to the status of a language.

#### **3.6.1 CS in contexts**

In his study of CS amongst children in Singapore, Foley (1998, p.136) cites an example of a predominantly English-speaking Indian home, where the

interlocutors, a mother and child, switch between English and Tamil for the primary purpose of clarifying terms and pronunciation. In a similar study limited to the home domain of a Singaporean Chinese household, Tan (1988) lists the social motivations that had prompted CS in the particular context, by drawing upon the collective works of Gumperz, Kachru, and Nartey. Some of these social motivations that may be relevant to the Singaporean context in relation to inter- or intra-ethnic communication are (a) topic; (b) situation; (c) audience (in-group or out-group); (d) habitual usage of lexical terms in a certain code; (e) lack of proficiency or knowledge of a code.

Investigating CS amongst bilingual Bruneians, McLellan (2005, p.161) points to “topic” and language behaviour typical of “young people’s modern way of speaking” as the top two motivations reported for CS, although he believes other motivations are implicated in the language choices made by the Malay-English bilinguals.

Appel and Muysken (2006) clearly explain the functions of codeswitching as illustrated in the examples above. One of these, which may be relevant in the discussion of codeswitching in Singapore, is the referential function of codeswitching, which refers to the lack of proficiency or knowledge of a code. In other words, according to Appel and Muysken:

This type of switching is one that bilingual speakers are most conscious of. When asked why they switch, they tend to say that it is because they do not know the word for it in the other language, or because the language chosen is more fit for talking about a given subject. (2006, p. 118)

Tan’s (1988) illustration of ‘audience’, aligns with Appel and Muysken’s (2006) directive function of codeswitching, which serves the purpose of either deliberately excluding a member in a conversation, or on the other hand, speaking the code of the hearer to accommodate, as posited in Giles’ Accommodation Theory (Appel & Muysken, 2006).

Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon (2009) present a different focal point of codeswitching by surveying the *attitudes* of one thousand Primary Five students in Singapore, towards codeswitching between English and their respective mother tongues, in this case, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, as well as the use of mother tongue only, and English only, through the mixed guise approach. The findings of

this study revealed that overall, these students demonstrated a positive attitude towards codeswitching between English and their mother tongue, possibly to signal a strong cultural identity (Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009). The study also drew on the works of Pakir (1993) and Vaish (2007b) to confirm that codeswitching was characteristic of Singaporean speech across both formal and informal domains.

Therefore, codeswitching has become a phenomenon associated with language contact, and is uniquely expressed across multilingual societies such as Singapore. As such, this study on Tamil and Tamils aims to examine the ‘why’ factor in codeswitching from a sociolinguistic perspective in order to make sense of the motivations underlying such codeswitches on one hand, and to see if any similarities exist with the works discussed above.

### **3.7 Factoring in Identity in LMLS**

Of particular interest is how a speaker of more than one language constructs his identity or identities. In addition, the relative position of language per se in relation to identity construction, and other variables that largely influence identity construction are important considerations in making sense of LMLS. These will be discussed as follows.

Jenkins (2004) notes the simultaneous representation of similarities and dissimilarities between self- and collective identities where “public individuality in the interaction order is in part an expression of each person’s idiosyncratic combination of collective identifications” (p.79). In a similar vein, Joseph (2006) describes this ‘similar yet different’ conceptualisation of the ‘collective’ and ‘self’ as one where “group identities seem more abstract than individual ones...[y]et combinations of such abstractions are what our individual identities are made of, and group identity frequently finds its most concrete manifestation in a single, symbolic individual” (p.486). Norton (2010, p.350) posits that “gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of [self] identity” (p.350) in relation to a group identity.

A central strand that binds the relatively more current scholarly discussion of the self and group identities aforementioned is the constant construction and reconstruction of one’s layered identity or identities in an evolving social network where the ‘self’ is not a stable or homogeneous existence. This can be summed up in



Joseph's (2006) words: "Each of us performs a repertoire of identities that are constantly shifting, and we negotiate and renegotiate according to the circumstances" (p. 489).

Drawing on the definitions of identity in the literature, Hatoss (2013, p.39) has delineated the inherent multidimensionality or layers of identity as: (a) personal identity (what the person thinks that he/she is); (b) enacted identity (how identity is expressed in language and communication); (c) relational identity or identities in reference to each other; and (d) communal identity (as defined by collectivities).

Therefore, the term 'identity' has to be conceptualised as a fluid whole where individuals are, from time to time, making sense of the primary question 'who am I'? This is particularly relevant in immigrant or diasporic contexts where the individual may assimilate or integrate, contingent on the social- psychological forces present, as Hatoss (2013) points out in her study of the Sudanese refugees in Australia.

### **3.7.1 Questions of identity in Singapore**

Edwards (2009) raises the question of identity construction amongst multilinguals who may display "variations in identity and allegiances" (p. 248). This is largely relevant in the context of Singapore when considering the different speech communities, namely the Mandarin, Malay and Tamil speakers. A case in point highlighted by Quirk (2000) is that of the Chinese community in Singapore, where the author states that Mandarin was used to cement the different Chinese dialect communities that existed, in order to create a pan identity, and in a narrower sense, create a transcendental Singaporean identity. However, it is partially inaccurate for Quirk to conclude that "Mandarin is promoted [...] to assist the development of a Singaporean identity across the *dialect* boundaries of Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese, *and* the ethnic boundaries of Chinese, Malay and Tamil..." (Quirk, 2000, p.9, emphasis in original). Whilst the claim that Mandarin unified the Chinese dialect groups is true from a linguistic perspective, it is erroneous to conclude that the language did the same for the other speech communities.

That the Singaporean identity is largely Mandarin-based, is a skewed representation. A combination of factors such as a shared national history, or even the indigenised colloquial variety of Singaporean English, Singlish, could intermix to

give meaning to an overarching Singaporean identity that the different ethnic groups can relate to.

### **3.7.2 Race and exogamous marriages**

In Singapore, racial identification is a ‘given’, based on the race, with the three main categories being Chinese, Malay and Indian (as mentioned in Chapter 1); those who do not fall under these categories (i.e., ‘others’) are identified according to a perceived category, for example, ‘Eurasian’, ‘Sri Lankan’, ‘Caucasian’ and so on. Race identification becomes problematised in double-barrelled races where children of mixed marriages are assigned an identity (by the parents), for instance, Chinese-Indian or Indian-Chinese, based on whichever race is perceived as ‘dominant’.

Furthermore, an increasing trend in inter-racial or exogamous marriages have been reported, with just under 22% of the total number of marriages in Singapore accounted for in 2016, a significant rise seen since 1990 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2017b). If this trend were to continue, it may have implications on the linguistic profile of Singapore, as well as the social identities of such individuals. Therefore, the social identification of these ‘bi-racial’ individuals becomes inherently complicated as they find themselves in a conflicted tapestry of mixed languages, cultures or religions.

### **3.7.3 The Sindhi Hindu diaspora example**

If one’s mother tongue is not a dominant marker within the space of one’s identity, what is identity rooted to then? David’s (2008) study, which utilised an email questionnaire, aimed to ascertain the markers of identity amongst the Sindhi Hindu diasporic community across ten countries. Her findings, based on thirty-two responses, demonstrate that language (Sindhi) does not necessarily make one (a Sindhi) feel any less Sindhi. Slightly more than half of the participants had indicated ten markers of identity, among which networking with other Sindhis and food emerged as dominant markers. Although the findings of this study consisting of a small sample size do not represent the larger diasporic Sindhi community, they are a confirmation that the intactness of a group need not necessarily be anchored in language only.

David’s (1998, 2001, 2008) studies on the Sindhi community support Smolicz’s (1988) viewpoint that group structure can survive the loss of a language,

and correspondingly, Fase, Jaspaert and Koon's (1992) observations that "if the minority language disappears without the group dissolving, it means that members of the minority groups have chosen to communicate in the dominant language within the group" (p.6).

The Sindhi example above parallels the English-speaking Welsh and Irish communities as reported by Edwards (2009). In the case of the latter, they continue to uphold their traditions, which remain an intangible and symbolic marker of their identities (Edwards, 2009, p.251) at the expense of their mother tongues. Therefore, ethnic language loss may not automatically translate to a loss of ethnic identity. For such communities, other markers of identities, such as their unique culture, may significantly contribute to their overall sense of identity.

#### **3.7.4 The Malaysian Tamil example**

In another study by Naji and David (2006) on markers of identity among Malaysian Tamils, Indian clothing, celebration of Indian festivals as well as endogamy emerged as primary markers that sustain the ethnic identity among younger Tamils, who have shifted away from using Tamil beyond the home domain.

This contrasted with the older section of the Tamil community where the Tamil language still remained a dominant marker of ethnic identity. Overall, the common denominator for the Malaysian Tamil ethnic identity across the three age groups (young, middle and old) surveyed, points to Indian food and lifestyle (Naji & David, 2006).

It appears that in communities experiencing a shift away from their mother tongues, the ethnic language may then recede to become a secondary marker of identity whilst other markers of identity dominate. Therefore, whilst language may influence identity and vice versa, other aspects such as culture, may prove that usage of the ethnic mother tongue may not primarily define identity at an individual or societal level.

The next section will examine LMLS of Indian languages, in particular Tamil, in the wider Indian diaspora, namely, Australia, South Africa, Mauritius and Malaysia, before focusing on Singapore. Identity construction in these contexts will also be discussed. Important factors such as language policy in education, its

underlying concept of bilingualism, and how this may have had repercussions in terms of language use will be also included in the following discussion.

### **3.8 Tamil in the Wider Diaspora**

#### **3.8.1 Tamil in Australia**

According to Smolicz (1988), the emergence of a multicultural, multilingual Australia is to be perceived as advantageous with the entry of other non-English languages into the English-dominant country.

Clyne and Kipp (1997) draw on the 1996 census data in relation to languages other than English spoken in the home domain to provide an analysis of language shift patterns and maintenance of the languages in comparison to the 1986 and 1991 census statistics. They observed that exogamy and the relative position of language in the community's culture are strong indicators of shift, while at the same time, the latter can be a source of language maintenance. Another of Clyne and Kipp's (1997) important finding indicated that those with an Islamic or Eastern orthodox background were seen to maintain their languages in the home domain more successfully, as compared to other immigrant groups. It appears that religion, in this case, could have accounted for the maintenance of these languages.

In the case of Tamil, it has been categorised as a language spoken by a relatively smaller population, and one associated with immigrants who arrived in Australia from the mid-1970s, and which demonstrated an almost three-fold increase, the most significant, in the ten-year period, closely followed by the Indo-Aryan language, Hindi. However, amongst the Indian languages, only Hindi and Urdu have been added to the list of languages to be taught in schools, owing to their potential economic capital in terms of trade and tourism.

This further underlines the strong correlation between perceived economic benefits accorded to certain languages and the availability of such languages across primary, secondary and tertiary academic institutions.

To date, research on the Tamil language in Australia has been sparse, and hence, it is difficult to gain an insight into its growth or vitality, apart from making sense of the statistics drawn from census reports. However, as pointed out by Fernandez and Clyne (2007), census questions that aim to quantify the number of speakers of languages other than English, or to gauge language shift or maintenance

within a certain linguistic community face the challenge of subjectivity or ambiguity in such questions. They further assert that the question relating to language use in the home domain illustrates a rather “simplistic picture of language use patterns” (p. 185).

In further exploring the Tamil situation in Australia so as to supplement and expand upon census findings afore-mentioned, Fernandez and Clyne (2007) studied language use amongst migrant Tamil speakers in Melbourne. They employed a qualitative approach comprising face-to-face interviews (complemented by participant observation) with sixteen Indian and Sri Lankan families that were either Hindus or Christians, as well as focus group discussions with representatives from Tamil or religious organisations.

Fernandez and Clyne’s (2007, p.185) case study revealed some important findings that pointed to variability in language use patterns owing to factors that include pre-migration experience with language maintenance, and with English in India or Sri Lanka; religiosity and religion; level and medium of education. Therefore, the study indicates that socio-political, socio-religious and socio-economic aspects are important considerations in LMLS research.

A recent study by Nirukshi Perera (2015) offers a comparative analysis of the Tamil and Sinhalese migrant experience in Melbourne, Australia, with one of the focal points being the role of religion in maintaining the language. A qualitative methodology was adopted, consisting of a semi-structured interview with a total of 18 participants. Whilst her study revealed no significant differences between the two ethnic groups from Sri Lanka in terms of maintaining their respective languages, it demonstrated a positive correlation between religiosity and maintenance of languages in both the groups. Perera’s (2015) study paralleled Fernandez and Clyne’s (2007) to a certain degree in that it drew on the participants’ pre-migration experience to ascertain the extent of its influence in relation to LMLS, identity and attitude towards the English language. As well, both these studies indicate religion as a contributing factor towards ethnic language maintenance, a view similarly held by Spolsky (2003).

One of the strengths of both studies points to the qualitative, comparative analysis of (a) Tamil speakers across religions, from both India and Sri Lanka, and (b) between two ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The small sample size (<20) in both

studies, and the possible challenges faced in recruiting potential participants also lean towards employing a comparative analysis in presenting a broad insight into the different groups surveyed. However, both studies could have included participants from the second generation for richer data in further examining the LMLS phenomenon in the diasporic communities surveyed.

### **3.8.2 Tamil in South Africa**

South Africa has accorded official status to eleven languages which includes English, Afrikaans and other indigenous languages; however, in reality, English predominates (Kamwangamalu, 2006, 2007).

Rajend Mesthrie has investigated the language situation in South Africa, which includes Indian languages such as Bhojpuri-Hindi, and to a lesser extent, Tamil. His work (1992, 2007a, 2007b) integrates sociolinguistics and historical linguistics in surveying the Tamil situation in South Africa. Mapping the history of Tamil in South Africa since its transplantation during the period of indenture, Mesthrie (1992, 2007a, 2007b) reveals the case of language shift based on census data (1951- 1991only) and interviews, as well as the language contact situation via language biography, and archived records, which include observations on the language repertoire of the South African Indian diaspora by the most notable South African diasporic, Mahatma Gandhi. By the 1950s, South African Indians were described as “one of the most multilingual communities in South Africa” (Mesthrie, 2007b, p.136) where Tamil-speakers could converse in Bhojpuri, the informal variety of Hindi. At the same time, Mesthrie (2007a) mentions that Tamil was “once the most-spoken Indian language between 1860-1970” (p.146)” in comparison to Gujarati, as illustrated in the census figures, before its number of speakers plummeted to just over four thousand in 1991 (Mesthrie, 2007b).

Again, the inherent problem of using census figures in estimating language shift surfaces in the South African case. Mesthrie (2007a, 2007b) challenges the accuracy of the census figures between 1960 and 1970, and pinpoints the exclusion of passive and semi-speakers as well as L2 speakers of Tamil, as a contributing factor for the skewed figures. Correspondingly, the accuracy of using census figures is questioned by Pauwels in the following example:

The multilingualism of the following speaker would be invisible or go

unrecorded: a woman born in India who speaks fluent Tamil, fluent English and some Hindi, and now permanently resides in the United Kingdom where she uses English as her main - most frequently used language. However, she continues to use Tamil regularly with family and friends [...] such a question [What is your main language] is unlikely to expose any use of languages other than English by members of the second or subsequent generations, as they almost always use English as their main language. (2016, p.38)

However, based on the scant literature in relation to Tamil in South Africa, Mesthrie's findings confirm a situation of shift away from the heritage language Tamil, to such an extent that it has reached an "obsolescent status in South Africa" (Mesthrie, 2007a, p.180) although retaining its symbolic meaning: "Tamil remains a language close to sectors of the Indian community for its heritage value, including the domains of classical culture and religion" (Mesthrie, 2007a, p.191).

He cites several reasons for the decline in Tamil by drawing on the generalisations made for the other Indian languages. A few of these include: (a) the dominance of English as an economic asset and lingua franca; (b) English education; (c) the lack of prestige in comparison to English, and association with indentured workers; (d) the unintelligibility across the Indian languages present in South Africa (Mesthrie, 2007a, 2007b).

It appears that where Tamil recedes as a spoken language to a state of obsolescence or near obsolescence due to the presence of a more dominant language, English, its symbolic function tends to remain intact in the religious and cultural (music, dance, classical singing) domains, as the above Australian and South African studies indicate. However, sporadic research on the maintenance or shift of Tamil language in these diasporic contexts, compounded by the challenges of using census data and recruiting participants in the studies can contribute to a seemingly disjointed representation of the LMLS phenomenon in the Tamil communities surveyed.

### **3.8.3 Tamil in Mauritius**

According to the 2000 census figures, Tamil is one of the seventeen languages spoken in Mauritius alongside other Indian languages such as Bhojपुरi, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Telegu and Tamil which have been termed "Asian ancestral languages" (Bissoonauth, 2011, p.422). Tamil is offered as an optional

language in addition to two other Indian languages, Hindi and Urdu, at both the primary and secondary levels (Bissoonauth, 2011).

Bissoonauth (2011) analyses the extent of Indian ancestral language usage in the home domain based on the findings of two studies she conducted in the mid-1990s and 2009 respectively. A mixed method was employed for a comparison to be made between the qualitative data from the interviews, and the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The latter focussed on eliciting data on factors that contributed to LMLS amongst the 140 secondary school students surveyed, as well as their language choices and attitudes towards their respective ancestral languages.

A strong correlation between age and ancestral language usage was observed in both the studies conducted by Bissoonauth (2011). That is, the ancestral language was widely spoken particularly amongst the grandparent generation. Results also indicated a slight increase in the use of Tamil (as with other Indian languages) in the 2009 sample in comparison to the 1998 sample surveyed. She explains that the apparent increase in Tamil language usage in the home domain could be due to the availability of the language in school, and as such, a higher possibility of using the language at home. Therefore, according to Bissoonauth, the ancestral language is maintained by the older speakers on one hand, and through schools, on the other.

The Mauritian example shows that language shift was seen to be highest amongst those of a higher economic status, where the ancestral language almost ceased to be in existence in the domestic front (Bissoonauth, 2011). Also, the impracticality of learning the ancestral languages in terms of economic gain contributed to the preference for English or French, as these were considered viable languages associated with social gains (Bissoonauth, 2011). The study further reiterates the maintenance of one's culture and religion as symbolic of an ethnic community, in the absence of its language. This presents an extreme case of shift, and loss of a language in the home domain in spite of maintenance efforts by the media and school language policies.

Overall, Bissoonauth's (2011) study highlights the common threads in language shift studies where (a) a correlation between socioeconomic status and degree of shift to a dominant language is apparent; (b) the economic value of a language fuels the shift to a more dominant or prestigious language.



### **3.8.4 Tamil and ethnic identity in the Sri Lankan diaspora**

Canagarajah (2012) introduces the term ‘self-styling’ to describe the construction of an ethnic identity amongst the Sri Lankan diasporic youth in Canada, Britain and the United States, with limited proficiency in Tamil. The study focusses on Sri Lankan Tamil identity construction in relation to the heritage language and culture in a diasporic community which has “virtually [become] monolingual English speakers” (Canagarajah, 2012, p.126).

As Canagarajah (2012) explains, ‘self-styling’ refers to the use of in-group codes, as opposed to out-group codes for the purpose of “in-group identity work” (p.126) where the young Sri Lankans use their limited proficiency of Tamil to construct an ethnic identity through strategies that demonstrate unique appropriations of grammar, lexicon and phonology of the Tamil language. Therefore, ethnic identity construction is mediated as a performative strategy amongst the youth who do not necessarily construct “identities traditionally associated with that [Tamil] language” (p.126). Interestingly, despite a decline in Tamil language use, self-styling allows the young Tamils who identify themselves as predominantly English-speakers, to construct a unique ethnic identity. This may emerge as a salient feature amongst Tamil diasporic youths in predominantly English-speaking countries.

In a previous study investigating the shift from Tamil language to English amongst the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, Canagarajah (2008) cites British colonisation, and hence, the relative superiority of English, and the lack of inter-generational transmission of Tamil, amongst others, as important contributing factors.

Furthermore, Canagarajah (2008) compares the maintenance of the Tamil language in European countries (e.g. Germany, France and the Netherlands) with that in English-speaking countries, where language maintenance is evidenced to be lower. The reasons for this, as Canagarajah (2008) argues is a combination of the following factors:

1. Poor intergenerational transmission of the heritage language.
2. Pre-migration circumstances.
3. English-Tamil bilingualism amongst the grandparents.

4. Pre-dominance of English in Anglophone countries.
5. The insistence of acquiring English proficiency by parents.

Therefore, socio-psychological as well as socio-political factors, as evidenced in the above example can contribute to language shift or language maintenance of a less dominant language.

### **3.8.5 Sindhi and Tamil in Malaysia**

David's (1998, 2001) investigation of Sindhi, an ethnic language in decline in Malaysia, and how the reduced or non-use of this language amongst the ethnolinguistic group, the Sindhis, have influenced their identity construction form the major component of this mixed-methods study. Based on a questionnaire survey, participant observation and recordings, David concludes that the Sindhi language is not a marker of identity. Instead, other core values, as listed by Smolicz (1988) such as religion and customs, to name a few, may take precedence over language per se in the construction of an ethnic or cultural identity.

In the case of the Sindhis of Malaysia, a shift from Sindhi to English, the "new first language" (David, 1998, p.76) and Malay, the national language, is indicative of language death. The study also reveals that there are distinct language practices, which includes code-mixing of English and Malay, inter- and intra-generationally and across genders.

David (2001) points to the lack of inter-generational transmission as one of the underlying reasons for Sindhi's rapid decline. Other reasons put forth by David are as follows:

1. Perceived lack of practical value of the Sindhi language.
2. Malaysia's environment.
3. Exogamous marriages.
4. The presence of English and Malay.
5. The Sindhis' non-resistance to language maintenance.
6. The minority status of the community in terms of numerical strength.

However, David's mention of Malaysia's 'environment' needs further explanation as the term can carry different interpretations. An important finding that

she highlights is the unique case of younger Sindhis in Malaysia, where unlike the traditionalist view of a shift from bilingualism to monolingualism as characteristic of a language shift phenomenon, the younger generation has embraced two languages instead: Malay and English, regarded as Malaysia's main languages (David, 2001).

David's studies (1998, 2001) prove that strong ethnic identity maintenance is possible in the absence of the ethnic language. The studies also support Smolicz's (1988) core values theory and corroborate with the findings presented by Sankar and Sargunan (2008) in their investigation of the Iyer Tamil community (a prestigious Indian caste) in Malaysia. Sankar and Sargunan's (2008) study clearly illustrates that the Iyer Tamils have shifted to English but at the same time, demonstrate their ethnic identity, as do the Sindhis (David, 1998, 2001) through other markers of identity.

The study of the Iyer community demonstrates that language policies, in addition to the economic value of a language can influence one's attitude towards the mother tongue, and one's perception of identity. As Sankar and Sargunan assert, "with this particular community of Tamils, the loss of the Tamil language does not appear to have brought about an identity crisis" (pp. 178- 179).

A recent mixed-methods research study across three generations by Alagappar, Dealwis and David (2016) investigated LMLS as well as cultural identity amongst the Tamils in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The Tamils in Kuching form the largest Indian group and are mainly Hindus (Alagappar et al., 2016). The data drawn from unstructured interviews and questionnaires present a slightly different picture of the Kuching Tamils in terms of Tamil language shift, maintenance and identity in comparison to the Tamil Iyers.

Alagappar et al.'s study (2016) indicates that the young Tamils of Kuching see the importance of preserving their ethnic language in spite of their lack of proficiency in it. Although this group has shifted to the use of English to a large extent, they continue to maintain the language through its functional use. The Kuching Tamils have turned to other markers of identity, namely "festivals, marriage, music, dance, movies, games, clothing and food" (Alagappar et al., 2016, p.163). Therefore, the case of the Kuching Tamils is one of minimal assimilation in the midst of other cultures, which further validates that ethnic language loss in this context is unlikely.

The Malaysian examples of Tamil and Sindhi yet again stress the interplay of factors in language shift, for example, the status of the language, attitude towards the ethnic language, and language use patterns in the family, with intergenerational transmission emerging as an important factor in language maintenance.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the main findings of the literature relating to Tamil language and identity amongst the Tamils in Singapore. In addition, it will present relevant findings in relation to LMLS studies that have investigated two other ethnic groups in Singapore, the Chinese and Malays. A comparison across the ethnic groups in this case would provide useful insights into common factors that could have contributed to a shift to English.

### **3.9 The Singaporean Case of Tamil and Other Ethnic Languages**

Much of the research on Tamil language and the Indian community, in particular the Tamil population, has focussed on language use patterns, language maintenance, shift or identity (Kadakara, 2015; Mani & Gopinathan, 1983; Ramiah, 1991; Rubdy et al., 2008; Saravanan, 1993, 1998, 2001a, 2001b; Schiffman, 2003, 2008; Vaish, 2007a) within multilingual, multi-ethnic Singapore. However, there has been very limited research in the 2010s that focussed on Tamil language in Singapore, with the exception of Kadakara's (2015) home domain analysis of the status of Tamil in Singapore.

One of the earliest observations made of Tamil language in Singapore was that of Mani and Gopinathan's (1983) on the acquisition and usage of the language, more than three decades ago. The authors put forth two issues that were viewed as threats at the time of the study: the phasing out of Tamil-language schools, and the apparent decline in Tamil language usage in comparison to the other languages, as reported by Kuo (cited in Mani & Gopinathan, 1983) based on census figures.

The 1983 study by Mani and Gopinathan posited a case of subtractive bilingualism where a minority group, as a result of:

national educational policies and social pressures of various sorts, are forced to "subtract out" of their basic language in order to develop minimal competence in a national or prestigious international language. For these people, the state of their bilingualism at any point in time is likely to reflect

some degree of subtraction of the basic language and its cultural accompaniments. (Mani & Gopinathan, 1983, p. 106)

Further to this claim, the study maintained that the ethnic language could sustain itself only if the cultural traditions (e.g., locally produced programmes, the classical arts) were promoted alongside efforts to promote the language: “For Tamil - it needs to be stressed - can only be a living, not a textbook, language when it has a vital cultural tradition to sustain it” (Mani & Gopinathan, 1983, p.115). Whilst the authors drew an assertive conclusion as such, the survival of a language cannot be reduced to a single point of ‘revival’, in this case, ‘cultural’ tradition. Moreover, subtractive bilingualism implies that an ethnic language is *forcefully* or *deliberately* removed from one’s repertoire, which is quite the contrary in Singapore where ethnic languages have access to institutional support.

Drawing on census figures, national surveys and small-scale studies, Mani and Gopinathan’s (1983) study concluded that the situation of Tamil language was of concern, owing to several socio-political factors that included language planning policies; antipathy towards Tamil, particularly amongst non-Tamil speakers within the community; the perceived lack of usefulness of Tamil in the wider society; and the opportunities associated with the English language.

Since Mani and Gopinathan’s (1983) study, Singapore’s linguistic and demographic profiles, as well as language policies have significantly changed. Whether the Tamil situation in Singapore has consistently remained the same as a result of these changes can be ascertained from other studies that have investigated Tamil language and identity as follows.

Ramiah’s (1991) study on “The Pattern of Tamil Language Use among Primary School Tamil Pupils in Singapore” employed a questionnaire survey which investigated Tamil language usage across eight domains as well as patterns of LMLS in one thousand students. Findings from both studies (Mani & Gopinathan, 1983; Ramiah, 1991) establish that a shift to English was evident in conversations with siblings and friends, while Tamil was mainly used in conversations with grandparents or parents.

On the other hand, in contrast to Mani and Gopinathan’s review of the Tamil situation (1983), Ramiah’s study claims that Tamil language maintenance was

‘satisfactory’ due to “close cultural ties with Tamil Nadu” (Ramiah, 1991, p.53) which acted as a revival tool for both the Tamil culture and language. Another reason cited for Tamil language maintenance was the affirmation demonstrated by parents in relation to Tamil language learning (Ramiah, 1991) while in Mani and Gopinathan’s study, the importance of positive parental attitudes was emphasised as a pre-requisite to Tamil language maintenance, implying that parents needed to foster a positive attitude then.

However, Ramiah (1991) made a ‘grand’ conclusion by stating that the “Tamil language and culture can be maintained in Singapore, *forever*, if the Tamil community takes an enthusiastic interest in the language” (p.53, emphasis added), although he indicated that the Tamil language was on a decline, particularly in the young participants surveyed. His concluding questions reflect the growing concern amongst educators, parents, or any Tamil speaker in Singapore: What about the twenty-first century? Will Tamil be able to withstand the onslaught of English? (Ramiah, 1991, p.53). These questions will be fundamental in the discussion of relevant Tamil language studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century later in the section, and to be ascertained by the current study’s findings.

Saravanan (1993, 1998) has explored LMLS and identity in the Indian population in Singapore, with a particular focus on the Tamil community. In her study of “Language and social identity amongst Tamil-English bilinguals”, Saravanan (1993) examines the reasons for the apparent decline in Tamil language. She asserts that the perceived low socio-economic status of Tamil is a primary contributor to its decline, particularly amongst the Tamil-English bilinguals, or the English-educated Tamils, as she refers them as. Tamil language maintenance is apparently low in this high socio-economic group who, as Saravanan pinpoints, identify themselves more with the wider English speaking community. Therefore, their identity is one that is not anchored in ethnicity.

Further to this, Saravanan (1993, 1998) has been critical of the emphasis of literary or formal variety of Tamil in the media as well as in pedagogical practices (Saravanan, Lakshmi, & Caleon, 2007) in the past as she argues that the formal variety is incongruent to the Singapore standard spoken variety of Tamil. This stance has been repeatedly put forth by Schiffman (1998, 2003, 2008) who concurred with Saravanan’s recommendation of shifting away from the purist view of maintaining,

or teaching the formal variety of the language. In particular, Saravanan (1998) warns that Tamil will be maintained within the boundaries of the classrooms only, amongst students whose dominant home language is English; she refers to this as ‘replacive bilingualism’, as opposed to Mani and Gopinathan’s (1983) case of ‘subtractive bilingualism’. Hence, Saravanan concludes that Tamil will be maintained by those in the lower socio-economic stratum of the Tamil community. As well, the author shares similar views to those of Mani and Gopinathan’s (1983) in that she stresses on growing the Tamil language through the arts that depict the Tamil culture, for example, poetry, literary writing and song writing.

Saravanan’s (1993, 1998) survey of the Tamil situation presents similar findings to the earlier studies in that Tamil language is in decline, in part, due to its relative position in Singapore; its lack of utility in Singapore as well as in the South-East Asian region, where Malay and Mandarin are seen to be more viable (Mani & Gopinathan, 1983).

In another study, Saravanan (1999a) investigates the language choices of the three ethnic language groups, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, in the domains of home, family and friendship as well as parental attitudes towards the bilingual policy. She concludes that whilst the Malay language is better maintained in comparison to Mandarin and Tamil, English emerges as the dominant language used in family activities and interactions. On the other hand, parents of all three ethnic groups indicated a positive attitude towards the bilingual policy.

Turning to identity construction amongst the Tamil community in multi-cultural Singapore, Saravanan examines bilingual and bicultural identity in a later study. She probes:

The question that arises is to what extent the original, distinctive, separate identities that express distinctive language codes and cultural identities have undergone a process of diffusion and assimilation when these separate island identities are overwhelmed by a homogeneous national identity, a Singaporean identity? (1999b, p.55)

She claims that the Singaporean identity, as opposed to the Indian Singaporean identity, is the result of the dominance of English in Singapore.

Saravanan in referring to the “diffusion and assimilation process”, explains as follows:

The Tamil-speaking community, as well as other smaller Indian linguistic groups, provides perhaps the best examples of communities who have undergone different levels of de-ethnification. These communities display widespread assimilation into a mainstream common Singaporean identity, brought about by the dominant use of English. (1999b, p.62)

However, whether the Tamil community in contemporary Singapore continues to present a case of ‘de-ethnification’, or demonstrates signs of ‘re-ethnification’ needs to be ascertained.

The Singaporean examples of Tamil language and identity discussed in the above studies, present similar views in relation to the status, position of Tamil in Singapore, the attitudes of Tamil-speakers towards the language, and the penetration of English at both the societal and individual levels. As well, the domain analysis has been used to provide snapshots of the linguistic situation in Singapore at various intervals.

On the other hand, Vaish (2007a, 2007b) draws on the quantitative data from “The Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore” conducted in 2006 in presenting a preliminary overview of the language use patterns amongst Singaporean children across the three major ethnic groups, in the media domain. Based on the quantitative data only (findings of the qualitative data were not available then), Vaish, contrary to Saravanan (1999b), asserts that amidst the pervasion of English in most of the 5 domains surveyed, “Singaporean children are not mere slaves to the spread of global English and passive consumers of Euro-American culture” (Vaish, 2007b, p. 231). She substantiates this claim by stating that both Indian and Chinese children create a cultural link with their respective ‘imagined communities’, India and China, through which a pan-Indian cultural identity is created in the former group, and at the same time, maintain the ethnic language.

In her preliminary analysis of the “SSS 2006” (Vaish, 2007a) in relation to the five domains, Vaish posits that the Tamil-English bilingual community represents ‘bilingualism without diglossia’ in reference to Fishman’s bilingualism-diglossia matrix (discussed earlier in 3.2.4). She validates this claim in relation to Singapore’s unprecedented transformation into an industrialised nation, and the introduction of



English at the socio-political level. In similar vein, Kadakara (2011) observes the mixing of languages, in this case, English and Tamil such that there are no rigid boundaries that separate the functions of these languages.

However, such a viewpoint seems to contradict findings that claim Tamil language is maintained in certain domains, for example in the domain of religion or worship (Saravanan, 1999a). Also, Fishman's Matrix (Quadrant 2) suggests that the adoption of a new, more prestigious language would occur at the abandonment of the existing "socio-cultural" patterns (Fishman, 1967, p.35) which may not be totally relevant or true for the ethnic groups in Singapore, who may continue to maintain their cultural traditions linked to the respective ethnic languages.

On the other hand, Schiffman's (2003) ethnographic, participant observation study of the Tamil language situation in Singapore revealed the underlying reasons for the apparent decline in the Tamil language, which included "Tamil teachers, parents, and students; the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (CDIS); the Ministry of Education (MOE)" (Schiffman, 2003, p.106), amongst others. Again, these so-called reasons need further probing to examine why these groups have been implicated in the decline, and in what ways they have contributed to the decline. These will be important considerations for the present study.

A most recent study by Kadakara (2015) on the LMLS of Tamil in Singapore employed a questionnaire survey in addition to face-to-face interviews. As with previous domain-based research, the family domain is central in this study; it draws on the bilingual policy and institutional support as reference points to investigate the current Tamil language situation, and its likely position in the future. This study reinforces a recurring thread in the literature relating to Singapore's ethnic languages. That is, the replacing of ethnic languages in Singapore, namely Malay, Mandarin and Tamil by English, which as Kadakara contends, has come to symbolise prestige, power and value.

One of the findings that Kadakara (2015) highlights is the mentality of the so-called elitist, English only, Tamil families that remain oblivious to the importance of maintaining the Tamil language as a mother tongue in the family domain. In families where either English only or English and Tamil is spoken, Tamil language transmission across generations is absent. Another important finding that he pinpoints is the growing potential threat of Hindi, an Indo-Aryan language spoken by

a large majority of the North Indian expatriates in Singapore, to the maintenance of Tamil, with the possibility of Hindi replacing Tamil, if Tamil was to decline further.

Kadakara (2015) maintains a highly critical stance in his examination of the Tamil situation in Singapore to such an extent that he argues the “absence [...] of [a] continued use within the home domain, will lead to language loss and, ultimately, sound the death knell for the Tamil language in Singapore” (Kadakara, 2015, p.58).

The present study’s findings may be able to shed some light on the elitist notion associated with the English only group, and the threat of Hindi in Singapore, by providing a different perspective, in this case from the young Tamils surveyed, as opposed to parents represented in Kadakara’s (2015) study.

### **3.9.1 An alternate viewpoint: English as mother tongue**

In pursuing the subject of English dominance in the Singaporean context, Tan (2014) argues that in view of the changes in Singapore’s linguistic profile, English could be perceived as an additional ‘mother tongue’, appropriated and defined by the author based on the following conditions: “language inheritance, language expertise, language function, and language identification” (p.337). Of the 436 participants across three ethnic groups stratified according to age, 89 were Tamil-speaking Indian Singaporeans. Tan’s study also revealed that Singapore English or Singlish emerged as the marker of national identity. In terms of language of leisure, Tan claims that most of the young Malay and Indian participants turned to more English television and radio programs due to the “lack of variety or availability in Malay and Tamil programs in Singapore” (p.334). However, this claim needs further validation in the wake of a number and range of locally produced Tamil programs, in addition to those that can be accessed via cable television. Also, the under-representation of Tamil-speakers in this study makes the conclusions drawn questionable. Furthermore, whether Tamils would appreciate English as a ‘mother tongue’ as opposed to a ‘first language’ needs to be ascertained, particularly when ‘mother tongue’ denotes a biological bond.

### **3.9.2 LMLS in the Chinese community**

Two earlier studies on language shift in the Chinese community (Gupta & Yeok, 1995; Wei, Saravanan, & Hoon, 1997) show an overall shift from Chinese dialects to English and Mandarin. Factors that have contributed to the shift point to

educational level and language medium of education, as well as the government's aggressive 'Speak Mandarin' campaign, and the dis-association of ethnicity from language. Another important factor for the shift to the so-called more prestigious languages, in this case, English and Mandarin, is socio-economic level. This finding parallels Saravanan's (1998) where English replaced Tamil in the homes of those who were in the upper stratum of the socio-economic status hierarchy.

### **3.9.3 LMLS in the Malay community**

Cavallaro and Serwe (2010) investigated the use of Malay across domains in the Malay community in Singapore (N=233), which as the authors pinpoint, has been repeatedly referred to in the literature as the most resistant group to the influence of English. The findings of the study point to a negative correlation between income earnings and educational level; and Malay language usage. Other factors observed to have influenced language use patterns were interlocutors and topics. Cavallaro and Serwe also highlight that the 18-24 year-olds surveyed were seen to demonstrate the strongest shift to English, while Malay remained a primary language of communication with the older members of the community. In addition, they confirm that English will gradually dominate as the younger Malays enter the workforce or undertake tertiary studies. The authors conclude that a likely decline in the Malay language across domains is highly likely in the future.

The studies on the Chinese and Malay communities confirm that the Tamil community is not the only ethnic community that has shifted to English, and that some common contributing factors for the shift include age, educational level, socio-economic status, and the prevalence of English in the workforce.

### **3.10 Concluding Remarks**

Insofar as the snapshot-sociolinguistic studies of the Tamil language in Singapore is concerned, a rather unpromising picture has been painted and forecast. First, a gradual decline in the usage of the Tamil language in the home domain has been established based on census reports. Second, various sociolinguistic studies have similarly reinforced this finding. Third, pedagogical practices and the Tamil community's lack of effort in sustaining the language have been repeatedly implicated for the apparent decline.

However, in the context of Singapore, where intergenerational transmission

of Tamil is perceived as almost absent, the school domain may be seen as critical in maintaining the language beyond its boundaries (Fishman, 1980). This means pedagogical practices are critical in encouraging the use of spoken Tamil. The situation in Singapore is one where ethnic languages have experienced varying levels of shift towards English, although the cultural or ethnic identity have been maintained, regardless of whether Tamil language is a primary marker in one's identity construction in reference to Tamils. Also, a mix of Tamil and English as evidenced in the studies does not equate to a balanced 'mix' of the languages in reality. Moreover, Singapore presents a case where strong institutional support for a community or minority language, as in the case of Tamil, does not automatically translate to resistance to language shift or widespread usage of the ethnic language.

On the other hand, the choice of terminologies such as 'heritage language', 'ancestral language', 'ethnic language', 'community language' or 'mother tongue' across the Tamil diaspora seems to reflect the position of Tamil and how it is perceived in the communities, from the Tamil-speaking Indian in Australia to one in Singapore. Furthermore, the term 'Indian' in the literature may be misleading as this convenient, umbrella term subsumes the multiple dialect groups present in the larger diaspora. Essentially, a bird's eye view of the Tamil language situation in Singapore and in the other Tamil speech communities spread across the globe, illustrates gradations in the shift and maintenance of the language, with the imminent threat of the loss of the language in Mauritius and South Africa for reasons such as lack of utility or resources, amongst others.

To date, research on Tamil language or the Tamil community in Singapore has been sporadic, with a spread of focus from investigating the extent of Tamil language usage in the family-home domain; the potential threats to the survivability of the language; attitudes towards the language; and the apparent replacive or subtractive bilingualism that have come to be associated with the state of Tamil language in Singapore.

These studies were varied in their methodological approaches and analyses as well. For example, some of these studies relied on census reports and national surveys, amongst other sources, to comment on, and predict future trends in Tamil language usage. Others (e.g. Saravanan, 1999a, Kadakara, 2015) used the home-family domain analysis in eliciting language use patterns and language choice in

parent-children interactions whereas the matched guise approach was utilised to reveal attitudes towards codeswitching amongst primary school students (Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009), and ascertain teachers' attitudes towards the literary Tamil variety and standard Tamil variety (Saravanan et al., 2007). Tamil language use was also investigated with socio-cultural and socio-economic factors as reference points, amongst primary school students across eight domains (Ramiah, 1991).

Therefore, whilst these studies primarily demonstrated depth in investigation, as in the home-family domain analysis, the breadth was lacking. As reported in the studies, a number of factors have been highlighted in the decline of the Tamil language. In an attempt to address and further investigate these factors that have been implicated in the decline in Tamil language usage, and at the same time, the shift to English amongst the Tamils, this study on 'Tamil and Tamils' aims to bridge the 'gaps' of earlier studies in order to provide breadth to the investigation of the Tamil language situation in Singapore in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the mixed methods approach employed in this study seeks to obtain a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

The next chapter will discuss the mixed methods strategy used in this study, and explain the relevance of employing such an approach in investigating the current situation of Tamil in Singapore, as well as the attitudes towards the language, and identity of the Tamils.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative inquiry can support and inform each other. Narratives and variable-driven analyses need to interpenetrate and inform each other.... Think of it as hybrid vigor.

-Miles and Huberman, 2002, p.396

Variation and change that are constantly evolving in the time-space dimension define the breadth of research in sociolinguistics (Llamas, Mullany, & Stockwell, 2007). Therefore, the field of sociolinguistics “diverges into innumerable subdisciplines” (Tagliamonte, 2011, p.1) that focus on distinctive aspects, be they socio-political, socio-psychological, social correlates or language change (Llamas et al., 2007), amongst others. This sociolinguistic research, therefore, adopts a multidisciplinary perspective outlined in Edwards’ (2010) framework, in addition to the ethnolinguistic identity theory, to investigate the LMLS phenomenon and notions of identity in the Tamil community in Singapore.

This chapter presents the rationale for mixed methods adopted for the study. It will first provide an overview of the three main research paradigms before discussing the use of mixed methods in LMLS research. Next, the chapter will describe the methodology of the study, which has been adapted from Patton’s (1990) mixed paradigm. Following this, it will outline the questions drawn from the theoretical framework; describe the data collection methods, namely survey questionnaire, focus discussions and in-depth interviews; and provide details of the sample surveyed. The chapter will conclude with the challenges associated with the data collection methods.

### 4.1 Research Methodologies: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods

Newman and Benz (1998) and Patton (1982) highlight that historically, quantitative research had prevailed in social sciences till the latter half of the twentieth century, driven by, what they term the ‘hypothetico-deductive’ philosophy. Similarly, scholars and researchers in the sciences who identified with this worldview or belief system exalted quantitative research as a necessary,

strengthening force due to its assumed superiority, although this view has now been challenged (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

However, emergent conflicting ideologies that challenged “positivist/post positivist research” (Creswell, 2009, p.6) or “logical positivism” (Newman & Benz, 1998, p.5) resulted in a shift towards qualitative research in social sciences. Representing the competing paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research, Newman and Benz (1998) posit that these paradigms are entities on either end of a continuum, therefore, rejecting the notion of the so-called dichotomy between the two approaches, calling it a theoretical “fallacy” (p.5). Similarly, Abbas and Teddlie (2009, p.viii) assert that “there is no dichotomy but rather a continuum between the terms [quantitative and qualitative]”.

#### **4.2 Mixed Methods**

Differing perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses inherent in both quantitative and qualitative research approaches initiated a new approach to research: mixed methods. The inception of “mixing methods” can be traced back to a research conducted by Campbell and Fiske in 1959 where they used a multi-method approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which as noted by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009), leaned more towards the quantitative method. They, however, expanded on Campbell and Fiske’s multi-method model—which they termed ‘multistrand’— by incorporating qualitative methods. Tashakkori and Teddlie’s typologies for a mixed methods research provide a framework for the different research designs available. These approaches can mean the mixing of field methods, for example, observations and interviews with surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Moreover, the evolution of mixed methods as a research design turned to triangulation where data derived from both quantitative and qualitative methods were analysed for convergence (Jick, 1979; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). However, the 1990s saw the emergence of an alternate viewpoint to ‘mixing’: an integration of both quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) in which procedures for a mixed method research, as delineated by Creswell (2009), could be either ‘sequential’, ‘concurrent’ or ‘transformative’.

Drawing on the concept of a quantitative-qualitative continuum, Creswell (2009) situates mixed methods research “in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches” (p. 3). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) present the varying perspectives of scholars on the broad scope of ‘mixing’ in research. For example, Greene (2007, 2008) views mixed methods or a ‘mixed methods way of thinking’ as a social inquiry that necessitates several ways of making sense of the phenomenon, and at the same time, the author provides different purposes for mixing methods, which include triangulation, complementarity and development. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) point to ‘mixing’ as occurring at any stage of the research process, be it for data collection or analysis of the results.

Overall, mixed methods research, which has been accorded different terms (e.g., ‘blended’, ‘multiple methods’) has come to be acknowledged as the third methodological movement, and a third major research approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), and has been conceptualised according to various reference points.

#### **4.3 Research Designs in Language Maintenance and Shift Studies**

The approach of this study was in part informed by previous studies that investigated either language maintenance or language shift in diasporic contexts using a mixed methods approach. For example, Aniko Hatoss (2013), in her study of language maintenance and identity amongst Sudanese refugees in Australia, employed both qualitative and quantitative methods by incorporating survey, ethnolinguistic observation and in-depth interviews to present a “deeper and richer data analysis” (p.47). Similarly, David’s (2001) study on the Sindhi population in Malaysia utilised instruments such as questionnaires as well as participation observation and audio recordings to determine language shift in a diasporic setting. Bissoonauth (2011) drew on the data collected from questionnaires and interviews to present the apparent shift from Indian ancestral languages in Mauritius to the prevailing dominant languages, namely Creole, French and English. Studies such as these aimed to explore related variables such as language use, language choice and language attitude by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.



#### **4.4 Situating the Study within the Mixed Methods Framework**

The primary research question is of fundamental importance and has to be the reference point that necessarily shapes the methodological approaches. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p. x) emphasise “the importance and predominance of the research question over the paradigm [quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods]”.

The modes of inquiry that have framed this research study were essentially shaped by the objectives and central questions that it sought to explore, examine and review: First, is the Tamil language in Singapore further declining in use, and if Tamil language use amongst the Tamils is declining, what are the possible reasons for this? Second, how do Tamils then mark their identity?

The main aim of this study was to investigate language shift amongst the Tamil community in Singapore as well as the maintenance of Tamil language in the nation-state. It also aimed to examine the construction of identity or identities amongst young Tamils between 15 and 25 years of age. Therefore, the breadth and depth of the LMLS phenomenon that underpinned the study necessitated a mixed methods approach.

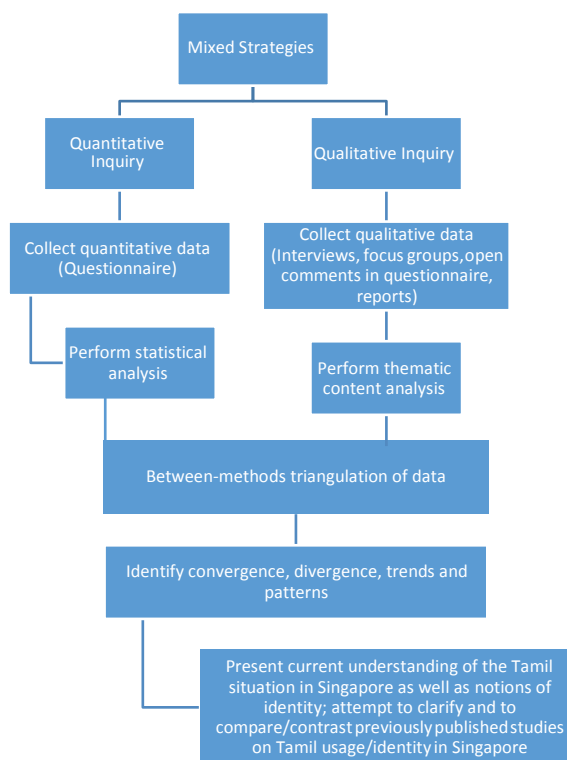
Rationales that underpin the mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods (Johnson et al., 2007) provide a basis for using “pluralistic approaches” (Creswell, 2009, p.10) in interpreting and understanding the phenomenon investigated, as is the case for this study. Moreover, effective use of mixed methods can augment findings, therefore, enhancing the validity of the study. Essentially, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative strands in the research design of this study, a more comprehensive presentation of the Tamil language situation in Singapore was made possible. In other words, drawing on the rationales for a mixed methods approach delineated by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (cited in Johnson et al., 2007), this study sought to (a) see points of convergence or divergence in the results through methodological triangulation; (b) to validate, clarify or expand on the results obtained from the quantitative approach to inquiry, with those from the qualitative approach to inquiry.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p.73) have detailed six paradigms that explain the key approaches in mixed methods design: convergent, explanatory,

exploratory, embedded, transformative and multiphase. Patton's mixed strategies (1990, see Figure 1 below), demonstrate the complementary processes that incorporate data from both quantitative and qualitative approaches to inquiry before the data are triangulated.

This study on Tamil and Tamils in Singapore was framed within the explanatory sequential design to “capture a more complete, *holistic*, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study” (Jick, 1979, p. 603, emphasis in original). Methodological triangulation or “between-method” triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979) was utilised for the following reasons: (a) to further explain the data presented quantitatively in the survey through qualitative strands (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) that included open-ended questions in the survey, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews; (b) to establish validity through identifying points of convergence or divergence, and trends in the phenomenon under study; (c) to solve the problem of being over-reliant on any single data source or method (Patton, 1990); (d) to minimise bias inherent in methods (Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979).

The explanatory sequential framework that necessitates triangulation, in this case, between-methods triangulation, provided the overall research design for the study as outlined in Figure 1 below. The overview of processes presented in the mixed paradigm flowchart below was adapted from Patton (1990), where quantitative data collection preceded qualitative data collection. While Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) sequential design foregrounded the quantitative approach in what Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) term a dominant-less dominant design, this study aimed to adopt an equivalent status design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were of comparable importance.



*Figure 1: Patton's (1990) Mixed Paradigm*

#### **4.4.1 Challenges in the mixed methods design and triangulation**

One of the key issues associated with mixed methods design is the amount of time it demands (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), particularly in a sequential approach. Another challenge points to the need for the researcher to be able to meaningfully and effectively mix both quantitative and qualitative strands (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, decisions about selecting specific quantitative results that necessitate a qualitative follow-up, and the criteria to be used to select participants for the qualitative component are important considerations that may not be straightforward (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A third challenge concerns the availability of a sub-sample for a subsequent qualitative interpretation. At the same time, triangulating between methods poses the challenge of reconciling possible “discrepancies” that can emerge from the “different measures” used (Jick, 1979, p.607) or interpreting “conflicting results” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21). However, Jick (1979) sees divergence as an asset that could lend itself to a richer explanation of the phenomenon under study.

#### 4.5 Questions from the Theoretical Framework

Overall, the study aimed to describe and analyse the position of Tamil and Tamils in present day Singapore from different disciplinary perspectives in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Tamil language and identity in Singapore. The theoretical framework (see Chapter 2), which comprised of these different perspectives, were adapted from Edwards' (2010) Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages, as illustrated in Table 4 below:

*Table 4: Theoretical Framework for the study of Tamil and Tamils in contemporary Singapore*

	Disciplinary perspective	Speaker	Language	Context
1	Demography	1	2	3
2	Geography	4	5	6
3	Economics	7	8	9
4	Sociology	10	11	12
5	Linguistics (including the anthropological perspective)	13	14	15
6	Psychology	16	17	18
7	History	19	20	21
8	Government and non -government organisations	22	23	24
9	Education	25	26	27
10	Religion	28	29	30
11	Media	31	32	33

Further to this, the corresponding questions to the matrix cells have been also adapted from Edwards' framework, and Giles et al.'s (1977) EVT. However, as Edwards (2010) stresses, the questions are neither exhaustive nor are they specific; rather, they offer "points of departure" (p. 100). Therefore, these questions have been aligned to suit the Singaporean context, and will be interwoven accordingly into the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods used for this study: questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions.

Overall, these questions have been guided by three (out of the four) main objectives of this study: language use across domains (e.g., sociology); attitudes towards the mother tongue by its speakers and to a lesser extent, the current Tamil curriculum (e.g., psychology and education); and maintenance of Tamil (e.g., demography, education, geography, media). However, overlaps in disciplinary

perspectives, as mentioned in Chapter 2, were inevitable. The following questions informed the analyses and units of analysis of the overall study:

#### **4.5.1 Questions that correspond to the cell numbers in the framework**

1. Number of speakers based on official records (e.g., census reports) over time? Birth rate? Marriages? Inter-racial marriages?
2. Any stronghold for language identified (e.g., ethnic enclave) Singapore?
3. Association between housing policy and concentration/distribution of Indians? (that includes Tamil speakers)
4. Minority group in Singapore? Elsewhere? (e.g., Malaysia ) Other minority groups in Singapore?
5. Tamil in other polities in South Asia and Southeast Asia?
6. The Indian diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
7. Economic status of speaker group?
8. Association between language and economic success/mobility?
9. Economic health of Singapore?
10. Socioeconomic status of speakers?
11. Degree and type of language transmission (intergenerational)?
12. Previous/ongoing Tamil language maintenance efforts? Domains where Tamil language remain vibrant? Venues for language- cultural celebrations?
13. Language proficiency of speakers? Codeswitching?
14. Language standardisation? Model used? Spoken Tamil vs Written /Literary Tamil? Language and culture? Symbolic forms of communication?
15. In- and out-migration of Indians in the last five years or so? (based on available official records)
16. Attitudes of speakers towards Tamil and other co-existing official languages? Factors that affect attitudes?
17. Identity construction of speakers along which dimensions? Linguistic? Ethnic?

18. Attitudes of other ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese, Malays) towards the group?
19. History and background of Indians, particularly the Tamils?
20. History of the language? History of language in colonial Singapore?
21. History of area assigned to Tamils/South Indians during British rule?
22. Rights, recognition and representation of speakers in the government and other organisations?
23. Degree and extent of official recognition of language? Institutional support for language? Major initiatives by policy makers, language planners, and key stakeholders to maintain the language? Sustainable? Frequency? Ongoing?
24. Linguistic landscape?
25. Speakers' attitudes towards the Tamil curriculum? Suggestions by speakers?
26. School support for language?
27. Educational policies in Singapore, past and current?
28. Religious denominations of speakers?
29. Association between religion and language?
30. Importance of religion amongst Tamils?
31. Group representation in local Tamil media over time (television, radio, and print media)?
32. Language representation in local media over time?
33. Reach and penetration of Tamil media? Satellite transmission?

#### **4.6 Sampling**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the key objectives of the study was to analyse the position of Tamil with reference to its usage across domains that included the school. Another objective sought to explore notions of identity or identities perceived by young Tamils, while the third objective focussed on the attitudes of these young Tamils towards their mother tongue, Tamil. A pragmatic approach was necessary in considering the sampling procedures because of the way the Tamil population in Singapore is unevenly dispersed, in addition to the minority status of the population. Therefore, for pragmatic reasons, schools or academic institutions

were identified as potential sites from which the sample could be drawn. A further advantage of using schools was that the researcher, having been educated in Singapore was also familiar with the education system.

The planned target sample size for the questionnaire was 100 to 150. The primary reason for a small sample size can be justified in terms of the relatively low numbers of Tamil language students in mainstream schools across Singapore. Some of these schools do not offer Tamil language due to the very low numbers of Tamil language students; therefore, students from these schools attend Tamil language classes once or twice a week in Tamil language centres around Singapore. Furthermore, the researcher was not given access to information on the number of Tamil language students in schools, due to the level of sensitivity involved. This meant that random sampling was not a feasible option; however, the researcher acknowledged the inherent sampling bias that may arise from non-probability sampling.

Purposeful or purposive sampling techniques (Patton, 1990) including snowball sampling and homogeneous sampling were, therefore, employed to recruit participants for the questionnaire survey, interviews and focus group discussions. This non-probability approach, as Bryman (2012) highlights, is not for the purpose of generalising but one that samples in a “strategic way” such that “those sampled are relevant to the research question” (p.418). Therefore, participants for both the questionnaire survey and focus group discussions had to satisfy two essential criteria.

One, they had to be Tamil language students in the schools, and also Tamils, as far as possible; two, they had to fall within the age bracket specified, 15-25. The rationales for the specified age bracket was (a) the presumed level of maturity that the participants would possess as opposed to younger students; (b) more mature participants are likely to articulate their views better; (c) the participants would be the next generation of parents, and hence, their Tamil language usage and attitudes towards Tamil would be of significance.

#### **4.6.1 Student participants: questionnaire and focus groups**

The sampling frame for this study consisted of class rosters of Tamil students who met the age criteria, in schools that agreed to participate in the study. The researcher enlisted the help of Tamil teachers in selecting classes of secondary three or four students who were between 15 or 17 years of age. The teachers were requested to not consider academic performance as a criterion for selection; this was especially important in reducing sampling bias. This issue came to the fore when one of the teachers decided to select students who were in the 'Express stream'; in Singapore, students are channelled to a few streams based on their overall academic performance at the national Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). The Express stream was for the more academically capable students as opposed to the 'Normal academic' or 'Normal Technical' streams. The rationale for the teacher's choice was that students in the Express stream would be able to understand the questions better and hence, would be better candidates for focus group discussions. The researcher had to explain to the teacher the sampling bias that could surface, if participants were to be selected on criteria as such.

A total of 319 participants from secondary schools, including Tamil language centres, junior colleges (pre-tertiary) and universities completed the questionnaire. Of these, 130 participants were drawn from five secondary schools, including Tamil language centres, and 161 participants were drawn from six junior colleges. The latter participants were surveyed with the help of their respective Tamil language teachers. The sample from the secondary schools, Tamil language centres and junior colleges consisted of whole classes of Tamil language students (see Table 5 below for a detailed description).

University or tertiary students were recruited by contacting the chairperson for the Tamil Language Society in the National University of Singapore. The Tamil Language Society was selected as a potential fieldwork site as its members had previously learnt Tamil in school, and could speak and understand the language. Twenty-eight students from the Tamil Language Society participated in the questionnaire survey. The chairperson agreed to administer the questionnaire during one of the meetings; he was briefed by the researcher on the phone prior to



administering the questionnaire; an email detailing the procedures as well as consent forms was also sent to ensure consistency.

Further to this, the researcher was able to recruit more participants for the questionnaire during a Tamil language conference organised by the Tamil Language Society, where she had presented a paper. These participants were either secondary school Tamil language students who attended the conference as part of their school's Tamil language programme, or tertiary students who were at the conference to assist in logistics, or to present a paper. In this instance, snowball sampling was particularly useful in recruiting potential participants for the questionnaire. However, none of the polytechnics contacted were able to participate in the survey.

Homogeneous case sampling was employed for the focus group discussion. As Patton (1990) and Morse (2003) state, this technique is traditionally used for focus group discussions. As mentioned earlier in this section, the sample for the focus group discussions was drawn from the original sample for the purpose of in-depth study. The participants were identified based on their similar or dissimilar survey responses as well as points of views conveyed in the open comments sections of the survey. This was to capture alternate and diverse views of the phenomenon under study.

#### **4.6.2 Key informants for interviews**

As for the individual interviews, Tamil teachers from the schools which participated in the study were identified as potential informants. Their experience in Tamil language teaching ranged from four years to forty-six years at the time of data collection. Therefore, these teachers were considered information-rich individuals. On the other hand, both snowball sampling and purposeful sampling were employed to recruit key informants from the Ministry of Education, National University of Singapore, Tamil Writers' Association and the local Tamil media. These informants included those who held top and middle level positions at the time of the interviews. They were considered potentially information-rich informants based on their contribution to Tamil language in Singapore through various platforms, and whose experience in relation to the challenges faced in promoting Tamil would be of significance to the study as well.

Table 5 below provides a breakdown of the different groups of participants and the respective numbers for the study.

*Table 5: Participants for the study*

Data collection methods	No. of participants			
	Secondary schools	Junior colleges	Tertiary institutions	Total
Questionnaire	130	161	28	319
Focus Group	Group A: 6	Group E:7	Group F: 4	33
	Group B: 6			
	Group C: 5			
	Group D: 5			
Interviews with key informants	Tamil teachers	Informants from the media, education, universities and a Tamil organisation		
	5	9		14

#### **4.7 Methods of Data Collection**

The primary methods of data collection included questionnaires, focus group discussions with a sub-sample, and in-depth interviews with key informants. Moreover, while it was possible to analyse the responses in the survey questionnaire, the in-depth interviews and discussions provided high quality raw data (Patton, 1990). On the other hand, the open-ended responses in the survey aimed to capture nuances that may surface. Data collection was carried out during two fieldtrips to Singapore, in April and June 2014 respectively. The first fieldtrip consisted of data collection from the questionnaire survey, focus group discussions and nine interviews; the second and final fieldtrip consisted of data collection from the remaining five in-depth interviews. The two field trips lasted a total of four intensive weeks.

### 4.7.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed using a descriptive model (Oppenheim, 1992) that aimed to analyse characteristics, opinions and attitudes presented by English-Tamil bilinguals aged between 15 and 25. The rationale for a descriptive survey, as Oppenheim (1992) mentions, “is essentially fact-finding and descriptive—although the data collected are also often used to make predictions” (p.12). Another important consideration in designing the questionnaire was to ensure that every question linked “with the conceptual framework of the study”, and was guided by the following questions: Why are we asking this question? What is it doing here? How do we intend to use the responses? (Oppenheim, 1992, p.122). In addition, guidelines and rules for designing questions, for example, ‘How would you answer it?’ or avoiding lengthy questions, double-barrelled questions or ambiguous and technical terms acted as important considerations when writing the survey questions (Bryman, 2012; Krosnik & Presser, 2010). Overall, the questionnaire was designed to include both “quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry”, an approach typical of a mixed methods study (Patton, 2015, p.15).

Pilot questionnaires-in English were employed to gather data on three aspects: (a) language usage across specific domains; (b) attitudes towards Tamil; (c) notions of identity. The choice of English over Tamil for the questionnaire was primarily to include respondents who were bilinguals. In other words, prospective respondents would be both English and Tamil literate. Another reason for the choice of English stemmed from the need to email the questionnaire survey to principals of all potential participating schools, before consent was given to administer the survey. However, the researcher acknowledged the implicit message that the choice of language could potentially convey, in this case English, especially in a social context where it is prevalent. Relatedly, varying levels of bilingualism amongst participants could possibly influence the survey responses. Although a questionnaire with both Tamil and English may have reduced such bias, it would have been logistically challenging in terms of word processing (for Tamil language); translating English into Tamil, and vice-versa, may present with inherent issues of nuances ‘lost in translation’; and analysing two sets of ‘language data’ would be equally challenging, given the mixed methods structure of the study.

The pilot questionnaire consisted of twenty-two questions categorised accordingly into three sections. The first section, consisting of 7 items, focussed on language usage across domains such as the home, public space, friendship, and school; the second, consisting of 8 items, focussed on language attitudes and the third, consisting of 3 items, centred on notions of identity.

The questionnaire was pilot tested on the researcher's social network in Singapore that satisfied the age bracket specified in the study. The questionnaire was revised accordingly, following analysis of the written text, and feedback from participants, and supervisors with respect to comprehensibility of questions, interpretation of questions, layout of the questionnaire items, length of, and time taken to complete the questionnaire. An important consideration was the average time needed to complete the questionnaire; this was because the participants, who were largely secondary school students, were allocated about twenty minutes only of their Tamil language classes to participate in the survey.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire items that employed the four-point Likert scale in the last two sections on attitude and identity. The reliability coefficient for the twelve items was .746, therefore, indicating an acceptable level in terms of internal consistency.

The final version of the questionnaire included re-formatting the layout and re-numbering the questionnaire: for example, the initial five-page questionnaire was reduced to three pages; some questions were re-worded with brief explanations provided (where needed) to avoid ambiguity or misinterpretation; a few questions were either deleted or replaced; the number of sections was reduced to two by adapting the "principle of separation" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 51). The final questionnaire consisted of 21 questions that consisted of 3 open questions and 18 closed questions. The first section on language usage or choice consisted of closed questions where participants had to 'tick' the languages used across domains accordingly; open questions, including two dichotomous questions, were also included to examine the respondents' views. The second section employed the Likert scale to measure the attitudes and opinions of the respondents while the corresponding open comments section aimed to explore their responses.

An initial analysis of the structured and unstructured responses from a select pool of participants was undertaken so that sub-groups for the focus group discussions could be identified based on similarities and dissimilarities in responses. Following this, the respective teachers confirmed the availability of the selected participants for the focus group discussions.

#### **4.7.2 Types of questions and the Likert scale**

The purpose of including open-ended or unstructured questions was to allow the researcher ‘to capture the points of view’ (Patton, 1990, p. 24) of the participants as opposed to the pre-determined response categories that formed the closed, structured questions in the survey. The seven structured questions that were included in the first section (Section A) aimed to examine language usage patterns and choice across specified domains. Two unstructured questions were included as well to elicit reasons for, and to capture the nuances in the responses provided earlier. This was to identify points of convergence or divergence between participants in relation to the position of Tamil in Singapore.

The remaining section (Section B) consisted of seven structured questions on attitude towards the Tamil language, followed by an adjacent column, ‘Any Comments’ to provide an opportunity for participants to comment on their chosen response category; in addition, three structured opinion questions and one final unstructured question on notions of identity were included in Section B (see Appendix 4).

Likert scale questions were used for attitude and belief questions. The Likert scale is generally reliable due to the possibility of a range of answers that can include a seven-point agreement scale (Oppenheim, 1992). Also, it is a common scale used for attitude measurement with respect to a particular area (Bryman, 2012; Oppenheim, 1992). However, there have been conflicting findings on the correlation between the number of scales used and validity or reliability of the items (Krosnik & Presser, 2010).

For this study, the 4-point Likert scale—‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly disagree’—was utilised for the closed questions on attitudes and identity. The neutral option, ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘unsure’ was not

included as social desirability bias is reduced when the mid-point is excluded (Nadler, Weston, & Voyles, 2015). Therefore, by excluding the neutral scale, participants were encouraged to express their level of agreement with respect to attitudes towards Tamil language. Moreover, those surveyed would be engaged in responding to the salient questions (Bryman, 2012) as opposed to taking an 'on the fence' view. As well, empirical evidence indicates that Likert scales that range between 4 and 7 are both reliable and valid (Cummins & Gullone, 2000). Moreover, a neutral response is open to interpretations (Muijs, 2011; Nadler et al., 2015; Oppenheim, 1992) and this may pose a challenge to the researcher. However, as Muijs (2011) notes, neutral responses may be a true representation of the participant's views or attitudes. In order to minimise bias, the questionnaire included 'Any comments', which allowed participants to indicate their stance with respect to the statements.

#### **4.7.3 Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaire as an instrument**

Questionnaires are a common instrument in gathering data in social research to ascertain underlying relationships that may be apparent between variables, or to explore the attitudes and opinions of a certain phenomenon (Muijs, 2011). Two main advantages of employing a questionnaire is the lower cost involved in administering it, and the relatively short time needed in surveying a large sample (Bryman, 2012) and as such, a questionnaire survey facilitates the collection of a large amount of data (Muijs, 2011). In the case of a mixed methods study, for example, the questionnaire is a useful pre-requisite for a qualitative investigation to follow.

One of the major criticisms often cited and levelled at self-report questionnaires is validity. This means participants may under-report or over-report activities where items tend to be sensitive (Bryman, 2012). Another criticism points to social desirability bias; however, as Krosnik and Presser (2010) believe, this type of bias can be reduced when social pressure is reduced by ensuring the anonymity of participants. A related limitation of using a questionnaire is the potential acquiescence that may result due to the participants' cultural background or personality (Smyth, 2016). Another criticism points to the de-contextualised nature of questionnaires when examining a phenomenon, and hence, the possibility of

gathering superficial information (Layder, 2013). However, these limitations may be greater if questionnaires were to be used as the only tool for collecting data.

#### **4.7.4 Focus group discussions**

The aims of the focus group discussions were to provide further insight into the phenomenon under study and obtain further background information, in addition to augmenting or complementing the survey results obtained through statistical analysis (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

A total of six focus group discussions were carried out within a week of administering the questionnaire: four groups consisted of secondary school students while the remaining two groups were pre- and tertiary students. All participants, who were Tamils, were Tamil language students at the time of the discussion or had studied Tamil language previously in mainstream schools, as in the case of the tertiary students. As mentioned earlier, availability of identified participants and school timetabling determined the selection of participants for the follow-up discussions; the sub-group was selected based on not only points of convergence in the responses but of divergence as well. This was to avoid a discussion that may have been characterised by “very dull conversation and data lacking in richness”, as in the case of converging data (Patton, 2015, p. 477). Therefore, the researcher aimed to include participants with similar responses as well as those who expressed the contrary, or less common views and responses to present “diverse perspectives” (Patton, 2015, p. 475). The number of participants for each of the discussions ranged from four to seven; each discussion lasted an average of 45 minutes and was audio- recorded.

The group discussion questions were semi-structured to allow for impromptu questions as the discussions unfolded (see Appendix 3). In order to maintain consistency in relation to language used in gathering data, the focus questions were also asked in English; however, participants had a choice to codeswitch between English and Tamil. The focus discussions that followed were mainly in English with an occasional use of Tamil.

Participants, along with the facilitator/researcher were seated in a circular manner so that interaction could be optimised between all members, and at the same time, eye-contact could be maintained (Stewart et al., 2007). The facilitator started

each discussion, and interjected where needed, therefore, providing opportunities for within-group interaction as well. Overall, majority of the participants were enthusiastic about expressing their views and worked collaboratively, despite occasional disagreements during the discussions. As noted in the literature, one of the strengths of focus group discussions is that they are generally an enjoyable experience to both participants and facilitator, therefore, such interactions in a familiar setting help strengthen the data quality (Patton, 2015; Stewart et al., 2007).

The researcher acted as the facilitator and drew on her experience as an educator to encourage every participant to engage meaningfully in the discussion and to ensure that the discussion did not digress from the topic(s) being discussed; where there were periods of silence following a particular follow-up question, the researcher checked if there were any underlying reasons for participants not wanting to express their views and thoughts, as what was not said can carry meanings (Krueger, 1998).

The questions for the focus group discussions were centred on the theoretical framework adapted from Edwards' (2010) Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages, as explained in the next chapter.

#### **4.7.5 Interviews**

In addition to focus group discussions, a total of fourteen interviews were carried out. Each of these semi-structured interviews lasted between ten and seventy minutes.

The key informants who participated in the study are as follows:

1. A Senior Assessment Specialist (Tamil language) from the Assessment Planning and Development Branch, Singapore.
2. Professorial Fellow of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, National University of Singapore, who has been a key figure in shaping Tamil education in Singapore since 1982, and who has worked as a consultant for Tamil Language projects by the Ministry of Education.
3. Five Tamil teachers from secondary schools and a junior college.
4. The Head of Tamil Programme, School of Arts & Social Sciences, UniSIM.



5. The Head of Tamil Language Unit, Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore.
6. Secretary of the Association of Singapore Tamil Writers.
7. Senior Vice President of Vasantham Television Channel.
8. Three deejays from the Singapore Tamil radio station, Oli 96.8.

These informants were selected based on their knowledge and experience in their respective areas and who were familiar with language policies related to or that influence the teaching of Tamil, and the promotion of Tamil language through platforms such as the media. The Tamil teachers, on the other hand, were an important source of information with respect to challenges faced by both students and teachers in the teaching and learning of Tamil, as well as student attitudes towards Tamil or learning Tamil.

## **4.8 Data gathering**

### **4.8.1 Questionnaire**

Potential fieldwork sites, in this case, academic institutions where Tamil was taught, were identified. An online publication of the list of schools and centres that offered Tamil was used to randomly select schools that were located in the northern, southern, eastern, western and central regions of Singapore. In other words, the researcher aimed to include students from different catchment areas so as to not present a 'homogenous' sample. Further to this, the researcher also contacted the Professorial Fellow of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, to help identify schools that could yield at least a sample size of ten each. He suggested Tamil language centres as these centres comprised of students from different schools and hence, different catchment areas.

As Tamil is not offered or taught as a subject in polytechnics and universities, the researcher contacted the officers-in-charge of the respective Indian Cultural groups in these institutions to assist in the recruiting process. Following this, written consent had to be sought from the Ministry of Education (MOE), Singapore before secondary schools and junior colleges could be accessed for the administration of the questionnaire. Approval from MOE was granted in December 2013. The researcher had to follow the guidelines, as stipulated by MOE, which included completing the

proposed data collection within six months of the date of approval. The Ministry also requested for a copy of the interview guide and the researcher's candidacy approval.

Details of the study, consent forms for both potential participants and parents, as well as the approval letter from MOE were emailed to 37 school administrators to seek permission to administer the questionnaire in secondary schools and junior colleges. Telephone calls were made to the respective schools to follow-up on the emails; this allowed the researcher to directly communicate with the school principals, the administrative managers, or the clerical officers to discuss the email and to check on the possibility of the students participating in the survey.

A total of 319 participants were drawn from secondary schools, as well as from Tamil language centres, junior colleges (pre-tertiary) and universities. As mentioned earlier (section 4.6.1), none of the polytechnics were able to participate.

The researcher administered the survey to secondary school participants in person to increase response rate, to minimise non-response, and to avoid delay in gathering data. Before administering the survey, she briefed the participants on the purpose of the survey; stated the institution that the researcher represented; encouraged the participants to be as honest as possible with their responses, and to write down any comments where needed. The participants were also encouraged to clarify instructions when needed. The administering of the questionnaire paralleled that of Smith and McVie's (cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 232) approach where "desks were spaced out ..., questionnaires were completed in exam-like conditions, with talking strongly discouraged, and little or no over-looking of others' questionnaires".

As the researcher herself shared a similar background in terms of ethnicity, languages spoken (English and Tamil) and country of birth with most, if not all participants, she was able to establish rapport with them. This was particularly advantageous as the participants appeared to be comfortable and motivated to participate, but at the same time, the researcher emphasised the need to be honest with responses so as to minimise or eliminate social desirability bias. The Tamil language teachers of the respective classes of participants were provided with the option of either being present or absent during the administration of the questionnaire. All of them chose to be present; the researcher requested that they did

not supervise the participants so as to reduce the possibility of bias. The researcher sat at the back of the classes.

Data collection from students was planned in such a way that there was minimal or no disruption to teaching or learning. The researcher scheduled the survey and focus group discussions during term time where there were no major examinations or tests.

Owing to time constraints and availability, the researcher sought the help of the junior college teachers to administer the survey to their respective student participants. One of the junior college teachers kindly volunteered to organise the distribution and collection of questionnaires as well as consent forms from the junior college teachers upon completion. The researcher prepared and emailed detailed instructions, which stressed on the importance of consistency with regard to administering the questionnaire, to the respective junior college teachers. This was to minimise any response bias (Lavrakas, 2008) that may stem from having more than one questionnaire administrator when completing the Likert scale items.

#### **4.8.2 Focus groups**

The rationale for conducting a series of focus group discussions that included participants from the secondary, pre-tertiary and tertiary levels was to “get a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns emerge” (Patton, 2015, p. 61). Focus group discussions were held at the respective schools during school hours, as specified by the teachers, or in the case of tertiary students, conducted at an agreed time and preferred location. These participants were drawn from the original quantitative sample size based on similarities and dissimilarities in their responses to both the open and closed questions in the questionnaire.

Before the start of the discussions, the researcher briefed the participants on the order of the discussion, and encouraged everyone to voice their views even if their viewpoint was of “minority perspective” (Patton, 2015, p. 478). The researcher also assured the participants that anonymity will be maintained. The discussions were audio-taped. The participants were group-interviewed in classrooms or special rooms (e.g., rooms in the library) that were conducive for audio recording. However, there were instances where the discussion had to be briefly stopped before resuming, due to the school bell. Other challenges included external noise

such as traffic, which impacted the audio quality of the recording, although this was not significant.

Participants as well as the researcher were seated in a circular arrangement so that “each group member can catch the leader’s eye” and be engaged in a “round-table discussion” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 79). In this case, the ‘leader’ was the researcher who acted as the facilitator so that the topics for discussion remained focussed, and that no single participant dominated the discussion. Overall, the participants readily exchanged views that did not necessarily converge and created a lively debate.

#### **4.8.3 Interviews**

The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to examine the following research question: How do some of the major initiatives by policy makers, language planners, media personnel and key stakeholders aim to maintain the language?

The interviews were conducted at the respective workplaces in special meeting rooms or quiet areas for the purpose of audio recording, with the exception of one that was conducted in a meeting room at a Hindu temple. As with the focus group participants, all interview participants were briefed on the rationale of the study and were assured anonymity unless otherwise requested, before commencing the interviews. These interviews were conducted during work hours; one of the participants was unwell on the day of the interview and requested that the interview be completed quickly. The rest of the interviewees were positive and appeared to be relaxed during the interviews. At least five of the interviewees shared more information that they considered as too sensitive to be included in the interview recording and hence, requested that these ‘asides’ were kept confidential.

The wording for interview questions, in addition to techniques of interviewing, for both the focus group discussions and individual interviews were guided by Patton’s (1990, p.293) Matrix of Question Options. Moreover, these questions, in general, reflected the eleven disciplines across the three dimensions adapted from Edwards’ (2010) typological framework (Section 4.5.1). Questions were asked in English; however, participants for both the focus group discussions and interviews could choose to respond either in Tamil, English or a mix of both languages. Six of the interview participants responded in Tamil while the remaining

participants either codeswitched between English and Tamil, or responded in English.

In addition to the above-mentioned qualitative data collection, a document survey was also conducted. Documents relevant to the research included census reports, reviews or reports of language policies, school curricula and related media reports.

#### **4.8.4 Census reports**

An email was sent, as requested, to the Department of Statistics, Singapore detailing the required census information contained in statistical tables before permission was granted for its use in the study. Relevant census information included ‘Indian Resident Population by Age Group, Dialect Group and Sex’; ‘Use of English As Home Language by Education Attainment’; ‘Resident Population Aged 5 Years and Over by Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home, Residential Status and Sex’; ‘Resident Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Language Literate In’. These data primarily reflected the figures for the year 2010, although some of the tables presented a comparison of demographics between the two most recent census years, 2000 and 2010.

Specific census data relating to the population under study provided an overview of Tamil language usage in the home domain; and the number of Indians who were literate in Tamil only or Tamil and English only for the year 2010. Furthermore, a comparison of the percentage of Indians who most frequently spoke English or Tamil in the home domain during 2000 and 2010 was useful, to some extent, in ascertaining language shift in the resident Indian population of Singapore; in addition, these data from the two census years were compared with the findings of the study to examine patterns in language usage.

However, the inherent problems in using census data were acknowledged by the researcher. These referred to perception versus reality; the preclusion of codeswitching amongst bilinguals; the census definition of ‘Indian’ in the Singaporean context (Rajan, 2014); and the fuzzy definition of literacy. Notwithstanding these problems, the census data can be used as an approximate barometer of the changing Tamil language profile in Singapore.

#### **4.8.5 Reports on Tamil language**

Reports on the Tamil language syllabi and recommendations; the revised Tamil language syllabi for the primary and secondary levels in 2015 and 2011 respectively; as well as relevant media reports relating to Tamil language in Singapore from the year 2000 were examined. Some of these reports were obtained from the MOE website; other reports that were obtained from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore, focused on the teaching and learning of Tamil language, and recommendations for revisions to be made to the Tamil language syllabi at the primary and secondary levels. These reports were made available to the researcher with the permission of a principal investigator from NIE.

Data from the above-mentioned reports provided essential layers of information that helped augment the findings from the questionnaire survey, focus discussions and interviews, in addition to interpreting and explaining the findings.

#### **4.9 Data Analysis**

Data from all focus group discussions and interviews were audio-taped using a digital voice recorder (Olympus WS-210S) and were transcribed by the researcher herself, as this allowed “an opportunity to get immersed in the data and, an experience that generates emergent insights” (Patton, 2002, p. 441). As the researcher was bilingual in Tamil and English, she was able to transcribe the data that were in both languages. Therefore, all audio-taped data were manually transcribed without the use of Nvivo software, as initially planned. Typing out the relevant verbatim quotes drawn from the focus group participants and interviewees, following the handwritten transcriptions provided the essential pre-requisite for a complete analysis of the data collected (Patton, 2002).

Content analysis was a strategy used in identifying themes from the qualitative data, namely the focus group discussions, interviews and open-ended survey questions, in addition to the open comments in the survey. Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyse the quantitative data from the questionnaire survey, in order to gain an insight into the general patterns and trends in relation to language usage and identity. These analyses were conducted separately, so results could be compared and validated (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p.64).

#### **4.10 Challenges faced in the collection of data**

The main challenge faced was access to potential sites primarily because they were schools and strict guidelines were in place with respect to collecting data for the purpose of research. The first point of contact was MOE as approval needed to be sought prior to commencing fieldwork. The time stipulated to complete data collection was six months. This meant the researcher had to fit in at least two fieldwork trips from Perth, Western Australia, her place of residence, to Singapore within a short time period.

School term breaks, exam or test periods as well as the researcher's work commitments had to be considered when planning the fieldwork schedule. As well, the generally small numbers of Tamil language students in schools that fell within the age bracket that was drawn up at the start of the study, and the low initial response rates, especially from the secondary schools, despite several follow-up telephone calls, further challenged the prospect of meeting the sample size for obtaining quantitative data. The low numbers in the age bracket (16- 30) at the beginning of the study meant the researcher had to consider including students who were aged 15 to meet the sample size, following discussions with her supervisors. Out of thirty-seven schools identified as potential field sites, only eight initially agreed to participate in the study; and eventually only five secondary schools including Tamil language centres participated in the study. The final sample consisted of participants aged between 15 and 25.

Some schools withdrew from the survey due to planned school activities that conflicted with the planned schedule for the fieldwork; other schools simply declined to participate on the grounds of low numbers of Tamil language students. In addition, the planned fieldwork schedule in April 2014 coincided with some of the schools' preparation for semester tests and therefore, they were not inclined to participate in the study for this reason. As mentioned above, the researcher had to make multiple follow-up calls at the start of the school year, and in many instances, she was not able to speak with the principals as they were busy with school matters or away at meetings. This process was particularly time-consuming.

Most schools required permission from the principals before the Tamil teachers could be contacted with regard to the study and collection of data. A few

other schools advised the researcher to directly liaise with the Head of Department for Tamil language regarding participation in the study. In a few cases, the schools' administrative officers or clerical officers assisted by discussing with the respective principals the possibility of administering the questionnaire, or focus group discussion in the schools. In most cases, however, while the Tamil language teachers were willing to include their students in the study, the principals were not agreeable for some of the reasons mentioned above.

Another challenge was the non-participation of polytechnics and pre-tertiary institutions where there were Indian cultural groups and a relatively high number of Indian students. The researcher had contacted the officers-in-charge of the respective Indian cultural groups in three polytechnics following email correspondence, but she was advised that the students would not be able to participate due to busy schedules, job placements, and involvement in projects or examinations. The participation of the polytechnics could have been possibly significant to the study's findings, in relation to examining Tamil language use and maintenance beyond secondary schooling.

#### **4.11 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has presented and explained the reason for a mixed methods design that was most appropriate and relevant for eliciting 'answers' to the research questions. Whereas the quantitative method of data collection included the questionnaire, the qualitative methods consisted of focus group discussions and interviews. A document survey that included census reports, Tamil language reviews undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Singapore, and other relevant media reports with respect to Tamil language in Singapore was also conducted. Participants for the study were recruited through purposeful sampling. Although challenges were faced with regard to accessibility to potential fieldwork sites, and in recruiting participants from secondary schools, the researcher was able to draw a sample beyond the targeted number with the assistance of teachers and principals, particularly from the junior colleges that participated.

The next chapter will discuss the descriptive statistical approaches used in the analysis of the quantitative data collected using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Statistics 24) software.



## Chapter 5 Analysis of Questionnaire

Many data that do not naturally appear in quantitative form can be collected in a quantitative way. We do this by [...] converting phenomena that don't naturally exist in quantitative form into quantitative data, which we can analyse statistically. Examples of this are attitudes and beliefs.

-Muijs, 2011, p. 14.

This chapter presents data analysis in terms of frequency counts, correlation analysis and chi-square test. It will also provide the reasons for these techniques to be used in the analysis of the questionnaire items. Drawing on the statistical analysis, the chapter will describe the position of Tamil in Singapore, and the attitude of the speakers towards the Tamil language. Further to this, the chapter will discuss the significance demonstrated between the three dimensions: language use, attitude towards Tamil language, and identity, through the statistical techniques employed.

### 5.1 Aims of the Quantitative Data Analysis

First, the quantitative data analysis sought to establish reliability of the scale used to assess the attitudes and identities of young Tamils towards their mother tongue, Tamil. Second, the analysis sought to ascertain if a significant association was evident between the various measures of attitude towards Tamil language and identity, and third, if there were any significant associations between language use, and attitudes towards Tamil as well as identity. Lastly, an analysis was useful in providing an age and gender profile of the sample.

Two questions, which in part guided the statistical approaches, were taken from Punch (2014, p.86): “First, will it help us to measure what we want to study: that is, will it be useful for the comparisons we wish to make? Second, if it is helpful, is it in fact possible to measure in this particular situation?” In other words, frequency counts were used to ascertain the domains in which Tamil language were either vibrant or in decline, as well as to obtain an insight into the attitudes of the participants towards the language. Correlation analysis, on the other hand, was useful in obtaining significant associations within the attitudes dimension, as well as those between the attitudes and identity dimensions. Finally, the chi-square test was used to ascertain if there were any significant associations between the three

dimensions namely, language usage, attitudes and identity. In addition, the test was used to validate the results obtained from the language usage dimension with those from attitudes and identity.

The statistical approaches that guided the data analysis met the objectives of the current study. First, an insight into the position of Tamil in terms of language use, including codeswitching across domains, such as the home, public space, friendship, and school was obtained. Second, the construction of identity or identities amongst the young Tamils through their attitudes towards, and choices of the use of Tamil, or English, in particular the colloquial variety - Singlish, were acquired. Finally, the attitudes of young Tamils (between the ages of 15 and 25) towards their mother tongue, Tamil could be inferred from the results.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the most updated version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Statistics 24) due to the reliability of the software (McQueen & Knussen, 2002; Norussis, 1993; Pallant, 2010), particularly in the analysis of questionnaires (Hinton, McMurray, & Brownlow, 2014).

Missing values, in relation to the items which were not answered, or left as blanks in the survey can bias the results of the statistical analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Therefore, the data were screened to ascertain if there were any cases of missing values, and whether there were consistent or regular patterns in the missing values. Typically, a random dispersion of missing values in the data matrix is not as significant as non-randomly missing values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The proportion of missing values for this study was very small. There were no instances where the respondents answered less than 80% of the items. In view of the high response rate, the analysis was conducted by excluding the missing values on a case to case basis. Overall, the small proportion of missing values had minimal impact on the reliability of the findings from this study.

## **5.2 Statistical Approaches**

### **5.2.1 Frequency and summary statistics**

The frequency distributions, counts and percentages were tabulated for all questions with a categorical response, that is, nominal or ordinal. The trends were then summarized based on majority responses, constituting responses from more than

50% of the participants. The skewness of the distributions was also recorded where applicable. This refers to identifying where the highest frequencies were located. Summary statistics in relation to means, standard deviations, medians and inter quartile ranges were reported for questions with a continuous response.

### **5.2.2 Reliability analysis**

Internal consistency underpins reliability, therefore, to ensure consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was used to test for reliability in the Likert scale items. In most cases, an alpha value of .7 or above is considered reliable (Pallant, 2010); the set of items for this study were internally consistent in measuring the thought of each scale. The scales used in the survey relate to Tamil language usage, attitudes towards Tamil language, and identity construction of young Tamils.

### **5.2.3 Test of normality**

Prior to conducting statistical analyses, the assumptions of parametric statistics were inspected for the age variable. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the statistical significance of normal distribution of this continuous variable at  $\alpha = .01$ . This was to determine whether parametric or non-parametric statistics and techniques were to be utilized, as discussed in the following section.

### **5.2.4 Multivariate analysis**

The multivariate analysis techniques used for this study include Spearman's correlation and Mann-Whitney U test. Spearman's correlation analysis is a useful technique to test for associations when nominal or ordinal variables are involved; and the Mann-Whitney U test is useful in situations where two independent, non-parametric variables need to be tested for statistically significant differences (Katz, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). An  $\alpha = .05$  was used to test for statistical significance.

## **5.3 Age and Gender Profile of the Survey Participants**

The sample size for the survey was  $N=319$ . A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was conducted to establish if the age of the survey participants can be assumed to be from a normally distributed population at  $\alpha = .01$ . The results of the test are shown in Table 6 below and indicate that age of the survey participants cannot be assumed

to be from a normally distributed population at  $\alpha=.01$ . Therefore, subsequently non-parametric statistics and techniques were used where the age variable is involved.

*Table 6: Test of Normality for Age of Participants*

Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Age	.723	313	<.001

The median age of the survey participants was 16 years (IQR=1 year) (Table 7). The sample had a slightly larger proportion of females (n=182, 58%) compared to males (n=132, 42%) (Table 7). A Mann-Whitney test indicated that the median age for males and females was not significantly different (U=11625.5, p=.699). This indicates that the age of the sample was matched by gender.

*Table 7: Age of the Survey Participants*

Mean	16.93
Median	16.00
Std. Deviation	2.10
Interquartile Range	1.00

*Table 8: Gender of the Survey Participants*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	182	57.1	58.0	58.0
	Male	132	41.4	42.0	100.0
	Total	314	98.4	100.0	
Missing		5	1.6		
Total		319	100.0		

#### **5.4 Analysis of Results**

The responses of the participants to the closed questions in Section A, relating to the position of Tamil in terms of language use, including codeswitching, across domains such as the home, public space, friendship, and school are summarised in Table 9 below. The following section discusses the observations made from analysing the highest frequency of responses for each question.

#### **5.4.1 Position of Tamil in terms of language use**

The highest number of participants, that is, 44.20%, most frequently used English and Tamil at the same time while 25.71% used mostly English when speaking to their Tamil-speaking friends within the school domain. In contrast, only 1.25%, the lowest across all domains, used Tamil only. A similar trend was observed when they were out with their Tamil-speaking friends. This relatively low percentage of using only Tamil seems to suggest that codeswitching between English and Tamil is a typical language use pattern in peer communication, which further suggests that topics discussed may influence language choice.

Within the home domain, whilst 39.19% of the survey participants spoke English only or mostly English to the father, a comparable number, 39.18% indicated that they spoke Tamil only or mostly Tamil to their mother. A similar pattern was seen when the language choice was reversed, with 33.54% indicating Tamil only or mostly Tamil used when communicating with the father, while 33.22% spoke English only or mostly English with the mother. In contrast, the preferred language with siblings is distinctively different from that observed with parents. Most of the participants, in this case, 25.08% indicated that they use English only at home when speaking with their siblings while 23.82% switch between English and Tamil.

On the other hand, 26.02% - 29.15% of the participants indicated a preference for using English and Tamil at the same time, when discussing personal or family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil, or talking about the day's happenings with a family member, or friend who speaks or understands Tamil.

The results demonstrate that the use of English and Tamil is the most prevalent across the domains when communicating with various interlocutors, with the exception of siblings. A second significant pattern in terms of language use across the domains, with the exception of speaking to the mother and siblings within the home domain, is the use of mostly English; a similar trend is again evident with the usage of English only. It is apparent from the results that codeswitching between English and Tamil, as opposed to using mostly English, or mostly Tamil, emerges as the predominant language use feature across the domains surveyed.

Table 9: Position of Tamil in terms of language use

Item	Tamil only	English only	Mostly Tamil	Mostly English	English and Tamil at the same time	Other languages	Not applicable	Missing
Q1: Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)	4 1.25%	47 14.73%	36 11.29%	82 25.71%	141 44.20%	1 0.31%	0 0.00%	8 2.51%
Q2: When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends	16 5.02%	49 15.36%	59 18.50%	64 20.06%	127 39.81%	0 0.00%	2 0.63%	2 0.63%
Q3: Speaking to my mother at home	72 22.57%	50 15.67%	53 16.61%	56 17.55%	72 22.57%	11 3.45%	1 0.31%	4 1.25%
Q4: Speaking to my father at home	54 16.93%	62 19.44%	53 16.61%	63 19.75%	64 20.06%	9 2.82%	11 3.45%	3 0.94%
Q5: Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home	25 7.84%	80 25.08%	40 12.54%	63 19.75%	76 23.82%	6 1.88%	28 8.78%	1 0.31%
Q6: Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	53 16.61%	63 19.75%	56 17.55%	60 18.81%	83 26.02%	1 0.31%	1 0.31%	2 0.63%
Q7: Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	34 10.66%	61 19.12%	58 18.18%	69 21.63%	93 29.15%	1 0.31%	1 0.31%	2 0.63%

### 5.4.2 Reliability analysis

The reliability coefficient for the ‘Attitude towards Tamil Language’ subscale was found to be .802 (Items=8); and the reliability coefficient for the ‘Identity’ subscale was found to be .689 (Items=3). The reliability coefficient for the overall scale was .839 (Items=11), as illustrated in Table 10. Since the Cronbach’s alphas were greater than, or close to 0.7, the items from the scale were reliable to be used in the analysis. Therefore, the reliability analysis indicates that the survey items are valid, consistent with, and reflect the various aspects of ‘Attitude towards Tamil Language’ and ‘Identity’ being measured.

*Table 10: Reliability analysis*

Scale	Number of Items (N)	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude towards Tamil Language	8	.802
Identity	3	.689
Overall	11	.839

### 5.4.3 Attitude towards Tamil language and identity

The responses of the participants to questions relating to attitude towards Tamil language and identity are summarised in Table 11 below. The responses to all questions except Question 16, ‘Hindi is an important language in Singapore’, were tilted towards the agreement end of the scale. In other words, whereas 42.64% of the participants agreed with the statement that Hindi is an important language in Singapore, more than double, that is, 88.09% of the participants, were in agreement to Question 15: ‘Tamil is an important language in Singapore’.

The strongest level of agreement, however, was for Q12 where 97.81% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that it is important that Tamil is passed on to the next generation. Following this, 96.87% indicated that they were proud to be able to speak in Tamil. A similar level of agreement which accounted for 96.23% of the total number of responses, was evident with regard to speaking Tamil regardless of the level of academic qualifications. In terms of identity, the majority, constituting 93.41%, held the view that speaking Tamil is an essential part of being a Tamil, in comparison to following the Tamil customs (88.71%) or being engaged with the Tamil media (82.44%). Overall, the results clearly demonstrate that the young Tamils who were surveyed hold a positive attitude towards the Tamil

language, in addition to strongly identifying with the language.

#### **5.4.4 Correlation analysis**

The Spearman's correlation coefficients were computed for the various measures of attitude towards Tamil language and identity (Table 11). Moderate to strong associations between variables typically fall within the range of 0.4 to 0.8 (Harris, G. Taylor, & J. Taylor, 2005). Whilst Spearman correlation coefficients establish a statistical indication of the strength in the relationship between variables (Huizingh, 2007; Myers et al., 2013), they do not necessarily demonstrate a causal relationship between variables (Chen & Popovich, 2002; McQueen & Knussen, 2002). However, as Chen and Popovich (2002) posit, "statistics such as the correlation ...mainly provide us with clues regarding what the plausible causal relationships might be" (p.7). A similar view is held by Punch (2005) who explains that although inferences can be made between variables that show a 'necessary connection', there is no clear-cut answer to an apparent relationship; however, he cites relatedness between variables as one of the criteria that can be used in making sense of any causal relationships.

For this study on "Tamil and Tamils", the statistics derived from the correlation analysis will be used to draw any inferences that may point to a possible causal relationship between the variables where a statistically significant association is demonstrated. Therefore, coefficients that fall within the range of 0.4 to 0.8, as aforementioned, will be considered in the interpretation of the data.

The results of the analysis indicate that the various measures of attitude towards Tamil language and identity, except the measure relating to the importance of Hindi language in Singapore, are significantly associated. A positive correlation is evident between one's pride in the ability to speak Tamil; the importance of being able to speak in Tamil due to its mother tongue status; and the importance of intergenerational transmission of Tamil. On the other hand, the insignificance of one's academic qualifications in relation to the choice of speaking in Tamil, and the necessity of using Tamil in intra-ethnic communication are strongly associated. This suggests that the young Tamils do not concede to notions of Tamil relegated to a language primarily associated with those in the lower socio-economic stratum, or the 'uneducated'.



Furthermore, the positive and significant correlation between Question 11 and Question 19 (correlation= 0.474) demonstrates a strong association between the attitude towards the importance of speaking the mother tongue, Tamil, with that of identifying oneself as a Tamil. Similarly, a strong Tamil identity is significantly correlated with the sense of pride in being able to speak in Tamil (Questions 10 and 19; correlation= 0.561). Therefore, it can be said that language is a dominant marker of identity, in this case. Another important result points to a strong association between speaking Tamil as a marker of identity, and the engagement with the Tamil media in forging the Tamil identity. In other words, a positive attitude towards Tamil would mean a stronger identity, and vice-versa. It can be inferred from these significant associations that speaking Tamil or the ability to speak in Tamil is a necessary precursor to identifying oneself as a Tamil, regardless of language choice or language usage across the domains surveyed. Tables 11 and 12 below contain the summary of the frequency counts and correlational analysis for Questions 10 to 20 of Section B.

Table 11: Attitude towards Tamil Language and Identity

Aspect being Measured	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Missing
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q10: I am proud to be able to speak in Tamil.	181 56.74%	128 40.13%	1 0.31%	9 2.82%	0 0.00%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q11: It is important to be able to speak in Tamil because it is my mother tongue.	198 62.07%	99 31.03%	7 2.19%	13 4.08%	2 0.63%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q12: It is important that Tamil is passed on to the next generation.	223 69.91%	89 27.90%	1 0.31%	6 1.88%	0 0.00%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q13: Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another whenever there is an opportunity.	145 45.45%	141 44.20%	3 0.94%	29 9.09%	1 0.31%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q14: Tamil should be spoken regardless of a person's academic qualifications.	188 58.93%	119 37.30%	2 0.63%	10 3.13%	0 0.00%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q15: Tamil is an important language in Singapore.	160 50.16%	121 37.93%	7 2.19%	30 9.40%	1 0.31%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q16: Hindi is an important language in Singapore.	31 9.72%	105 32.92%	48 15.05%	130 40.75%	5 1.57%
Attitudes of young Tamils	Q17: It is important to actively promote Tamil in Singapore (e.g. Tamil Language Festival).	183 57.37%	123 38.56%	1 0.31%	10 3.13%	2 0.63%
Identity	Q18: Following the Tamil customs (e.g. festivals, ceremonies, greetings) is important in being considered a Tamil.	162 50.78%	121 37.93%	8 2.51%	26 8.15%	2 0.63%
Identity	Q19: Speaking Tamil is an essential part of being a Tamil.	182 57.05%	116 36.36%	1 0.31%	19 5.96%	1 0.31%
Identity	Q20: Being engaged with Tamil entertainment media (e.g. radio, TV, cinema, stage shows) is part of my identity as a Tamil.	122 38.24%	141 44.20%	12 3.76%	43 13.48%	1 0.31%

Table 12: Spearman's correlations between measures of Attitude towards Tamil Language and Identity

	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19
Q10: I am proud to be able to speak in Tamil.	1									
Q11: It is important to be able to speak in Tamil because it is my mother tongue.	.593**									
Q12: It is important that Tamil is passed on to the next generation.	.580**	.647**								
Q13: Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another whenever there is an opportunity.	.527**	.467**	.449**							
Q14: Tamil should be spoken regardless of a person's academic qualifications.	.541**	.494**	.540**	.660**						
Q15: Tamil is an important language in Singapore.	.522**	.421**	.488**	.416**	.487**					
Q16: Hindi is an important language in Singapore.	-.044	-.052	-.006	-.061	.043	.164**				
Q17: It is important to actively promote Tamil in Singapore (e.g. Tamil Language Festival, Tamil on signboards, announcements in MRT stations).	.446**	.394**	.531**	.479**	.554**	.511**	.057			
Q18: Following the Tamil customs (e.g. festivals, ceremonies, greetings) is important in being considered a Tamil.	.356**	.360**	.305**	.347**	.386**	.347**	-.005	.402**		
Q19: Speaking Tamil is an essential part of being a Tamil.	.561**	.474**	.447**	.493**	.490**	.492**	-.075	.433**	.472**	
Q20: Being engaged with Tamil entertainment media (e.g. radio, TV, cinema, stage shows) is part of my identity as a Tamil.	.391**	.332**	.301**	.372**	.328**	.338**	-.006	.326**	.364**	.545**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### **5.4.5 Chi-Square test of independence**

The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to test the association between questions (Smith, Gratz, & Bousquet, 2009) relating to language use and those relating to attitude towards Tamil language and identity. In order to ensure that the assumptions of this test were met, the responses from the questions relating to language use, and those relating to attitude towards Tamil language and identity were collapsed into fewer categories or ignored. For the questions relating to language use, the final categories that were used included ‘Mostly Tamil’ or ‘Tamil Only’, and ‘Mostly English’ or ‘English Only’; the other categories were ignored as they had low frequency counts. For questions relating to attitude towards Tamil language and identity, the final categories that were used included ‘Strongly Agree’ or ‘Agree’, and ‘Strongly Disagree’ or ‘Disagree’. A .05 level of significance was used as the criteria for statistical significance. Non-significant results or instances which still did not meet the assumptions of the Chi-square test are not reported.

#### **5.5 Chi-square Test: Association between Language Use and Attitude towards Tamil Language, and Identity**

The chi-square test was used to highlight any significant associations apparent between language use (Section A of the questionnaire) on one hand, and attitudes, as well as notions of identity (Section B of the questionnaire) on the other. The following section presents a discussion of the significant results.

The results demonstrate that more than 96% of those who speak mostly Tamil or Tamil only, across all the situational contexts, or across domains such as the home, friendship, and school, as indicated in Section A of the questionnaire, are in agreement that Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another, whenever there is an opportunity. This is relatively higher in comparison to those who speak mostly English or English only, whose level of agreement fell within the range of 76.8% to 83.1%. However, the strongest level of agreement was evidenced in questionnaire item 13 (Q13) which accounted for 100% of the responses. This was seen amongst those who speak to their siblings in mostly Tamil or Tamil only. The table below shows a comparison of the extent of agreement between the two groups of respondents in relation to Q13.

*Table 13: Q13: Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another whenever there is an opportunity:*

Language Usage	Mostly Tamil or Tamil Only: Group 1	Mostly English or English only: Group 2
Q1: Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)	97.5%	81.3%
Q2: When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends	98.7%	76.8%
Q3: Speaking to my mother at home	96.8%	81.0%
Q4: Speaking to my father at home	99.1%	81.5%
Q5: Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home	100.0%	83.1%
Q6: Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	99.1%	78.9%
Q7: Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	97.8%	79.8%

Those who speak mostly Tamil or Tamil only, have also indicated that Tamil is an important language in Singapore, in addition to indicating that part of their identity as a Tamil stems from their engagement with the Tamil media. The results are presented in the Tables 14 and 15 below:

Table 14: Q15: Tamil is an important language in Singapore

Language Usage	Mostly Tamil or Tamil Only: Group 1	Mostly English or English only: Group 2
Q1: Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)	97.5%	79.7%
Q2: When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends	98.7%	83.0%
Q3: Speaking to my mother at home	92.0%	81.0%
Q4: Speaking to my father at home	94.4%	83.9%
Q5: Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home	95.4%	85.2%
Q6: Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	91.7%	81.1%
Q7: Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	94.6%	81.4%

*Table 15: Q20: Being engaged with the Tamil entertainment media (e.g. radio, TV, cinema, stage shows) is part of my identity as a Tamil*

Language Usage	Mostly Tamil or Tamil Only: Group 1	Mostly English or English only: Group 2
Q1: Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)	97.5%	69.5%
Q2: When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends	94.7%	65.2%
Q3: Speaking to my mother at home	91.2%	69.5%
Q4: Speaking to my father at home	92.5%	71.0%
Q5: Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home	90.8%	75.4%
Q6: Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	89.8%	69.1%
Q7: Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	90.2%	69.8%

Table 16: Q18: Following the Tamil customs (e.g. festivals, ceremonies, greetings) is important in being considered a Tamil

Language Usage	Mostly Tamil or Tamil Only: Group 1	Mostly English or English only: Group 2
Q1: Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)	97.5%	83.5%
Q2: When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends	93.3%	83.8%
Q3: Speaking to my mother at home	93.6%	80.0%
Q4: Speaking to my father at home	95.3%	79.7%
Q5: Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home	95.4%	83.0%
Q6: Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	99.1%	78.7%
Q7: Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil	94.6%	79.7%

It can be seen that in terms of engagement with the Tamil media (Table 15), those in Group 2 do not place emphasis on Tamil media as a marker of identity, in contrast to those in Group 1, whose level of agreement is significantly higher.

Furthermore, more than 93% of respondents who speak mostly Tamil or Tamil only, across the various contexts (with the exception of Q2: *When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends*), have indicated that following Tamil customs is an important marker of Tamil identity, in comparison to those who speak mostly English or English only (Table 16). For the latter group, between 78.7% and 83.5% strongly agree or agree that following Tamil customs is an important marker of identity.

On the other hand, Tamil language usage with family members, or when out with friends, with the exception of the school domain (Q1), demonstrates a very significant association with the importance of speaking Tamil as an important marker



of identity, with 100% of the respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement relating to identity. A relatively high level of agreement is also seen amongst those who speak mostly English or English in the same contexts, with more than 86% strongly agreeing or agreeing that speaking the mother tongue is closely related to one's identity.

Moreover, the use of mostly Tamil or Tamil only, when out with Tamil-speaking friends; to one's parents (with the exception of siblings); when discussing personal or family matters; or when sharing the day's happenings with family or friends who speak or understand Tamil demonstrates a strong bearing on the importance of being able to speak in Tamil due to its mother tongue status. While more than 98% of those who speak mostly Tamil or Tamil only, strongly agree or agree to this statement on attitude towards Tamil language, more than 86% of those who speak mostly English or English only, share the same view. Related to the questions on attitudes was Question 8, an open-ended question from Section A that drew on the importance of learning Tamil: Do you think learning Tamil is important? Out of the 319 survey participants, 91.85% of them indicated that learning Tamil was important.

Overall, the results indicate that the extent of Tamil language usage in the respective contexts or domains influences the attitude towards Tamil language, as well as Tamil identity. At the same time, the results also reveal that those with a relatively higher Tamil language usage, as opposed to those who use mostly English or English only, in the contexts surveyed, have indicated a strong sense of Tamil identity and ownership of the Tamil language. In other words, these respondents have underscored the importance of speaking the Tamil language in intra-ethnic communication (that is, with other Tamil speakers), and regard Tamil as an important language in Singapore. This does not automatically translate to mean that those who have indicated a higher usage of English across the various domains or contexts, in comparison to Tamil, demonstrate a negative attitude towards the Tamil language or that they do not have a strong sense of Tamil identity. A comparative analysis of the results presented above show that while this group of respondents have indicated that they use mostly English or English only, in all contexts (with the exception of the school domain), their sense of a Tamil identity seems to be associated with speaking Tamil. Though it appears to be a contradiction at first, it

can be inferred that these respondents value the importance of speaking their mother tongue, regardless of its extent, which is factored into their sense of identity.

On the other hand, as aforementioned, when speaking to their parents or when discussing family matters, or the day's events with a family member or friend, in mostly English or English only, the same group of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is important to speak in Tamil because of its mother tongue status. The degree of agreement, in this case, point to a positive attitude towards the Tamil language, in particular, in being able to speak it, regardless of the extent of its use.

One sharp distinction between those who use mostly Tamil or Tamil only, and those who use mostly English or English only, in the contexts or domains described above, appears to be in the construction of identity in relation to Tamil language usage. Whilst following Tamil customs, speaking in Tamil and being engaged with the Tamil media are strong indicators of identity in the former, speaking Tamil has been cited as an essential part of the Tamil identity in the latter group. Essentially, speaking the language remains a critical aspect of one's Tamil identity in all the respondents. Both groups demonstrate a positive attitude towards the Tamil language in terms of its mother tongue status; the importance of its usage in intra-ethnic communication; and it being regarded as an important language in Singapore.

## **5.6 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has discussed language choice, attitudes towards Tamil, and notions of identity through descriptive analyses, which included frequency counts, correlation analysis and chi-square test. The statistics demonstrate that the students surveyed, regardless of the extent of English or Tamil used in the contexts, draw a strong link between language and identity. That is, a dominant marker of identity remains Tamil amongst these English-Tamil bilinguals, as demonstrated in the strong association between the attitude towards the importance of speaking the mother tongue, Tamil, with that of identifying oneself as a Tamil. Also, a strong Tamil identity is significantly correlated with the sense of pride in being able to speak in Tamil. At the same time, whilst following Tamil customs and engaging with the Tamil media are important indicators of one's identity amongst those who spoke mostly Tamil, speaking Tamil, interestingly, was fundamental to one's identity, for those who spoke mostly English. Overall, the young Tamils surveyed

held a high regard for their mother tongue, and view the importance of speaking Tamil due to its mother tongue status, and as a marker of identity.

The next chapter aims to examine the three dimensions: language usage or choice; attitude towards the Tamil language; and notions of identity, through a thematic content analysis of the transcribed texts from the focus group discussions and interviews. The thematic analysis aims to provide an insight into these three dimensions. The findings obtained from the qualitative analysis will be useful in seeking further clarifications in relation to the results derived from the statistical analysis.

## Chapter 6 Content Analysis: Focus Group and Survey data

Virtually all disciplines within the whole spectrum of the humanities and the social sciences, including those that seek to improve the political and social conditions of life, are concerned with the functions and effects of symbols, meanings, and messages.

-Krippendorff, 2004, p. xvii

It was necessary to capture the experiences drawn from both the focus group participants as well as from the open-ended survey questions, in relation to language usage, attitudes towards Tamil (or English), and how the young Tamils constructed their identities to (a) clarify or confirm if the Tamil language is further declining in use; (b) explain possible reasons for the reported phenomenon; (c) ascertain notions of identity. As such, the ‘voices’ of the participants dominated the qualitative strand of the overall study.

This chapter explains the rationale for content analysis as a strategy used to analyse the qualitative data, and how this can complement the results from the quantitative analysis (Chapter 5), as well as to ascertain patterns through an analysis of themes identified (Bernard, 2011). The chapter describes and interprets the “purposive data” (Richards, 2015, p.41) extracted from the six focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions.

### 6.1 Thematic Content Analysis as a Strategy

One of the challenges faced by researchers is making sense of the copious amounts of qualitative data gathered (Bryman, 2012), in pursuit of explaining or finding patterns (Gibbs, 2007) within “records of observation or interaction that are complex and contexted...not easily reduced to numbers” (Richards, 2005, p.34). To compound this further, an often-cited issue in the literature points to the lack of available, standardized procedures for the analysis of such data (Miles & Huberman, 1984), in addition to the growing number of methods that seek to exploit qualitative data (Gibbs, 2007; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Content analysis is an approach, amongst others, that has evolved since the 1960s, and widely used across an expanding number of disciplines or fields of study in search of ‘answers’ (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Tesch, 1990);

however, it is not without criticisms, which are mainly levelled at its many interpretations and lack of a solid framework relating to text classification (Weber, 1990). Another grey area highlighted is the synonymous use of the terms ‘content analysis’ and ‘thematic analysis’, although discernible differences are said to be evident between the two (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

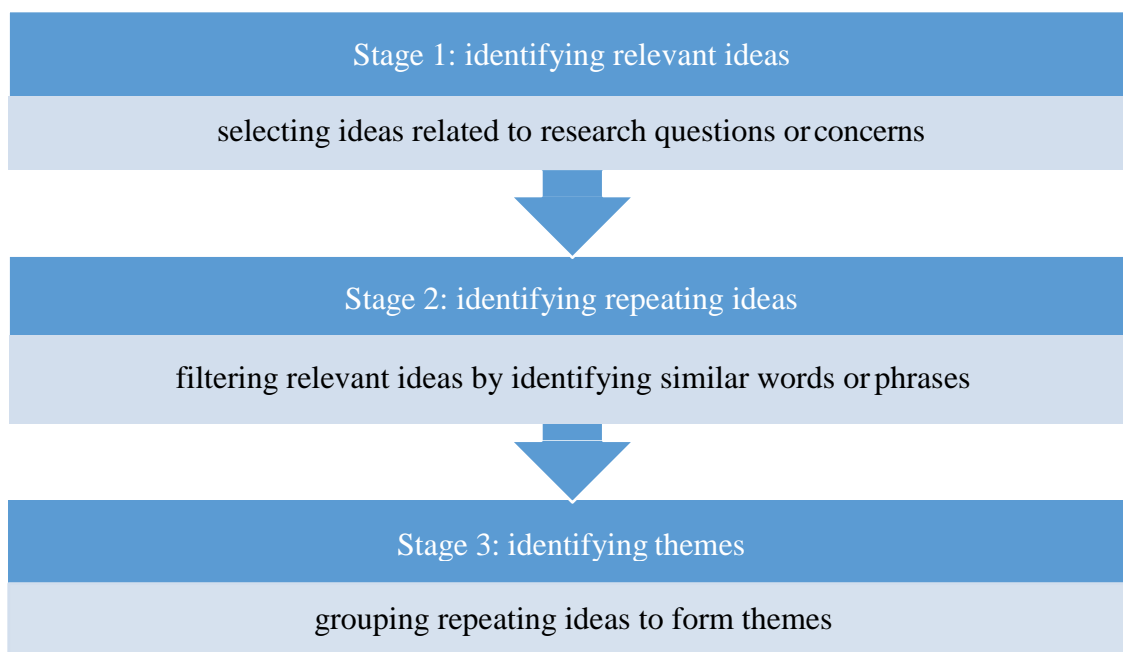
Whilst quantifying is usually a feature assigned to content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Neuendorf, 2002), “nonquantitative studies in content analysis may also be based on extreme or deviant cases, cases that illustrate maximum variety on variables, cases that are somehow typical of a phenomenon, or cases that confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis” (Bernard, 2006, p.510). In a more general sense, “content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessary from an author's or user's perspective” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.3). Further to this, several definitions of content analysis abound in relation to contexts (e.g. Holsti, 1969; Rosenberg, Schnurr, & Oxman, 1990).

This study adopts the general definition of the term ‘content analysis’ and in this case, themes or combined categories are the units of analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Also, analysis of focus group data typically relies on thematic units (Stewart et al., 2007). This strategy is used to look for frequently occurring ideas, themes or common words across the data sets that can provide further insight into, and validate the quantitative data obtained (Bernard, 2011). Furthermore, identifying themes is a common strand evident in other approaches used in analysing qualitative data, which includes but is not limited to, discourse analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Moreover, the “commonalities and uniqueness within the themes” can further illuminate the existing literature of the phenomenon under study (Tesch, 1990, p.60), in this case, language shift and maintenance of Tamil language, as well as the identity of the Tamils in Singapore. As this is a mixed methods study, the intent of thematic content analysis is to (a) identify patterns within the rich data (Kruegar, 1998); (b) interpret the data so as to provide an understanding of the phenomenon; (c) draw comparisons to previous literature related to the study.

The content analysis approach utilised for the current study has been adapted from Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) procedure for identifying patterns and

themes in the qualitative data. This includes three stages, as illustrated in Figure 2 below:



*Figure 2: Adaptation of Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) procedure for identifying patterns and themes*

Relevant ideas are “manageable” parts of the text that are related to the research questions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). For this study, they were identified by examining responses to each question within and across focus groups. Similarly, the responses to the open-ended survey questions that were related to the research questions were identified and classified as relevant in the first instance. Texts that were not relevant were discarded. Next, recurring or repeating ideas, representative of phrases or words (synonyms and approximations) that were frequently used within and across the focus groups, were extracted from the relevant ideas. This approach, to a certain extent, corresponds to the process of constant comparisons put forth by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Therefore, at this stage, data were reduced to recurring ideas that were similar in their stance or meanings. However, this did not mean the unique, singular experience of a particular participant was considered insignificant. Such responses were also woven into the narrative as “individual differences have an important place in the paradigm” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p.48). In the final stage, themes were identified by grouping repeating ideas.

Codes allocated for the categories were largely *a priori*, based on the adaptation of Edwards' (2010) Sociology-of-Language-Framework for Minority (and other) Languages, and to a lesser extent, data driven.

The *a priori* codes served as categories derived from Edwards' (2010) typological framework for initial coding. Codes which emerged from the data sets were added accordingly. The final revised version of the coding manual consisted of twelve categories. These categories were then re-organised under themes, which were framed within the scope of the central research questions. Table 17 below shows an example of an *a priori* coding category, and its description; the descriptions of emergent data are italicised for identification (See Appendix 5 for the complete list of categories and description).

*Table 17: Coding categories*

	Categories for coding	Description
1	Demography= DEM	<p>1. Marriages. Inter-racial/ exogamous marriages.</p> <p>2. <i>Multiracial/Multilingual/Bilingual society as a contributing factor for use of English/Singlish within the wider contemporary society.</i></p> <p>Stronghold for language identified (e.g. ethnic enclave) in Singapore.</p> <p>Concentration/distribution of Indians in Singapore (including Tamil speakers).</p>

Nine themes were identified from the qualitative data as follows:

1. Language choice and codeswitching in intra-ethnic communication
2. Attitudes towards Tamil language and fluency
3. The diglossic dilemma
4. Language transmission and predictions of Tamil survivability
5. Making sense of identity
6. The multiracial strain: a sense of togetherness and 'otherness'
7. The economics of languages

8. The connect and disconnect with India
9. Growing and maintaining Tamil

## **6.2 Validity and Reliability in Content Analysis**

Hammersley (cited in Silverman, 1993, p.149) equates validity with truth: “By validity, I mean truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers”. Krippendorff (2004) echoes this view by stating that validity within the context of content analysis “concerns truths” (p.212). Weber (1990), however, explains the problematic and ambiguous conception of ‘truth’ when classifying content, in relation to coding categories during the data reduction process, where overlaps can occur, to which he suggests more specific categories to counter the issue of grey areas.

Reliability, on the other hand, can be strengthened with intercoder reliability where assigned codes are typically revised in the process of arriving at a level of consensus with other coders (Bernard, 2006; Carey, Morgan, & Oxtoby, 1996). For this study, the assistance of one other coder, who was the researcher’s colleague, and a research associate at the time of the study, was sought. A few revisions, which included re-classifying and revising the code descriptors so they were more explicit, followed in the course of discussion between the researcher and coder. The categories and descriptors were finalised when high agreement was reached.

The following section will discuss the themes by presenting the purposive qualitative data drawn from both the focus group discussions and survey, in a narrative style. Therefore, *in vivo* codes, presented in italics, have been used extensively to illustrate the experience and thoughts of the participants. Square brackets have been used for context information, or to indicate Tamil to English translations. Such translations within square brackets have been boldfaced for easy identification.

## **6.3 Theme 1: Language Choice and Codeswitching in Intra-ethnic Communication**

### **6.3.1 Language choice**

Reasons for language choice varied across the focus group participants. However, the interlocutor, in addition to the social distance between the interlocutors, surfaced as important determinants of language choice. A recurring



reason cited for the use of Tamil pointed to the interlocutor. In other words, *the person we are talking to make us decide what languages to use*. For example, *mostly in Tamil when with our friends; If I talk with my Tamil friends, [it's] mostly Tamil; With my mother and brothers, it's Tamil*.

However, the choice of Tamil, in this instance, was usually determined in relation to the social distance. That is, Tamil was used if the interlocutor was 'close': *If they are close, Tamil will be fine; I only speak Tamil to friends who are very close to me; If I know the person, like my friend I know him for a year, so I talk Tamil to him*.

Another reason cited was the language used by the interlocutors, which acted as a 'code signal'. In other words, participants mentioned that they normally responded in the language they were spoken to. For instance, *if he answers in Tamil, I'll try my best to speak in Tamil but if he doesn't, it's all the way in English; when they start speaking to me in Tamil and continue in it, I will start speaking back in Tamil, but if they were to speak to me in English, I'm not going to speak to them in Tamil*.

Similarly, the choice of language was also influenced by family members as the following illustrate:

*There are instances when my mum will be telling me to speak in English more because she wants to learn English, then I'll speak to her [in English].*

*I only use Tamil when I talk to my parents because [my parents are not so literate in English].*

*My grandma herself speaks in English to us, so there's no necessity for me to speak in Tamil at home although we do.*

*To my father, I speak in English, but my mum, I speak in Tamil because she's more fluent in the language.*

*At home, I usually speak to my mum in English. We normally communicate to parents in English. My parents speak a mix-Tamil and English.*

A second reason stated was the context or environment. One of the participants cited home as a domain where *it's more easier to converse in Tamil*; Another participant stated that *[I speak Tamil 99% of the time at home, very little*

**English].** Apart from this, a Tamil-oriented context was seen to influence the choice of language, *for example, in a Tamil Language society meeting, I'll prefer talking in Tamil because the society is such; We don't really use it [Tamil] except for Indian context; To be honest, most of us speak Tamil only in Tamil classes [at school].*

Further to this, Tamil was also reserved for jokes, which at the same time, seemed to create a sense of 'insider-ness': *when I am joking or when we're playing around [that's when I use Tamil]; Like inside jokes; It's very difficult to communicate without Tamil to a Tamil-speaking friend because the way you say it in Tamil is much funnier than you say it in English.* The participants agreed that Tamil carried the nuances necessary in such contexts. Contrary to this, a switch to English was made when Tamil was perceived to be inappropriate: *With my sister, we somehow end up speaking in English because the things we talk about [history lesson] will sound quite weird in Tamil. I think it depends on context.*

On the other hand, age was also implicated as a contributing factor to language choice: *[They speak] mostly English because they are in the same age group; I speak mostly Tamil unless it's with my cousins [then, it's English].*

### **6.3.2 Codeswitching**

Whilst language choice is determined by interlocutors, social distance or contexts, as indicated in the data, codeswitching primarily occurred due to habitual practice, or lack of vocabulary which impacted level of fluency. In relation to habitual usage, for example, *sometimes we tend to mix Tamil with English. It's just our thing; In other words, it's natural to switch between Tamil and English; If I'm talking to a group of Indians, I won't speak solely in Tamil but I'll mix English and Tamil.* In addition to using English, participants also mentioned that, *we mix English, Tamil and Malay when we speak, and also, Tamil is mixed with Chinese and Malay words in Singapore.*

The second reason for codeswitching weighed heavily on lack of vocabulary. In other words, *when we don't know the words in Tamil, we use English words to replace and vice-versa; I can't find words I think of in English, can't translate into Tamil [so I use English]; Because we don't have a wide range of vocabulary; There's a lot of words that I don't actually know how to say in Tamil so instead of struggling, I would rather switch to English so that people won't*

*laugh at me.* One reason indicated for inserting Tamil words in a single speech is because *certain words are lost in translation.* In other words, *something that you can describe in Tamil but you can't do in English.*

A repetitive motif that emerged in the discussion with the participants in relation to codeswitching was ease of communication: *It's easier to express ourselves [in both Tamil and English] and it's easier to talk in both English and Tamil.* Therefore, participants conceded that *it's more comfortable for us to use both languages.*

Codeswitching, therefore, served as a stylistic device on one hand, and as a strategy to avoid embarrassment as a consequence of low fluency, on the other. It was also a 'natural' feature of speech amongst these bilinguals or multilinguals. This was evidenced throughout the focus discussions across the six groups, which were interwoven with instances of codeswitching between Tamil and English.

## **6.4 Theme 2: Attitudes towards Tamil Language and Fluency**

### **6.4.1 Attitudes**

Tamil language was regarded highly amongst the participants due to its aesthetic and symbolic values, long history, as well as being held as a carrier of Tamil culture and traditions, despite it being perceived as *a difficult language to learn,* or one that had been labelled a 'coolie language' during British reign. On the other hand, qualitative data drawn from the surveys also revealed other reasons for the perceived importance of Tamil language in Singapore, such as the official status of the language. These will be discussed in the following sections.

A common thread in the responses of the participants was that Tamil was perceived as *one of those unique languages. It has so much beauty, for example, its poems are very nice, even though I don't understand, I listen to poems.* However, the appreciation of Tamil was seen to demonstrate no correlation to one's level of fluency in the language, as summarised in the following responses: *although I have difficulty speaking the language, I'm definitely proud of the language; I don't need to be fluent in it [Tamil] to stop someone, like Indians, Chinese, whoever from making fun of it. That's where my pride comes in for the language.*

The acknowledgement of Tamil as a classical language, or one with a long history was evident as well: *It deserves the respect because it has been around for a long time; I really think Tamil is important, how can you forget something that's*

*been there for two, three thousands of years?* One of the respondents drew a comparison between Tamil and English, stating that *Tamil is an ancient language. It's not like English or some other languages. It's been around for a long time.* This sense of pride demonstrated by the respondents reveals the intrinsic value attached to the language as captured in the following statement: *It [Tamil] may not have much economical value [in Singapore] but it has a lot of historical value. To me this is irreplaceable.*

Furthermore, Tamil was seen to be instrumental in *[forming] the basis of the Tamil society in Singapore*, and as a language that *bonds them despite the fact they mix languages and speak.* There was also strong agreement amongst the participants across the groups that Tamil is important as it was perceived as an integral part of *our roots* and that *we need to know our roots.*

When questioned about the label 'coolie' (labourer) that came to be attached to the Tamil language during British colonisation in Singapore, all participants except for two, stated that they were not affected by the negative connotation that the term 'coolie language' conveyed. The participants were quick to defend their mother tongue: *I should be proud of myself, why should I be ashamed?* Appreciation of the coolies, who were predominantly Tamil speakers, was evident: *My language built the railway track; the coolies are the reason for what we have now, [and] I don't see any issues with that.* Therefore, it appears that having cast Tamil as a labourer's language then has had hardly any influence on one's attitude towards the language in contemporary Singapore. Relatedly, it demonstrates that a relatively low-prestige language such as Tamil in the Singaporean context is symbolic of Tamil identity, and is valued by the young Tamils.

On the other hand, other reasons that expressed agreement or disagreement to whether Tamil was an important language in Singapore also emerged in the qualitative data drawn from the 'Any comments' section of the survey. These data were considered relevant as they contained clear explanations in relation to the perceived level of importance, as opposed to responses that were either dichotomous (yes/no/I don't think so), or which were rephrased versions of the given statement, for example, *it is considered one.* More than half of the survey participants did not include any other comments to the Likert item on the importance of Tamil language. The following discussion of the qualitative data

were drawn from 43 out of the 319 completed questionnaires. Although this may be considered a relatively small number, the responses helped clarify notions of importance or otherwise, in relation to Tamil language.

A primary reason cited for the perceived importance of the Tamil language was that *it's one of the four official languages in Singapore*, in addition to Singapore being *a multi-racial society* and, hence, its recognition as a *national language*. This suggests that official recognition of the language was equated with importance. In other words, it appears that the importance accorded to Tamil was a consequence of its official recognition as one of the main languages. A second, though minor reason cited was that *since Tamil is spoken by the majority Indians, and is a recognised language, Tamil is an important language in Singapore*. To a lesser extent, it was indicated that *Tamil language is given importance everywhere like public places, schools* as well as in *shopping malls, public transport*. One other reason provided was *Tamils help to promote the reputation of Tamil in Singapore*. Therefore, the importance of Tamil language seems to stem from its official status, and to a certain extent, the linguistic landscape, in addition to Tamil being embedded in the school curriculum, and spoken by the Tamils, currently the majority group amongst the Indians. This suggests that overall, the institutionalising of Tamil in Singapore has apparently contributed to the perception that 'Tamil is important', although the number of Tamil speakers in relation to Indians as a community, was also indicated as a reason.

In contrast, the minority status of Tamil speakers when compared to the other ethnic groups, was viewed as a disadvantage in relation to the importance of Tamil. In other words, *Tamil language is not really a priority in Singapore as not much importance is given to the small Indian community*. Furthermore, the importance of Tamil was measured in comparison to English and Mandarin, as well as Malay. For example, it was perceived that *English is the most important language; everyone is dependent on English*; and that *English is a more important language in Singapore*.

Similarly, *other languages such as English, Chinese and Malay are used more often as official languages but Tamil is not given enough importance; and Tamil is not a widely-used language*. On the other hand, *it is not required neither is it in high demand such as Mandarin*. Apart from these reasons, that *some Singapore*

*schools do not offer TL [Tamil] as a subject* was perceived as the language not well recognised within the Singaporean context. To a far lesser extent, neutral views were expressed as in *every language is important. It is whether you choose to speak it or learn it.*

These varying interpretations of the importance of Tamil reveal the underlying dimensions, be it sociological or psychological that seem to influence one's attitude towards the language. However, overall, the data demonstrate a positive attitude towards the language as well as indicating a sense of pride and respect for it.

#### **6.4.2 Fluency in Tamil**

Fluency surfaced as an important contributing factor to one's motivational or confidence level in relation to speaking Tamil. The data indicated that whilst fluency in Tamil was held in high esteem, the lack of it appeared to cause embarrassment to the participants.

In general, the participants across the focus groups admitted that they were not very fluent in Tamil, during the discussion around language choice. Only one of the participants appeared to be effectively bilingual in that her command over both Tamil and English was evident when expressing her views; the other participants in this particular focus group also pointed out her strength as being able to demonstrate seemingly equal level of fluency in the two languages, and particularly in Tamil, which they regarded highly. This sense of pride or satisfaction was conveyed in the following response: *If I can hold a conversation in Tamil, I will feel very proud of myself, like I've succeeded in something, whereas for English, it's not pride, it's something I'm used to. In the same vein, I am able to say what I feel exactly [in Tamil], so if I say it in English, I won't have that satisfaction.*

While embarrassment from lack of fluency in Tamil seemed to largely affect one's motivation or confidence to speak the language, this did not automatically translate or lead to disregard for the language. That is to say, *we don't feel embarrassed about the language, it's how we speak it; correspondingly, I have a very high respect for Tamil and me not being able to convey it properly is very disappointing. In the same way, I like the language and I would love to speak it as well as [the other Tamil classmates] but I don't and I guess I'm embarrassed. This*

sense of ‘losing face’ or being self-critical repeatedly surfaced amongst the participants, who revealed that *we find it awkward to talk in Tamil because we make a lot of mistakes; when surrounded with Tamil-speaking [people] and I can’t speak fluently, I’m afraid I’ll be looked down; or when I can’t answer to the Tamil teacher in Tamil [I feel embarrassed], as well as in cases when I cannot talk to elders in Tamil, I feel embarrassed.*

On the other hand, the Tamil teacher appeared to cause embarrassment to students in instances where *the [Tamil] teacher will let me stand up in class and say my ‘ra’ [a rhotic Tamil consonant in the alveolar region], it’s so embarrassing and I hated her for that.* Another example points to being scared that *she [Tamil teacher] will correct you, and then very embarrassing.* However, *among our friends when we speak Tamil, when we make mistakes it’s normal, since it’s among us only.* Therefore, to a certain extent, *the more fluent we are in the language, we are more inclined to speak that.*

The above contexts illustrate that a strong correlation between fluency and language choice seems to be apparent, and as such, reason to shift to another language. In this case, it was to avoid embarrassment from not speaking the language fluently, in addition to not marring the image of the language itself. At the same time, the social environment, as evidenced in the context of friendship, may positively influence one’s motivational or confidence level in speaking Tamil.

### **6.4.3 Attitudes towards Hindi**

The preference of learning Tamil over Hindi in the context of Singapore was prevalent, although a small number thought Hindi may be useful in relation to engagement with the Hindi media or as an additional third language.

A predominant notion that supported the learning of Tamil over Hindi was *because it’s a language we learn since young, so definitely Tamil; that is, from kindergarten, [we have] learnt Tamil, so why suddenly change to Hindi?* On the other hand, the small number of Hindi speakers in comparison to Tamil speakers in Singapore emerged as a primary reason for perceiving Hindi as a less important language in comparison to Tamil. One extreme view was *Hindi is nothing in Singapore and is not recognised in Singapore where majority of the Indians in Singapore are Tamils.* This notion was reiterated by drawing on an important comparison as such: *even if Hindi might be the most important language in India, it*

*is not true in Singapore. Most of the Indians are Tamils in Singapore.*

However, a few considered Hindi to be *a highly spoken language*, and still a few others expressed a preference to learn Hindi *for a playful reason, I like Hindi songs...Now I watch Hindi movies, so I want to learn Hindi*. Overall, the motivation to learn Hindi appeared to be driven by a recreational purpose.

### **6.5 Theme 3: The Diglossic Dilemma**

The diglossic nature of Tamil, dichotomously classified as Literary Tamil (hereafter LT; also referred to as Written Tamil) and Spoken Tamil (hereafter ST), *like two different languages*, attracted divided views amongst the participants. Whereas LT was generally revered due to its aesthetic values, ST was regarded as both an essential and practical communicative bridge in intra-ethnic communication. Within the education domain, the teaching and learning of LT was perceived as a *waste of time* due to its lack of utility in communication, but at the same time, it was regarded as a language variety that was symbolic of Tamil *poetry and history*.

#### **6.5.1 Literary Tamil**

LT was perceived as being *professional* or simply, *I just feel it's more important*. It is a variety that is used in a context *like a debate*, and that *which we're going to learn and write on the exam paper as writing is your literary skill*. Further to this, it was regarded as *the original* form of Tamil, and therefore, distinct from its spoken variety.

Also, within the school context, questions such as *why must we struggle to learn [LT] when we can just speak [ST]* emerged, and therefore, a perception that *LT is not very important* in relation to learning it at school for the purpose of exams. This line of argument seemed to underscore the lack of transfer of learning from the classroom to beyond. This means *by communication, people understand your views, so I don't think written Tamil is important*, and moreover, *you can't go around talking Tamil in poetic lines*. Further to this, a participant who had completed college commented that *I think more should be done in schools to remove the mindset that I wanna do well in Tamil, get into Higher Mother Tongue, so I don't have to do it in JC [Junior College, or the equivalent of Australia's Year 11/ 12]*. This comment seems to pinpoint the general tendency amongst the more academically capable students, who choose to learn Higher Tamil at secondary



school, but to opt out of Tamil at college. At the same time, it implicitly highlights an education system that appears to support the learning of Higher Mother Tongue, in this case Higher Tamil, by providing an ‘incentive’ as perceived by students: the option and ability to stop studying Tamil at pre-tertiary or college level.

### 6.5.2 Spoken Tamil

Affirmative statements, as well as those that appeared to reflect equally divided or ambivalent views surfaced during the discussion on ST in comparison to LT. On one hand, ST was considered critical in casual communication, and a variety that needed to be *developed from a young age, so they [students in general] will have confidence, and they won't feel so awkward when they grow up [speaking the language]*. In terms of its relatively lower status, in comparison to LT, it was thought that one *can't really say it's a corrupted language* to such an extent that *they [teachers] even encourage us to talk in ST for Tamil oral exam*. It was argued that *you speak in ST to your friends and family, not in LT*. Further to this, it was expressed that *ST is easier and brings us closer* as opposed to the formal variety, which is spoken in limited, specific contexts such as debates, as mentioned above.

Moreover, within the classroom, the use of ST by the teacher was thought to be reassuring and motivational in that it seemed to *make you study and you feel like listening to her [the teacher]* as opposed to *when the teacher speaks in [LT], it's like she's scolding us*. One unique viewpoint that emerged across the groups pointed to an association between identity and ST; that is, *[ST] is enough for identity as a Tamil*.

Whilst the spoken variety was considered *simple Tamil* or *casual Tamil*, it was not perceived to be inferior as such. When questioned about which variety would be necessary to keep the Tamil language alive in Singapore, majority of the participants concurred with the view that *because you can't talk in LT, so if you want to keep the language alive, you talk [ST]*, which self-evidently points to how *languages have died because they were not in use*.

On the other hand, some participants held the view that both ST and LT were equally important. In other words, LT was perceived to be important as it was the authentic variety; more important than that, it was felt that *we should learn both ... we need [ST] for communication. To communicate in [LT] is weird, so a 50-50*

*weightage*. The importance of both varieties was further illustrated as such: *you can use [Spoken] Tamil but don't forget [LT]*. Also, within the school context, ST was used by teachers to *pass the message [as in instructions or concepts]* to the students while at the same time, LT was one that the students were *going to learn and write on the exam paper*.

Ambivalent views, although not many, on both ST and LT were also expressed in relation to which variety would potentially sustain the language. For instance, *I feel that it's [ST] equally important, so even if I speak simplified Tamil to communicate, I feel the main thing is written Tamil*. This participant had initially argued that LT was relatively more important, before veering towards the group consensus that supported ST, but maintained the stance that *I just feel it's [LT] more important*. Another comment passed was *we should learn both [ST and LT], but need to concentrate on [Literary] Tamil because [Spoken] Tamil, we can learn it at home*. In sum, the central argument points to *instead of writing Tamil, we can converse more, we're only writing for exams but when we speak, we are deeply engrossed in the language*.

The divide between LT and ST, which emerged in the discussion, appear to be one along the lines of usefulness, relevance and function within the school domain and beyond. Although the relevance of LT, particularly beyond the classroom was questioned, it was still regarded as an important variety. ST, on the other hand, was perceived to be key to the survival of the language in Singapore.

#### **6.6 Theme 4: Language Transmission and Predictions of Tamil Survivability**

Language transmission, as used in the context of this study, refers to the intergenerational transmission of the spoken or written variety of Tamil, by the family, teachers, or the Tamil community. As the data indicate, family members, in particular parents, as well as teachers were considered vital in the transmission of Tamil, while on the other hand, attitude appeared to influence inter-generational transmission of Tamil. A conscious effort to speak the language to other Tamil speakers was also regarded important, however, this was dependent on the context. There was strong agreement amongst participants that it was critical that Tamil was transmitted to the next generation. On the other hand, predictions on its survivability drew mixed responses. These will be discussed in the section to follow.

The transmission of Tamil was closely associated with one's attitude towards the language: *I have a big love for Tamil, so I want my kids and generation to carry*

*on, and I would do my part in making sure they definitely learn Tamil even if they don't have it in schools; moreover, I want them to learn that language because that language has a lot of importance to me and my family so it'll be continuous.* An equally important responsibility of parents was thought to be the *need to take the effort to explain to the future generation that Tamil is important*, therefore, underscoring the influence parental attitudes can exert on inter-generational transmission of the language. Another view held was that *parents are the ones teaching Tamil first, then they will learn more in school*, hence, reinforcing the critical role of parents in the transmission of Tamil in the early stages of a child's life. On the other hand, the attitude of family members was also implicated in the transmission of Tamil: *It's terrible if some family members were to ask you to learn another language [such as Mandarin]; then Tamil usage will decline and over time, we will lose our language, Tamil.*

Apart from this, the inter-generational transmission of Tamil was seen to be 'reconciliatory' in its purpose, in relation to one's fluency. In other words, *with my kids, they'll definitely have to speak in Tamil because I don't speak Tamil properly.* In the same vein, *I have been through the whole struggle conversing in Tamil so I would make sure my kids are able to do it with ease and confidence.*

However, the importance of English in the context of Singapore, and the probable consequences that can occur as a result of it being learnt or taught alongside Tamil emerged as well. For example, *if we teach them, they will learn, so it's natural as the parent, you'll teach the mother tongue first, then slowly you'll teach them English.* On the contrary, if the sequence of language were to be reversed, *like when they are born we will speak to them more in English than in Tamil, most probably, they'll not speak much Tamil than us.* Such predictive comments suggest that the choice made by parents in prioritising a particular language, or according it equal importance may consequentially influence the shift from or towards the language, be it Tamil or English, as demonstrated in the following comment: *I will pass on [Tamil] but it takes two hands to clap. It must also be their [children's] commitment; if I'm committed and they're not, it might not work out.*

Teachers were also considered important agents for language transmission, or even replacing the role of parents in introducing Tamil at the pre- or primary school

stage. The following two comments best illustrate such notions: *We're not qualified to teach [Tamil], we're not Tamil teachers, we just know the basic stuff; if there's a continuity of teaching Tamil in Singapore [Tamil will flourish]*. On a macro-level, this seems to indicate that the institutionalising of Tamil has in part contributed to the existence of Tamil in Singapore so far. On a micro level, teachers were perceived to be vital in teaching the language, in particular, the written variety, in addition to being considered models for the spoken variety. It also seems to suggest that the school is perceived as the 'locale' for learning mother tongue languages such as Tamil, as opposed to naturally acquiring the language through interaction with family members or others in the social network. In other words, the school was also considered a site for mother tongue transmission, in this case, Tamil, be it the spoken or written variety. Nonetheless, it was believed that *keeping Tamil confined to the boundaries of the classroom or home is insufficient to enable us to be well-versed with the language*.

### **6.6.1 Learning Tamil: multiple perspectives**

The school has been identified as a site for learning Tamil, and 'learning' in this context has been interpreted and evaluated along various dimensions, as demonstrated in the open-ended responses to Question 8 of the survey. Whilst learning Tamil was considered important by majority of the survey participants, a small number indicated their varying levels of disagreement as in *no; maybe; not really; no and yes*. The underlying reasons for the range of views expressed, which to a large extent converged with the responses drawn from the focus group discussions, will be discussed below.

One of the reasons that emerged was *Tamil has been growing for so many years, [so it] should still be passed down to our future generation*. Learning Tamil at school was also considered an essential pre-requisite to *make sure it does not become extinct* and at the same time, to *allow the younger generations of Tamil students to know and embrace their mother tongue*. Another reason cited was that the learning of Tamil facilitated intra-ethnic communication, which pointed to fluency as well: *Tamil is important for us to know how to speak well to Tamil-speaking friends or family members, and I should not lose fluency of my mother tongue*. The importance of learning Tamil was also associated with exams as it

continues to be an examinable subject up to ‘A’ levels.

However, being bilingual was also considered important as *by learning both Tamil and English, we are able to communicate better with more people around the world*. On the other hand, it was important to *ensure every time we speak at home, it's in Tamil and at the same time, not disturbing their English areas because in Singapore, English is also important*. In the same vein, *as much as Tamil is important, English is also important in this era as it is needed for future career; however, Tamil should not be forgotten...it is very valuable*.

On one hand, these reasons seem to again suggest that speaking Tamil was associated more with ‘learning’ it at school rather than it being developed in the home or family domain, as conveyed by one of the focus group participants: *I feel sad because we need to learn how to speak spoken Tamil*. On the other, the co-existence of English and Tamil was considered necessary, though for different reasons.

The language-culture link emerged as a strong reason that supported the learning or teaching of Tamil within the school or home domain, as evidenced in the qualitative data drawn from both the survey and focus group discussions. The following illustrates the perceived association between the two interlinked entities: *It is our mother tongue and we not only learn a language by learning Tamil, we get to know more about our culture*. In other words, *it helps us to know who we are and appreciate our culture and traditions*. As such, learning Tamil was regarded important as *Tamil is our culture* and the next generation needed to *know their roots first*. Similarly, *I don't see how as parents, we can teach our kids values and stuff [without them learning the language] because language plays a strong role in bringing about values and morals, especially traditions*. The language-culture association was also thought to instil *a sense of diaspora*, therefore suggesting that Tamil and Tamil culture were a common, shared ‘inheritance’, yet unique within its own respective contexts or geographical boundaries.

On the contrary, learning Tamil was not considered totally important to a few, primarily due to the seeming lack of currency in the global arena, as well as locally, in comparison to other official languages in Singapore. A reason that emerged was Tamil was *not a recognised language in the world*, in addition to being not widely used as *it is mainly only used in households and with friends, not*

during work or study to such an extent *I do not see future uses for it*. In addition to this, it was felt that *it [Tamil] is not useful for our future career* and that learning Tamil was not going to occur past pre-tertiary education, therefore, undermining its importance. Government ideology was also implicated to explain the limited use of Tamil in Singapore. This was indicated as follows: *The government mainly stresses on English Language rather than Tamil and Tamil does not help us in academic, however, English does.*

For those who thought learning the language was *not really* important, one reason that explained this was *we can learn how to talk and read in Tamil but should not be tested on exams*. Echoing a similar line of argument was *I want to be able to speak, understand and read Tamil, but I don't really want to be great at writing Tamil or be grammatically perfect*. Such notions, although put forth by a small number, reveal that the perceived economic value and utility of Tamil were important considerations in relation to whether learning the language *per se* was deemed necessary.

In terms of predicting Tamil survivability in Singapore, relevant data drawn from the group discussions revealed a divide in the views expressed, with reasons that ranged from *the lack of opportunities [in speaking the language]*, to more positive views such as ***[it will definitely stand strong despite the fact there are those who do not speak in Tamil sometimes]***. However, most of the responses were illustrative of the opinion that the language *is dying* and that *I don't think so it'll [the future of Tamil in Singapore] be bright*. Possible reasons for this, as revealed in the data, are outlined below.

One of the reasons point to an observation made that *teenagers are not talking properly in Tamil outside the home, so they have to have much exposure to Tamil, and parents should help, like talk to them more in Tamil*. Therefore, parents were also thought to be a contributing factor as *not many students and parents nowadays are speaking in Tamil*, therefore, it was emphasised that the *mother tongue [Tamil] should be spoken at all places so it becomes a habit*. More important was an awareness that *a language will be lost if people do not speak in it* emerged; and in the case of Tamil, *it would be a big loss to humanity, given its rich history, culture and traditions*. Hence, speaking the language widely, in public places, was considered essential so that *it will not die out or disappear from*

*Singapore*. Another factor that surfaced was parental language choice and attitude, as implied in the following comment: *I don't believe so [that speaking Tamil is an important part of being a Tamil] as I find English better as I was taught from young, and hence, (as conveyed by the same survey participant), Tamil is secondary to English.*

The attitude of the younger generation emerged again as a contributing factor for the apparent decline *because youngsters are losing interest in it [Tamil]*. This shift away from Tamil seems to imply that *it's already becoming obsolete, we treat it like a subject*. The lack of Tamil usage amongst its speakers in general was also highlighted as a probable reason: *At this current moment, we're not even speaking much Tamil, so as the generation goes by, Tamil might be left behind, which I hope not.*

Another reason cited was the perceived attitude towards Tamil language lessons at school, as put forth: *I think the future generation will not really respect Tamil because even the primary school kids and lower secondary students don't really like Tamil lessons, they don't really care. Like for math and all, they rush to class. For Tamil, they don't really give importance.* The need to cultivate interest in learning Tamil within the classroom was regarded as vital in mitigating a consequence as such, for example, *they [teachers] should start teaching us about the history [of Tamil language] like the basic, so from there, the interest will develop.*

On the other hand, it was argued that *the youngsters have a choice whether they want to give up the language or not, so if they don't take the responsibility [to grow the language], that means you shouldn't blame that Tamil is dying. It's their responsibility.* Another comment similarly demonstrated that the individual, as opposed to other external factors, was the root cause for the apparent lack of Tamil usage in Singapore, and hence the perceived decline: *If the Tamil language is dying, it's our fault. We never pass down our language so it's our vital role to pass down so that Tamil will stay, the future will be bright.* As such, survivability of the language was still thought to be contingent on language transmission, regardless of the prediction that Tamil will sustain: *Tamil will definitely live but it depends on each individual, everyone should take the initiative.*

Apart from the individual being perceived as an important agent for language survivability, the government and the media were also regarded as necessary forces

to mitigate the decline: *Even if it's dying, it can be preserved by the media, the government, and ourselves. The government is doing their best in promoting Tamil and the media is also [doing that].* A sense of optimism in this instance seems to downplay the perceived decline that may impact the survivability of Tamil. At the same time, it demonstrates the efforts undertaken by the government and the Tamil media in maintaining Tamil in Singapore, to such an extent that the individual's responsibility in spreading the use of Tamil becomes a shared one, bolstered by 'external forces' in this case. Further to this, it suggests that external intervention is needed to propel the language into the future, as the following comment also demonstrates: *However, there are lots of effort taken, for example, the Tamil Language Festival. If this were to continue, Tamil will continue to thrive.* Therefore, there seems to be general tendency that points to the presumption that Tamil will continue to exist as long as support is provided.

## **6.7 Theme 5: Making Sense of Identity**

Identity, in relation to ethnicity, nationality and language emerged in the data that revealed basic spoken literacy in Tamil was a necessary and important prerequisite to identify oneself as a Tamil. Other notions of identity, apart from one that was predominantly language-based, were also apparent. The following section will discuss the multi-faceted aspects of identity by drawing on the qualitative data from both the survey questionnaire and group discussions.

### **6.7.1 What are you: ethnic and national identity**

In response to the question 'What are you? - meaning referring to your identity', various notions of identity emerged across the focus groups; however, the most prominent one was defined by ethnicity, followed closely by nationality, in the data.

Ethnic identity was signified with the term *Indian*. This was explained as, *'Indian' because you grow up watching Tamil movies, eating 'ponngal' [a sweet rice dish served during Tamil festivities], praying...you just know you're Indian; not Hindu, [but] Indian;* or in a broader sense, *Indian, in a Singaporean context.* On the other hand, a sense of nationality was seen to be embedded in the notion of one's identity. The following is illustrative of this: *Singaporean; I would say Singaporean first, I have a very strong pride towards my country, patriotism;*



*Singaporean Indian*. Further to this, linguistic identity was also indicated as in *like the language we speak; Indian speaking Tamil*. Therefore, identity, as the above examples reveal, is influenced by one's ethnicity or *based on the country or what you speak*. A less straightforward conceptualisation of one's identity emerged as well: *Indian Muslim, but Indian; If a friend asks me, I'll say Tamilian but if a professional asks me, I'll say Indian*. A few others drew on official documents in making sense of their identity. Therefore, identity in this case, was aligned to the official label one was given either in the *passport* or as *what my IC [abbreviation for Identification Card] says*.

Identity, as demonstrated in the data, has been drawn from various reference points, although it may not be possible to completely encapsulate the totality of one's multiple layers of identity in a single label. For instance, the term 'Indian' need not necessarily be just an indication of ethnicity, as a further probe may reveal other aspects embedded in this seemingly singular perspective. Other fine-grained notions of identity that emerged are illustrated in the following section.

### **6.7.2 The language-identity link**

A dominant view put forth was that speaking Tamil (as opposed to writing Tamil) was essential in one's construction of identity or identities. This means *you don't need to be able to write Tamil, but just to speak it as the language comes back to your traditions, values, to speak Tamil, to be Indian, so in that sense, it's an identity*. On the contrary, *speaking in proper Tamil without the influence of English or speaking good Tamil* was considered important. However, a strong marker of identity was clearly, basic literacy in spoken Tamil, which in other words, was perceived as the minimum threshold level needed for identification as a Tamil. In this sense, learning Tamil was thought to be important as *Tamil is our main source of identity*. This means that though one is bilingual, speaking Tamil was regarded key to one's Tamil identity, so *just because one talks English does not make him an Englishman, he or she will still be considered Tamil*.

Stronger views conveyed by a few pointed to speaking Tamil *with passion and love* and similarly, *having a strong passion for the language and accepting it as a part of your identity is essential in being considered a Tamil*. Therefore, the *passion and enthusiasm in learning, speaking and experiencing Tamil* was considered integral in the identity as a Tamil. However, such a strong sense of

allegiance was perceived to be a threat when someone did not possess a high level of fluency in the language as the following comment illustrates: *People who cannot speak fluent Tamil are often ostracised by their fellow Tamil classmates, they are not considered 'Tamil'.*

Therefore, the language-identity relationship was regarded to be inextricably connected to such an extent that *my mother tongue is a crucial part of my identity; it acts as a form of identifier; it gives me the identity as a Tamilian; our language, our identity; it is the only identity we have; our mother tongue defines who we are; Tamil is a linguistic identity.*

In sum, these ideas indicate that *it [Tamil] is the identity of Tamil-speaking people in Singapore.* The uniqueness of the Singapore variety of colloquial Tamil was also highlighted as an important marker: *Any Tamil needs to know the slang, the Singapore lingo, because it is what unites the Indian community in Singapore.* Being strongly related to language, such recurring notions of identity may be translated to mean, *when a person can't speak the language, that means we don't wish to be a Tamil, therefore, speaking Tamil is very important for a Tamil.*

Furthermore, a defensive stance was evident in the discussion around the importance of Tamil language, which again revealed the intertwined relationship between Tamil and Tamil identity. The following two *in vivo* codes best illustrate this: *It's [Tamil is] our identity, we can't just leave it behind, [and] it's been going on for generations; I think it comes down more to ideals also in a sense that [Tamil is our identity]. This is an important attitude. It should be there.*

### **6.7.3 Fostering a sense of pride in the Tamil identity**

Another recurrent view expressed was *taking pride in being a Tamil*, and in this case, it meant *not being ashamed to speak in our mother tongue; not to be ashamed of our identity; and to speak up for the Indian community all the time.* To a certain extent, there appears to be an indication of ethnolinguistic vitality, implicit in the frequent use of *don't be ashamed; don't be shy/embarrassed; don't be afraid*, in the context of signifying identity through Tamil language usage. The following illustrates this prevailing notion: *not being afraid to talk in Tamil and ensuring you do not forgo your customs due to modern times; we should not be ashamed to show that we are Tamil and hence, not be afraid of what others would say [when we speak in Tamil]; to not have an inferiority complex on ourselves and to hold our*

*esteem high and continue to speak in Tamil; to be able to hold the dignity of being an Indian, behave well in public, and to try to change the perceptions of Tamils in Singapore. On balance, we need to have a strong sense of belonging and respect to the language.*

These notions convey subtle meanings in relation to the general perception of speaking Tamil in Singapore, beyond the home or classroom. This may be a consequence of a combination of factors such as demographic, sociological or psychological, amongst others, as implied in the following: *I think it is important not to look down on this language and not hesitate to speak it just because it is shameful, and others make fun of it. A similar thought was we should not back down when someone offends our race or language.* Again, this signals an apparent tension resulting from the actions of ‘others’ and ‘someone’, although the use of such vague language here seems to intentionally avoid pinpointing a certain category of people or individuals. However, this apparent sense of vulnerability may be perceived as discouraging to *many youngsters who feel talking Tamil in public is a disgrace*, but at the same time, it was asserted that *Tamil is also a language like English, so why should we care? We should show others we are not ashamed and proud to speak our mother tongue.*

#### **6.7.4 The culture-identity link**

Just as culture was perceived to be one of the key reasons that supported the learning of Tamil, it was thought to be equally important in one’s construction of identity as a Tamil. A prevalent, recurring view that emerged demonstrated that one’s identity as a Tamil was to a large extent *following the culture and tradition* and at the same time, *spreading the knowledge of our culture to the younger generations.*

An aspect of culture was *experiencing Tamil customs and festivals*, as this is *our only way of showing how awesome Tamil is*, which also extended to mean *taking part in cultural activities* in addition to *actively participating in all events that promote Tamil in Singapore.* Further to this, *the values taught by our culture shows that we are a Tamil.* These values or attributes considered unique to Tamil identity included *the practice of hospitality; demonstrating respect; being conservative; being kind-hearted just like our fore fathers; showing determination, patience; respecting the elderly.* Also related to the culture-identity

link was *wearing traditional costumes* and *being able to enjoy Indian food (e.g., Briyani, Tandoori chicken)*, more specifically, *eating 'Tamil' food with your hands when applicable*. Therefore, *food is important [in relation to identity] and I'm so glad I can take spicy food*. Overall, the data revealed that *one who follows the Tamil culture and tradition, and one who speaks the language should be considered a Tamil*.

### 6.7.5 Religion and other markers of identity

Religion, to a lesser extent, was regarded as a marker of Tamil identity as well, which meant *following religious practices* and *going to the temple and worshipping Hindu gods*. Another marker of identity quite frequently indicated was *to know the history of the Tamil language [in addition to speaking it], afterall, that's what makes a true Tamil man*. Relatedly, *appreciating the historical value of Tamil will instil pride in speaking Tamil and being a Tamil*. Apart from these, involvement in the performing arts or *the expressive forms such as music, dance* was also considered important in addition to speaking or writing Tamil, in making sense of identity. In other words, Tamil identity in part can mean *taking part in performing arts or witnessing performing arts*. Other less pronounced markers of identity that emerged were related to *patriotism for India; having Tamil names*, which was thought to *psychologically bond us with Tamil language; skin colour or complexion*.

Whilst engaging with Tamil media was considered part of Tamil identity by some, a small number thought it was not necessarily an essential marker of identity. In other words, *it doesn't prove anything about being a Tamil*. This strong sense of conviction was reiterated as such: *at the end of the day, whether you are engaged in Tamil media or not, your identity remains Tamil*. A similar line of argument was demonstrated in relation to speaking Tamil or following the Tamil customs in the context of identity: *you can be a Tamil even if you don't speak the language; just because one is unable to converse in Tamil does not mean one is not Tamil*. This may mean *I do not speak Tamil well at all, but I am still an Indian*. Likewise, *to be called a Tamil, one need not follow 100% of the Tamil culture or follow Tamil customs; however, the least one could do is to not forget or neglect Tamil*.

On the other hand, *even if one doesn't speak Tamil but follows the culture, he or she is considered a Tamil*. These views demonstrate that identity may not be limited to possessing fluency or proficiency in the language, or to practising the

customs. However, practising the customs becomes slightly blurred where the participants identified themselves as *Indian Muslim*. Although they *don't follow the Indian culture that much* due to a different religious affiliation, the importance of speaking Tamil as part of the Tamil identity was underscored.

### **6.8 Theme 6: The Multiracial Strain: A Sense of togetherness and 'otherness'**

The multiracial or multi-ethnic setting appears to influence the choice of language, therefore, in part contributing to the shift to English. Moreover, as much as a sense of togetherness in relation to Singapore's multiracial backdrop was revealed in the data, a sense of 'otherness' emerged as well. This psychological construct of 'otherness' within a context as such could be interpreted as (a) a sense of distinctiveness in relation to others (non-Indians in this case); (b) consciousness of the minority status as Indians; (c) influence of the other ethnic groups and their perception of Indians, in general.

Whilst the importance of English as a common currency or *lingua franca* in Singapore, as well as it being *prevalent* was stressed, the dilemma around language choice was evidenced as well. In other words, *Singapore is a multi-racial country, so the common language we use is English; there are different kinds of races, so we have to communicate with them in a standardised language, English. Therefore, being bilingual is important to our society now.*

The 'dilemma', on the other hand, also meant *we are a minority, so we need to communicate with others for survival*. This could be explained as follows: *Singapore has very few Indians compared to the Chinese; every day, I see Chinese people, Malay people. An extreme view put forth was since we're the minority, most of the people like from the dominant group tend to dominate us. The lack of opportunities to use the language seems to be implicit, as a repeated idea that surfaced was we still have the other races. This means when we are around other races, we use English. For example, if the place you are at is Serangoon Road [an ethnic enclave] and context of the space is Tamil, [it's ok to speak Tamil, but not] if you are in a place where 'others' are around. Hence, the only chance we get to speak in Tamil is when we see Tamil-speaking people; but we feel embarrassed speaking in Tamil especially when there are Chinese and Malay people around you.*

Further to this, the interplay of the multi-ethnic dynamic and lack of opportunities was re-iterated: as in *this generation and the other generation, like we*

*have a mix race kind of friends, so even though we have Indian friends, if we come as a group, if we talk in Tamil, it's quite rude for those who don't understand. This sense of accommodation in relation to the multiracial dynamic prevailed in the data. That is, a recurring reason for not speaking Tamil in public places was we are a multiracial society, and as such, not everyone understand the language [Tamil]. To elaborate, I do not want non-Tamil speakers to misunderstand the things I am saying to my Tamil-speaking friends. It was argued that English was a pragmatic choice as it is not easy to communicate with the Chinese and Malay people [if Tamil was used in a group that included Tamil speakers].*

Similarly, English emerged as a choice in the friendship domain, within the multiethnic-multilingual context. This was explained as such: *our friends are from other races, so for them to understand, we have to use English; with your Chinese friends, you want to insert it [Tamil] but you speak in English because you don't want your other friends to be left out. Correspondingly, in my soccer team, there are Chinese guys and Malay guys, so to respect them, we talk in English; like one important thing is that these people [Tamil speakers] have a lot of Chinese friends, so they don't get the opportunity to speak Tamil. Therefore, a sense of togetherness was apparent through the use of a common language in instances of inter-ethnic communication, although this was achieved in part due to accommodating to the 'other races'.*

In contrast, a sense of 'otherness' emerged in relation to the attitude of 'others' towards Tamil usage. This was perceived as a negative influence to a certain extent, as illustrated in the following: *But sometimes, when you want to talk in Tamil, in front of the other races, they tend to make fun of it, so it brings down our morale. It has happened many times [others in the focus group agree], we just ignore, like part of life already [the other participants laugh at this comment]. Another related line of thought was as in Singapore, some people laugh at those who speak Tamil, so speaking English seems to be cool. One reason that was put forth to explain this was, as in the way we pronounce the words, like the really hard words. It's easy for us to pronounce, so maybe to them [the other races] it seems funny so they make fun. Further to this, those who are not Indians find it [Tamil] funny and Tamil is not highly regarded as I feel; people always make fun of our language to such an extent that if I could speak Chinese, I would not be left out.*

However, this sense of ‘otherness’ as illustrated above, was not considered an impasse as when *we share our culture to other people of other races, they will know more about us and learn to respect us*. In addition, *other races will be able to learn the language as well when we speak in Tamil [in the public domain]*. Another view that emerged was *though Singapore is a multi-racial society, we still need to speak our language because that cannot be an obstacle or excuse to stop us from speaking Tamil entirely*. This was believed so as *when Chinese and Malay are being spoken, why not Tamil?* Therefore, in order to maintain a sense of distinctiveness as part of the multiracial backdrop, it was thought that *we should actually talk to each other in Tamil so we can differentiate more from the other races*.

Correspondingly, *when other races speak their own languages, then we should do that instead of being embarrassed of our own language*. This demonstrates that whilst others may be implicated in the reluctance or lack of opportunities to speak Tamil in certain contexts, the individual is confronted with the question, *what is wrong in speaking Tamil in public when we can speak English as well?*

A contrasting set of data emerged as well from the discussion of Tamil in the midst of other languages, and the multiracial dynamic. One view that emerged in a particular focus group was *non-Indians find Tamil very fascinating because ...they think we are rapping in Tamil because of our tongue twisters*. Another belief (conveyed in a jocular tone) was that *nowadays, more and more non-Tamils tend to understand Tamil, it's difficult for us*. This group of participants provided a few examples as follows:

*Once I was going home after tuition and saw this Chinese guy with a tattoo on the bus. His phone rang and he answered in Tamil, he sounded so local!*

*I used to have a Chinese neighbour. He's an old man now. His aunty from mixed marriage taught him Tamil. So when we were young he used to come and ask my mother in Tamil if everything was ok.*

It was also revealed that *the Chinese...a lot of friends want to learn Tamil*, which in part was due to their fascination with the written form, as illustrated: *I will purposely write in Tamil, Chinese is lines, Malay is English, Tamil is so curly*. Additionally, *they find the beauty in how we speak*. Such attitudes were perceived as favourable and which made the Tamil speakers *feel so proud when non-Indians*

*speak Tamil.*

## **6.9 Theme 7: The Economics of Languages**

In the context of Singapore, official recognition and institutionalisation of the four languages did not necessarily mean parity of languages, as revealed in the data, although Tamil, as one of the four, was considered important largely due to its official status. The economics of languages in relation to the co-existence of other languages, namely English, Mandarin and Malay alongside Tamil was thought to be an important factor which contributed to one's perception of Tamil. The prevailing view revealed a hierarchical order of these languages in economic terms although it was thought that *in a globalising world, bilingualism will be very beneficial.*

English and Mandarin emerged to be economically viable languages, in comparison to Tamil, where the former was typically related to job opportunities whilst the latter was associated with the Mandarin-speaking Chinese majority, as well as with increased job opportunities. Drawing on job advertisements, it was revealed that in most cases, there was a general tendency like *'preferably Mandarin and English speaking'*, so things like these tend to stir people, especially the younger generation to feel like *'What's the point of learning Tamil? Therefore, notions such as there is no use for it [Tamil] in Singapore as English is more important or that it is not required neither is it in high demand such as Mandarin emerged.*

Therefore, languages were positioned in accordance to their chances of employment or economic value. The following comments best illustrate this notion: *As living in Singapore, most of the people speak Chinese and Malay, and also, most of the jobs do not require Tamil; I do not think it [Tamil] would be a language used when I am applying for a job and hence, it [Tamil] is not going to help me in the future.* Therefore, to leverage one's linguistic competence in relation to future job offers, literacy in Mandarin was highly regarded: *and to be honest, my cousin is in Primary one and my uncle has just enrolled her in Mandarin studies [out of school].*

Furthermore, the importance of Mandarin in job applications was revealed in the following two examples:

*I usually tell them [interviewers] that I can understand Malay and Mandarin but I can't write in these languages, so they will in turn tell*



*me that's not enough. So, Tamil is completely left out. They [employers in general] do require you to speak in Mandarin, so it [Tamil] doesn't seem as economical as learning Mandarin.*

*A lot of people think you need to know Mandarin...like a lot of jobs require Mandarin. My mom, three years ago, applied for a job, could have gotten it if she knows Mandarin, so it's kind of unfair. I mean English is said to be the first language, so why are you making everyone learn Mandarin?*

From an economic perspective, Tamil appears to be marginalised, unless, for example, you're looking at media specific to Tamil, then I'm sure you can flourish, or as observed, in this country[Singapore], you can't use Tamil to earn a living unless you perhaps become a Tamil teacher or a Tamil tutor. In this context, therefore, Tamil can earn you a living but currently, [but] this view is slowly losing its grip.

On the other hand, the linguistic landscape was also pinpointed as a probable cause that may have contributed to an overall perception of marginalisation: *If you look around Singapore there are very few Tamil signboards around, maybe now, it's slowly increasing in numbers. Along the same line of thought was only recently Tamil is being promoted, they have four languages everywhere on the board, like English, Chinese, Malay and Japanese. There wasn't Tamil.*

A similar sentiment was demonstrated as such:

*There's this electronic board ...how many days to what event...they did for Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, they didn't do it for Deepavali. I made noise. I went to the vice -principal and asked why you didn't put [the message] just because we are minorities, you can't do that. Another example, we celebrated Deepavali on Saturday, that Monday they put supplementary [class]. Why don't you put Monday still holiday? They just don't consider all this stuff.*

This suggests that the linguistic landscape is perceived as a visual representation or demonstration of the status of a language, in this case, Tamil, and as the data have indicated, a strong association was made between the minority status of the Indians, in general, and the linguistic landscape, further underscoring the sense of marginalisation in relation to both Tamil *per se* and its speakers.

Therefore, the economic status of Tamil in comparison to the other

languages appears to be relatively low, and this has been largely associated with job opportunities in Singapore. As such, the notion that Tamil was marginalised emerged, which was, to a lesser extent associated with the linguistic landscape in Singapore.

### 6.9.1 English in education

A dominant factor that seemed to contribute to the shift towards English was language in education, in this case, English. Most importantly, English is conceptualised as the first language, whereas Tamil is regarded as the mother tongue or second language.

A prevailing reason which sought to explain the prevalence of English was *the language we use most of the time in school is English, so when we go home, it catches on*. This meant using English has become *a habit, and it's very difficult to change it*. In the school domain, *most of our subjects are based on English, taught in English*. This was rationalised as such: *As in school, we learn English because that's what we're going to speak in the working life since we're living with many other people from different races, so as an international language, we depend on it*. Views such as these, further underscore the role of English as a main language of instruction in Singaporean schools. However, contrary to this perception was one where *both English and Tamil have the same value, we can't really say one language is higher than the other because you use it more*. This notion of equity in languages seems to be interpreted differently where each language is viewed to have unique attributes, regardless of its penetration.

The number of periods allocated to the English-based subjects in comparison to mother tongue was also cited as a reason for the shift towards English: *we have more English periods compared to Tamil*. Therefore, it appears that the exposure to English as a language of education has had a significant influence on language choice *because we have been learning English since young, so it's more comfortable for us [to use English]*. However, this was not only perceived to be confined to those who learn Tamil as a mother tongue as the following point of view demonstrates:

*I think a lot of kids, not just Tamil, struggle with mother tongue in general, that's because we are brought up with the idea that it's not important whatever you learn in second language. It's like when you grow up, you're*

*not going to use it, so when they are in school, they don't really put a lot of attention to their mother tongue, and if they do, it's only for the grades. So, it's not just that Tamil suffers, but other languages too.*

As much as this revealed underlying tensions that seemed to indicate a mindset where mother tongue learning is motivated on the premise of contributing to a good academic result overall, it also demonstrated one's attitude towards mother tongue learning to such an extent that *most students see Tamil as a subject other than seeing it as a language, so it's more like a chore*. On the other hand, it also implicates the education or language policy that may have led to such notions, as suggested in the following: *the national exams for Tamil, Chinese and Malay, it's compulsory, without mother tongue, you can't go into junior college.*

### **6.10 Theme 8: The Connect and Disconnect with India**

The concept of 'imagined community' in relation to India and Tamil revealed diverse views. Whilst a sense of connection with India primarily along linguistic, cultural or historical lines emerged, a disconnect was apparent in terms of practices or attitudes. The data also revealed the apparent influence of social environment on Tamil language usage as well as a perceived sense of belonging within the context of a wider Tamil diaspora.

India was viewed as an ancestral land because *grandparents, ancestors, all came from India* and therefore, a strong acknowledgement that India meant *our roots* was evident. In addition, the connection with India was established *because most of my family members are there; or I know people who are there, so it's like I feel more connected*. Connection with India was also conceptualised in terms of visits to India, as in *many times or once a year*.

More important was a strong sense of belonging to India, or a conception of 'comfort zone' that was revealed as follows: *That's the only country I'll feel truly comfortable in; even in Singapore, up to now, we still have the other races, that's the only place you will not be judged based on your race or what you speak*. Whereas the prevalence of Tamil in India, or more specifically Tamil Nadu, was regarded key to one's motivation to speak the language, the lack of opportunities in Singapore, as a consequence of Tamil-speakers being a minority, was perceived to be a drawback. The following comments across the focus groups illustrate this common conception:

*Wish I was born in India because in India got a lot of people know Tamil. Very comfortable to get along with the Tamils. Like here [Singapore] got Chinese, Malay.*

*I freely speak in Tamil [in India] like I totally forget there's a language called English. I like that. It's a first language to me than English so I speak not even an English word.*

*I speak in my mother tongue [Tamil]. I don't go there [India] and walk around speaking in English 'cos everyone there are Indians [as in Tamil-speaking].*

*You feel foreign over there [India] when you speak in English and all those people speak in Tamil.*

The above examples again point to the multiracial strain in Singapore, further underscoring the apparent influence of social environment on language choice. As the data reveal, the English-Tamil dynamic is realised differently in India in comparison to Singapore, and hence, suggests that *maybe in Singapore [Tamil is not so valuable] but if you're in India, it's more valuable*. Relatedly, *India is the only place that majority are Tamilians*, and in this case, Tamil Nadu.

On the other hand, the absence of relatives or friends in India did not automatically mean a disconnect with the country: *I have a sense connection to India as in Tamil movies, we do watch it in Singapore, the world is globalised with Internet*. This suggests that technology can assist in connecting the diaspora, linguistically or culturally. Other less significant forms of connection with India that emerged were associated with religion *like when I am praying, sometimes I feel I want to go to India, know more about the religion*, or with the *myths and mythologies of India*.

In contrast, little or no association was established with India due to perceived dissimilarities between Singapore and the former. The following comment is representative of a commonly held view that emerged across the focus groups: *I don't feel connected because of the cultural diversity, the difference between Singapore and India...the way they do things is very different and you feel sometimes you disagree with what they might do*. In instances as such, a strong identification with Singapore was evidenced.

Overall, despite the perceived disconnect, India was largely viewed as a linguistic and cultural capital: *When I go there, I usually speak in Tamil, and over there I'm more cultural.* This finding highlights an inverse shift in language from English to Tamil in a linguistically favourable context, in this case, the Tamil-speaking region, or clusters in India.

### **6.11 Theme 9: Growing and Maintaining Tamil**

Government and government-supported initiatives, as well as the local Tamil media and Tamil teachers were largely regarded as important transmitters of Tamil language. The data also revealed both positive and negative attitudes towards these agents in relation to growing and maintaining the language in Singapore.

Despite the feeling that mother tongue education was not considered as important as English as reported above, participants still felt that the inclusion of Tamil (along with Mandarin and Malay) in the school curriculum was a positive initiative on the part of the government: *The government, one good thing is they're actually making sure that everyone is learning their mother tongue.* Whilst this was the case, the emphasis on grades and examinations was perceived as discouraging to learning Tamil. On the other hand, the month-long Tamil Language Festival to promote the language was received favourably by most. For example, it was thought that *Tamil Language month in Singapore is quite popular, so a lot of people will look forward to it, they will attend the programmes so it's like a motivation, like [we need to speak in Tamil, and communicate with others in Tamil].* Apart from promoting the language *per se*, the festival was seen as an opportunity *to learn about culture.*

Growing Tamil in Singapore also meant *increasing exposure to Tamil, a lot of activities in Singapore that you can go for, so maybe if parents put in the effort to introduce them.* However, in terms of how effective Tamil language month is, *it does create awareness but everything is putting into action. I know April is Tamil language month but how many of us actually go down to all the events, poetry events.* Therefore, one view expressed was that putting it into practical sense, I think more needs to be done [with the Tamil Language Festival].

The role of Tamil teachers was regarded as critical in growing Tamil. A dominant view expressed was that Tamil teachers were the role models with regard to speaking the language and providing exposure to the language. Further to this, qualifications, 'cultural symmetry' and pedagogical practice were considered

important in a Tamil teacher, to some extent. For instance, *my Tamil teacher was my main inspiration for me like he made me like going to his class*. To a far lesser extent, effectively bilingual Tamil teachers were thought to be helpful as in *I prefer my teacher to know English because there are words that are difficult to explain*.

Rigour in relation to qualifications was regarded essential in maintaining high quality of Tamil teaching. It was generally perceived that *the qualifications are easing to such an extent one's impression of Tamil is destroyed. It's the teachers*. As revealed, in the case of Tamil, *[one] just needed a diploma* as opposed to teaching other subjects that required a degree. On the contrary, it was indicated that it was *not a matter of qualifications. It's how they present the language to you in class*. This in part pointed to the perceived discord resulting from the seemingly, culturally 'asymmetrical' teachers. This meant *they [the Education Department] need to change primary school and secondary school teachers. They are all from India*. Hence, a need for *more Singaporean teachers who were people you can relate to*, which contrasted to *the India people, [who] go through a whole different education system*, was pinpointed. Therefore, as revealed in the data, teachers recruited from India seemed to deter one's interest in learning Tamil to a certain extent. However, beyond the confines of the classroom, the influence of Indians (from India) was considered to positively contribute to the growth and maintenance of Tamil: *It's important a lot of Indians [are] migrating to Singapore from India, especially Tamils. It's important to preserve the culture of speaking in Tamil*.

Appealing Tamil textbooks as well as *more interactive lessons*, amongst others emerged as important factors in growing and maintaining Tamil amongst students or young Tamil speakers. A recurrent view was a call for *more conversations in class, when the teachers tell a lot of stories, they tell a lot of encouragement in Tamil...so we feel we want to speak Tamil fluently*. Another equally important factor that emerged was embedding the history of Tamil into the lessons so that *instead of just teaching us Tamil during Tamil lessons, they should actually talk about the history of Tamil as well so that students will start to take Tamil seriously*. Correspondingly, *they [Tamil teachers] should bring interest on why we're studying Tamil instead of looking at the marks*. One such initiative that was strongly supported was sharing about *the five epics-they never tell us*.

To a lesser extent, other activities that were considered motivational to speaking and learning Tamil were *cultural games; singing competitions; debates; more videos* as opposed to *book-based* learning. Books were considered *boring* to a certain extent because they contained *lame stories*, and again a preference for *Tamil history* or *more interesting facts about Tamil* emerged. Also, the shift away from merely passing Tamil examinations was explicitly demonstrated: *the Tamil teacher says [you have to pass], that's the only thing they say. They don't tell you where you come from, why you're studying Tamil.*

It appears that the interplay of the factors discussed above can influence one's motivation to use Tamil. Tamil teachers were regarded to be crucial in their role of transmitting the language in a way that motivates young learners. In addition, it was felt that there should be no compromise with regard to Tamil teacher qualifications. Also, a shift away from an emphasis on merely passing exams emerged as an important change needed to grow and maintain Tamil amongst the young learners.

Tamil media, to a large extent, was regarded essential in growing and maintaining Tamil in Singapore. Local media artistes or celebrities were thought to primarily represent the Tamil language, and therefore, there were mixed views on the role of the media in relation to promoting the language.

An often-cited notion was that the Tamil media, which included the radio, television, cinema and stage shows, was *a good medium to promote Tamil* in addition to providing *a good exposure to the language*. Furthermore, *our Tamil knowledge will grow if we listen to Tamil media, and we will be also encouraged to learn Tamil*. Therefore, it was important for *the media to be role models because we students don't read Tamil story books, so we see our celebrities the way they act, the way they talk, we tend to learn from it.*

In contrast, the representatives of the Tamil media were thought to not *really promote [Tamil] because they are influenced by other cultures, especially western culture. They also speak English and Tamil*, or as indicated by a few, *they speak in English most of the time*. As such, *the Tamil celebrities should speak Tamil more fluently because they are representing the media and society. The Tamil viewers are getting influenced by it, so before coming up with Tamil shows, they should actually improve the Tamil language first*. A view that the Tamil media has to use at least *mostly Tamil* prevailed, by drawing a comparison to Chinese media where *they don't even use a single word [in English]*. Therefore, it seemed that fluency in Tamil was

integral in the media, to such an extent that the use of English was not viewed positively.

### **6.12 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has presented an analysis of the qualitative data drawn from both the focus group discussions and surveys. Nine themes were identified through the process of thematic content analysis. *In vivo* codes were used in the discussion of themes to present the participants' perspectives. Therefore, these themes were illustrative of the research concerns, which ranged from language choice to growing and maintaining Tamil. This will be further examined in relation to the interview data in Chapter 8, which discusses the triangulation of findings. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the interviews by utilising a thematic approach as well.



## Chapter 7 Content Analysis: Interviews

We cannot observe how people have observed the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things.

-Patton 2002, p. 341

This chapter presents an analysis of the 14 in-depth interviews through content analysis adapted from Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). In order to maintain consistency in the way qualitative data in the study were analysed, the strategy, process and procedures utilised for analysing the interview data paralleled those used for the focus groups and open-ended sections of the survey, as explained in the preceding chapter. Therefore, relevant ideas, as well as repeating ideas, were identified within and across the interviews. Repeating ideas were then classified under the themes identified for the qualitative data drawn from the focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions. The rationale for maintaining the major themes across the qualitative data sets points to validating and comparing the findings at the triangulation stage, where the different strands of “cumulative data” (Patton, 2002, p.441) will provide a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon under study.

However, as Crabtree and Miller (2014, p. 86) point out, “although major themes may be consistent across methods (and are validated by this consistency), nuances may vary”. In order to present the ‘nuances’ of the interview data, three out of nine conceptual labels or themes were slightly modified, but at the same time, they retained the essence of the major themes identified. Therefore, the interview data were not ‘force-fitted’ into these themes.

### 7.1 The Informants

Fourteen potentially information-rich informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling as explained in Chapter 3. These informants included Tamil teachers; Head of Tamil Programme, UniSIM; a representative of the Tamil Writers’ Association; top management and senior-level officers from the Ministry of Education (MOE); top management and deejays from the local Tamil media, Vasantham (television) and Oli 96.8 (radio), respectively; and then

Professorial Fellow of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS). All interviews were conducted in English; however, the informants were provided with an option to choose between responding in either English or Tamil. Half of the interviewees responded in either language. Interview responses in Tamil were transcribed into English by the researcher. There was minimal codeswitching in all the interviews.

## **7.2 Transcribing Conventions**

While *in vivo* codes have been used to present the analysis in a narrative style, confidentiality of informants will be maintained throughout the discussion, with references made only to their positions held, where necessary. The views presented throughout this chapter are representative of the majority view, unless explicitly stated through (a) enumeration, in relation to the number of informants who held a similar or dissimilar view; (b) the use of phrases that denote level of agreement, such as ‘to a lesser extent’. ‘Majority view’ in this case, refers to similar views evidenced in more than half of the informants, as demonstrated in the recurring ideas amongst them.

In terms of conventions, as in the previous chapter, all *in vivo* codes have been italicised. Interview responses in Tamil have been boldfaced without the use of square brackets, whereas those in English have not been boldfaced. Relevant context information, where necessary, have been provided within square brackets.

## **7.3 Major Themes**

Themes are “conceptual linking of expressions” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.88) and these ‘expressions’ are bound by repeating ideas. The repeating ideas that emerged within and across the interviews lent themselves to the themes identified for the focus group discussions and surveys. This was possible as the questions asked for the interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended survey questions were related, and hence, the themes were relevant. However, the repeating ideas contained within the themes demonstrated a different perspective to the latter two data sets, in the way language and identity in relation to the current study were conceptualised or experienced, due to the various roles of the informants. These ideas will be discussed within each theme and sub-theme in the following sections.

As with the preceding chapter, nine major themes will provide the framework for the analysis as follows:

1. Language choice, codeswitching and fluency
2. Attitude towards Tamil
3. The diglossic dilemma
4. Language transmission and predictions of Tamil survivability
5. The Tamil identity
6. The multiracial strain
7. The economics of languages
8. The connect and disconnect with India
9. Growing and maintaining Tamil

#### **7.4 Theme 1: Language Choice, Fluency and Codeswitching**

The reasons underlying language choice, codeswitching and fluency represented multiple perspectives, as conveyed by the informants. While there were commonalities in the views expressed, differences in the level of agreement surfaced as well. Two important reasons cited were the prevalence of English in Singapore and the lack of opportunities to use Tamil, although parents were implicated in the observed decline in the usage of Tamil amongst young speakers, as well. Overall, the reasons cited by the informants, which were inter-related, were considered significant in the observed shift towards English usage.

##### **7.4.1 Language choice**

An apparent decline in the usage of Tamil was perceived to be the prevalence of English in Singapore, and this recurring strand which was highlighted, emphasised *there are more opportunities to use English outside their home*. Hence, the *preference to use more English, the challenge is the predominantly-English speaking thing* to such an extent that *with youngsters today, the first language is English, so Tamil becomes a subject*. This meant that *we learn Tamil as a second language here, even if we get a distinction, it doesn't mean you're very proficient in the language*. As expressed by one of the radio deejays, *some call-in listeners talk in English, out of habit...they tell us about their lack of fluency at the first instance*, and according to this deejay, *the reason for this lack of fluency is the prevalence of English at home*.

In addition to this, a typical student profile was defined by a predominantly *English-speaking background* when compared to *those days* where less English was used. The following comment made by one of the teachers demonstrated a common view shared by the other teachers interviewed, as well as the senior officers from the Ministry of Education: *Almost all my students come from English-speaking background because their parents are educated... at workplace, when they come back home, they continue to speak in English and the children have got very little exposure to spoken Tamil.* Therefore, as observed by a senior teacher, who at the point of the interview had had 46 years of teaching experience, the current situation in Singapore was one where ***English is the dominant language at school; it is also a language that has to be used beyond the home, so, students are comfortable using English. This is the challenge we face.***

The lack of opportunities emerged as another important contributing factor to the reduced usage of Tamil in Singapore, with the role of parents cited as a related factor. As expressed by an informant, who has been a key figure in Tamil education in Singapore, *outside the home, there's no possibility using Tamil, they have to use only English, therefore, we have to create an opportunity in the home and social gatherings [to speak in Tamil].* Therefore, as indicated by majority of the informants, the home was perceived as a critical domain where exposure to the mother tongue occurs *at the formative age*. The following comment was drawn from the findings of a doctoral research study conducted by an informant, who was also the Head of the Tamil Programme at a tertiary institution: *As Tamil is concerned, apart from the classroom, the child has no opportunity to practise the language, so the last bastion where you can save the language is the home. Relatedly, if you can speak Tamil at home say since one, two years old, then it shouldn't be a problem, but for those who start learning after they enter pre-school, then it will be tough.* Therefore, according to these educators, the pre-primary years of a child were considered crucial to acquiring a language, in this case the mother tongue, Tamil.

This was because *in the Tamil-speaking home, two skills are already learnt: listening and speaking, so they are only learning reading and writing [at school]. But in the case of the English-speaking home students, they have to learn four skills at home.* As such, to a large extent, the reinforcement of Tamil in the home domain

was perceived to be a mitigating factor as *the language will be there if it's spoken in the home*.

Parents were, therefore, viewed as a vital link to the language, so *if parents or friends do not create the opportunities to speak Tamil, then it's going to be a challenge*. In other words, *parents need to speak Tamil at home and give importance to the language, only then can we see a change in the children*. Further to this, parents were deemed responsible for creating a home environment that would foster the growth of Tamil in the early years of a child. Hence, *the parents here [in Singapore] need to realise that a child needs to be exposed to the mother tongue for the first five years from birth. That's when the language becomes fossilised, so parents need to create that opportunity for their children during that period*. As argued by the Head of the Tamil Programme on the importance of prioritising Tamil at home, *it's not difficult to learn English when the child goes to kindergarten and then primary school. Very easily, they can get exposed and master the language, then everywhere you turn, it's English*. The data demonstrated that parents needed to ensure that the mother tongue was transferred to the child, as learning English at a later stage or at the pre-primary level would not be a disadvantage, contrary to what most parents thought.

These concerns and views were a common thread, particularly amongst the teachers, or those involved in training Tamil teachers, as it was generally perceived that *children don't speak [Tamil] in their house*. This was seen as a *critical challenge... the non-use of Tamil in Tamil families, so we run programmes on creating awareness of the importance of speaking Tamil*. To a lesser extent, it was indicated by two informants that although living with grandparents may be perceived as advantageous, *some of them [students] say their grandparents speak to them in English so it seems even grandparents are now shifting to English*.

On the other hand, the education system, which has embedded English as the main language of instruction, was considered an important factor that was perceived to have resulted in *both parents being educated in English, hence, the influence of English is significant*. In contrast, the influence of Tamil was more apparent in families from India, which had relocated to Singapore, as indicated by one of the teachers: *A quarter of them [students] speak very fluent Tamil. These are students from Tamil speaking homes, their parents apparently speak Tamil at home. Some of*

*them are from India, with very few local families.* First, this example seems to highlight a correlation between home language choice and fluency of students, and in this case, Tamil or English-speaking backgrounds. Second, it suggests a divide between immigrant and local families in relation to language choice in the home domain.

#### 7.4.2 Fluency

Fluency in Tamil was invariably expressed as an area for concern although it was expected that *a typical student should master at least two languages, one is English, and the other is his mother tongue.* Within the context of the local Tamil media, in this case, television, *we have certain guidelines in place...when you speak, you must speak in Tamil [referring to participants in a beauty pageant]. They [the participants] were all stuttering and stammering [in Tamil], we told them to brush up.* It was a similar scenario for the call-in listeners in the local Tamil radio where, *if you ask them to speak in English, they are very fluent but when it comes to Tamil, they start stammering.* As demonstrated by the data, fluency in Tamil was considered essential, particularly in Tamil media, while ‘balanced bilinguals’ were perceived as an ideal outcome of the current education system.

This lack of fluency was also evident amongst students in the school domain, as reported by all the teachers: *you ask the question, they always answer in English, this is the difficulty we’re facing; in terms of fluency, there are two extremes: the ones who speak well and those that can’t and are afraid to [speak in Tamil].* Therefore, *it’s disappointing that most students are not able to speak naturally in Tamil.* Therefore, fluency in this context, was defined as the ability to naturally converse in Tamil. On the other hand, it was observed that *if they were to prepare a speech and deliver, they do that very well.* This seems to again pinpoint the lack of fluency in spontaneous interactions, and at the same time, highlights the diglossic nature of Tamil, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

A reason cited for the perceived lack of fluency was summarised by the longest serving teacher amongst the informants, in Tamil, as follows: *these students have limited vocabulary due to their limited exposure to Tamil. They don’t read Tamil books, they don’t hear much Tamil.* Therefore, a common challenge faced by the teachers was to constantly *remind students not to speak English in Tamil classrooms. This is a big challenge,* and further to this, it was pointed out that *they*

*say they are so used to speaking in English, and that it comes naturally to them.* As such, fluency in Tamil was seen to be associated with the amount of exposure to the language.

The tendency to speak English as a natural choice was unfavourably regarded by one of the informants as follows: *people who speak English very comfortably will realise that they need to speak in Tamil or they're going to be in trouble. Their children and grandchildren will become monolingual.* This cautionary note predicts an extreme case of language shift in Singapore, which can ultimately lead to Tamil language obsolescence over a span of few generations.

### 7.4.3 Codeswitching

Codeswitching between Tamil and English was perceived as acceptable, particularly in a multilingual environment such as Singapore. All informants, except one, agreed that *it's not wrong to mix two or three English words in a Tamil sentence, but not mixing Tamil in an English sentence.* According to the Head of the Curriculum Development Planning, Tamil language, *they [students] find it difficult to express their ideas using all Tamil words, so we do allow students to use a bit of English words.* From the teachers' perspective, the rationale for allowing codeswitching amongst students in class was as follows: *we [teachers] should not restrict and warn the students not to use English words, then they will lose interest in Tamil language.* In other words, *we should not suddenly tell them not to mix English as that may discourage them from trying to speak in Tamil.* In relation to the local Tamil media, a similar viewpoint was expressed by the Head of the Tamil media: *In dramas, they speak Tamil but we allow a smattering of English because it's not natural to say **I'm going to the bathroom** [in Tamil]. There'll be some portions [in the dramas] where we code switch, which we allow but we minimise.* Therefore, a common view held was that minimal codeswitching in the contexts mentioned above was acceptable, due to the influence of increased English usage in a multilingual environment.

However, only one of the informants who teaches at an elite secondary school, objected to mixing Tamil with English during Tamil language lessons. It was argued as follows:

*I have a very strong classroom rule or routine that the moment they enter the TL classroom, they have to speak in Tamil. If they speak in English, I will ask them. "What did you say?" and they know that's a cue. That's a no- no [in response to allowing a mix of English and Tamil in a sentence]. They shouldn't unless it's a proper noun.*

This particular informant encourages her students to use translating applications in their mobile phones or Google Translator to obtain the Tamil equivalents, which was claimed to be useful practice, particularly in preparation for the oral examinations.

However, in some cases, a dilemma was faced, when *students discuss in English, write in Tamil and present in Tamil...the students speak in Tamil in my presence [during an Indian Cultural Society meeting], but as soon as I step out, they switch to English, so it's not as if they can't speak in Tamil.* This example demonstrates that although these bilingual students seem to possess the versatility to switch between languages, in this case, Tamil and English, they gravitate towards the latter. This case parallels another cited where *students think in English when they write Tamil compositions.* Whilst there can be several inter-related factors that may explain these 'actions', the tendency to shift to English appears to be characteristic of these bilingual students, therefore, implying that Tamil in most instances, within a classroom, remains a conscious choice.

Generally, it appeared that the informants perceived codeswitching as 'natural speech', in this case, containing a few English words in a predominantly Tamil sentence. Therefore, an accommodative and flexible approach was practised by teachers who felt that a Tamil only approach in the classroom may result in a lack of motivation to learn Tamil, especially amongst an increasing number of students who come from an English-speaking background whose *acquisition is in English, learning, Tamil.* However, the teachers or radio deejays employ other discreet strategies to assist with the 'gaps' in vocabulary. For instance, as indicated by one of informants, *if students use one or two English words in a sentence, which is unavoidable, I try to say that sentence again by replacing the English words with the Tamil equivalent.* The informants believed that such indirect ways of 'teaching' Tamil are encouraging, and not cause embarrassment to the students or



call-in listeners. This viewpoint was reiterated by an informant who has had vast experience working with Tamil trainee teachers: *I am not against using English because you know, it's a bilingual society but always insist when you use English words, you must give the equal Tamil word immediately, so the child will know.*

Overall, it was concluded that ***the number of students from Tamil-speaking background is on the decline.*** For these students, Tamil language is learnt, as opposed to being acquired, as indicated above. Therefore, typically, it was observed that ***the introduction of Tamil begins at kindergarten for students who come from English-speaking backgrounds.*** The prevalence of English in Singapore within the school domain and beyond has been cited as a factor that has contributed to the shift towards English, and hence, implicated in the lack fluency noticed in young Tamil speakers. On the other hand, parents were considered a critical link to instilling Tamil in children while they were in their *formative years*. Codeswitching in Tamil language classes was perceived to be ***unavoidable***, and hence, acceptable when kept to a minimum, as it was thought students will not be deterred from speaking in Tamil.

## **7.5 Theme 2: Attitude towards Tamil**

Multiple views, both positive and negative, were shared by the informants in relation to attitude towards Tamil and the perceived consequences, or observations made in recent years. The discussion of attitude was centred on parents; students; Tamil teachers, including prospective teachers; and the Tamil community. Whilst most informants were critical of the attitude demonstrated by the three groups identified, a few felt that interest in the language and an awareness of its importance was gradually increasing.

### **7.5.1 Parent**

One of the criticisms levelled at parents was *the attitude [of parents and teachers] is they speak English, they'll be high society* or in other words, ***it's very difficult to change the mindset of parents. They think it may be embarrassing to speak in Tamil, but more respectable to do so in English.*** Further to this, the perception that parents were not taking ownership for the reduced Tamil usage at home surfaced: *The majority have learnt Tamil as a second language but they say they hardly read, hardly write or hardly speak Tamil at home, but they're blaming the others. They don't realise they're a contributing factor [to the decline in Tamil*

*usage in the home domain*]. The above comments reflected the findings of a study on the status of Tamil language in Singapore, conducted by the informant in 2011.

On the other hand, another informant claimed that Tamil was spoken at home, but that *there are false pretences like you portray another image when in the house, you actually speak Tamil [but not admit it]*. The same informant felt that there was a general perception that *if you speak in English, it's 'hip', it's very cool. If you speak Tamil at home, your parents encourage you to speak in English. I think this stigma is still there*. Therefore, as indicated by the informants, there seems to be a hierarchical ordering of the languages, where English was equated with prestige and respectability, in contrast to Tamil, which was relegated less importance.

In order to develop a collaborative network between parents and teachers, at least two informants pointed out that during parent-teacher meetings, effort was made to promote an awareness on the importance of speaking Tamil. The following two examples illustrate this:

***During parent-teacher meetings, we stress on the importance of speaking Tamil. We tell them that it's important to work with, and help Tamil teachers in growing Tamil.***

*When I meet parents, I tell them you cannot expect us to teach your children Spoken Tamil, it doesn't happen that way. So I ask for their help but most of the time, I don't get it because they're quite helpless themselves.*

Therefore, as the data indicate, parent-teacher meetings offer a platform to further reiterate the need to maintain Tamil in the home front. However, teachers may be confronted with a deadlock situation when parents themselves are not able to assist on this, due to reasons that range from lack of fluency in Tamil or in a few cases, mixed marriages.

### **7.5.2 Students**

There was agreement amongst the informants that generally, students *are learning Tamil by compulsion, not by desire, passion. In order to avoid taking Tamil in Junior College, students are taking Higher Tamil [in secondary schools]*. An explanation provided for this was *the [education] system says if you get an 'A' for Tamil, you can go to good schools, so students think it's sufficient to speak Tamil within the classroom*. A further comment made highlighted a perceived

attitude thought to be typical of *those from the higher-end schools, [who] see Tamil as a language to score marks and move on*. As such, a recurring comment, as demonstrated in Tamil was, the ***majority of students study Tamil to pass and move on to the next level***. Therefore, it was argued that ***you will not develop any sense of passion towards the language if you simply learn it***.

Resistance to speak Tamil or engage with the local Tamil radio as well was indicated: *There were some students who actually refused to speak Tamil when I first joined this school, they felt that they had no need to learn [Tamil], they thought they could just do away with one language, English*. Correspondingly, in relation to the local Tamil radio, one of the deejays commented that *they [the youths] feel that Tamil is not cool. You would rather listen to 98.7 or 93.8 [English radio channels]*. This informant added that *I am embarrassed to say this, I was from [School X] and I thought that listening to [Tamil] radio was not cool*. There are implications of peer or social pressure in these instances, where one is de-motivated to use or engage with the language. Nevertheless, it was felt that students needed to come to an understanding that *they cannot just go around saying, "Oh, I know English" Not enough. Everybody speaks English. It's no big deal anymore*. The data above suggest that English seemed to be associated with a sense of contemporariness, but at the same time, it was thought that competence in English was not to be considered superior, as the language was perceived a common commodity.

Another informant shared the findings of a survey they had conducted on spoken Tamil usage, during one of the Tamil conferences held some time in 2008 or 2009, where ***results indicated that about 70% of the 250 surveyed don't speak in Tamil with their parents or friends***. Hence, it was perceived that ***the new generation, they are not bothered about this situation, attitude [is an issue]***. This further suggests that the non-use, or lack of Tamil usage amongst the youths, was perceived to be influenced by their attitude. However, there could be underlying reasons for the attitude 'observed', therefore, a conclusion as such may seem to be simplistic.

In most cases, teachers played a vital role in attempting to reverse such attitudes that were perceived to be detrimental to the growth of Tamil, through purposeful learning or teaching. For example, as one of the informants indicated, *it shouldn't be a case of learning for the sake of passing exams. They [students] must*

*have some purpose in learning, so let them know about the bilingual policy [in Singapore], how the language connects with the culture.* The informant went on to add that *I make them realise that Tamil is not a home language but an international language, and it has tremendous research potential and would serve them well.* Hence, going beyond just teaching to the curriculum was considered an important approach in cultivating interest in the language. This would mean shifting students' perception of Tamil, so they develop appreciation for the language.

On the other hand, for *some students [who] think when they speak in Tamil, they are not equal to the other people, as a teacher, we have to make them feel proud when they speak in Tamil. It must help them for life [as in the moral values learnt through the language].* It can be seen that conveying the intrinsic or extrinsic values of Tamil was a strategy employed by teachers to re-align students' pre-conceived notions of their mother tongue.

However, the language-culture link did not appear to be relevant to a fraction of students *because they don't really have the Tamil culture in their system, some could be Christians or Muslims.* Hence, religion, to a lesser extent, emerged as a contributing factor in relation to making sense of learning Tamil. On the contrary, it was observed that *ironically, the Indian Muslim students have a better hold with the [Tamil] language. They somehow speak the language at home even though they pray with the Arabic language.* It can be seen that religion may influence one's motivational level to learning Tamil, although an exception was observed in the Indian Muslim students.

Nonetheless, the informants were positive that Tamil was slowly and gradually gaining ground amongst the young Tamils, following the revised Tamil syllabus and a collaborative effort by the government, teachers and Tamil organisations in promoting Tamil through various activities and platforms. This was demonstrated as follows:

*The attitude towards the language is slowly gaining, they've started enjoying the language.*

*Overall, we can see the interest in the students in the language, the motivation, the proficiency level.*

*The teachers are also encouraging the pupils to participate in the activities, so in that way, slowly the interest [in Tamil] is increasing.*

*They said they liked it [new syllabus] because they could watch video clips and share their views on it, so it's engaging.*

It was also concluded that although the students *speak English during a discussion [in Tamil language classes]*, **this does not mean they are not interested in Tamil**. As such, the use of English did not necessarily mean that Tamil was not spoken due to a lack of interest, hence, suggesting that there can be other reasons that contribute to language choice, for example, fluency.

### 7.5.3 Teachers

The attitude of prospective teachers, as well as some current Tamil teachers were highly criticised by informants who held top or middle management positions. For one, these informants regarded pursuing degrees not relevant to teaching Tamil, as indicative of a lack of genuine interest in teaching Tamil, and to a certain extent, mercenariness amongst these prospective Tamil teachers. A tone of disapproval was demonstrated as such: *They (prospective Tamil teachers) don't valorise the language anymore;* and as for current Tamil teachers, it was highlighted that *quite a substantial number of Tamil teachers got a degree in Open University, but in English language and Literature...I don't know to what extent this degree has enhanced to do their job [as a Tamil teacher] as it is totally unrelated...they wanted to be re-deployed as an English teacher because there was also a concern of prestige. They want to be recognised as an English teacher rather than a Tamil teacher*. In this case, as indicated by the informant, prestige was perceived as a pull factor for some teachers to transition into English-based teaching.

On the other hand, as explained in Tamil, it was considered not *fair when a Tamil teacher with 'A' level does a Psychology degree, continue as a Tamil teacher, but draw a graduate pay. What justification have you to draw this pay? What is your contribution to Tamil? Children are not benefitting*. Therefore, it was emphasised that *teachers with 'O' or 'A' levels should upgrade themselves and get a degree in Tamil, and not just upgrade in the English disciplines*. In sum, a sense of commitment and passion towards Tamil language, in addition to ethical behaviour,

were considered critical in both students and teachers, in order to be meaningfully engaged with the language.

#### 7.5.4 The Tamil community

A recurring view amongst the informants was the perceived level of complacency amongst the Tamil community, although at the same time, it was thought that a renewed interest in Tamil and a sense of awareness on the importance of Tamil was gradually developing in the community. Other views expressed pointed to the notion of ethnolinguistic vitality.

A complacent attitude amongst Tamils was a recurring motif, as pointed out particularly amongst those who held top management or senior positions in their fields. They highlighted the perceived divide between ‘want’ and ‘action’ which means *they [the Tamil community in Singapore] are very fond of the Tamil language, they are willing to sacrifice anything for the language, but practically, they don’t do anything...if nothing they will immediately ask, after being done by the government, they will not use the facility. That’s an important problem in Singapore.* This attitude was evidenced in the following instance, as indicated by another informant: *Our community was asking for one of the universities to introduce a [Tamil] degree programme, basically the Ministry of Education was not keen. Our community will ask for such degrees but once introduced, they may not give their full support.* Hence, it was concluded that ***the problem with Tamils is that they demand for something when it is not there, but don’t do anything when they’ve got it.*** Therefore, there seemed to be a conflict between demands and usage of services or facilities.

Further to this, the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tamils surfaced as an important factor that influenced one’s attitude towards Tamil. It was observed that ***the Chinese speak their language without reservation, likewise the Malays, but with the Tamils, I don’t know why they shy away from speaking Tamil. I think they are afraid of making mistakes.*** Echoing the same line of thought was a question put forward by the Head of Tamil Programme: *Do you have some sort of inferiority complex when you use Tamil? Having people around you is a different thing, but when you have your own kind, what’s wrong with speaking in Tamil?* As indicated in Tamil, this means ***Tamils feel that they should speak in English in public places, but what’s important is that when a Tamil converses with another***

*Tamil in such a context, it should be in Tamil.* As pointed out by another informant, *you can speak in English when you see another Tamil, but there will be no closeness in that communication.* Therefore, it was important that *we have pride that this is our language...even think about a job, I can do a B.A. in Tamil and earn as much as someone who has done a B.A. in Political Science.* In other words, it appeared that pride in Tamil was essential in developing a sense of solidarity amongst Tamil speakers.

On the other hand, it was argued by one of the informants that *some are embarrassed to speak Tamil because they are afraid to make mistakes, as in people may laugh at them if this happens.* In other words, it was an issue of ‘loss of face’ in this instance, and hence, one’s reluctance to speak the language was not necessarily a sign of disinterest or disapproval demonstrated towards the language.

However, the informants indicated a sense of reassurance as it was observed that *compared to about 10 years ago, parents are now slightly more aware of the importance of speaking in Tamil, so I think there is slight improvement in Tamil usage in the home domain now.* A perceived change in parental attitude was also highlighted by another informant as such: *parents telling us, they’re [the children] not speaking in Tamil at all, so we said “send them to the workshop, we’ll make them realise that Tamil can be fun”.* In terms of participation in the local Tamil media, the Head of Tamil media in Singapore felt *there’s renewed interest in Tamil, because through the media...people feel it’s cool, it’s hip and it’s glamour factor also being on TV.* Although it was generally agreed there was renewed interest in Tamil, it was indicated that *we still need more support for Tamil [from all sections of the Tamil community].* A more optimistic view claimed that *everyone has realised that to make a language live, one has to speak it.* The above data demonstrate a sense of positivity, in relation to a perceived gradual change attitudes towards maintaining Tamil.

### **7.6 Theme 3: The Diglossic Dilemma**

All informants acknowledged the diglossic nature of Tamil, as well as the attributes and function of each variety, the spoken and written: *We’re a bit diglossic. What we write and what we speak is very different; Tamil has lots of differences.* As revealed by one of the informants, who is an authority on Tamil language, *from the earliest grammar itself, you can find Tamil as a spoken*

*[language] as well as written.* The written variety is also referred to as the formal or literary variety. For the purpose of consistency, Literary Tamil (LT) will be used throughout the discussion. A recurring view expressed was that Spoken Tamil (ST) was critical to the survival of the language in Singapore, although it was emphasised that *we should not say spoken language is better than written and vice-versa. They are [like] two rivers.* Whilst, the two varieties held separate attributes, LT and ST were considered equally important for a full appreciation of the language.

The school syllabus saw a shift in its emphasis on ST in recent years, and a result, ***the weightage for the oral component is gradually increasing, and this is an initiative to make mother tongue languages [Tamil, Malay and Mandarin] sustain and live in Singapore.*** It was revealed that in the past, *in the classroom, the written Tamil was given more focus, the students get very disoriented. Attempts to use the language [LT] becomes very artificial.* In response to this, the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Planning and Development Branch strategized *to develop a set of confident speakers and to encourage students to speak the language [Tamil] and to use the language fluently, therefore, the approach we're taking is Spoken Tamil.* This meant the textbooks were aligned *towards Spoken Tamil.* It was observed that *they [students] were motivated to start to use the language [ST] and then did not consider Tamil a foreign language that they did not relate to as Spoken Tamil is more used in their daily lives than the written Tamil.* Therefore, the usage of ST in the curriculum was considered a progression that provided students with a meaningful learning experience.

The notion of relevance across contexts in respect to the two varieties emerged, in the discussion with the informants. For example, the use of ST in local Tamil drama was thought to be justified, as *that way, it'll remain relevant. People don't speak in literary Tamil. We can connect with the young people who don't see Tamil as a chore.* Hence, it was argued that *if you keep it [Tamil] in the pure, pure state, you'll lose relevance with the audience.* It was evident that the shift to ST in local Tamil programmes *is being endorsed for sure, more relaxed, more informal Tamil,* with an exception to news and current affairs programmes where the formal variety is used.



In the school context, however, *we didn't want to use the term SST [Standard Spoken Tamil] but rather use ST [as the former comes with some rules]*. In other words, *we can teach Tamil using a simple form of acceptable spoken Tamil which is not equivalent to dialects*. It was agreed that exposure to ST, as well as encouragement to use the variety of *daily interactions and discussion* would mean *some relevance in learning*. Therefore, teachers were responsible to *consciously use ST to motivate students to use the language*. The data also revealed that an increased use of ST in the class by teachers was encouraging to students. For example, *students don't feel afraid of using the spoken variety as it's encouraged. They don't have to worry about being grammatically correct, as is the case in LT*. Furthermore, teachers were regarded as *role models* where *students learn from the teachers*, as ST cannot be taught. It was also revealed that the shift to using ST in class made *students feel comfortable participating in class activities ... and have lots of fun*. The data demonstrate that the shift to ST, to a certain extent, had alleviated the fear in students in terms of using the language, in addition to providing a more conducive learning environment.

An important observation made was in relation to students who spoke English only in the home domain, and as such, *they struggle with Tamil, and these are the ones who speak the formal variety. They can write Tamil very well and they go on to take Higher Tamil, but they are not fluent in ST*. In this case, it appears that those who have had hardly any exposure to ST beyond the classroom speak the formal variety instead, which was considered *artificial*. On the other hand, *if you mix written Tamil with spoken Tamil, it's quite unnatural. Every child should know the two varieties, and not think that one is higher than the other*. It can be seen that fluency in LT benefits the student as far as examinations and grades are concerned.

There was strong agreement that the emphasis on ST was considered *critical in keeping the language alive* in Singapore and that people *connect with Spoken Tamil easily*; as well, ST encouraged Tamil usage amongst the young Tamils. As pinpointed by one of the informants, *people think you're preaching, you're being very teacher-like [when you speak in the formal variety]. They feel like you're a friend, you're talking to them [when you speak more informally]*. The importance of ST was also justified in relation to the population size of Tamil speakers in Singapore as follows: *we are a minority in Singapore, so the emphasis must be on*

*spoken Tamil. Spoken Tamil is important, because as long as there is Spoken Tamil, Tamil will be a living language. In essence, Spoken Tamil is more important [in today's situation within the Singaporean context] because Literary Tamil, they can master easily.*

However, both varieties were regarded as important in appreciating Tamil language, and growing the language in Singapore. In other words, *I would say Literary Tamil [is important] because of its inherent beauty, however, Spoken Tamil is important for maintaining the language.* As one of the informants reasoned, *if you learn written Tamil only, you will not understand Tamil movies, so both varieties are important, but, in terms of making a language live, then we have to give importance to Spoken Tamil.* However, in the media, *we encourage the use of both varieties on an equal basis*, hence, *we juggle between spoken and written [Tamil] ...we are told not to mix spoken and polished Tamil [in an utterance].* Therefore, it appeared that ST and LT were considered important in their own right.

The current focus on ST, particularly in schools, can be interpreted as a pragmatic response to an observed decline in Tamil usage in the community. None of the informants, however, regarded either variety as higher than the other, as expressed by one of the informants, *only the scholars think written Tamil is higher than ST.* This stance also revealed that the purist notion of preserving Tamil in its literary form only was not going to be relevant in the Singaporean context. Overall, it was thought that by foregrounding the spoken variety, *we are moving in the right direction.*

#### **7.7 Theme 4: Predictions of Tamil Survivability**

The discussion on Tamil survivability in Singapore yielded a range of responses, which at the same time revealed varying levels of confidence expressed. Moreover, the survivability of Tamil was considered to be largely reliant on its official language status, and the bilingual policy: *Tamil is still here because it's compulsory for Indian students. That's the truth.* The local Tamil media and other Tamil organisations were also perceived to be instrumental in taking Tamil into the future. On the other hand, it was asserted by an informant who headed the Tamil Programme, that the following two observations made may impede the growth of Tamil in the future: *One is the proficiency is going down for each generation, the*

*other thing, the number of speakers is going down [as revealed by the census figures].*

The optimism expressed in relation to the future of Tamil was primarily because *the government is very supportive in endorsing Tamil as an official language right from the 60s*. Therefore, it was felt that *we are very fortunate because Tamil is still our national language, one of the four official languages. As long as we have that, it'll be always be part of our lives for all the Indians here*. A recurring thread was that ***the official status of Tamil in Singapore along with the support given by the government has been encouraging*** to such an extent that it was illustrated as such by a key informant: *The famous writer Arasaratnam has written a book on Indians in Malaysia and Singapore, it's quoted like this: "In Malaysia, Tamil is living because of the people; in Singapore, Tamil is living because of the government"*. Another informant, a teacher who also had vast experience in the local Tamil media, was certain that Tamil will sustain in Singapore as *two of them from our Parliament have emphatically mentioned that Tamil language will continue to be an official language in Singapore, so it will be here, so it will be strong*. Therefore, it was concluded that ***so long as Tamil continues to be an official language, is taught in schools as a compulsory subject, and with Tamil teachers around, Tamil will remain a living language [in Singapore]***.

On the other hand, the growth of broadcast media was thought to be strongly associated with the growth of the language as indicated by the Head of Tamil media: *the audience pool grows bigger, that way the language also grows*. To a lesser extent, a perceived change in parental attitudes was also thought to help sustain the language as ***parents have realised the importance of maintaining the language***. The achievement of Tamils also emerged as an important contributing factor with regard to Tamil survivability, as indicated: ***Why I say there's a bright future for Tamil is because Tamils are achieving; when Tamils progress, the language progresses as well***. Further to this, it was revealed *that the youngsters [from tertiary institutions] nowadays, they've got a renewed interest and awareness in Tamil. It means there are people to take Tamil forward*. In addition to this, it was thought that *the profile of our learners are changing, we're getting new citizens*. In other words, immigrants from India were considered an asset to the growth of Tamil in Singapore. Therefore,

slightly more than half of the informants perceived that Tamil was growing in Singapore, compared to the past, as indicated: *If you had asked me if the language was declining a few years ago, I would say 'yes' but now, 'No'*. This suggests that a sense of awareness on the importance of Tamil language, as well as efforts taken to promote Tamil were contributing to the perceived growth in Singapore, though a gradual one.

While it appeared that the future of Tamil was *very bright* or *good* due to the reasons mentioned above, there were some reservations expressed by at least three of the informants. For example, it was thought that *without the support of the government and the initiatives taken by the media such as Oli and Vasantham, it may be a challenge to keep Tamil going*. As such, the Tamil situation was thought to be fragile, as indicated in Tamil: ***If the present ruling government remains, Tamil will remain, but if there's a change in government, then the state of Tamil is questionable***. In view of the Tamil media, one informant indicated *we have that fear, will there be a Tamil radio fear*. A more pessimistic view of the Tamil situation was demonstrated as follows: *I can't predict on the future of Tamil, I am really scared. I find that even with the Tamil Language Month, we're still doing it, but why isn't there an emphasis on speaking Tamil on an everyday basis?* Furthermore, it was claimed that Tamil survives in the school domain primarily because *only the bilingual policy keeps Tamil as a living language in schools*. The data, therefore, demonstrate that institutional support has been pivotal in maintaining the language in schools and in the media.

Another view demonstrated a seemingly contradictory statement in relation to the perceived decline in Tamil: ***Tamil is definitely declining. Generally, it may seem like it is declining but if you look at the students, when they participate in debates or dramas, they speak very well, but when it comes to speaking to their friends, they don't use the language***. It appears that Tamil usage in this context was unlikely to have been spontaneous. Hence, the apparent fluency observed in students, and the perception that Tamil was not declining. To a lesser extent, other non-committal responses were as follows: ***only time will tell but it's going in the right direction, I think, but I don't know; the future of Tamil is with the future generations***. In this case, a sense of uncertainty in relation to the position of Tamil in Singapore was

demonstrated, where the growth or decline of the language were thought to be contingent on the generations to come.

### **7.8 Theme 5: Tamil Identity**

Tamil identity was strongly associated with language, and to some extent, culture and tradition. From the teachers' perspective, *we're trying to make students come to terms with their identity, a Tamil identity, a Tamil-speaking Singaporean.* Moreover, it was asserted that ***Tamil is important, it is our identity, the importance needs to be conveyed to the parents.*** It was also felt that young Tamils were *beginning to realise that they need an identity, Tamil language is their identity.*

At the same time, it was stressed that maintaining the Tamil identity was critical, particularly in the Singaporean context, where the prevalence of English was evident. For example, while codeswitching in local Tamil media is permitted, it is kept to a minimum as ultimately, *we still want to maintain a Tamil identity.* This meant, ***although the influence of English is there, what runs in us is Tamil.*** Therefore, while acknowledging the importance of English in Singapore, the importance of Tamil was equally reiterated as such: ***Go ahead and study English, that's a must, but don't forget your roots and your identity.*** On the other hand, a reference was also made to the Tamil diasporic identity where it was emphasised that ***Tamil is our identity, you can't be an American, or be London-based, you still remain a Tamil.*** Overall, it was asserted that ***to speak in Tamil is not an embarrassment, Tamil is an identity,*** and that ***we need both language and culture.*** However, it was warned that if ***they [Tamils] lose their identity, they will really regret.*** Therefore, maintaining a Tamil identity emerged as essential, regardless of the environment, be it multilingual or English-dominant.

### **7.9 Theme 6: The Multi-Racial Strain**

The data demonstrated that a multiracial environment posed some limitations on Tamil usage in Singapore, primarily due to the minority status of Indians as a whole, which includes Tamils. It was argued by the Head of Curriculum Development Planning for Tamil that *the biggest challenge is critical mass, we don't have the critical mass to actually sustain the interest in the language.* A similar view was expressed as such: ***Living as a multi-racial society [in Singapore], it's very difficult for Tamils to focus and show an interest in Tamil.*** Overall, it was felt that

because *we are living with other races, we can't expect that Tamil has to be spoken [everywhere, all the time] or that Tamil is an important language*. Therefore, the limited usage of Tamil in Singapore seems to have been impacted by the wider society.

A second, related factor pointed to the prevalence of English in Singapore, and its function as a lingua franca. It was highlighted that the *environment has changed, the whole nation is English-speaking. In Singapore, the bus-driver, the taxi driver, everyone speaks English*. As recounted by one of the younger informants, *when I did my National Service [mandatory military service], and University, I had little opportunity to speak Tamil as I had Chinese and Malay friends*. Hence, this informant indicated that *in my circle of [Tamil] friends, we try to use Tamil as much as we can, we use a different lingo, unique to us*. However, it was perceived that the influence of English was not only evident amongst the Tamils but also the Chinese and Malays: *The society is tilted more towards using English in their daily conversations that has led to the decline in Mother Tongue, not only Tamil...this is also felt in Chinese and Malay*. This was viewed disapprovingly as it was felt that *it's a bad thing because we're in a multiracial thing where you think that English is more important than your own Mother Tongue*. Hence, it appears that the co-existence of other races can impact language choice, and in this case, the use of a lingua franca, English, in inter-ethnic communication.

Moreover, the data demonstrated that *even the Chinese and Malays have a problem in relation to mother tongue usage. Malay parents are speaking in English. It's a trend. Nothing can be done about this*. As such, *the current trend points to more students coming from an English-speaking background. This is true for all races, but it's more prevalent amongst the Tamils*. It was also indicated that in order to mitigate this issue, *the Singapore government is spending more money to encourage pupils to speak their own languages. Not only Tamil, but Malay and Chinese also*. Therefore, it was concluded that *the challenge is the predominantly-English speaking thing...we should ensure a good balance between being a Singaporean, a bilingual society*.

A third factor that emerged was mixed marriages. In other words, *the other issue is the hyphenated race, the mixed marriages, there are more mixed marriages*

now. *Once mixed marriage, they will of course go for the other language [instead of Tamil]. This means in families of mixed marriages, Tamil is declining.* In some instances, *there are students whose parents are of mixed marriages. They do not know Tamil at all.* It was also observed that *those from a mixed parentage find learning Tamil difficult.* Therefore, it appears that Tamil is sidelined in mixed marriages, as indicated in the data above, and this carries implications, which may point to the position of Tamil in respect to other languages in Singapore, amongst others.

### 7.10 Theme 7: The Economics of Language

The data demonstrated that within the context of Singapore, Tamil was not viewed as an economically viable language or a language which was going to be *very useful for them [students] commercially.* This, to a certain extent was seen to influence the motivational level in learning the language amongst students. As indicated, it was felt that *Tamil is not needed for jobs, and has no economic value. So, students feel there is no use to learn Tamil.* This could mean that learning other languages thought to have economic value in Singapore, may be preferred. For example, as one of the informants predicted, *if the government were to make learning Tamil optional, parents may start opting for either Malay or Chinese,* further suggesting that pragmatism may be an underlying factor in parental choice.

On the other hand, it was revealed that undergraduate Tamil degree programmes *may not attract students who look at the economic value of the language.* This could be interpreted to mean that an appreciation for the aesthetic attributes of Tamil was regarded an essential quality for prospective undergraduates who choose to pursue a career in Tamil. In other words, *Tamil is not meant to be looked at as a language with economic value. One has to put aside pragmatism and think of Tamil as a language that offers so much through its literature, the moral values. It's a language to realise through experiential learning.* To a lesser extent, the perceived vulnerability of Tamil in the future, in the presence of Hindi, was indicated as well: *The fear is, if the usage of Tamil goes down, they may scrap the idea of having Tamil and bring in Hindi because it gives more weightage for the relationship between India and Singapore.* Therefore, it appears that the challenges

that Tamil may face is the apparent economic viability of other Indian languages, such as Hindi which may compromise the position of Tamil in Singapore.

Overall, Tamil was perceived to have no economic value, in comparison to other languages, in this case, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and to a little extent, Hindi. According to the informants, this seemed to have impacted students' motivation as a result as they see little or no purpose in learning the language.

### 7.11 Theme 8: The Connect and Disconnect with India

India, in particular Tamil Nadu, was considered an important contributing factor to Tamil in Singapore, but at the same time, it was conceptualised as an entity where practices and culture differed from those in Singapore. In addition, the contrastive position and strength of speakers of Tamil in India and Singapore was pinpointed. The connect and disconnect with India was represented in relation to mainly teaching, resources and communication.

It was highlighted that *if you're in India, you have to be well-versed in Tamil but when you're in a place where English has the upper hand [as in Singapore], I think it's not about changing the mindset of people but it's the surrounding you're in.* This viewpoint suggests that India offers opportunities to use Tamil, in contrast to Singapore where English prevails, hence implicating that *surrounding* can influence one's language choice, or motivation to use the language. On the other hand, the movement of Tamil speakers from India into Singapore was viewed as an advantage. For example, *with a steady flow of Tamils from India coming into Singapore, they bring Tamil along with them. It doesn't matter if it's a slightly different variety to ours.* In agreement to this, it was highlighted that this growth of Tamil speakers was ***a plus point because they conduct many activities, participate in radio call-in shows and TV as well.*** Hence, the data suggest that the flow of Tamil speakers from India was perceived as an asset to the growth of Tamil in Singapore.

Further to this, it was indicated that *teachers from India have a good command of Tamil and they have contributed significantly. Over time, say 10 years, these teachers have come to understand the Singapore culture and with their command of Tamil, they are able to teach the students accordingly.* However, a dissenting viewpoint demonstrated that *the people from India [Tamil teachers] are already trained [in India] but there's an issue of pedagogy and issue*



*with the command of English because these people are not going to work in a Tamil-medium school, they are going to work with other races, so they have to communicate [in English].* Moreover, the use of Tamil textbooks from India as resources in the past [70s] was thought to have created a sense of disconnect, *so we have to actually develop books that's more related to our students, local contexts.* A more critical stance of the perceived disconnect with India was demonstrated as such: *in terms of pedagogy, Singapore is very advanced, and these people are still traditional, conventional and trying to impose on us.* The critical stance, as demonstrated above, seems to point to a divide where the notion of 'otherness' is implied.

In the same line of thought, inviting *speakers from India during the TLF [Tamil Language Festival] month* in Singapore was considered unnecessary. On the other hand, ideological differences seemed to have had negative repercussions as well: *People who came from India occupied the top positions like radio...they were influenced by the Dravidian movement, they considered Spoken Tamil taboo.* Furthermore, it was thought that *we do not have to depend on India [for writers], second is that India is different. They've got a Tamil-speaking environment down there in Tamil Nadu ... we are focusing on Tamil language in multi-racial countries like Singapore, Malaysia, America, Australia, we all belong to one category.* These comments, presented by two informants who were involved directly in Tamil education suggest that the growth of Tamil in Singapore was not necessarily dependent on India.

### **7.12 Theme 9: Growing and Maintaining Tamil**

Government-supported initiatives, Tamil teachers, and the media emerged as primary agents responsible for the growth and maintenance of Tamil in Singapore. In addition, the perceived change in the linguistic landscape, and the flow of Tamil speakers from India to Singapore were positively viewed. Recommendations in relation to the teaching and learning of Tamil in Singapore were also expressed by two senior-level informants who have been involved in Tamil education in Singapore.

The Tamil Language Month, a collaborative effort of the Tamil Language Council and Ministry of Education, was considered an important initiative supported by the government at a national level. It was indicated that *the*

government is doing its best, for instance the Tamil Language Month...because they noticed the decrease in fluency [in Tamil]. Generally, it was demonstrated that ***the Tamil Language Festival has definitely created an awareness of the importance of speaking in Tamil.*** At the school level, programmes aimed at promoting mother tongue languages have been ***made compulsory [by the government], and in conjunction to this, we have a range of activities which incorporate the traditions as well. I appreciate the government which has provided equal opportunities for promoting Tamil, as Tamil is one of the four official languages.*** It was highlighted that *the Singapore government is spending more money to encourage pupils to speak their own languages. Not only Tamil, Malay and Chinese also.*

On the other hand, an informant who represented a Tamil organisation revealed that ***we are seeing more Tamil writers, and more students participating in our programmes, so I think Tamil will be taken to the next generation;*** in addition to this, ***we run programmes on creating awareness of the importance of speaking Tamil.*** Overall, the data demonstrated that efforts were made through a range of initiatives to grow and maintain Tamil, at both the national and school level. Not only was spoken Tamil promoted but also the written variety, in addition to increasing exposure and awareness to the Tamil traditions and customs through the various platforms.

The media emerged as another important contributing factor to the growth and maintenance of Tamil in Singapore. For example, it was indicated that *the media can help, Vasantham Central [local Tamil television channel] is doing a great job. Most of the students, even if they don't speak Tamil at home, they watch Tamil dramas. I think TV is doing a great contribution to Spoken Tamil.* Furthermore, for those who did not have much exposure to the language, it was indicated *that's where the media comes in because the exposure to it [Spoken Tamil] is very important.* For example, *the radio can help in promoting the language. When parents turn on the radio at home, children do not have a choice, but listen.* Road shows held by the local media were seen as a strategy to promote awareness of the importance of maintaining Tamil amongst its speakers, as well as an opportunity for participation in the activities organised. It was indicated by the Head of Tamil media that *a lot of them [who take part in road shows] are new citizens [from Tamil Nadu, India]. For them, it's a connection with Tamil.*

Also, it was reported by one of the informants that amongst a group of 250 students surveyed on spoken Tamil usage, a majority ***watch Tamil dramas and movies, including those who don't usually speak Tamil, so that's another consolation.*** Apart from the local media, the access to Tamil movies was perceived as an advantage to growing Tamil: *The younger generation are fond of Tamil movies... here [in Singapore], if you don't see the films, you wouldn't speak in Tamil.* However, it was thought that the *local Tamil media is better than India's.* Whilst the local Tamil media was perceived to have *a huge responsibility as the guardian of the Tamil language,* it was thought that *the expectations of the community are very high.* As expressed by the Head of Tamil media, *they expect us to preserve, guard, and protect [the language] that I think is not feasible.* Overall, the local Tamil media were regarded as vital support to growing the language: *we have Vasantham and Oli.*

On the other hand, Tamil teachers were considered critical in creating a conducive environment to learning Tamil, particularly due to the increasing number of students who come from a predominantly English-speaking background. It was felt that *the tone of the classroom has a far-reaching impact on the students' learning of Tamil, so we made sure it's a non-threatening environment, especially for the students coming from the non-Tamil speaking environment.* Therefore, it was concluded that *the media, Tamil teachers are doing their part to keep the language a living one.*

Next, the improvement observed in the linguistic landscape in Singapore was demonstrated as follows: ***In the past, there were Chinese, Malay and Japanese signage, now they have added Tamil to the signage in Changi Terminal 3, so there's progress.*** This change further implies the lack of recognition observed in the past, where Tamil appeared to have been sidelined in the linguistic landscape. It also demonstrates the effect that visual recognition may have on one's interpretation of the importance of a language, in this case, Tamil.

To a lesser extent, the interest in learning Tamil through an elective programme at the local university by non-Tamil speakers of other ethnic groups, as well as *exchange students born in western countries* was considered a contributing factor to the growth of Tamil in Singapore. The reasons demonstrated in the data are as follows: *Some of the local Chinese students, they want to know Tamil [because*

*they know the other official languages]; Malay students, they've got Tamil friends, they want to converse with their Tamil friends; marriage and having Tamil boyfriends. Malay people are fond of seeing Tamil films, so that's another reason. They always go to Tamil restaurants, they are interested to know the Tamil culture.* However, it was indicated the class size for this elective programme had declined, while the reasons for this was said to be not known.

Two recommendations were also put forth as ways to grow and maintain Tamil with regard to teaching and learning. That is, a cumulative approach to incorporating both spoken and written Tamil from the primary through the secondary level was argued as such: *My concept is like this: P1, 10 % written Tamil, 90% spoken Tamil; then 20%, 30[%], up to primary level, 50-50. Then secondary 40-60, 20-60 because they are well-versed in the spoken. We have to give importance to written Tamil in the higher areas. Slowly, they will be able to read the classical texts.*

On the other hand, it was asserted that Tamil should be a common mother tongue to all South Indians in Singapore: *Make it clear, for all South Indians, it's Tamil.* This approach, according to the informant, would help maintain Tamil amongst the South Indian community, and it was perceived that Tamil, in this case, would be uniting the South Indians instead of *dividing* them.

### **7.13 Concluding Remarks**

Lack of fluency in Tamil amongst young Tamils has been associated with the prevalence of English in the school domain and in other aspects of life. Whilst a critical stance was demonstrated by informants in relation to attitude towards Tamil by different sections of the Tamil community, there was acknowledgement that a change in attitude was slowly developing. Moreover, a collaborative effort was considered vital for the growth of Tamil through various agencies, be they teachers, parents or the media. On the other hand, the data also revealed that the practice of speaking in Tamil in intra-ethnic communication was considered important, although this may be largely a conscious effort. Ultimately, a positive attitude towards Tamil was perceived as one that demonstrated passion, a characteristic that was regarded essential in sustaining interest in either speaking, teaching or learning the language. This sense of passion was perceived as a cultivated attribute, where in the context of

teaching and learning, the value of Tamil was to be realised through experiential learning or creating a sense of awareness of its potential.

The future of Tamil was dependent on agents that were considered critical to the survival of Tamil in Singapore. These included the government and media. The bilingual policy as well as the official status accorded to Tamil were regarded the bedrock on which Tamil survivability was positively perceived. However, at the same time, the necessity to speak Tamil was also perceived as paramount to its survival. On the other hand, a sense of uncertainty was revealed in relation to the future of Tamil in Singapore, where it was felt that changes in future government policies could compromise the position of Tamil.

Tamil language emerged as a strong and essential marker of Tamil identity. In the Singaporean context, the Tamil identity was further conceptualised as both language and nation- based, as in the representation of a Tamil Singaporean identity. Therefore, speaking Tamil was considered an important pre- requisite to a Tamil identity. Although it was implied that some had reservations speaking in Tamil, it was reinforced that speaking in Tamil should not be regarded an embarrassment.

Tamil was perceived to have no economic value, in comparison to other languages, in this case, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and to a little extent, Hindi. This seemed to have impacted students' motivation as a result as they see little or no purpose in learning the language.

A line of divide between Tamils represented by Singapore, and those in India also surfaced. Whilst the influence of India was viewed positively in terms of growing Tamil in Singapore, perceived differences between Tamils in Singapore and those who have relocated to Singapore from India have remained a concern to some.

The support for and the initiatives undertaken through different platforms to promote Tamil in Singapore have been significant, as demonstrated by the data. The local Tamil media, in addition to Tamil movies were thought to create and sustain interest in Tamil, particularly amongst the young Tamils, including those who did not speak the language widely. Tamil teachers were also regarded important in promoting Tamil in view of the changing student profile in Singapore. An approach to progressively incorporate both spoken and written Tamil was thought to potentially equip one with both varieties of Tamil in order to appreciate the language as a whole. As well, making Tamil a common mother tongue to all South Indian

students in Singapore was considered essential to the growth of Tamil and the unity of the larger South Indian community.

The next chapter will discuss the triangulation of findings drawn from both the quantitative and qualitative data through the data collection methods used in this study. The objective of this is to validate, clarify and compare the findings drawn from the different data sets, in addition to comparing the findings to previously published studies. Finally, the limitations of the current study will be presented.

## Chapter 8 Discussions

When you come to the discussion, you may be looking at the whole for the first time; it is as if you had returned to your painting after a break, [...], with an opportunity to assess and describe its strengths and faults as a complete work.

-Evans, Gruba, and Zobel, 2014, p. 115

### 8.1 General Discussion of the Findings

This chapter firstly compares the findings across the qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions, interviews and open-ended survey questions, in addition to the open comment sections of the survey. Secondly, the findings drawn from both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative data will be compared in an aim to identify commonalities and differences. Through triangulation, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the phenomenon under study, the maintenance and shift of Tamil to English in the Tamil community in Singapore, framed primarily within Edward's (2010)'s Sociology-of-Language framework. Furthermore, the chapter will compare the findings of the current study with those from previous studies. Additionally, it will seek to present the relevance of the findings to related theories. The chapter will conclude with the limitations of this study.

Selected key data, representative of the views expressed are presented in a matrix table, according to the data collection methods. These data, consisting of *in vivo* codes, have been obtained from the themes in Chapters 6 and 7 and classified under 'sections' in this chapter. These qualitative data will then be compared with the quantitative survey results presented in Chapter 5, as well as with data obtained from documents (e.g., reports and transcripts of speeches). There are 9 sections in all, and each section will present the key findings followed by a corresponding discussion.

Table 18: Section 1: Language choice, codeswitching and fluency

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>The person we are talking to makes us decide what languages to use.</i></p> <p><i>If he answers in Tamil, I'll try my best to speak in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>Depends on fluency, so the more fluent we are in the language, we are more inclined to speak that.</i></p>	<p><i>Some people think in English, and then they will translate the English sentence and phrases into Tamil and then they will be able to speak. That's why fluency is dropping.</i></p>	<p><i>Speaking Tamil is based on the situation.</i></p>
<p><i>It's more comfortable for us to use both languages.</i></p> <p><i>The language we use most of the time in school is English, so when we go home, it catches on.</i></p>	<p><i>They [students] find it difficult to express their ideas using all Tamil words, so we do allow students to use a bit of English words.</i></p> <p><i>English is the dominant language at school.</i></p>	<p><i>Keeping Tamil confined to the boundaries of the classroom/home is insufficient to enable us to be well-versed with the language.</i></p>
<p><i>If I can hold a conversation in Tamil, I will feel very proud of myself, like I've succeeded in something, whereas for English, it's not pride, it's something I'm used to.</i></p>	<p><i>They cannot just go around saying, "Oh, I know English". Not enough. Everybody speaks English. It's no big deal anymore.</i></p>	<p><i>Many people have this ideology that English should be spoken every time than their own language.</i></p>



The findings indicate that language choice is influenced by the context, interlocutor (including social distance), fluency, or language code used by the 'addressee' in a dyad, while at the same time, the prevalence of English at the societal level, and within the school domain is stressed as a contributing factor to the widespread use of English in Singapore. Interestingly, a high level of competence in the use of Tamil is favourably viewed, while competence in English is a 'norm'. Tamil is maintained in the domains of family, friendship and recreation in various degrees, although an exclusive or a predominant use of the language in any of these domains is not evidenced in the quantitative data. Rather, the use of both Tamil and English at the same time prevails in all domains.

An important finding points to the prevalence of English with siblings, as reported in the qualitative data. This is supported by the survey results, with 44.83% indicating a predominant use of English with their siblings, as opposed to the use of Tamil. The reason for this includes the ease of expressing or explaining one's ideas in English when communicating with siblings. On the other hand, the use of English or Tamil with either parent reveals an unexpected finding where survey results confirm that English is used more frequently with the father, whereas Tamil is used more with the mother. Although there may be a host of factors that can be implicated in such language use patterns observed with either parent, it can be inferred that socially constructed notions of parental figures may influence language choice as well, as the qualitative data suggest. On the other hand, the language reciprocated by the addressee provides the 'cue' for the choice of language in a dyad.

Another significant finding highlights the lack of opportunities for Tamil language usage in Singapore. Although a converging view emphasises the home as a space for the promotion and growth of Tamil, the limited use of Tamil in the home or classroom is seen as not sufficient for its overall maintenance. The public sphere, therefore, becomes an important space for Tamil to be spoken. Survey results indicate more than three quarters of those surveyed, or 80.88% agreeing that Tamil should be spoken in the public domain. To a lesser extent, English is preferred in such instances due to the multilingual mix of the population, and hence, if one speaks in Tamil in such a context, it is interpreted as a demonstration of 'rudeness' to the other ethnic groups. On the other hand, to a lesser extent, a sense of prestige and status remains to be associated with English, as a language that is

considered 'cool', particularly amongst the younger Tamil population. Social pressure appears to be implicated in this case, where the choice of English over Tamil is sometimes made to avoid embarrassment. Interestingly, a contrastive finding indicates close to 90% agreeing that Tamil should be spoken amongst Tamil-speakers whenever there are opportunities. This mismatch establishes the apparent inconsistency between attitudes and actual behaviour (Edwards, 1985).

For this study, as stated in Chapter 3, codeswitching has been used as an umbrella term to refer to switching between two languages, in this case, Tamil and English, at the inter- or intra-sentential level. The switch between two languages is seen to be associated with fluency, which in turn is seen as a consequence of a lack of exposure to the mother tongue. Codeswitching is primarily employed as a strategy to mitigate the lack of vocabulary in either language, as well as being a 'natural' and 'comfortable' choice. The survey results confirm this finding, with the majority codeswitching, or using English and Tamil at the same time, with different interlocutors, across various contexts. This is particularly evident when speaking to Tamil-speaking friends within the school domain (excluding Tamil language classes). Overall, whilst codeswitching is evidenced as a common phenomenon amongst these bilinguals across the data sets, the reasons for the switches point to both social and psychological factors (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Drawing on Fishman's (1965, p.75) definition of a domain as "a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication", this study confirms that topic, role-relations and context in part influence language choice. However, the language use patterns are consistent with, but at the same time, challenge or contradict earlier, related studies. The finding of this study converged to a large extent with those reported by Mani and Gopinathan (1983), Ramiah (1991), and Saravanan (1999a) in that Tamil was particularly maintained when interacting with parents in the family domain, while a shift to English was evidenced when communicating with siblings. However, in contrast to these studies, the use of both English and Tamil was the most dominant language use pattern across the domains in this study, as opposed to the use of mostly English or English only. This in part supports Kirkpatrick's (2016, p.128), observation made, drawing on recent studies: "English is the main language of the home, although it must be stressed that the majority also indicate that English

is not the sole language spoken in the home”. In addition, an unanticipated finding, which contradicts earlier studies, points to Tamil being used just as much as English and Tamil with the mother, while English prevailed in communications with the father. The study also reveals that the factors put forth by Fishman (1965) in explaining language choice cannot be interpreted as being independent of one another, but rather, work interdependently. In other words, as explained by Fishman, although the choice of languages can be influenced by topics, role relations can additionally lead to a conscious choice of one language over another despite possessing language competence, or sharing a similar socio-cultural background.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study do not completely support the statistics reported in the 2010 Census of Singapore (Chapter 5) in relation to language use patterns amongst the younger Indian population. According to the census reports, English emerged as the most frequently used ‘home language’, with the biggest increase seen in the 15-25 age group, over a ten-year period, from 2000 to 2010 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). For the current study, which surveyed those in the same age group, Tamil is maintained in the home domain, although in varying degrees; at the same time, only less than half of the 319 surveyed, used predominantly English in interactions with either parent or siblings.

The language use patterns of the current study, although illustrative of ‘bilingualism without diglossia’, evidenced in the studies by Kadakara (2015) and Vaish (2007a, 2007b) on the Indian community, challenges this traditional notion of non-compartmentalised use of two or more languages, put forth by Fishman (1967). In other words, is it relevant for bilingualism in contemporary Singapore, to be defined in reference to either an absence or presence of diglossia, particularly in the twenty-first century, when a concept as such may be best perceived as outdated? Would ‘translanguaging’ (Chapter 3, 3.2.4), a term advanced by García (2009) which includes code-switching, be a more appropriate concept to re-present current language use patterns and practices in Singapore?

The findings of this current study, relating to language use patterns in the domains, are more congruent with the pioneering concept of translanguaging practices, as the bilingual or multilingual engages in “multiple discursive practices” (García, 2009, p.45) in intra- or inter- ethnic communications. For example, a

bilingual may use both English and Tamil with his friend; mostly Tamil with the mother; predominantly English with the father; and at the same time, English only with siblings. Another bilingual may act as a ‘translator’, switching between two or more languages, in instances when a parent or grandparent lacks competence in a language. Code-switching, on the other hand, often precludes the use of languages across *both* the receptive and productive skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) and modalities (e.g., texting, ‘tweeting’), which are incorporated into the overall conception of translanguaging.

The findings of this study have provided a shift in perspective of making sense of the language patterns within and across domains, as well as language use within a Tamil language classroom, where students think in English and write in Tamil, or discuss in English, but deliver the content in Tamil. In essence, “[t]he notion of translanguaging can be seen as a new approach to understanding long-studied language practices of multilinguals, such as code-switching” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p. 63). This leads one to consider globalisation *in* sociolinguistics or ‘sociolinguistics of globalisation, where languages are ‘mobile’ commodities for the multilingual (Blommaert, 2010), particularly in highly globalised nation-state economies such as Singapore (Brown, 1998). This means, not only are social, cultural or psychological factors relevant in the discussion of language use patterns or language choices in contemporary Singapore, but also the ‘bigger forces’ such as the infiltration of political and economic ideologies into education policies. The study’s findings have also led to an understanding that one’s language behaviour is a representation of both identifiable factors (e.g., lack of fluency, habitual language use, language in education) and at the same time, factors that remain unidentifiable - *I don’t know why-*, which is a legitimate ‘reason’.

The study of code-switching, however, remains relevant in this study, where language use patterns specific to an interlocutor, demonstrated in a specific setting, present an overview of the motivations underlying such switches. These ‘motivations’ have been largely similar in past studies (Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009; Chew, 2014; Foley, 1998; McLellan, 2005; Pakir, 1993; Vaish, 2007b; Wei, 1994), which further establishes the legitimacy of topic, situation and interlocutor, as well as the level of fluency or proficiency in code-switching. In addition to corroborating the findings in these studies, this study provides further evidence that

codeswitching is the unmarked feature in interactions amongst the Tamil-English bilinguals, as also evidenced in the study on Turkish-German bilinguals, where the exclusive use of Turkish operated as the ‘marked’ feature (Auer, 2011).

The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is also relevant in explaining accommodative behaviour amongst bilinguals, which includes the influence of social distance between interlocutor-addressee, in relation to language choice (Giles, N. Coupland, & J. Coupland, 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2006; Giles & Powesland, 1997). For example, in the current study, Tamil is used with someone who is ‘close’ to the interlocutor, or a switch is made to reciprocate the language used by the addressee. Overall, the study’s findings support the CAT, which emphasises the influence of social psychological factors on accommodative behaviour.

Next, the discussion of the ‘bigger forces’, being political and economic, in relation to the prevalence and position of English within the school domain, as well as at the societal level, is of central importance. Much of the earlier literature that has examined or critiqued the bilingual policy in Singapore (e.g., de Souza, 1980; Gopinathan, 1998; Pakir, 1993) underscore the political agenda of the ruling government post-Independence, that consequentially led to the unprecedented shift to English as mainstay, in Singapore. As a socio-historical snapshot indicates, “for economic reasons, [...] Singapore parents have more and more opted for English-medium education for their children and the Government has provided considerable resources to meet their wishes” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 176). Of fundamental importance here is the emphasis on the economic factor, which saw the positioning of English as a first language, with the mother tongues assuming second language status in schools. This is best explained by the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, first Prime Minister of Singapore:

Eventually, it was the market value of an education in English that settled the problem. Hence, we have today’s Singapore, with English connecting us to the world and attracting the multinational corporations, and the mother tongues as second language keeping us linked to China, India and Indonesia. This was a crucial turning point. Had the people chosen the other path, Singapore would be a backwater. (Lee, 2013, p.297)

Therefore, the spread of English in Singapore, driven by political and economic factors, has made it a first language, a lingua franca, and a springboard for employment opportunities, and to sum this up in Alastair Pennycook's (1994) words, is a case of "cultural politics of English" (p.224). In a context such as Singapore, the choice of languages represents shades of 'utility' and 'emotional' attachment (Coulmas, 2013). However, as the findings in this study suggest, the predominance of English in Singapore, is not an unwelcomed choice, let alone a representation of 'linguistic imperialism' (Kirkpatrick, 1999). That English is appreciated for its associated benefits, (however one interprets these 'benefits'), remains an important consideration in the context of Singapore.

In sum, language choices and patterns of language use are determined by a host of factors. These cannot be oversimplified to such an extent that a single theory is deemed sufficient to explain the complexities of language behaviour. Broadening or re-focusing one's lens is imperative before conclusions are drawn about a sub-population's maintenance or shift of a language, in this case Tamil to English. Traditional approaches to making sense of linguistic phenomena have to make way to emerging scholarly debate that seeks to explain the constantly evolving 'new' bilingual in a rapidly transforming world. Therefore, expanding and thinking along Vaish's (2007a, p.177) question, "Does codeswitching or translanguaging indicate language shift?", the answer is temptingly 'most certainly not'. However, in the case of the Tamil community in Singapore, other issues need to be addressed in light of the consistently bleak picture of Tamil projected in the literature (Rajan, 2014). These will be interspersed in the discussions to follow. The next section will discuss the attitudes of the Tamil community towards their mother tongue, and its relevance to existing theories and literature.

Table 19: Section 2: Attitudes towards Tamil

<b>Focus group</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Survey open comments</b>
<p><i>We don't feel embarrassed about the language, it's how we speak it.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil means more to us. It's our mother tongue.</i></p> <p><i>My language built the railway track; the coolies are the reason for what we have now, I don't see any issues with that.</i></p>	<p><i>It's not true to say Tamils don't speak much Tamil. The reason for not speaking Tamil is because of this fear of making mistakes.</i></p> <p><i>Although the students speak English during a discussion, this does not mean they are not interested in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>Some students [who] think when they speak in Tamil, they are not equal to the other people, as a teacher, we have to make them feel proud when they speak in Tamil.</i></p>	<p><i>It's a language connected to culture, literature, and emotion, which enhance the human life.</i></p> <p><i>Since Tamil is spoken by the majority Indians, and is a recognised language, Tamil is an important language in Singapore.</i></p> <p><i>We should not back down when someone offends our race or language.</i></p>
<p><i>I think most students see Tamil as a subject other than seeing it as a language, so it's more like a chore.</i></p>	<p><i>As with youngsters today, the first language is English, so Tamil becomes a subject. Because the system says if you get an 'A' for Tamil, you can go to good schools.</i></p>	<p><i>Speaking in English would allow us to communicate faster, plus speaking Tamil in public places is embarrassing and racist.</i></p>

The study of attitudes has remained a primary component of sociolinguistic research, and typically engages with the affective, behavioural or cognitive dimensions (Edwards, 1985; Garrett, 2010). Defining the abstract construct of 'attitude' has remained problematic, due to the largely unobservable nature, in addition to "possessing various facets and manifestations" (Garrett, 2010, p. 20). As further explained by Garrett (2010), one way of making sense of how attitudes are revealed (manifestations) towards, for example, language (facet), is through making inferences from interviews or statements that measure attitudes. In keeping with this school of thought, the current study's findings drawn from both the survey and interviews reveal a largely positive climate in terms of attitudes towards Tamil, and at the same time challenge existing notions of language attitude in previous studies.

A largely positive attitude towards Tamil is evidenced amongst students, despite a lack of fluency in the language. Interestingly, the 'fear of making mistakes' is a central issue as opposed to embarrassment felt towards the language. In addition, the history, values, and culture associated with Tamil are highly regarded; as well, the opportunities and official status accorded to Tamil signify its importance within the Singaporean context. These views are supported with 88.09% of the survey participants indicating that Tamil is an important language in Singapore; with 93.10% agreeing that it is important to be able to speak in Tamil; and 96.87% indicating they are proud to speak in Tamil. Therefore, it is of no surprise that Tamil speakers are protective of their language. On the other hand, a complacent attitude of the Tamil-speaking population in Singapore is perceived as not utilising or supporting Tamil language related facilities. Another important finding points to Tamil seen as a 'school subject', and only a means of progression to the next academic level. This presents a discord where, whilst Tamil per se is held in high regard, the perception of Tamil as a 'subject' amongst students works against sustaining interest in the language. As such, the school or education system is implicated for the apparent attitude observed.

The mostly positive stance towards the Tamil language in this study supports an earlier attitudinal study of Tamils in Singapore by Thinnappan (1995), which similarly indicated affirmation towards speaking Tamil. This suggests that positive attitudes towards Tamil has been maintained for slightly more than two decades now. That is, Tamils continue to appreciate the language in relation to its



history, literary contributions, core values, and most importantly, take pride in being able to speak the language. On the other hand, the incongruence between actual language practices and perceptions observed in both studies reveal, as mentioned above, the complexities of language behaviour. For example, lack of fluency in Tamil is one of the main reasons that point to this seeming incongruence between perception and language practice in the current study, where students generally feel embarrassed when they make ‘mistakes’ in a conversation. This can be explained in terms of the Asian, socio-psychological construct of ‘face loss’, which deters the interlocutor from communicating in a certain language, due to the perceived consequences the action may bring. On the other hand, the current study contradicts the findings of Thinnappan’s study in relation to the perceived low status and prestige of speaking in Tamil. That is, while Thinnappan’s study concludes that speaking Tamil is significantly less prestigious compared to speaking in English, the current study maintains that both languages are important for different reasons, although to a far lesser extent, status and prestige continue to influence one’s attitude towards speaking Tamil.

The current study further contradicts and challenges the findings presented in Saravanan’s (1998) and Schiffman’s (2003) studies in terms of the negative connotations that Tamil is perceived to carry. Two issues in particular, come to the fore. One, that “[e]ducated people who love Tamil are upset that Tamil is becoming thought of as a “coolie language” and regret this very much (Schiffman, 2003, p. 105) is outdated and irrelevant in the current context as young Tamils do not, and probably have not considered this an embarrassment at all, but on the converse, readily acknowledge that *my language built the railway track*. Two, that “antipathy expressed amongst English educated Tamils towards Tamil’ (Saravanan, 1998, p. 160) is no longer consistent with current attitudes towards the language, as evidenced in the most recent study on the status of Tamil language in Singapore (Kadakara, 2011), as well as in the current study. Kadakara’s study confirms that a positive attitude towards Tamil amongst English-educated parents, as well as a commitment towards their children learning Tamil is evident. Moreover, the positive parental attitude observed in Kadakara’s study parallels that of the students surveyed in the current study. Therefore, the association of Tamil with the so-called lower stratum of the Tamil community in contemporary Singapore is questionable.

The current study has also necessitated factoring in the notion of motivation in light of the findings. That is, does motivation influence attitudes towards one's mother tongue, particularly in a multilingual context where different ethnic groups co-exist? Using Gardner's and Lambert's motivation theory (1972) as a reference point, Edwards (1985) puts forth a few salient points that explain the complexities in deconstructing the concept of attitude. In other words, while an overall positive attitude towards the language itself is regarded significant in acquiring the language, the ambiguity that surrounds the presumed interrelatedness between the affective-behavioural-cognitive dimensions makes any attempt at elucidating such complexities nearly impossible.

The findings of this study support this 'ambiguity' to some extent. For example, while a large majority affirm the importance of learning Tamil (cognitive) and take pride in being able to speak the language (affective), it is not clear if these are transformed into 'behaviour' or whether the behaviour itself is an accurate representation of the other two dimensions of attitude. For example, does lack of fluency in the language, which may or may not be related to motivation, necessarily signal a negative attitude towards the language or vice-versa? The findings of this study do not support this to a large extent. However, the findings can be explained in terms of an instrumental attitude as a possible constituent of motivation (Baker, 1992). Citing McClelland, Baker (1992) establishes instrumental attitudes as "mostly self-oriented and individualistic" (p.32), and which in the context of the findings, includes learning Tamil for its link to one's identity or culture, as well as the need to maintain the language. Overall, the findings suggest that "one of the most important attitudinal factors is the attitude of the learner to the language and to its speakers" (Spolsky, 1969, p. 247).

Nevertheless, the language-attitude-identity association is both an intriguing and complex one. As seen in Letsholo's (2009) study (Section 3.4.2), the lower status of a minority language, in this case the mother tongue, may not deter one from using it, as evidenced in the use of Ikalanga in the home domain and in intra-ethnic communication amongst the Bakalanga youth. That Ikalanga is neither an official language of Botswana nor a language taught in schools further demonstrates that cultural and ethnic identity may in some cases be a strong motivator for maintaining a minority language in certain domains. This scenario is quite similar to

that of the young Tamils in Singapore. As mentioned above, the young Tamils demonstrate a strong cultural and ethnic identity despite the low economic standing of Tamil in comparison to the other official languages. However, home language use between the Bakalanga youth and that of the Tamil youth differs. While the former have indicated a predominant use of their mother tongue in the home domain, the latter have indicated a predominant English-Tamil usage. Therefore, actual language usage may not be a good measure of language loyalty and vice versa. This incongruence can be understood in terms of “passive goodwill” (Edwards, 2012 p. 52) or the “symbolic valorization of language and culture” (Vail, 2006, p. 140). This further puts into question the ‘predictive validity’ of positive statements or positive attitudes expressed in relation to maintaining or transmitting one’s mother tongue.

The case of Tamil in Singapore may bear out a few similarities with other ‘small’ or minority languages. A case in point is the indigenous African languages in South Africa which have been accorded official status, alongside English; in total, there are eleven official languages in South Africa (Kamwangamalu, 2007). As is the case with Singapore, not all official languages stand equal in a broader sense. One example points to the domain of media (local television) where the number of hours allocated for official languages can be disproportionate, with English-medium television programs and the majority or higher status languages typically provided more airtime transmission.

The challenges of minority languages in general have been highlighted in recently published literature (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Slavkov, 2017). These are, to some extent, reinforced by the Tamil situation in Singapore. First, the pressure of shifting to the dominant or ‘majority’ language, in this case, English, regardless of the minority language being taught in schools via different models has been observed. Second, the implications of translanguaging between the majority and minority language may extend to decreased proficiency in the latter; this has been a concern voiced by educators. Third, a lack of resources, for example, teachers and materials in the implementation and teaching of a minority issue is an often- cited issue.

Therefore, despite their official status or recognition in the school language policy, minority languages appear to be consistently in a vulnerable state. The case of Tamil in Singapore may be no different. A discussion of the Tamil community's reliance on the school with regard to Tamil language transmission and maintenance will be discussed in Section 5 of this chapter.

Table 20: Section 3: The multiracial strain

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>Singapore has very few Indians compared to the Chinese; every day, I see Chinese people, Malay people.</i></p> <p><i>Like one important thing is that these people [Tamil speakers] have a lot of Chinese friends, so they don't get the opportunity to speak Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>But sometimes, when you want to talk in Tamil, in front of the other races, they tend to make fun of it, so it brings down our morale.</i></p>	<p><i>The biggest challenge is critical mass, we don't have the critical mass to actually sustain the interest in the language.</i></p> <p><i>It's a bad thing because we're in a multiracial thing where you think that English is more important than your own Mother Tongue.</i></p> <p><i>The society is tilted more towards using English in their daily conversations that has led to the decline in Mother Tongue, not only Tamil...this is also felt in Chinese and Malay.</i></p>	<p><i>Not every place in Singapore are places that enables us to speak Tamil].</i></p> <p><i>When we share our culture to other people of other races, they will know more about us and learn to respect us.</i></p> <p><i>As in Singapore, some people laugh at those who speak Tamil, so speaking English seems to be cool.</i></p>
<p><i>Now mixed marriages are very common. Even my parents are mixed marriage. Malay and Tamil.</i></p>	<p><i>The other issue is the hyphenated race, the mixed marriages, Once mixed marriage, they will of course go for the other language.</i></p>	

An important finding points to the notion of 'us and them', where the multiracial mix of Singapore's population is seen to be one of the most significant barriers to using Tamil. This is further compounded by the relatively small population size and uneven spread of the Tamil speakers in Singapore. Hence, the lack of a 'critical mass' works against promoting Tamil usage in the public space. The co-existence of other 'races' or ethnic groups in Singapore means English is widely used as a lingua franca in any inter-ethnic communication. This means that in most cases, Tamil usage is often limited to intra-ethnic communication. Hence, it is not surprising that 89.65% of those surveyed agree that Tamil should be spoken whenever an opportunity arises. However, this contradicts with the view that the use of English in the public domain is seen as 'proper' due to the multiracial composition in Singapore. Such contradictions point to circumstances that force one to resort to accommodative behaviour that seem to stem from the minority status of the Tamils.

Similarly, assimilation is seen in inter-ethnic or exogamous marriages, where the Tamil language or Tamil culture typically becomes less dominant or ceases to be used or practised. On the other hand, the perceived behaviour of the 'other' races towards speaking Tamil is seen as discouraging in that it becomes a barrier to speaking the language; although this so-called 'anti-social' behaviour of the other ethnic groups does not stem from disrespect towards Tamil, but rather from being intrigued by the phonological aspect of the language, it is not clear whether there are other reasons that may contribute to this 'behaviour'. Interestingly, the Malays and Chinese are keen to learn about the Tamil language and culture, although for different reasons.

Singapore presents a unique case of a pluralistic Asian country in that the national language Malay, is not the language of the majority, while English, which functions as the language for wider communication, is a 'first language' to the country's bilinguals, to such an extent that it is now re-configured as a new 'mother tongue' (Tan, 2014). Mandarin, on the other hand, is spoken by the majority, and Tamil, by the minority. Paradoxically, the 'mother tongues' are learnt and ingrained as second languages in schools. These 'opposing' elements not only explain the challenges of nation-building but at the same time, leads one to make sense of the language use behaviour, in a multilingual, multiracial context and the possible

tensions associated with it. This is particularly so from the perspective of the minority group, in this case, the Tamils.

The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) (Giles et al., 1977), discussed in Chapter 4, although useful, is not completely relevant in explaining the ‘vitality’ of the language and its speakers in relation to the three factors: status, demography, and institutional support, especially in multilingual contexts such as Singapore. Although the factors are so-called ‘objective’ in determining the vitality of the ethnolinguistic community, in practice, this is not the case. For example, are data drawn from the census or archival records completely free from objectivity? Do they objectively present an accurate representation of a certain variable, for example, sociohistorical status? How does one interpret ‘weak’, ‘medium’ or ‘strong’ vitality then? In other words, gauging the vitality of a minority language and that of the minority group based on the structural variables (Giles et al., 1977) is not straightforward. However, the theory is useful in that it provides a ‘checklist’ for a broad, brushstroke of the group’s vitality.

Using the checklist as a reference, the study’s findings suggest that the vitality for the ethnolinguistic group is positive overall, in spite of seemingly ‘weak’ vitality in a few areas. For example, the uneven distribution and minority status of the Tamil community, further exacerbated by the housing policy (Ooi, 2005; Sim, Yu, & Han, 2003), is a barrier to frequent usage of Tamil. Furthermore, although the sociohistorical and social factors had relegated the Tamil community to the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, with the language spoken associated with the coolies or plantation workers then, this has not resulted in ‘weak’ vitality; the young Tamils now do not see the historicity of the language (Stewart, 1962) nor the community as a cause for concern. In essence, the strong affirmation for Tamil, and its importance in Singapore evidenced in this study, as well as the census figures on the most recent socio-economic status of the Indians as a whole (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011), also suggest that the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Tamil community is positive. Additionally, the institutional support provided (i.e., mass media, education, culture and religion) indicates strong vitality.

However, does a weak vitality in relation to language status and demography, in the case of Tamil and Tamils, necessarily mean a weakening of the ethnic group as a collective whole, and eventually leading to a loss of the language?

The current study suggests that the real situation is more complicated and hence, cannot be fully understood through a subjective evaluation of the so-called objective variables in the EVT. Nonetheless, the Tamils continue to function as a distinctive collective group in Singapore, and hold their language in high regard, although the overall status of the language is relatively low within the context of Singapore, as opposed to Tamil Nadu in India, the territorial stronghold for Tamil.

The findings have also prompted an evaluation of intergroup relations, which support the concept of normative beliefs (Garrett, 2010) to explain the language use behaviours evidenced in this study. It is apparent that the Tamils choose to not speak in Tamil in the presence of other ethnic groups primarily due to two reasons: (a) to avoid being laughed at; (b) to maintain intergroup friendship. This means their behaviour is, in a way, shaped by the perceived judgement of the other ethnic group member, or as Garrett (2010, p. 21) puts it, “in terms of our everyday use of language, language attitudes would be expected [...] to help us anticipate others’ responses to our own language use and so influence the language choices that we make as we communicate”. At the same time, the study suggests that the majority-minority, or in-group, out-group distinctions (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006) and the socio-psychological implications of this can influence language use behaviour as well.

The notion of ‘others’ or ‘them and us’ requires attention as well in light of the findings; however, the sensitivity of such an inquiry in the context of Singapore has rendered this a less or hardly explored research topic. The obvious linguistic diversity between the majority and minority groups alone does not seem to contribute to this belief of ‘us’ and ‘them’. A hierarchy of languages and of ethnic groups, among other factors are implicated in this overall sense of separateness felt by the Tamils.

Therefore, whilst the Tamils may demonstrate strong vitality as a distinct group, with the language accorded institutional support, in reality, the underlying tensions that speak of the ‘separateness’ and ‘togetherness’ inherent in a multilingual, multi-ethnic, multicultural context remains a conflict. This discord in inter-ethnic relations is further illuminated in a study by Ooi (2005) where the majority Chinese perspective provides an important insight into the ‘other’. She concludes, “In many aspects, the large Chinese majority does not appear to be as



supportive of multiracial living as the other smaller ethnic groups” (p.118), being Malays and Indians. In essence, interethnic relations, with a focus on minority groups remain sensitive in the context of Singapore, where the emphatic narratives of ‘national interests’ (Mutalib, 2011) override other concerns. The multiracial strain, therefore, continues to be one of the challenges that Tamil speakers face.

Table 21: Section 4: The economics of languages

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>It [Tamil] may not have much economical value [in Singapore] but it has a lot of historical value. To me this is irreplaceable.</i></p> <p><i>In a globalising world, bilingualism will be very beneficial.</i></p> <p><i>We should stop making it seem like if you have Mandarin, a lot of people think you need to know Mandarin...like a lot of jobs require Mandarin...so it's kind of unfair.</i></p> <p><i>Only recently Tamil is being promoted, they have four languages everywhere on the board, like English, Chinese, Malay and Japanese. There wasn't Tamil.</i></p>	<p><i>One has to put aside pragmatism in this case, and think of Tamil as a language that offers so much through its literature, the moral values.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil is not needed for jobs, and has no economic value. So, students feel there is no use to learn Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>In the past, there were Chinese, Malay and Japanese signage, now they have added Tamil to the signage in Changi Terminal 3[airport], so there's progress.</i></p>	<p><i>By learning both Tamil and English, we are able to communicate better with more people around the world.</i></p> <p><i>It [Tamil] is not required neither is it in high demand such as Mandarin.</i></p>
<p><i>From kindergarten, learn Tamil, so why suddenly change to Hindi?</i></p>	<p><i>The fear is, if the usage of Tamil goes down, they may scrap the idea of having Tamil and bring in Hindi.</i></p>	<p><i>Even if Hindi might be the most important language in India, it is not true in Singapore. Most of the Indians are Tamils in Singapore.</i></p>

In this study, the aesthetic value of Tamil is held in high regard, although Tamil is not an economically viable language in the Singaporean context, due to the position and status of English and Mandarin. Mandarin is seen to be favourably perceived as an additional language in job applications, which is seen as a disadvantage to Tamil speakers. This acts against the motivation to learn Tamil from a pragmatic point of view. However, in spite of the apparent lack of economic importance, 91.85% of the students agree that learning Tamil is still important. This presents a significant increase from 83.4% reported in a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2005, on the attitudes of Secondary 4 students who took Tamil as a Mother Tongue subject (TLCPRC, 2005). The advantages of being bilingual, that is, competence in both Tamil and English is seen as being advantageous in a globalising world. Also, the inclusion of Tamil in Singapore's linguistic landscape, especially in recent years, has been significant in that it has added 'value' to the language.

On the other hand, the support for Hindi is generally weak amongst the Tamil speakers, with just under 45% agreeing that Hindi is an important language in Singapore. The importance of Hindi is primarily associated with Bollywood (the film industry in Mumbai, India), as well as its recognition as a language spoken in Singapore, due to the inflow of Hindi speakers from India. Students, in general, do not view Hindi as a threat to Tamil in Singapore; neither is there an interest in learning the language, except for the recreational purpose of understanding Hindi movies and songs. Hence, from the students' perspective, the probability of Hindi displacing Tamil in Singapore is very low.

Multilingualism has become even more complex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with globalisation seen as an important contributor to the economics of languages. In other words, economics and language is described in terms of a causal relationship where one influences the other, and vice-versa (Grin, 2003). The new linguistic order (Fishman, 1998) saw the rise and predominance of English in previously colonised countries, as it became synonymous with 'utility', amongst other tangible benefits. On the other hand, regional languages, such as Mandarin and Hindi, are predicted to gain recognition as the world continues to globalise with international trade and multinational corporations (Fishman, 1998) defining the businesses around the world today.

In the Singaporean context, this means languages may co-exist as official languages in a multilingual setting, but only hierarchically, in part due to the economic value each language seems to possess, as the findings indicate. However, with reference to Hindi, this Indo-Aryan language does not seem to be a threat in Singapore, based on the study's findings.

This only further reiterates the critical role of language planning in leveraging one's 'linguistic capital', and therefore, it is no surprise that in Singapore, both English and Mandarin are promoted (Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009; Gupta, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1999; Rubdy, 2012) for 'national interests' as Singapore identifies itself as a global player in the arena of international trade and commerce. This has entrenched English as a bridge to key global economies, as well as necessitated educational reforms in response to the needs of globalisation in flux (Gopinathan, 2007; Mok & Tan, 2004). The findings of this study affirm that the state's education, including language policies, in part influences one's perception of English and the ethnic languages, and at the same time, positions bilingualism as an asset.

Mandarin, on the other hand, is clearly perceived as more prestigious compared with Malay and Tamil, in terms of its economic value, in addition to its spread in Singapore as the language of the majority (Rubdy, 2012). Nonetheless, as the findings show, Mandarin is seen as a valuable economic commodity among the Tamils, although not favourably, as the system denies non-ethnic Chinese access to learning Mandarin as an additional subject in mainstream schools (Gupta, 1997). This, in turn is seen to have repercussions for the Tamils in terms of employability.

On the other hand, Malay is not seen as a 'competing language' despite its national or regional language status (Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016). This leaves Tamil out of the equation of the more 'privileged' languages, or to borrow Volker and Anderson's (2015) term, is presented as a language of 'lesser power'. To a certain extent, Singapore's linguistic landscape has also been implicated in the economic viability of Tamil. In essence, the language ideology (Rubdy, 2008), implicit in terms such as 'language of lesser power' point to a stereotypical representation of Tamil in scholarly discourses (e.g., Saravanan, 1998, Schiffman, 2003, Shegar & Gopinathan, 2015). The findings, on the contrary, calls for a re-examination of this stance.

Therefore, do political and economic agendas directly or indirectly cause language shift as well as construct a linguistic order in a multilingual setting? Can a more equitable approach to ethnic languages work towards “ethnolinguistic democracy” (Fishman, 1998, p.38)? The answer to the former leans towards a ‘yes’, according to the findings of this study, while the latter remains to be seen.

In the Singaporean context, Tamil is seen to possess little or no economic value; opportunities to pursue Tamil-oriented jobs are limited, as stated: “speaking the language well will not necessarily bequeath one with a job” (Shegar & Gopinathan, 2015, p.158), although this is not completely true, if one considers the local or overseas Tamil media. However, the lack of economic value in Tamil, in addition to the ‘low status’ standing assumed from the socio-historical associations (Shegar & Gopinathan, 2015) have not affected the young Tamils’ appreciation of the language; neither has this made the Tamils disengage themselves from the language, in contrast to the Fisherfolk community reported in Dorian’s (2014) study. The resistance of the Tamils can be explained from the ‘core values perspective’ (Smolicz, 1988; Smolicz, Secombe, & Hudson, 2001), where in this case, language accounts for one of the core values that defines a collectivity, and hence, explains the sense of respect and appreciation observed towards the Tamil language. On the other hand, whilst those surveyed were quick to point out that Mandarin holds a higher status to Tamil, surprisingly, they did not make explicit comparisons between Tamil and English in terms of its relative status.

The case of Hindi in Singapore, on the other hand, needs to be understood from the socio-psychological stance. The Tamil-Hindi divide within the Singaporean context can be explained from an observation made of the same in Tamil Nadu, India: “English seems less like a colonial language than does Hindi (Fishman, 1998, p.37). In keeping with the theme of economics in language, the cost-benefit associated with learning Hindi has had little impact on the Tamils in Singapore, further indicating the significance of an emotional attachment to a language (Tamil), over its political or economic value (Annamalai, 2003); This finding supports Kadakara’s (2011) recent study where Tamil parents demonstrated an unfavourable attitude towards their children learning Hindi. At the same time, the current study’s findings challenge Annamalai’s (2003) claim that ‘language liability’ typically leads to language shift unless the community salvages itself by

“preserving [its] communal identity and heritage” (p. 123). One has to re-think this causal relationship in the context of Tamils in Singapore. That Tamil is an *economic* ‘liability’ in the Singaporean context remains undisputed among the Tamils; however, the shift to English has, clearly, not been prompted by this sense of ‘liability’, to a large extent. English remains a neutral but important language, while Hindi continues to be marginalised in the linguistic order perceived by the Tamils. The study’s findings also do not support the preliminary conclusions drawn by Siemund, Schulz, and Schweinberger (2014, p. 360) in that (a) Tamils (along with the Malays) may turn to learning Mandarin in view of it being an economic asset; (b) Tamil “may be lost in Singapore altogether”. For one, the under-representation of Tamils in Siemund et al.’s study denies an accurate assessment of the current and prospective Tamil situation in Singapore.

In sum, the study’s findings support Grin’s (2003) view that language and economics are connected, although this association cannot be simply attributed as the sole factor for the prevalence of English, as other inter-connected factors are implicated as well. Nonetheless, the language-economics link demonstrates the relevance of factoring in ‘economics’ in making sense of the language maintenance and shift of a minority language. The hierarchy of languages in the Singaporean context seems to reflect Johnson’s (2016, p.309) observation that “English is portrayed as a resource for everyone, Chinese is increasingly seen as a resource for everyone given the increasing opportunities to do business with China, and Tamil and Malay seem to largely be resources for Tamil and Malay speakers to stay connected to their ethnic roots”. In the case of the Tamils, however, the lower economic standing of their mother tongue has had little significance to their overall perception of the language, in part due to their emotional attachment to the language.

Table 22: Section 5: Learning, growing and maintaining Tamil

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>The government, one good thing is they're actually making sure that everyone is learning their mother tongue.</i></p> <p><i>In terms of how effective Tamil language month is, it does create awareness but everything is putting into action.</i></p> <p><i>The media is trying to promote Tamil more. Making children speak more.</i></p> <p><i>Instead of just teaching us Tamil during Tamil lessons, they should actually talk about the history of Tamil as well so that students will start to take Tamil seriously.</i></p>	<p><i>The Singapore government is spending more money to encourage pupils to speak their own languages. Not only Tamil, but Malay and Chinese also.</i></p> <p><i>The Tamil Language Festival has definitely created an awareness of the importance of speaking in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>We [local Tamil media] have a huge responsibility as the guardian of the Tamil language, the expectations of the community are very high. They expect us to preserve, guard, and protect [the language] that I think is not feasible.</i></p> <p><i>\</i></p> <p><i>The media, Tamil teachers are doing their part to keep the language a living one.</i></p>	<p><i>Promoting Tamil in Singapore through Tamil Language Festivals encourages Tamils to speak more Tamil and encourages non-Tamils to engage in the festival and activities</i></p> <p><i>Our Tamil knowledge will grow if we listen to Tamil media, and we will be also encouraged to learn Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>Appreciating the historical value of Tamil will instill pride in speaking Tamil and being a Tamil.</i></p>

The role of the government, as well as the Tamil media and Tamil teachers is significant in maintaining Tamil in Singapore. Government-supported initiatives in cultivating awareness on the importance of speaking Tamil, either at the community or school level is critical to the maintenance of Tamil. This is validated by 95.93% indicating that Tamil should be promoted in Singapore through various platforms, including the Tamil Language Festival. However, the effectiveness of the Tamil Language Festival is a concern, particularly when students are not able to participate fully due to the demands of school. Interestingly, sharing the history of Tamil, or the five notable epics in Tamil Literature is seen as a prime motivation for students to appreciate and use the language. In addition, well-qualified Tamil teachers are considered ‘role models’ in terms of usage and promotion of Tamil language; as well, the integration of more interactive class activities, and the inclusion of the ‘historical aspect’ of Tamil language are seen to be essential in cultivating interest in Tamil language, as a whole.

The findings prove that the institutionalisation of Tamil in education and the media have been critical for the language to be maintained in Singapore. However, the more important question is, ‘Does this necessarily mean a secure position for Tamil?’ The findings have necessitated a re-alignment of language teaching approaches to face the challenges of a continuing decline in mother tongue languages in Singapore, partly due to a dislike towards learning the language as a *subject*, as reported in the most recent studies (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen & Sun, 2016; Ng, 2014; Tan, 2014). One way to doing this is to reframe Fishman’s (1991) language reversal strategies, to one which would mean to “re-orient educational policy to build on students’ rich and varied language practices to facilitate successful school experiences and greater academic achievement (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.262), particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To ‘re-orient’ in the Singaporean context could mean a promotion of learning across languages (García, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2016). At the same time, community effort in sustaining the language remains important, as the findings indicate.

At this juncture, it is important to examine how far the following visions outlined in a report by the Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (TLCPRC, 2005, p.3) compares to the study’s findings.

The committee envisions a Tamil environment as follows:



- a) The Tamil Singaporean will be able to speak both English and Tamil so that he can communicate effectively in a multi-lingual society;
- b) Any two Tamil Singaporeans will be comfortable conversing in Tamil, and will readily do so;
- c) The Tamil Singaporean will be at ease using Tamil at home and will communicate with his children in Tamil;
- d) The Tamil Singaporean will be able to read the daily Tamil newspaper and understand the radio or TV news bulletins;
- e) In each generation, there will be a group of Tamil Singaporeans who are able to go far in the language, and contribute in areas such as Tamil media and internet, literature, theatre, education and research and be internationally recognised.

The importance of Tamil-English bilingualism, as well as literacy in Tamil, put forth in the report supports the findings. However, that ‘any two Tamil Singaporeans will be comfortable conversing in Tamil’ remains an issue, when considering young Tamils, who, according to the study, indicate a lack of fluency in Tamil as a barrier to using the language ‘comfortably’. In terms of Tamil usage in the home domain, the findings prove that Tamil is maintained at home, although only Tamil is rarely used in the home domain; however, it is not clear what “will be at ease” means, as it seems to carry multiple interpretations, for example, relating to fluency or attitude towards the language.

On the other hand, a survey of the Tamil organisations is proof that Tamil is actively promoted currently in Singapore, through various platforms (e.g., theatre, media, literature), which is also reflected in the study’s findings. One example points to Tamil theatre in Singapore (e.g., Ravindran Drama Group, Avant Theatre, AKT Creations), which in recent years, has brought Tamil to a more multicultural, non-Indian, non-Tamil speaking audience (through English surtitles), as well as involved young Tamils in the production process (Ho, 2015; Lee, 2015). Another positive turn in the Tamil theatre recently is its inclusion of plays in English for the larger Indian audience in Singapore, who are non-Tamil speakers (Lee, 2015). This is a classic illustration of using English, a link language, to present the Indian culture to a larger, diverse audience. With young Tamils pioneering such initiatives, the growth of Tamil should continue in Singapore.

Furthermore, according to a recently broadcast local Tamil programme (Vel Murugan, 2017), initiatives by the Tamil community to promote and maintain Tamil in Singapore have been encouraging. These include (a) the involvement of young Tamils in the promotion of Tamil language amongst secondary and tertiary students through technology and collaborating with parents; (b) the increasing support for and growth of local Tamil theatre, which sees around 20 productions a year; (c) the Tamil Language and Learning Promotion Committee's ongoing initiative in using social media as a collaborative platform to involve parents, schools and Tamil organisations to maintain Tamil as a living language; (d) digitising the history and arts of the Tamil community in Singapore for an audience beyond Singapore, in particular, those in the wider Tamil diaspora. Therefore, considering the extent of initiatives taken by Tamil enthusiasts in the community, it appears that there is scope for Tamil to continue as a living language in Singapore.

Next, that the school is an important site for Tamil language learning, within a bilingual environment provides the impetus for 'translanguaging' to occur. Pursuing the suggestions put forth by García (2009) and Kirkpatrick (2016), this would mean improving the Tamil bilingual's competency in Tamil, in addition to collaboration between the Tamil teacher and the teacher of English, content-based subjects. This not only re-positions the Tamil teacher as a bilingual teacher, but also paves the way for more cross-linguistic or cross-cultural exchange to occur within the school domain. For example, selected literary works in Tamil, discussed in the Tamil class, can 'cross over' to an English class where the Tamil bilingual is provided an opportunity to meaningfully share these works in English. Also, considering the fact that mother tongues are learnt as second languages in Singapore, the allowance for a reasonable level of English to be incorporated into mother tongue teaching is justifiable (Kirkpatrick, 2016) as Tamil teachers have begun to appreciate such approaches. However, the promoting of translanguaging has been of growing concern (see Section 2), and remains an evolving pedagogy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Although the school is often a site for language maintenance and revival for some minority languages, the question to consider is whether it is to be perceived as a main 'transmitter' of these languages. The reliance, or sometimes, over-reliance of the school downplays the importance of family in transmitting the mother tongue languages, which in this case, are also minority languages. The

Welsh and Irish examples (J. Edwards, 2017; V. Edwards & Newcombe, 2005; Jones, Cunliffe, & Honeycutt, 2013; Ó hlfearnáin, 2013) demonstrate that the school may not be sufficient enough for sustainable language transmission to occur. This can be explained in terms of a lack of opportunities to use the language in the wider social context; the decrease in the curriculum time allocated for the minority language post- primary education; low proficiency levels of parents in the minority language, therefore impacting home language use. These reasons are arguably not unique to Welsh, Irish or Tamil. In the case of Tamil, institutionalising the language may not necessarily safeguard it in the long term if opportunities to use it in the wider social context amidst a multilingual setting is lacking. Also, the curriculum time designated for mother tongue teaching in Singapore as a subject (discussed below) may be counterproductive. The changing demographic profile, in relation to exogamous marriages may again impact the transmission of Tamil as a mother tongue within the home domain.

That the school is primarily, if not, completely responsible for mother tongue transmission appears to be a case of misplaced confidence as intergenerational language transmission needs to be a collaborative effort of the individual, community and the wider society. The general perception amongst young Tamils that the school (in addition to other external agencies) is a necessary agent for Tamil language transmission or maintenance suggests that Tamil language proficiency in either the written or spoken form may be one of other underlying reasons for this.

On the other hand, contrary to the notion that the importance of mother tongue learning has waned in the ‘cosmopolis’ (Gupta, 1997), young Tamils view the learning of Tamil as fundamental to their identity as a collectivity, as well as being critical for the transmission of the language. Therefore, the study’s findings support a pedagogical shift in line with translanguaging discussed above and in Section 1 of this chapter. If, as the government stresses, mother tongues are symbolic of the respective heritage and Asian values (e.g., Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016), and at the same time fears the displacement of mother tongues by English (Ng, 2014), then the perception of mother tongue as a ‘subject’ has to be addressed, as ‘subject’ denotes little or no emotional attachment to the language, with an emphasis instead on academic excellence. This is further compounded by the amount of time allocated for mother tongue learning in comparison to English-

based subjects, with an average of four hours for the former and twenty hours for the latter in a week (Curdt- Christiansen & Sun, 2016), which is highly incongruent to achieving a ‘balanced bilingual’, let alone the near impossibility of such an idealised individual (Baker, 2001).

Community efforts, such as the Tamil Language Festival, is reflective of the efforts associated with revitalising the language (King, 2001; Romaine, 2006) as opposed to Fishman’s (1991) reversing language shift (RLS), which, grounded in stable diglossia, remains irrelevant in the Singaporean context. Therefore, the growing, maintaining and learning of Tamil in Singapore aligns more with language revitalisation which aims to “promote new uses of the language and to increase the number of the users of the language” (King, 2001, p.24). This is not to be translated to mean primary use of Tamil in domains, in particular, the home domain, as the traditional concept of RLS proposes.

Table 23: Section 6: Making sense of Identity

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>Tamil is our main source of identity.</i></p> <p><i>When a person can't speak the language, that means we don't wish to be a Tamil, therefore, speaking Tamil is very important for a Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>Just because one talks English does not make him an Englishman, he or she will still be considered Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>'Indian' because you grow up watching Tamil movies, eating 'ponngal' [a sweet rice dish], praying...you just know you're Indian.</i></p>	<p><i>They [students/young Tamils] are beginning to realise that they need an identity, Tamil language is their identity.</i></p> <p><i>We're trying to make students come to terms with their identity, a Tamil identity, a Tamil- speaking Singaporean.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil is our identity, you can't be an American, or be London-based, you still remain a Tamil. .</i></p> <p><i>We need both language and culture</i></p>	<p><i>People who cannot speak fluent Tamil are often ostracised by their fellow Tamil classmates, they are not considered 'Tamil'.</i></p> <p><i>You can be a Tamil even if you don't speak the language.</i></p> <p><i>One who follows the Tamil culture and tradition, and one who speaks the language should be considered a Tamil.</i></p>

Language is the primary marker of identity for a Tamil-speaking Singaporean Indian. This means speaking Tamil is essential to one's identity or identities, as confirmed by 93.41% of those surveyed indicating a similar view. This further validates that Tamil identity is inextricably linked with speaking Tamil, to such an extent that one is 'ostracised' if he does not possess even basic Tamil proficiency. Therefore, regardless of one's hybrid identities constructed along various dimensions, for example, 'Tamil', 'Indian', or 'Singaporean Indian', the common denominator remains language, in this case, Tamil. This representative view is further augmented by 96.23% of those surveyed who agreed that Tamil should be spoken regardless of a person's academic qualifications. The second most important aspect of identity emphasises the language-culture link. This is supported by 88.71% agreeing that following the Tamil customs is important in being considered a Tamil. However, religion is implicated in this, as Tamil customs are followed by Hindus, while for the Indian Muslims or Christians, such practices are irrelevant. To a far lesser extent, traditional attire and practices are markers of identity.

The constructivist notion of identity, that which is non-static, multi-layered and constantly negotiated, holds true for the case of the young Tamils in Singapore, and more important than that, the findings support the stance that language is typically a defining symbol of ethnic collectivities, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts (e.g., Fishman, 1977). Equally relevant in the discussion of identity with reference to the Tamils in Singapore is the ethnolinguistic identity theory by Giles and Johnson (1987), which incorporated Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory. Not only do the findings confirm that language defines ethnic identity to a large extent, but also support the theory of ethnolinguistic identity in that an ethnic group in a pluralistic setting adopts strategies accordingly to either accentuate or attenuate their ethnic language in inter-ethnic relations.

The sense of 'in-group' and 'out-group' affiliations amongst the Tamils in Singapore is distinguished in terms of language, in this case, Tamil "with some emotional and value significance" (Tajfel, 1972, cited in Hogg & Reid, 2006, p.9) or 'psycholinguistic distinctiveness' (Tajfel, 1978); at the same time, the Tamils display "variations in identity and allegiances" (Edwards, 2009, p. 248), for example, by drawing on their multi-layered identities: Tamil, Singaporean, Singaporean Indian, or Indian. Further to this, Bhabha's (1994) notion of

hybridised identity can be used to explain the *Singaporean* Indian identity, which not only emphasises nationality as a marker of identity but also one's ethnic orientation within a specific geographical setting, with some semblance to the Indian of an 'imagined community'.

The findings also challenge the notion of social identity of the Tamils reported in Saravanan's study (1993), considering the current context of Singapore. First, the sharp contrast drawn between the social identity of the Tamil-educated and that of the English-educated is no longer a valid distinction in contemporary Singapore. That the Tamil-educated is a marginalised, 'trapped' individual appears to be a discriminatory stance, and makes one to speculate if the Malay educated or Chinese educated then, held highly paid jobs and enjoyed upward social mobility. That the "Indians have played a prominent role in almost every phase of the economic development of Singapore" (Sandhu, 1993a, p.781), including Tamil-speakers and labourers, is an alternate viewpoint that the findings support. Second, that "the English educated recognise that the English language has higher status and therefore [...] is an expression of identity of not only belonging to the English-educated community of Singaporeans, but also [...] to the larger, wider English-speaking world" (Saravanan, 1993, p. 280), runs contrary to the findings. Third, pursuing Saravanan's (1993) argument that socioeconomic status and education influence one's identity, the findings again prove otherwise in respect to education.

The current study, which included pre-tertiary and tertiary students, confirms that while there is acknowledgement that English is needed for socio-economic betterment, the primary marker of ethnic identity amongst these English-educated remains Tamil as opposed to English, whether it is framed within the 'Singaporean Indian' or the broader, 'Singaporean' identity constructs. Surprisingly, the colloquial version of Singapore English, Singlish, was hardly mentioned in relation to one's identity; however, it is not clear if those surveyed included Singlish in their definition of 'English', although there were a few instances where 'Singlish' was explicitly mentioned in relation to identity.

Saravanan's (1993, 1998) depiction of the Tamil-educated Indian, and the association of Tamil with plantation workers is further reiterated in Kwan-Terry's (2000) study, where the choice of English over Tamil due to prestige, was a common thread. This again proves to be not the case as far as the findings of the

current study indicate.

The ‘Singaporean’ identity, on the other hand, is defined by Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a recent speech as follows: “We are also a multiracial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society. This diversity is a fundamental aspect of our respective identities” (Lee, 2017). It is interesting to note that the multilingual aspect is subtracted from the so-called ‘respective identities’, although the leader goes on to add that “Being Singaporean has never been a matter of subtraction, but of addition; not of becoming less, but more; not of limitation and contraction, but of openness and expansion” (Lee, 2017). This stance on the Singaporean identity aligns with that of Siemund et al.’s (2014) study (where Indians were under-represented) in that the linguistic marker (in this case, mother tongue) is insignificant in the Singaporean identity; however, as discussed above, the current study holds an opposite view.

Essentially, the mother tongue of the Tamils remains rooted as a dominant marker of their identity, or across their multi-faceted identities. To those who do not speak the language well, or who do not identify with their mother tongue, other symbolic markers of identity, such as attire, ethnic celebrations, and following certain traditions remain as salient features. Although this study did not factor in socio-economic status as a variable implicated in one’s identity construction, the affirmation that one’s academic qualifications should not dictate the choice of English over Tamil evidenced in the study, presents a shift in the perception of identity amongst young Tamils.



Table 24: Section 7: The connect and disconnect with India

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>That's the only country I'll feel truly comfortable in; even in Singapore, up to now, we still have the other races, that's the only place you will not be judged based on your race or what you speak.</i></p> <p><i>It's important a lot of Indians [are] migrating to Singapore from India, especially Tamils. It's important to preserve the culture of speaking in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>I have a sense connection to India as in Tamil movies, we do watch it in Singapore, the world is globalised with Internet.</i></p> <p><i>They need to change primary school and secondary school teachers. They are all from India; more Singaporean teachers, people you can relate to.</i></p>	<p><i>With a steady flow of Tamils from India coming into Singapore, they bring Tamil along with them. It doesn't matter if it's a slightly different variety to ours.</i></p> <p><i>The younger generation are fond of Tamil movies... here, if you don't see the films, you wouldn't speak in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>The people from India are already trained but there's an issue of pedagogy and issue with the command of English because these people are not going to work in a Tamil-medium school, they are going to work with other races, so they have to communicate.</i></p>	<p><i>One should learnt to respect India. India is the only place that majority are Tamilians. But people in Singapore look down on people who came from India.</i></p>

The Tamil language is a primary means of forging a sense of connect with India. The growing number of Tamil speakers from India, who have made Singapore their country of residence in recent years, is seen to be favourable to the growth of Tamil. India, in particular, Tamil Nadu, is positively viewed as a space where Tamil could be used without any inhibition, or where Tamils would feel ‘comfortable’, in contrast to the Singaporean context where English is prevalent, or where the choice of language is sometimes dependent on the situation. As well, the young Tamils create a connect with India through Tamil movies. On the other hand, a mismatch of the cultural schema between the Tamil speakers in Singapore and those in India causes a sense of ‘disconnect’. This ‘mismatch’ is also seen to be extended to the pedagogical practices of Tamil teachers sourced from India. The absence of a shared Singaporean history or culture amongst the two groups of Tamils is a further contributory factor to a disconnect as such.

The young Tamils’ notion of a connect or disconnect with India can be understood by drawing on Kanno and Norton’s (2003) integrative overview of ‘imagined communities’. In other words, a bond is created with India, where a relationship is imagined with the “fellow compatriots across space and time” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241) or is realised through ‘engagement’ with the imagined community. This sense of belonging in part explains how identity or language is re-conceptualised in relation to India as an imagined entity.

First, Tamil assumes a symbolic value in that it connects its speakers in Singapore with those in Tamil Nadu, India, regardless of the apparent linguistic differences. Second, to those who occasionally visit India, the engagement with the people and culture, in addition to the language, is one that is both direct and concrete (Kanno & Norton, 2003), and this may create a sense of re-ethnification within a space which is in sharp contrast to that of Singapore. Third, India remains an imagined ancestral link amongst those who wish to someday directly experience the ‘imagined’. Fourth, Tamil movies are an important source of connectivity between India and the Tamil diaspora in Singapore.

However, the notion of a bond with an ‘imagined’ community may dissolve if a disjuncture is realised between the imagined and the ‘real’. This can be understood not only from the perspective of the diasporic Tamil in Singapore, but also from that of the Tamil from India, as they find themselves negotiating their

similarities and differences, within the context of Singapore. In this case, a sense of disconnect may be mutually felt, and hence, contribute to a disconnect with India on the part of the Singapore Tamils. The establishment of a Tamil Nadu community by the Indians (from India) in Singapore (bin Yahya & Kaur, 2010) further suggests that the once imagined bond with ‘compatriots’ geographically separated, may cease to be relevant. This only goes to prove that the ‘culture’ experienced through a certain language cannot be homogeneous (Kirkpatrick, 1999), as while they acknowledge the common values that define the Tamil culture learnt through the language, it can be argued that the Singapore-born Tamils have, in their own ways, developed a Singaporean variety of Tamil, infused with the Singaporean Tamil culture, quite in the same way Singaporean English has been evolved.

In sum, the connect or disconnect with India in relation to the young Tamils in Singapore, is aptly described by Lal (2007) as such: “However fractured or frayed, ossified or fluid, there is a sense of cultural, religious and historical ties with India, in various combinations of longing and nostalgia” (p.14).

Table 25: Section 8: The diglossic dilemma

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>If you want to keep the language alive, you talk [Spoken] Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>We should learn both [Spoken and Literary Tamil] because Literary Tamil is the original.</i></p> <p><i>Spoken Tamil should be developed from a young age, so they [students in general] will have confidence, and they won't feel so awkward when they grow up [speaking the language].</i></p> <p><i>Two of my classmates write very good Tamil with no spelling mistakes but can't really speak the language.</i></p>	<p><i>Spoken Tamil is important, because as long as there is Spoken Tamil, Tamil will be a living language.</i></p> <p><i>Every child should know the two varieties [ST and LT], and not think that one is higher than the other.</i></p> <p><i>If you can speak Tamil at home say since one, two years old, then it shouldn't be a problem</i></p> <p><i>People don't speak in literary Tamil. We can connect with the young people [with Spoken Tamil] who don't see Tamil as a chore.</i></p>	<p><i>Colloquial conversations are more important than formal usage as this is how the essence of Tamil is maintained.</i></p>

ST is considered critical in maintaining Tamil as a living language in Singapore in terms of its relevance in day-to-day communication. Additionally, the informal variety creates a sense of closeness between interlocutors. At the same time, LT or formal Tamil is regarded just as important, as it is the 'original' form of the language, and the carrier of Tamil culture and value system. However, a mismatch exists between the level of LT and ST in academically able students. A significant finding also points to embedding ST in the formative years of a child, so that confidence in speaking the language could be cultivated early on.

The foregrounding of LT in teaching and learning has been cited as a reason for the reduced use of Tamil in Singapore (Lakshmi & Saravanan, 2011; Saravanan, 1998; Schiffman, 2003), as it was not the variety spoken at home; neither was it the variety used in daily communications (Lakshmi & Saravanan, 2011). Therefore, there was an urgent need to focus on encouraging ST in the classroom following reports on Tamil language usage by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP), in addition to the Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (TLCPRC) in mid-2000s. However, the TLCPRC had also recommended that students should be able to switch between the two distinct varieties of Tamil, spoken and formal accordingly. A question that needs to be explored would be: Has the focus on encouraging ST in both teaching and learning reaped any benefits?

Slightly more than a decade from the inception of pedagogical reforms in relation to Tamil language teaching, it can be argued that gradual progress has been made, as the findings from the current study demonstrate. That is, students have welcomed the change in foregrounding ST in classes as well as the use of other modalities for learning Tamil, for example, videos and the Internet; furthermore, the informal variety has assumed a symbolic function as well, in which both students and key stakeholders (i.e., Tamil language curriculum planners, Tamil teachers, Tamil media personnel) appreciate the solidarity that ST has come to represent. At the same time, the formal variety continues to be symbolic of Tamil antiquity (Schiffman 1998); however, the appreciation for the 'original Tamil' does not equate to language devotion reminiscent of demonstrations by Tamil purists (Ramaswamy, 1997) both in Singapore and India, fuelled by the Dravidian movement in the 1950s (Mani, 1993).

The young Tamils in Singapore are not affected by the so-called High-Low linguistic divide in Tamil. That ST remains critical for Tamil to be sustained in Singapore, is unanimously agreed by the young Tamils.

The study's findings also support Shegar and Gopinathan's (2015) conclusions that (a) more Tamil teachers think the new pedagogical initiatives are gaining ground in that students are becoming more interested in learning Tamil; (b) more students (in this case, both primary and secondary school students) are speaking more Tamil with the new teaching approaches. However, whilst the findings of both studies indicate a positive turn, the top-down language policy in Singapore (e.g., Gopinathan, 1998), which typifies the 'left branching', traditional notion of language planning, seeks to address the human resource needs (Kaplan, 1997). Therefore, the emphasis on academic excellence at the expense of cultivating interest in the mother tongue, is in that sense, counterproductive, and will remain a challenge.

Table 26: Section 9: Tamil survivability

Focus group	Interviews	Survey open comments
<p><i>I have been through the whole struggle conversing in Tamil so I would make sure my kids are able to do it with ease and confidence.</i></p> <p><i>I think it's very important for the media to be role models because we students don't read Tamil story books</i></p> <p><i>If there's a continuity of teaching Tamil in Singapore.</i></p> <p><i>I think Tamil will die. To be frank, our mother tongue is declining.</i></p>	<p><i>The youngsters [from tertiary institutions] nowadays, they've got a renewed interest and awareness in Tamil.</i></p> <p><i>Future of Tamil is very bright, the profile of our learners are changing, we're getting new citizens, the government is very supportive in endorsing Tamil as an official language right from the 60s.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil is still here because it's compulsory for Indian students. That's the truth.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil is definitely declining.</i></p>	<p><i>Tamil will definitely live but it depends on each individual, everyone should take the initiative.</i></p> <p><i>Even if it's dying, it can be preserved by the media, the government, and ourselves.</i></p> <p><i>Tamil is declining because youngsters are losing interest in it.</i></p>

Two contrastive views are evident in terms of Tamil survivability in Singapore. On one hand, the future of Tamil is predicted to be ‘bright’ due to reasons ranging from the institutionalisation of the language to the inflow of ‘new citizens’ from India. On the other hand, Tamil has been projected to decline over time with reduced usage of the language for reasons such as lack of opportunities and the multiracial dynamic. To a lesser extent, the future of Tamil is seen to be uncertain, dependent on the successive generations. From the students’ perspective, the school is considered fundamental in growing and learning Tamil in Singapore. As mentioned above (Section 4), this representative view is supported by 91.85% of those surveyed, indicating that learning Tamil is important, in part for its continuity in Singapore. The language policy, which has placed Tamil (as well as the two other, main mother tongue languages) as a compulsory subject in schools, is largely responsible for its existence in Singapore, although any change in mother tongue policies that could jeopardise the position of Tamil in Singapore is a concern. The government and the Tamil media are paramount to the survival of Tamil in Singapore. As well, there is growing awareness of maintaining Tamil amongst the current generation of youngsters, particularly amongst tertiary students. This is further complemented by an overwhelming majority of 98.81% of those surveyed stressing the importance for Tamil to be passed on inter-generationally, a view supported by the key informants as well, and in the literature reviewed (Chapter 3).

The key question that remains is, “Will Tamil in Singapore survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond?” The answer to this question seeks an analysis of the complex workings of multiple factors investigated in this study, as laid out in Edwards’ (2010) *Sociology-of-Language* framework. The study confirms that traditional ways of predicting survivability may not stay relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or beyond. That is, Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) is not sufficient to predict the survivability of Tamil in Singapore, primarily because the descriptions that correspond to each stage on the scale may not be an accurate representation of the real situation. To illustrate, the current situation of Tamil in Singapore closely corresponds to both Stage 2 and Stage 4: that is, mass media is available in Tamil; and for those classified ‘Indians’, Tamil is a compulsory subject in schools, although there are exceptions to this now. In this case, how would one predict the survivability of a minority language, where there are overlaps? Are the descriptions on the GIDS a sufficient ‘measure’ of the status



of a language? On the other hand, does the family carry the sole responsibility of sustaining a language? When considering the case of contemporary Singapore, the school has become a critical site (as is the home) for the transmission and promotion of Tamil, in addition to the media, although this may be perceived as over-reliance (see Section 5). Furthermore, that the neighbourhood is just as important for a language to survive (Fishman, 1991, 2004, 2012) will be relevant only if there are ethnic enclaves. For Tamil to survive in Singapore in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one has to come to terms that, in Singapore, Tamil is both a mother tongue *and* a second language (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) to the majority of the Indians in general. These then have implications on ways to maintain the language in Singapore.

The following excerpts from speeches by Singapore's ministers in 2005 and 2010, point to a few salient points that highlight not only the apparent issues that have persisted, but also implicitly underscore the need to address them through innovative ways, targeted at the young Tamil bilinguals:

Our Tamil students and their parents are however keen for them to learn the Tamil language. That's an advantage. Students take Tamil seriously when they are in school, and generally do well in the subject. But too many of them leave the language behind when they leave school. If we do nothing, this situation will persist. The Tamil language will eventually fade away in Singapore.

They [the young] should define their own culture, not have it defined for them by those of us who came before them. Only then will Tamil be a cool language, a language that each generation of young people regards as fashionable and wants to use. (Shanmugaratnam, 2005)

It is the attitude of the youths that will determine the relevance and importance of the language in future years. (Iswaran, 2010)

First, that students perform well in Tamil as a *subject*, but 'leave it behind' when 'they leave school' suggests that while the bilingual language policy has been successful as far as academic excellence is concerned, it has consistently presented Tamil (along with the other mother tongue languages) as a high- stakes subject. However, the questions that need further probing are, "Why do young Tamils apparently not use the language after school?" "Are they driven by external

constraints, or is it due to attitudes towards the language?” Next, that the language has to be re-invented in relation to an evolving culture, reflective of every passing generation, points to the need to keep the language ‘current’. Going by the argument that nothing happens in a vacuum, projecting Tamil as a ‘cool’ and ‘fashionable’ language would require intense efforts and collaboration at both the national and community level; also, such efforts need to be sustained in order to achieve such goals. Therefore, the feasibility of such highly collaborative tasks is questionable. Third, that the attitudes of the young Tamils have a bearing on the survivability of the language, is but only one aspect of the whole complex network of factors that contribute to the survivability of the language. As García (2009) posits, the maintenance of a language, as well as a shift towards a more prevalent language is dependent on factors that contribute to the relative standing of the language in its setting. At the same time, it has to be understood that attitudes “are formed, enacted and changed through the interplay of individual attributes and social situations” (Baker, 1992, p.26). In the case of Tamil in Singapore, the findings indicate that ‘social situations’ can be a challenge, considering the demographic and linguistic profile, amongst others.

Returning to Ramiah’s (1991) question, “Will Tamil be able to withstand the onslaught of English? (p.53), one has to reframe the question within the current context of Singapore. That English in Singapore is symbolic of a destructive force, or has assumed the role of an ‘intruder’ (Phillipson, 1992), to the detriment of mother tongue languages needs some appraisal. In a bilingual context such as Singapore, where English functions as a lingua franca across the socio-economic strata (Kirkpatrick, 1999, 2008), as well as a language of ‘science and technology’ as stressed in multiple scholarly work, it seems an overstatement to think of English as a threat. Equally, to conclude that Tamil will become extinct in Singapore, if collaborative efforts at the community and national level are insufficient to sustain the language, particularly in the home domain (Kadakara, 2015) has to be re-examined. Although Kadakara’s conclusion appears to be a straightforward, logical deduction, the more important aspect to consider would be the ‘efforts’ in question. In other words, have these efforts over the years, seen any marked changes in the way Tamil is being used, particularly among the young Tamils? As the findings indicate, some of the Tamil youths are losing interest in Tamil, and still

others question the effectiveness of community-level initiatives such as the Tamil Language Festival, which kick started in 2007 (Tamil Language Council, 2017). Could a non- traditionalist approach then be used to promote Tamil in schools? For example, English may be used to create awareness of the language and its associated culture in schools through the curriculum, or programs such as the Mother Tongue Fortnight. This will not only lead to better understanding between the ethnic groups representative of the mother tongues, but also re-orient the young Tamils towards their own mother tongue when its currency and relevance is made known beyond the Tamil classroom, and their own community. This may lead to a strengthening of the vitality of both speakers and language.

In sum, the position of Tamil in the future remains equally divided. While the official status of the language remains the fort for the community, in addition to the support rendered by the government, the findings also suggest that an alternate approach be taken to instil and sustain interest in the language. This means, as opposed to learning Tamil as a subject, and for a specific purpose, its currency and relevance has to be brought beyond the classroom and the community. Also, the Tamil speakers from India, or referred to as the ‘new citizens’, can be tapped as a resource rather than viewing them as being ‘different’. Collaboration need not only be local, but ‘glocal’, in keeping with current thinking and practices. For example, the Tamil youths in Singapore may additionally tap on the larger Tamil diaspora to re-invent Tamil as a ‘cool language’. Therefore, whilst the official status has been critical in safeguarding the position of Tamil in Singapore, a re-invention of collaborative efforts, which includes language planning, would determine the survivability of Tamil in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond and possibly, gradually reverse its decline in Singapore.

## **8.2 Limitations of the Study**

Schools formed the primary sampling frame for this study, for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Two limitations of this was (a) the spread of Tamil students in secondary schools and junior colleges where Tamil was taught as a subject; (b) the time allocated by the schools for the survey largely determined the length and scope of the questionnaire, which had to, at the same time, capture the main research questions. Therefore, a questionnaire consisting of more items investigating aspects of language use, attitudes and identity would have added to the

depth of this study. Another limitation pointed to time constraints, which in part determined the number of schools that could participate in the surveys and discussions. Limited time also meant that participant observation was not possible. Also, the fact that the researcher was not residing in Singapore meant access to participants and schools had to be co-ordinated and determined well in advance, leaving little or no room for alternative arrangements, in the event where participants were not available due to unforeseen circumstances or last-minute changes.

The breadth of the study also posed a challenge in that multiple perspectives had to be sought, and this seemed an ambitious undertaking. The researcher had to, therefore, slightly narrow the scope of the study by refining the aims of the study, so that they were more practical. In retrospect, the researcher could have limited the number of interviews with key informants, to avoid covering ‘too much ground’, which would be of little significance to the study. On the other hand, while the sample size for the survey (N=319) was statistically significant, it would not equate to generalisability, which would have implications on interpreting the results. However, access to potential students was not within the control of the researcher, and the researcher had acknowledged this limitation at the start of the study.

Next, the typological framework, which addressed the ‘breadth’ of the study, as well as the mixed paradigm approach that guided the methodology of the study, proved to be just as intense as it was risky, as the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data had to not only in part complement each other, but also aim to validate and strengthen the findings. However, not all of the qualitative findings classified under themes could be validated or complemented by statistical evidence. Further to this, the framework had to be fine-tuned to accommodate new, emerging data. In hindsight, the researcher should have anticipated such ‘unexpected’ results due to the semi-structured nature of both group and individual interviews. In addition, the inherent overlaps in the typological framework, in spite of the various, neatly delineated categories, proved to be a challenge. That is, classifying recurrent ideas in the data was sometimes subjective when they appeared to fit more than one category, for example, when demonstrating elements of both ‘psychology’ and ‘sociology’. Such dilemmas were, however, resolved following consultations and discussions with a fellow coder.

One of the shortcomings anticipated for the study also pointed to the ‘insider effect’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) (which could be both advantageous and disadvantageous), where the researcher, having been raised in Singapore, and who shared a similar cultural background, language, and ethnicity with the participants, was thought to influence the way the participants responded during the group discussions and survey. However, the participants’ candid responses during the group discussions, and the open comments in the survey demonstrated that they were hardly influenced by the ‘insiderness’; as such, even if the insider effect was to be accounted for, it would have been insignificant to the study, overall. Other limitations of the study have been integrated into the concluding remarks in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **8.3 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has provided an insight into the factors that explain the perceived shift to English amongst the young Tamils, as well as the maintenance of Tamil within the Tamil community in Singapore. The shift to English at a societal level has been the consequence of a network of factors such as the language planning policy, the demographic profile of Singapore, and the multilingual context that necessitated a common link language, or *lingua franca*. These factors in part have influenced the language behaviours of the individual; however, it can be argued that they do not necessarily indicate a decline in Tamil language usage, if one were to re-align such communicative behaviours as ‘translanguaging’. Also, if attitudes are a measure of whether Tamil will continue to be a living language in Singapore, then it would be in the affirmative.

However, again, there can be a disparity between attitudes and actual behaviour. As far as the position of Tamil is concerned, the official status of the language in Singapore, as well as the teaching of the language in schools have been crucial to the sustenance of the language, at least superficially. With the school perceived as of fundamental importance for the transmission and promotion of Tamil, the recommended shift in pedagogical approaches has been gradually reaping benefits. In particular, the use of ST in both teaching and learning has been critical in creating a sense of relevance in terms of home-school language use. At the same time, the role of the Tamil media has been equally important in not only providing models of ST, but also maintaining the language in Singapore.

In that sense, the overall vitality of Tamil in Singapore is positive. On the other hand, India remains an important ‘imagined community’, or an ancestral land. In particular, Tamil Nadu provides an impetus for young Tamils to use the language when they visit the Tamil-speaking state. Identity, to the young Tamils is marked by a primary language, in this case Tamil, therefore, reiterating the language-ethnicity link.

Findings of previous studies on the Tamil community or Tamil (e.g., Saravanan, 1998; Schiffman, 2003) sharply contrasts with those from the current study’s in relation to (a) attitudes of young Tamils towards their mother tongue; (b) perceptions of identity; (c) Tamil usage in various contexts, along with English. On the other hand, similarities point to the maintenance of Tamil in the home domain, where exclusive use of English or Tamil is not typical in the Tamil family, although English remains a main vehicle of communication between siblings, particularly in discussions relating to school or homework. The only so-called Tamil ethnic enclave in Singapore, aptly referred to as ‘Little India’ remains a space that encourages the use of Tamil in intra-ethnic communication.

In the current context of Singapore, a bilingual has access to at least two languages, with English typically the dominant one. Also, Singapore presents a unique case in that English was positioned as a language that was to be fundamental in Singapore’s nation-building process, and just as important was its link to key global economies. The language- economics link has, therefore, been an important contributor for the shift to English, in Singapore. Furthermore, it may not be relevant to use traditional models of language shift, for example, the GIDS, or Fishman’s Matrix (which explains the four distinct ways in which the dominant and non-dominant language functions) as a benchmark to measure or predict the Tamil situation in Singapore as such models cannot accommodate the complexities of language use. The multi-dimensional approach, drawing on Edward’s typological framework in making sense of the language shift and maintenance of Tamil in Singapore, has necessitated alternate perspectives that do not solely relate to one particular theoretical model. This has also proved that an in-depth analysis of a language situation requires an integration of relevant strands of theoretical underpinnings. For this study, key ideas drawn from influential scholarly work (e.g.,

Edwards, 1985; Fishman, 1989; García, 2009) have re-framed the interpretation of Tamil and Tamils in Singapore.

The next chapter, which concludes the study, will seek to answer the main research questions. It will also present the conclusions and implications of this study as well as outline some suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 9 Conclusion and Implications

The human condition doesn't remain static long enough for the work to be completed, even for an instant. You need to recognize when to keep reaching, when to focus, and when to stop.

-Saldana, 2011, p. 155

This chapter comprises of 4 sections. The first section aims to answer the research questions in light of the findings. The second section presents some recommendations for the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore. Suggestions for future research is described in the third section. The final section concludes the chapter by reiterating the major findings of this study, and presents the implications.

Much of the discourses on the sociolinguistic perspective of Tamil and its speakers in Singapore has been anything, but a repeated motif of grimness, primarily due to the low socio-economic status of Tamil, and its association with the lower stratum of monolingual Tamil speakers, hence, the likelihood of the language 'disappearing' in the future. This study has attempted to clarify such notions of the 'past', and has provided a fresh perspective on the current situation of Tamil and the Tamil community in Singapore, in view of the time lapse evidenced in research investigating the Tamil community. Therefore, the study has been significant, in that it can inform future pedagogic practices and curriculum planning, as well as offer alternate approaches to promoting Tamil within and beyond the Tamil community.

### 9.1 Findings

Using a multi-disciplinary approach to investigate the Tamil and Tamils' situation in Singapore, this study has attempted to integrate multiple perspectives from the Tamil community, to present a comprehensive interpretation of the LMLS phenomenon in Singapore. Representatives from the Tamil community surveyed for this study included students, Tamil teachers, and key personnel from the media, curriculum planning and Tamil education, amongst others. A secondary aim of this study sought to examine identity construction amongst the young Tamils surveyed. In general, the study indicates that possibilities exist for Tamil to be maintained in Singapore, in the future, hence challenging notions that Tamil may 'fade away' along the language shift continuum, resulting in (English) monolingualism. The



study has also found that the attitude towards learning Tamil has taken a positive turn compared to attitudes reported in previous studies. This signals a potential for Tamil to grow in the future, amongst other indicators. These are considered in the discussion of the four research questions below, followed by the main research question:

*1. In which domains does the Tamil language remain vibrant, as opposed to those that indicate a decline in its usage, and to what extent are these patterns and trends consistent with past research?*

The typical language use pattern with the family or friends is the mixed use of *both* English and Tamil. As such, although Tamil is not particularly vibrant in any of the domains surveyed, it continues to be maintained in varying degrees across the domains of the home, school and friendship. At the same time, exclusive use of English in these domains is minimal, especially in the school and friendship domains. A comparison with past studies show that the predominant use of English in sibling interactions has remained a consistent feature. Another commonly occurring language use pattern that compares with previous studies is the switching between English and the mother tongue, which has been observed amongst the Chinese and Malay bilinguals as well. However, the predominant use of Tamil with the mother in the home domain, evidenced in this study, diverges from recent studies, in particular, Kadakara's (2015), which reports the predominant use of English in parent-child interactions.

Saravanan (1993, 1998) and Schiffman (2009), have consistently underscored an apparent decline in Tamil usage drawing on factors such as the association of the language with the low socioeconomic status of monolingual Tamil speakers, and the attitudes of the Tamil community towards their mother tongue. Similarly, Kadakara's (2015) study on the status of Tamil, indicates a decline in Tamil language usage due to a general perception that speaking in Tamil is not as prestigious as speaking in English.

The decline in Tamil language usage observed in previous studies aligns with the census reports on the language, or (Chinese) dialect used most frequently in the home domain, where the biggest increase in the use of English amongst Indians was observed in the 15-24 age group (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). However, census figures, as noted in Chapter 4 (Section 4.8.4) has its

limitations, and in this case, the Singapore census questionnaire precludes the use of two or more languages in the home domain, hence not completely capturing language use patterns.

In contrast, the findings of the current study demonstrate that Tamil continues to be maintained in the domains surveyed, and remains a part of the repertoire of the English-Tamil bilingual, although it may not be the more dominant of the two. As codeswitching was not the focus of the study, the amount of Tamil and English used in a single utterance could not be ascertained.

Contrary to previous studies, the current study also confirms that the choice of English over Tamil is not a matter of prestige or status, but rather one that is motivated by various factors, for example, the social distance of the interlocutor, the topic in conversation, or the level of fluency in the language. As well, this study refutes the claim that “The choice of language code, Tamil or English, [amongst the English-educated] is strongly correlated with socio-economic classification and the distinctive life styles that go with it” (Saravanan, 1993, p.280). More importantly, the study has revealed an apparent shift in the way young Tamils now perceive their mother tongue in relation to English. In this case, both languages, English and Tamil, are valued as important for different reasons and used accordingly by the English-educated young Tamils.

*2. What are the factors that influence a young Tamil's attitude towards his or her mother tongue, and what are the similarities or differences in terms of attitude and language use that emerge in the age group (15-25)?*

Contrary to results reported in past studies, a major finding of this study confirms that the young Tamils are not largely affected by the relatively lower socioeconomic status of Tamil in Singapore; neither do they associate the speaking of English as a marker of prestige, as reported in earlier studies, which claimed speaking Tamil was significantly less prestigious compared to speaking in English. Therefore, this study shows that to a far lesser extent, status and prestige continue to influence one's attitude towards speaking Tamil. Furthermore, the nation-state's recognition of Tamil as one of the four official languages, hence, perceived as an important language, has in part contributed to an overall positive attitude of the young Tamils towards their mother tongue.

On the other hand, while the young Tamils are in general positive towards their mother tongue, they are sometimes discouraged to use the language in the midst of other ethnic groups for reasons such as ‘being made fun of’ because of the way the language sounds; however, they feel this behaviour does not imply disrespect for the language, but is rather motivated by curiosity and a lack of understanding about the Tamil language. Further to this, an accommodative tendency amongst the Tamils in part deter them from using the language in contexts, where they feel using one’s mother tongue could mean a display of ‘anti-social’ behaviour.

At the same time, the antiquity and ‘beauty’ associated with the formal variety of Tamil, as well as a sense of pride in being able to speak the language, underpin the positive attitude amongst the young Tamils towards their mother tongue. This sense of a collectivity as Tamil speakers explains the protective nature of the Tamils towards their mother tongue, in terms of upholding it if it is looked down upon by non-Tamil speakers. Also, the keenness in learning Tamil to ensure its continuity in Singapore reiterates the positive attitudes, and this challenges previously held notions of young Tamils towards learning their mother tongue.

Furthermore, the young Tamils hold a pragmatic view in that they readily acknowledge that English remains essential in the context of Singapore, be it for inter-ethnic communication or for the purpose of employment. The study has also revealed that English remains the common lingua franca for all Singaporeans, where generations have been English-schooled, and hence, ‘English-educated’. To the young Tamils, English is a neutral language that they appreciate for its usefulness to operate in a globalising world. Contrary to a recent study (Chapter 3, section 3.9.1) that posits the possibility of English re-inventing itself as an additional mother tongue in Singapore, this study takes an opposite view that although English is of fundamental importance to the young Tamils, it is highly unlikely that it will replace Tamil as a mother tongue, or perceived as an ‘additional mother tongue’.

*3. How is identity constructed in contemporary Singapore with regard to the use of Tamil, or other languages, or both, in particular the vernacular varieties of Singaporean English?*

An intriguing and major finding in relation to identity construction in the young Tamils points to speaking Tamil, or the ability to speak Tamil as an essential

pre-requisite for one to be identified either as a ‘Tamil Singaporean’, an ‘Indian’, or a ‘Singaporean’ within the context of Singapore. This strong sense of identity linked to Tamil language sharply contradicts earlier notions of the Tamil’s identity, which was claimed to be one associated with the wider English-speaking community. At the same time, the study provides additional evidence that suggests a re-ethnification of young Tamils in that, these Tamil-speakers stress the importance of being able to speak the language to such an extent that those who are not able to speak the language well are ‘ostracised’ or perceived to be not ‘totally Indian’. This further underscores that Tamil is clearly linked to ethnic identity, which again contradicts an earlier conclusion that the English-educated Tamils’ identity was not rooted to ethnicity.

Furthermore, the study confirms that the low economic status of Tamil language in Singapore is insignificant to the Tamil’s identity, as these English educated Tamils do not associate one’s high academic qualifications, which is typically correlated with socio-economic status, as indicative of an identity not rooted to Tamil. In that sense, the study suggests that the vitality of Tamil, and the Tamils as a collectivity looks positive.

The study, therefore, suggests a shift in the Tamil’s notion of identity as one linked with the mother tongue, Tamil, further reiterating the language-identity link, in contrast to conclusions drawn in past research, some twenty years ago, as discussed above (Research Question 1). On the other hand, it is not clear if the colloquial variety of Singapore English, or ‘Singlish’ is significant in the Tamil’s identity, as references to this variety was minimal in the study.

*4. How do some of the major initiatives by policy makers, language planners, media personnel and key stakeholders aim to maintain the language?*

As far as the findings indicate, Tamil is well maintained in schools through the bilingual policy; through the Tamil media; and multiple Tamil organisations that, although with a singular purpose of promoting Tamil in the Tamil community, have adopted various approaches, from the month-long Tamil Language Festival to cultural shows. However, the effectiveness of the Tamil Language Festival, in particular, has attracted divided views. While it has worked towards promoting an awareness of speaking Tamil to make it a living language in Singapore, the

approaches taken to achieving this has been contested. Other organisations, for example, appear to maintain the formal variety of Tamil through poetry recitation or short-story writing competitions, which may not be appealing to the younger generation.

The school has been critical in maintaining Tamil through the bilingual policy. In Singapore, the 'bilingual' policy means English functions as the first language, and Tamil as the second, as with the other mother tongue languages, Mandarin and Malay. The learning of Tamil, according to the bilingual policy, is in part to be seen as a link to the 'Asian' culture it represents, in addition to learning the four productive and receptive skills. The study's findings prove that the learning of Tamil is important due to its perceived link to culture, for example, the importance of filial piety, hospitality and responsibility towards the family. These are implicitly learnt through lessons in schools. One particular Tamil Language Centre, whose students were surveyed, had colourful posters in classrooms that illustrated values fundamental to Tamil culture, in addition to those that captured the traditional performing art forms, therefore, emphasising the language-culture link.

In an attempt to encourage the speaking of Tamil within and beyond the classroom, the emphasis of ST in pedagogic practices has had a positive uptake amongst both educators and students. This initiative by the curriculum planners, following a review of Tamil Language teaching, has been perceived as a positive step towards revitalising the language. Further to this, the government- initiated 'Mother Tongue Fortnight' has provided an opportunity for young Tamils to be exposed to both the language per se, and its culture. For example, students participate in traditional games, which they appreciate, or learn about the herbs used in traditional Indian medicines. Furthermore, trips to the Tamil enclave in Singapore, called 'Little India' are sometimes part of the Fortnight's activities. Such activities not only demonstrate the culture in language to these students, but also provide an opportunity to make sense of the multiple facets of the language. Therefore, the study indicates that schools are a platform through which the students may gain a holistic experience of learning a mother tongue language, in this case, Tamil.

The local Tamil media has had the paramount responsibility to maintain both the formal and informal variety of Tamil, dependent on context of use. The findings indicate that locally produced Tamil dramas are popular amongst the

young Tamils, and these dramas motivate them to use Tamil, and at the same time, learn some new vocabulary. Additionally, the ‘glamour’ factor in the local media has made the young Tamils look to celebrities as role models, which includes speaking ‘good’ Tamil. In addition, the study indicates that workshops facilitated by the Tamil deejays for secondary school Tamil students during school holidays, as well as collaboration between the local Tamil media and other Tamil organisations have been important in maintaining and promoting the speaking of Tamil, particularly amongst the younger generation of Tamils who come from a predominantly English-speaking home background. The study suggests that Tamil parents, which include the ‘new citizens’ from Tamil Nadu, India, view the media as an agent for promoting the speaking of Tamil to their children via such initiatives.

*Is the Tamil language in Singapore further declining in use, and what are the possible reasons for this? How do Tamils then mark their identity?*

The study’s findings indicate that while Tamil is maintained in the domains surveyed, a dominant use of English is only the second most common, language use feature, while the most common feature is the mixed use of English and Tamil. On the other hand, the use of English only across the domains is not significant. While the language use patterns may not point to an obvious decline in Tamil language usage, the major challenges to using Tamil in the Singaporean context suggest a decline. These are discussed as follows.

First, the lack of opportunities to use the language frequently with another Tamil-speaker is largely due to the small population size, and the uneven spread of the Tamil community. Second, the multi-racial dynamic has led to the use of English as the unmarked choice in inter-ethnic interactions. Third, the lack of fluency in Tamil, or the embarrassment caused when mistakes are made while conversing in Tamil with older interlocutors, have impacted the use of Tamil amongst the young Tamils. Fourth, the use of English as the medium of instruction in schools has made English a ‘comfortable’ language to use due to the amount of exposure to the language in schools, in terms of curriculum time.

However, further findings, which underpin the socio-psychological and socio-political dimensions of this study suggest there is scope for Tamil to grow in Singapore. The attitudes of the young Tamils suggest that they are keen to pass on

Tamil to their children when they become parents, with the school acting as an important agent for language transmission as well. At the same time, ‘English-knowing bilingualism’ has remained essential to the young Tamils, who appreciate and value learning their mother tongue as a second language. It also remains that the English-Tamil bilingual is able to ‘translanguage’ according to contexts, drawing on his or her linguistic resources and competencies in both languages.

It is not to be denied that the home is a critical space to nurture one’s mother tongue, however, this study has shown that the school has become just as important, where Tamil is learnt formally as opposed to acquiring the language naturally. Nevertheless, an over-reliance on the school for this purpose may seem unreasonable to a certain extent, when responsibility to transmit the language shifts from the home to the school, thus adding pressure on educators and curriculum planners.

Even though the students perceive Tamil as a subject, they value the importance of learning it for the continuity of the language in Singapore. The positive attitudes of the young Tamils towards their mother tongue is also reflected in the way they construct their ethnic identity. That is, to reiterate, one of the major findings of the study demonstrates that Tamil is an important component of their identity, therefore rejecting earlier claims that the Tamil community identifies with the larger English-speaking community.

## **9.2 Recommendations for the Maintenance of Tamil**

### **9.2.1 Promoting Tamil learning**

The school has emerged as an important site of language transmission and learning, as Tamil remains a compulsory subject for ethnic Indians, although other Indian languages, for example, Hindi, Gujerati, and Bengali, are offered to non-Tamil Indians. While it is advantageous that Tamil is compulsory in primary and secondary schools, it is equally, if not, more important to leverage on the students’ positive attitude towards learning Tamil, and their keenness in learning about the history of this classical language as evidenced in this study. More curriculum time at the lower levels, or across levels to engage students in projects could be more motivating than written assignments or assessments. These projects could involve the students drawing on both varieties of Tamil, and using multi-modal communication approaches in presenting their work. Projects could be a more

meaningful and fun way to appreciate Tamil as a language, rather than to view it as a subject that is transferred primarily through textbooks and worksheets. In addition, collaboration between Singapore-trained and India-trained Tamil teachers over time, may lead to an exchange of good practices and ideas to enhance a student's learning experience. As these India-trained teachers are native speakers of Tamil, and would have been exposed to different pedagogical practices and teacher training content in Tamil Nadu, their expertise in the language can be re-framed to suit the more innovative and modern approaches typically associated with the Singapore trained teachers. An advantage to having both the native Tamil teachers and the local bilingual Tamil teachers is the exposure to the varieties of Tamil, as one would speak of 'varieties of English'.

A cross-curricular collaboration could exploit and develop the bilingual competence of a student. This could lead to more bilingual 'productions' that could be 'played out' in the English classroom to promote multiculturalism, as well as provide an awareness of the other co-official, mother tongue languages. Also, the enforcement of Tamil only during Tamil lessons in schools can be counterproductive, especially if students have not developed enough competence in the language. The so-called purist approach should be abandoned and a bilingual pedagogy encouraged.

Also, as much as pedagogical practices are fundamental in sustaining interest in students, so are the physical set-up of the Tamil classroom, and resources allocated for Tamil language learning. The study has shown that classrooms allocated for Tamil language learning can negatively affect the motivation levels of students, particularly if these classrooms are 'special' or purpose-built rooms that cater to technical subjects or Art.

### **9.2.2 Bridging the gap**

The findings have shown that notions of 'them' and 'us', which have hardly been discussed in previous research, are significant in that they reveal the political-economic forces that contribute to the Tamil's perception of 'separateness' or as being 'disadvantaged' in light of the economically viable language, Mandarin, required for a variety of positions. A more equitable approach may help bridge the gap, where individuals of a minority group, in this case, Tamils, are not marginalised on the grounds of not being Mandarin-speakers. On the other hand, as the study has



found, Tamil could be made more ‘visual’ through the linguistic landscape in Singapore, so that its importance as an official language is affirmed.

### **9.2.3 Taking Tamil beyond**

The language-culture link is another significant finding in the study, which underpins the appreciation for the language, as well as an emotional attachment to it. While Tamil is actively promoted through the media and other platforms, such as cultural shows and various competitions from story-telling to writing short stories within the Tamil community, it is not ‘seen’ or ‘heard’ enough beyond the community, except for the occasional signages which may include Tamil. Hence, English can be used as a medium to bring the Singapore Tamil culture, to the non-Tamil speakers within the Indian community, and the other ethnic groups. Such approaches may be more appealing to the younger generation who view English as a neutral language. The use of surtitles in a recent Tamil play for a non-Tamil speaking audience proves that Tamil can be taken beyond its own community.

The need for more opportunities to use Tamil is also of significance in the study, in light of the population size and the uneven dispersal of the Tamil community throughout Singapore. Social events, or outings targeted at young Tamils or Tamil families from the various ‘heartlands’ of Singapore in conjunction with Tamil festivals or celebrations may be more appealing. Such events can see a collaboration between Tamil organisations to optimise resources. Likewise, Tamil or Indian societies in schools could collaborate and innovate to take Tamil beyond their own spaces.

### **9.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

The study has investigated many inter-related dimensions that have provided an insight into the challenges faced by the Tamil community. These include the repercussions of the multiracial dynamic, and the results-driven education system.

Hence, research into inter-ethnic relations, with a focus on attitudes of other ethnic groups towards Tamil and its speakers may be useful in gauging tolerance for other languages and groups. As this study has only presented an ‘insider’ perspective of Tamil and Tamils, an ‘outsider’ perspective, in this case, that of the Chinese and Malays, of the Tamil language and its speakers could be useful, and offer a comparison as well. An analysis of the so-called productive tension between different

ethnicities may shed some light on power dynamics in relation to language, access to resources or even social standing.

At the same time, a comparative attitudinal study on how the three ethnic groups, the Chinese, Malays and Indians (in this case, Tamils) perceive their respective mother tongues would offer a useful insight into the vitality of these languages in the speech communities. On the other hand, a longitudinal ethnographic study of a predominantly English-speaking Tamil family could be useful in making sense of the family language dynamic, and to ascertain the use of Tamil in such instances. This may provide an insight into the attitude towards Tamil in an English- dominant family as well.

Further to this, research into alternative modes of assessments for minority languages, such as Tamil, as well as cross-curricular approaches to promoting the language beyond the Tamil classroom could inform future pedagogical practices and curriculum planning.

Based on the study's findings, another important area for research could be the impact of exogamous or inter-ethnic marriages on the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore. That is, if the trend that has indicated a rise in inter-ethnic marriages in Singapore continues, it may have implications on the maintenance of Tamil, for example, when a Tamil marries a Chinese or a Malay.

Next, in light of the findings, it would be useful to investigate the extent to which Tamil media, for example Tamil movies, produced in India or locally, or local Tamil dramas, help in maintaining or promoting Tamil amongst the younger Tamils in Singapore. Such research can also shed some light on whether notions of 'imagined communities' are significant to a diasporic Tamil. Relatedly, case studies on the role of local Tamil theatres in the promotion of Tamil language or culture, within and beyond the Tamil community may be useful.

The use of Tamil in social media may be another potential area for future research to investigate how young diasporic Tamils may resort to innovative ways of conveying their sense of 'Tamilness' or Tamil identity through Tamil, for example, in the use of Romanised Tamil or in combination with English. Relatedly, a study of codeswitching in young Tamils in the friendship domain may provide the linguistic

dimension of how English and Tamil are used at inter- or intra-sentential utterances. This can further be probed to ascertain reasons that motivate such switches.

#### **9.4 Conclusion and Implications**

This study has challenged past notions and has created new knowledge about the attitudes of the Tamil community towards the language and learning the language. In other words, the young Tamils now do not see Tamil as a ‘coolie’ language, nor do they associate it with Tamils who belong to the lower stratum of the socio-economic hierarchy. The young Tamils also stress the importance of possessing at least basic proficiency in speaking Tamil. Therefore, current attitudes towards Tamil, as well as the perception of Tamil as an important language in Singapore implies a re-framing of the language amongst these young Tamils, as one that has intrinsic values, and which gives meaning to their identity and culture.

On the other hand, key personnel involved in the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore see Tamil ‘moving in the right direction’, with a renewed interest in the language observed in the young Tamils, despite inherent challenges, for example, a lack of critical mass for increased usage of Tamil in intra-ethnic interactions.

The bilingual policy that emphasises the learning of Tamil for those who are classified as ‘Indians’ is viewed as critical for the continuity and transmission of the language in Singapore. Equally important is the official status of Tamil, which the Tamils believe has accorded importance to the language in Singapore. Tamil teachers and the Tamil media are the ‘fort’ in maintaining Tamil in Singapore, while the school has been emphasised as an important site for Tamil language transmission, particularly to those who come from a predominantly English-speaking background.

Further to this, the initiatives undertaken by the government to promote Tamil within the Tamil community (e.g., Tamil Language Festival) and in schools (e.g., Mother Tongue Week) have been positively viewed; however, while the Tamil Language Festival has brought awareness on the importance of speaking the language since its inception a decade ago, the extent of its effectiveness is not clear. Overall, institutional support for Tamil as a minority language has been strong in Singapore, and this suggests that Tamil should grow in terms of its usage in the future. As evidenced in the study, the likelihood of Hindi replacing Tamil as an official language or as a compulsory Indian, second language

in schools is low. Also, the attitude of the Tamil speakers towards Hindi is best described as ‘antipathy’.

English remains a dominant language in interactions between siblings in the home domain, in part due to the topics discussed during these interactions, while ‘translanguaging’ or codeswitching between Tamil and English is a common feature across the school, home and friendship domains. Language choice is largely determined by interlocutors, topics, contexts and one’s fluency in the language. For example, Tamil is used in instances where the interlocutor is ‘close’ to the speaker, or for ‘insider’ jokes. Hence, the study suggests that language choice is not largely determined by one’s socio-economic status or educational levels.

English continues to be valued as an important language for the purpose of employment, upward social mobility, or for inter-ethnic communication, while Tamil remains integral to the identity of the Tamils, as a link to the Tamil culture, and is held in high esteem for its antiquity and rich literary traditions. Hence, both Tamil and English are seen to carry different values to the Tamils. Mandarin, on the other hand, is valued as an economic asset after English, although the disadvantages of being non- Mandarin speakers in terms of employment opportunities remain for the Tamil- speakers.

Important reasons for the reduced use of Tamil in Singapore include (a) lack of opportunities to use the language for intra-ethnic communication, due to the uneven distribution of the Tamils around Singapore, and their small population size; (b) the multi-racial dynamic that necessitates the use of English as a lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication; (c) the prevalence of English in schools, beyond. In addition, lack of fluency and confidence to use the language is a barrier amongst the young Tamils, who see it as an embarrassment to make ‘mistakes’ while interacting in Tamil. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu, India is favourably viewed as a conducive environment, where the young Tamil feels motivated to speak the language without any inhibitions, in a majority Tamil-speaking environment. Thus, the link with India, be it real or imagined, indicates a sense of belonging in part through a common language, in this case, Tamil.

However, positive attitudes towards a mother tongue that in some ways reflect language loyalty, may be more important for a minority language to sustain in a multilingual environment than the need for a critical mass. In light of more

powerful languages that co-exist with a minority language in such a context, a positive attitude may be critical in maintaining the vitality of the language, or resisting a likely replacement of the minority language by another language, for example, in schools. Therefore, the socio-psychological dimension is of particular importance to the survival of a minority language in a multilingual context. More importantly, positive attitudes towards the language have to be transformed into actions and not stagnate as 'passive goodwill'. Furthermore, although institutional support for minority languages is considered critical for their continuity in multilingual contexts, an evolving socio-political climate may determine the extent of sustaining these languages in such contexts, prospectively.

On the other hand, a re-imagining of the language shift continuum means language shift may not necessarily signal a potential language loss in some bilinguals. This means these bilinguals, who would typically possess different levels of speaking competencies in the two languages (dominant and less dominant), may plateau at the dominant/less-dominant stage of the continuum, without completely shifting to monolingualism in the dominant language.

Also, in an increasingly globalising world, transnationals as well as new immigrants can be a linguistic resource in terms of strengthening the vitality of a minority language in another geographic territory, as additional users of the minority language. Relatedly, with increased human movement across national borders, multilingualism has now become a common feature. Therefore, conflict-free inter-ethnic relations are integral in maintaining minority languages and in particular, upholding its status amidst other languages farther up the socioeconomic ladder. Maintaining a delicate, complex balance of inter-ethnic relations in a pluralistic society is, therefore, largely contingent on government policies.

In sum, to make sense of the situation of a minority language, such as Tamil in Singapore is to come to terms with the politics and economics of Singapore. To make Tamil live in a highly competitive society as such may seem an uphill task. However, by innovatively re-inventing Tamil in Singapore in order to traverse the challenges that they currently face, the Tamil community as a whole, drawing on their resources, expertise, position, or attachment to the language, should be able to maintain Tamil as a living language in Singapore.

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## Appendices

<b>Appendix 1 - Consent Form Questionnaire.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Appendix 2 - Participant Information Sheet Interviewees .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Appendix 3 - Focus Questions Schools.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Appendix 4 - Final Version Research Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Appendix 5 - Code Descriptions .....</b>	<b>vi</b>

## **Appendix 1 - Consent Form Questionnaire**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Title: A Study of Language and Identity amongst the Indian Tamil Community in Singapore**

**Researcher:** Rajeni Rajan

1. I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study.
2. I agree to take part in this questionnaire survey.
3. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
4. I understand I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
5. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material.
6. I understand that the consent form and data will be stored for a period of five years.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 154/2013). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing [hrec@curtin.edu.au](mailto:hrec@curtin.edu.au)

## **Appendix 2 - Participant Information Sheet Interviewees**



## Participant Information Sheet

### **Title: A Study of Language and Identity amongst the Indian Tamil Community in Singapore**

#### **Researcher:**

My name is Rajeni Rajan and I am a Ph.D student and staff at Curtin University, Western Australia. I am conducting research as part of my doctoral degree under the supervision of Associate Professor Grace Zhang and Professor Andy Kirkpatrick, and you have been invited to participate in it. Please read the following and ask any questions if you need any clarifications.

#### **Aims of Project**

First, this research aims to study the use of Tamil Language among young Indian Tamil speakers between the ages of 16 and 30. Second, it will look at the attitude towards using Tamil by this age group. Next, it aims to find out how these young Tamil speakers identify themselves. Finally, the research will investigate how Tamil language is kept alive by the government, media and community organisations.

#### **What this research involves**

Part of this research involves interviews. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

#### **Participants**

As a participant, you will be required to participate in the interview which should take about 30 minutes to an hour. To obtain data, an audio recording of the interview will be performed. The transcription of the recorded interview will be undertaken by the researcher.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may listen to the recordings after they are made, and you are free to delete all or parts of your recordings as you wish, and you may withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. Information that you provide in this research is confidential and your identity will be protected at all times. The data will be stored in a secure place for five years to safeguard confidentiality. Access to the data will be strictly restricted to the researcher and the supervisor.

I would be very grateful if you would participate in this project, as your input would be of significance to my research.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 154/2013). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing [hrec@curtin.edu.au](mailto:hrec@curtin.edu.au)

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me and /or my supervisor.

**Contact Details**

Researcher: Rajeni Rajan

E-mail address: [r.raju@curtin.edu.au](mailto:r.raju@curtin.edu.au)

Contact in Australia: +61 4011 68331

Supervisor: Associate Professor Grace Zhang

Department of Education

Curtin University of Technology

GPO Box 1987

Perth, WA 6845

Australia

Tel: + 61 8 9266 3478

Fax: + 61 8 92664133

E-mail: [Grace.Zhang@exchange.curtin.edu.au](mailto:Grace.Zhang@exchange.curtin.edu.au)

### **Appendix 3 - Focus Questions Schools**



## Interview Guide

### **Section A**

1. What are some reasons for you to use both English and Tamil at the same time when you speak to your friends or family members?
2. Why do you use mostly English in situations where you speak to your ....
3. What makes you choose the language (s) you use when...
4. How do you feel when using your preferred language, for example, Tamil when chatting casually to your friends as opposed to using English or any other languages?
5. What are your thoughts on Tamil being referred to as a language without much economic value or status?

### **Section B**

1. Do you think the next generation like your children and grandchildren will speak Tamil? If yes, why? If no, why?
2. What makes you think Tamil is /is not an important language in Singapore?
3. Given a choice, would you learn Tamil or Hindi in schools? Why?
4. Would you choose to speak in Tamil to your Tamil-speaking friends in school, outside Tamil class? Why?

### **Section C**

1. If someone asked you 'What are you?'-meaning referring to your identity, what would be your response? Why?
2. Do you see yourself connected to India? If yes, in what ways? ; If no, why?

### **Some additional questions:**

- Are you embarrassed when you can't speak Tamil very well? When do you feel that way?
- Tamil was termed a 'coolie language' in the past during British colonisation in Singapore as it was spoken by the coolies. Does this affect you as a Tamil speaker?
- Do you think spoken Tamil or **Pechu Tamizh** is corrupted or ungrammatical? Why? Why not?
- Do you think the spoken variety should be used more than the literary variety, in Tamil classes?
- Why? Why not?

**Appendix 4 - Final Version Research Questionnaire**



Curtin University

# TAMIL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

*TAMIL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY*

*Thank you for participating in this short survey. Your responses will remain confidential at all times. Please give your honest responses, as only this will help guarantee the success of the study. Once again, thank you very much for your help.*

**Section A**

Please tick ( ✓ ) the language (s) you use in the following situations:

		Tamil only	English only	Mostly Tamil	Mostly English	English and Tamil at the same time	Other languages (please specify)	Not applicable
1.	Speaking to my Tamil-speaking friends at school/JC/Uni (excluding Tamil language classes)							
2.	When I am out with my Tamil-speaking friends							
3.	Speaking to my mother at home							
4.	Speaking to my father at home							
5.	Speaking to my brothers and sisters at home							
6.	Discussing personal/family matters with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil							
7.	Talking about the day's happenings with a family member or friend who speaks or understands Tamil.							

8. Do you think learning Tamil is important? \_\_\_\_\_

Please give reasons for your answer:

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9. Do you think Tamil should be spoken in public places in Singapore (e.g. streets, shops, shopping centres, restaurants, coffee-shops, bus-stops, MRT stations)? \_\_\_\_\_

Please give reasons for your answer:

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### Section B

Please tick only one of the answers that best represents your response to each statement:

**SA= Strongly agree**

**A= Agree**

**D= Disagree**

**SD= Strongly Disagree**

	<b>Attitude towards Tamil Language</b>	SA	A	D	SD	<b>Any Comments</b>
10.	I am proud to be able to speak in Tamil.					
11.	It is important to be able to speak in Tamil because it is my mother tongue.					
12.	It is important that Tamil is passed on to the next generation.					
13.	Singaporean Tamil-speakers should speak in Tamil to one another whenever there is an opportunity.					
14.	Tamil should be spoken regardless of a person's academic qualifications.					
15.	Tamil is an important language in Singapore.					
16.	Hindi is an important language in Singapore.					
17.	It is important to actively promote Tamil in Singapore (e.g. Tamil Language Festival, Tamil on signboards, announcements in MRT stations).					
	<b>Identity</b>					
18.	Following the Tamil customs (e.g. festivals, ceremonies, greetings) is important in being considered a Tamil.					
19.	Speaking Tamil is an essential part of being a Tamil.					
20.	Being engaged with Tamil entertainment media (e.g. radio, TV, cinema, stage shows) is part of my identity as a Tamil.					

21. What else do you think is/are important to be considered a Tamil?

Please write down your response(s) below:

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Please fill in the following details:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for your time and effort***

## **Appendix 5 - Code Descriptions**

	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description of codes</b>
1	Demography= <b>DEM</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marriages. Inter-racial/ exogamous marriages.</li> <li>2. Stronghold for language identified (e.g. ethnic enclave) in Singapore.</li> <li>3. Association between housing policy and concentration/distribution of Indians. (that includes Tamil speakers)</li> </ol>
2	Geography=	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Classified as minority group in Singapore. Elsewhere? (e.g. Malaysia; India) Other minority groups in Singapore mentioned?</li> <li>2. Tamil in other polities in South Asia/India and Southeast Asia.</li> <li>3. The Indian diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.</li> </ol>
3	Economics= <b>ECON</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic status of speaker group/Indians</li> <li>2. Association between language and economic success/mobility/job opportunities.</li> <li>3. Economic health of Singapore.</li> </ol>
4	Sociology= <b>SOC</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Socioeconomic status of speakers.</li> <li>2. Degree and type of language transmission (e.g. inter-generational, intra-generational).</li> <li>3. Previous/ongoing Tamil language maintenance efforts.</li> <li>4. Domains where Tamil language remain vibrant (e.g. school, recreational, home, public space)</li> <li>5. Venues for language- cultural celebrations (e.g. schools, community centres etc.)</li> </ol>
5	Linguistics (including the anthropological perspective)= <b>LING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language proficiency of speakers in relation to Tamil.</li> <li>2. Codeswitching/codemixing</li> <li>3. Spoken Tamil vs Written Tamil.</li> <li>4. Language choice influenced by topics or interlocutors (i.e. those of the same ethnic group/Indians)</li> <li>5. Symbolic forms of communication in relation to Tamil/Indian culture (e.g. clothing; festivals; habitual practices).</li> <li>6. In- and out-migration of Indians in the last five years or so that could have influenced the maintenance or otherwise, of the Tamil language?</li> </ol>
6	Psychology= <b>PSY</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attitudes of speakers towards Tamil and other co-existing official languages(i.e. Mandarin, Malay, English)</li> <li>2. Factors that affect these attitudes.</li> <li>3. Identity construction of speakers along dimensions (e.g. cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national)</li> <li>4. Attitudes of other ethnic groups (i.e. Chinese, Malays) towards the Tamils/Indians or the Tamil language?</li> </ol>
7	History= <b>HIST</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. History and background of Indians, particularly the Tamils.</li> <li>2. History of the language. History of the language in colonial Singapore.</li> <li>3. History of area assigned to the Tamils/South Indians during British rule.</li> </ol>
8	Government and non-government organisations= <b>G/NGOV</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rights, recognition and representation of speakers in the government and other organisations.</li> <li>2. Instituting bilingualism amongst Singaporeans.</li> <li>3. Degree and extent of official recognition of language.</li> <li>4. Institutional support for language. Major initiatives by policy makers, language planners, and key stakeholders to maintain the language.</li> <li>5. Linguistic landscape.</li> </ol>
9	Education= <b>EDU</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speakers' attitudes towards the Tamil curriculum, resources for learning/teaching</li> <li>2. Suggestions by speakers with regard to teaching /learning Tamil.</li> </ol>



	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description of codes</b>
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. School support for language.</li> <li>4. Educational policies (e.g. bilingual policy) in Singapore, past and current.</li> </ol>
<b>10</b>	Religion= <b>REL</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Religious denominations of speakers.</li> <li>2. Association between religion and language.</li> <li>3. Importance of religion amongst Tamils.</li> </ol>
<b>11</b>	Media= <b>MED</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Group representation in local Tamil media over time (television, radio, and print media).</li> <li>2. Language representation in local media over time.</li> <li>3. Reach and penetration of Tamil media? Satellite transmission.</li> </ol>
<b>12</b>	Intergroup relations= <b>INT</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speaker group communicating with other ethnicities</li> <li>2. Language dynamic in above instances</li> <li>3. Influence of setting/context beyond the school domain on language choice</li> </ol>