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LANGUAGE USE AMONG MALAYSIAN TAMIL YOUTH

Summary. Most studies on the language use of Malaysian Tamils focus on the upkeep of the Tamil language. There is, however, a dearth of investigations into language use in a multilingual context among the younger generation of speakers. The present study aims to fill this gap by using Fishman's (1972) domain model to examine the language used by Tamil youth in intra-group communication in seven domains. Data were collected from 109 questionnaires, 42 audio-recordings of natural conversations and 40 interviews. The findings revealed that in four domains, which were the family, friendship, religion, and neighbourhood, Tamil is used more frequently. The highest usage of the language is predominantly among friends. However, there was a decreasing use of Tamil in the family domain among the younger generations with many married participants claiming to use English rather than Tamil as the home language. This does not bode well for the maintenance of Tamil as a first language in the future. The findings show how participants' use of Tamil, English and Malay is linked to concepts of identity, solidarity, and their perceptions of these languages. The findings also point to the development of a localised variety of Tamil reflective of the Malaysian cultural landscape.

Keywords: language choice; language domains; language use; Malaysian Tamil youth.

Introduction

The majority of Tamils in Malaysia originated from the southern part of India and were mainly brought in as immigrant workers during the British colonization of then Malaya. They served as plantation workers in rubber, oil palm, coffee, tea and sugar estates in the late 18th century and early 19th century (Sandhu & Mani, 1993). South Indians also worked on the construction of buildings, railways, and bridges during this period (Sandhu & Mani, 1993). At the same time, with the development of public services at the end of the nineteenth century, a large number of educated Tamil immigrants were also brought to Malaya from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to work in governmental departments (Sandhu & Mani, 1993). The Sri Lankan Tamils

added to the existing number of south Indians in Malaya resulting in an increase in the Tamil speaking population, and thus, they are now the largest Indian ethnic group in Malaysia, comprising about 80% of Malaysian Indians who make up approximately 7% of the total population of Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010).

The Tamil language spoken in Malaysia has gone through multiple changes due to Malaysia's diverse environment, national education policy, and other socio-economic factors. Minority communities, like the Malaysians of Indian and Sri Lankan descent, are more vulnerable to language shift due to, among others, language and education policies, socio-economic mobility, and a lack of intergenerational transmission. Intergenerational language transfer has been cited as a crucial factor in language shift and language loss (Pillai et al., 2014). Most Malaysians of Tamil ethnicity are now trilingual, with Tamil, English, and Malay in their linguistic repertoires. However, language shift to English, especially among the educated upper- and middle-class urban Tamils in Malaysia, has been previously reported (David, 2001; David, Naji, & Kaur, 2003; Dealwis, 2008; Schiffman, 2002). In fact, this shift can also be observed among other Malaysian Indians as well, such as among the Punjabis (David, Naji & Kaur, 2003), Malayalees (David & Nambiar, 2002; Nambiar 2007), and Sindhis (David, 2001).

Language shift can be observed by examining the language choices made by bilinguals or multilinguals in various domains over time (Aree, 2018; Holmes, 2013). Most studies on Tamils in Malaysia have tended to focus on the linguistic features of the Tamil spoken, and on language shift and maintenance among Tamils. However, there is a gap in the understanding of the patterns of language preference and use among the younger multilingual Tamils in major domains of use. Considering this gap, the present study examines the language use of Malaysian Tamil youth in a suburb in the state of Selangor in the central part of Peninsular Malaysia in seven domains of use (Fishman, 1972). The study focuses on the youth since this generation plays an important role in language shift (Stenström & Jorgenson, 2009). More specifically, this study aims to address the following questions:

(i)   What are the different styles of language use observed

among Malaysian Tamil youth in seven domains of use: family, friendship, education, the workplace, religion, the neighbourhood and business transactions?

(ii)   What are the motives for their language choices in these seven domains?

Language Use Among Tamils

In Malaysia, Tamil medium education has played a significant part in the maintenance and use of Tamil. The history of Tamil schools and Indian immigrant workers in plantations are interrelated as it is here that they worked and lived as a community. Tamil schools were located in these plantations to provide basic education for the children of the workers under the Labour Ordinance 1912 by the British Colonial Government (Asmah Haji Omar, 2015). Living together in a community further enhanced the speaking of the mother tongue, Tamil. Since English medium schools were generally located in the cities, only a very small percentage of privileged urban Tamils were able to attend these schools. After independence, national-type Tamil primary schools increased in number under the implementation of the New Education Policy with a common national curriculum (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992). At present, Tamil can also be offered as an elective subject in non-Tamil medium primary schools and in national secondary schools (Asmah Haji Omar, 2015). Although Tamil-medium primary schools continue to exist in Malaysia, many parents prefer to enrol their children at national schools where the medium of instruction is the national language, Malay (Normardhiah Ibrahim, 2018). It is interesting to note that in the 1970s, only half of the Indians in Peninsular Malaysia could speak Malay (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992), but the percentage increased tremendously to more than three quarters by 1980, signalling a shift in language use and language repertoires among Indians, including the Tamils, who still comprise the majority of Indians in Malaysia.

In public schools, Malay and English are compulsory subjects, and there is currently a choice to use English to teach Science and Mathematics under the Dual Language Policy. Based on recent statistics, it is estimated that 55% of Malaysians of Tamil ethnicity attend Tamil primary schools (Vernacular

Schools in Malaysia, 2012). It can be assumed that those who have attended Tamil primary schools are proficient in the formal spoken and written variety of Tamil. On the other hand, those who do not attend Tamil schools may be only fluent in spoken Tamil if they grow up speaking it at home. However, the Tamil that they speak may be confined to the more colloquial variety of Tamil (Sreetharan, 1996). They may not, however, be able to read and write Tamil, or use a more formal variety of Tamil.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, previous studies have reported a language shift among Malaysian Tamils. For example, David's (2001) study revealed that the younger generation of Tamils, especially those who live in urban areas tended to use English more than Tamil, and further, three main languages (Malay, English and Tamil) were obvious in their patterns of language use. In fact, at least 30% of their spoken Tamil contained influences from other languages (David, 2001). Educated Tamils in big cities in Malaysia, like Kuala Lumpur and Penang, tended to link English to a higher status, and therefore, used more English in intra-group communication (David & Naji, 2000). This could also be because they have already shifted to using English as their first or dominant language. Another study found that a drastic language shift has occurred in all domains except in the domain of religion among a group of Tamil Iyers, who are a caste of Hindu Brahmins of Tamil origin in Malaysia (Sankar, 2014). A similar trend has been observed among the Tamil community in Sarawak (David et al., 2010; Selvajothi, 2017). In addition to the use of Tamil in the family domain, religious practices and cultural activities seemed to have helped to maintain the language in the community.

A similar situation can be observed among the Tamil diaspora in other locations. In Singapore, for instance, English is perceived as a prestigious language and is the most used of the four official languages along with Mandarin. Hence, Singapore Tamils tends to use more English in intra-group communication (Saravanan, 1998). In fact, English has become the dominant language in many Singapore Tamil homes, with Tamil mainly spoken by the older generations (Saravanan, 1998). Likewise, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in London, Toronto, and California (Canagarajah, 2008) and in Melbourne (Fernandez & Clyne, 2007) have also shifted away from Tamil

towards English. This is not surprising as these cities are in countries where English is the dominant language. However, the case in Malaysia is different due to the existence of Tamil-medium schools and formal Tamil classes, and the easily accessible local and South Indian Tamil media and entertainment, as well as the religious, social, and political contexts in which Tamil is still predominantly used.

Methodology

Fishman's (1972) domain concept was used as a tool to explore the study of language patterns. These domains are family, friendship, education, workplace, and religion. In addition to these, this study includes the domains of neighbourhood and transaction (business) to enable a more comprehensive examination of the patterns of language use among the participants. Fishman (1972) posited that besides domains, the level of bilingualism also regulates language choice in a community, and he defined the four stages of the domain overlapping processes in bilingual communities, depicting the ongoing natural phenomenon in multilingual societies. At the first stage, the dominant language will be expected to be used in certain domains like work environments and formal administrative places. Next, as posited in the domain overlapping model, the capacity to speak in a dominant language within the intra group is followed by the third level of balanced bilingual capacity, and finally in the next generation the dominant language eventually supersedes the mother tongue.

Participants

The target participants in this study were Tamil youth aged between 15 to 30 years old as defined by the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (Amendment) 2019 (Act 668). The research sites were the semi-urban areas of Batu Caves and Rawang in the district of Gombak in the central-west Malaysian state of Selangor, where a considerable number of Malaysian Tamils live, and thus, were likely to speak Tamil along with Malay and English. The participants were a relatively homogenous group based on their ethnicity. Further, based on the socio-economic profile of these two locations, it was
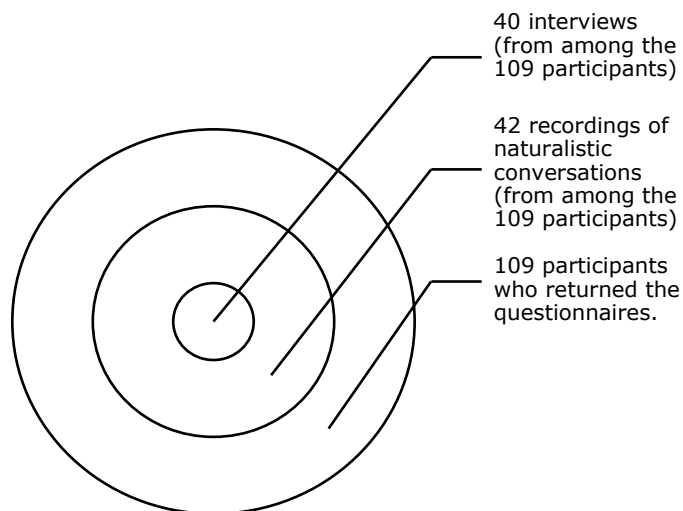
anticipated that they were more likely to be products of the national education system. In other words, they were less likely to have attended private or international schools. It was also assumed that they would have had exposure to similar forms of Tamil media and entertainment.

Data Collection

Initially, a total of 150 questionnaires using the snowball method were distributed among Tamil speaking youth, who then roped in their friends and relatives in the specified age group and who are of Tamil ethnicity to participate. A total of 109 questionnaires were finally returned, which was a 72.7% return of the total number of questionnaires distributed. From the 109 participants, 42 of them agreed to have their natural conversations recorded, and 40 out of these 42 participants agreed to be interviewed (see Figure 1). A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for natural conversations and interview, with five to six of the participants selected for each domain. The participants were contacted to have their conversations audio-recordings and to be interviewed.

Figure 1

Participants of the study and methods of data collection

40 interviews (from among the 109 participants)

42 recordings of naturalistic conversations (from among the 109 participants)

109 participants who returned the questionnaires.

Questionnaires

Eighty-three open-ended questions were prepared with subsections and additional space for comments. The first part of the questionnaire concentrated on participants' demographic details and the second part elicited details regarding participants' choice of language use in intra-group communications and their reasons in the various domains.

Interviews

The participants were informed of the interview earlier and the time was at their convenience. The interviews were conducted at their homes or their friends' houses. The interviews were conducted in groups of a maximum of five people, and their informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. Participants who were students were interviewed after school hours or at their homes, upon obtaining consent from their parents. Each interview lasted from 15 to 30 minutes and was conducted in Tamil except for two participants who were not fluent in the Tamil language, where English was used. Interviews were conducted informally by the first author, and each consisted of three parts. The first one elicited information on the languages used by the participants. The second part aimed to elicit reasons for their language choices in their audio-recorded naturalistic conversations which were played to them. Finally, the third part focused on their attitudes towards Tamil. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants in the interviews.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Gender	Non-Tamil educated	Tamil educated	Total
Participants	Male	6 (15%)	7 (17%)	13
	Female	10 (25%)	9 (23%)	19
Married	Male	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	4
	Female	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	4
Total		**20 (50%)**	**20 (50%)**	**40**

Naturally Occurring Conversations

It was felt that audio recordings in natural settings would reflect real discussions, and form more reliable data for a sociolinguistic study (Labov, 1972). Hence, this study incorporated audio-recordings of participants' verbal interactions in the selected domains. The recordings in the homes of participants were conducted after they were informed about the aim of the study and consent was obtained to have their conversations recorded using a digital recorder. Next the recordings for the education domain were done in classrooms during intervals. Recordings at colleges and universities for the same domain, and the workplace domain were recorded by the participants themselves. They agreed to record their conversations and obtain informed consent from the other people involved in the conversations to be recorded. Only audible audio recordings, and those for which all speakers consented to being recorded were used for analysis. The audio recordings of natural speech came with its own challenges. As expected, the participants appeared mindful of their speech in the beginning as they were aware of being recorded. Thus, the observer's paradox was minimized by ignoring the initial part of the recordings. The number of recordings and duration for the seven domains is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Duration and number of recordings

Domain	Total hours	Total recordings
Home	6	10
Friendship	8	11
Education	2	7
Workplace	2	7
Neighbourhood	30 minutes	2
Religion	30 minutes	2
Transaction	2	3
Total	**21 hours**	**42**

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, the related data from the questionnaires were analysed quantitatively. To answer the second research question, data from the questionnaires, recorded conversations and interviews were qualitatively analysed based on Fishman's (1972) domain concept. By examining the data from these three sources, this study made use of a concurrent triangulation strategy, where both quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously examined, and the findings from each were compared and cross-referenced.

More specifically, the data elicited from the questionnaires provided an overall picture on the patterns of language choice of the participants. Demographic information of the language skills of the participants and their patterns of language choice in multiple domains from the questionnaire were quantitatively analysed. The interviews aided in eliciting detailed responses on the rationale for participants' language choice in the selected domains. Where Tamil was used, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed in Tamil script, and then transliterated into Roman script, while the recordings were orthographically transcribed if English or Malay was used. The interview data were analysed in relation to the questions asked in the questionnaire, and the recordings of the conversations.

The audio recordings of the conversations in the various settings provided supporting information to the findings from the questionnaires. These recorded conversations were then transcribed verbatim orthographically. The language used was coded according to the language used by the participants, and the transcription conventions used were as follows:

- Tamil: normal font
- Malay: italic bold font
- English: normal bold font

The languages used in these conversations were then compared to the findings in the questionnaire and used as a basis to elicit responses in the interview questions.

Findings and Discussion

The following sections present and discuss the patterns of language use in the seven domains elicited from the three modes of data collection.

Language Use in the Family Domain

Based on the responses from the questionnaires, almost 75% of the participants said that they spoke Tamil at home with their family members. However, there was also a declining pattern of usage between the generations: grandparents (84.4%), parents (74%), siblings (70%), and finally, children of married participants (33.3%) as shown in Table 3 and Table 4. It can be seen from Table 3 that participants mainly used three languages at home, with some even using four. Most of them used Tamil as their main language at home, followed by English and Malay while communicating with their siblings.

Table 3

Participants' spoken language in the family domain

Language	Parents	Siblings	Grandparents	Uncles & Aunts	Average
Tamil	80 (74%)	76 (70%)	92 (84%)	76 (70%)	82 (75%)
English	29 (26%)	29 (27%)	14 (13%)	33 (30%)	25 (23%)
Malay	0	4 (3%)	0	0	1 (1%)
Others	0	0	2.8	0	1 (1%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of young parents spoke English to their children, and only about one third of them spoke Tamil to their children. This is despite the fact that more than half of the married participants claimed Tamil as their first language. These responses from the questionnaire were verified in the interviews with eight married couples. The participants who were young parents said that they wanted their children to be able to speak English as they felt that this would grant them access to a better education and future. They

felt that speaking English to their children would lead to the children speaking better English. This is because the couples who were interviewed seem to think that speaking to their children in more than one language may hinder the acquisition and fluency in another. They also felt that since English was an important language in the Malaysian education system, it was essential for their children to be fluent in English.

Table 4

Married participants' language preference in the family domain

Language Preference	Language spoken to spouse		Language spoken to children		Parents preference for children		Viewing preference for children	
Language	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Tamil	21	63.6	11	33.3	17	51.51	1	3.03
English	12	36.4	22	66.7	14	42.42	30	90.90
No answer	-	-	-	-	2	6.06	2	6.06

The following extract from an interview with one of the married participants sums up their opinion about the use of English and Tamil:

> **Extract 1**
>
> I feel comfortable to converse in English. (It) feels decent as well compared to speaking in colloquial Tamil. It is a competitive world (and so we) should know English first. (It's) easy for my child to mix with neighbours' children. Malaysia is a mixed-race country. My children should know English. Other languages are important too. My child must be steady (fluent) in English first. Tamil is next. Tamil is important too.

The consequence of these young parents using mainly or solely English with their children is that their children and the following generations may start using English as their first language rather than Tamil. This has happened in many Tamil families (David, 2001; David & Naji, 2000; Pillai, 2006; Sankar,

2004). Many studies have in fact shown that intergenerational transmission in the family domain plays an important role in retaining the use of a mother tongue in minority communities (Baker, 2007; Canagarajah, 2008, 2011; David, 2001; Pillai et al., 2014).

As to why Tamil was used to communicate in the family domain, 36% of the participants who responded to the questionnaire felt that it was their mother tongue, while 46% of them said that they felt comfortable using Tamil in this domain as they could use it to convey their thoughts and feelings effectively. For 18% of them, Tamil was used to express connectedness or intimacy among family members. The interview sessions confirmed the reasons found in the questionnaires. Families would normally converse in Tamil on matters regarding their members and family activities.

From the questionnaires, it was found that participants typically tried to use more Tamil when speaking to their elders, such as their grandparents, and appeared to try their best to use solely Tamil without mixing it with Malay or English in this context. However, they used more Malay and English words when speaking to their parents. With their siblings the degree of English and Malay increased with about 6% of those in the 15-to-17-year age group responding that they used English and Malay when speaking to their siblings. The mixing of Tamil and Malay by younger participants can be seen in Extract 2.

Extract 2

Context: 16-year-old Tamil female speaking to her mother at home (Family Domain)

P2F: sollama:tti:ngke….! kollepasi ma:, nalikku **school**-ukku ni:ngka **one forty**-kku varave:na: *kelas tambahan* irukku. *tiga setengah*-po:le mudiyum. oru *tiga setengah* vanthaa po:thum.

(Say whatever …. I'm extremely hungry mother, please do not come to school at 1.40 tomorrow. I have extra class. Finishes around 3.30 pm. It will be just right if you come around 3.30pm.)

Language Use in the Friendship Domain

As shown in Table 5, many of the participants used Tamil to their Tamil friends as their primary language, whereas only a minute percentage preferred conversing in English with their Tamil friends. Most of the participants preferred to use English rather than Malay when they needed to establish a common ground among friends of different ethnic groups. In such a situation, English seemed to be the main choice. The percentage of Tamil use in this domain was found to be about 90% for teenagers, and this could be because this age group may not have as diverse a network as older working adults.

Table 5

Main language spoken to Tamil friends

		No.	Percentage
Main language spoken. with Tamil friends	Tamil	99	90.8
	English	10	9.2

However, the analysis of the audio recordings of conversations in this domain indicate that language choice varied according to age. Participants in the 15-to-18-year age group spoke more Malay with their Tamil friends. This may be because most of them were still, or had recently been in school, and thus, they are still, or were recently, in a context that used more Malay. In government secondary schools, the main medium of instruction is Malay, and the main language of communication in their schools would have been Malay. It was not surprising to find that Malay was used to refer to items related to school as shown in Extract 3.

>   *Extract 3*
>
>   Context: 17-year-old Tamil male speaking to his Tamil friend (friendship domain)

P15M: namakku enna: udu…. na:laikku varrappe *sukan* **t-shirt** –a: po:ttu ttu varanum? *Latihan sukan* irukkunna:ungke. ungke **class**-ukkuma?
(Why should we worry? Do we wear our sports attire to school tomorrow? I heard sports practice is on,so will your class be involved too ?)

Friend 1: ille da: *tingkatan lima* mattum tha:n. atum *separuh pertama* tha:n. *kelas G* varaikkum tha:n.
(No,not us, only the form fives are involved so they'll have to use their sports attire and that too only the first half of the form,until 5G.)

P15M: apdina: en **class** *tak terlibatlah*.
(If that's the case, then my class is not involved.)

Based on audio recordings of their conversations, this age group also tended to use Tamil colloquial terms and expressions in their speech. These included the following:

- dei when calling or referring out to friends.

- ennalah (why + lah)

- machi (literally means 'brother in-law' in Tamil but this to refer to or as a term of address for friends)

- chemmaya (very well or very good),

- nalla: varuthuda: va:yile (don't know what I will say)

The findings from the questionnaire and interviews reveal that those who were not fluent in Tamil tended to use English to communicate with their friends. However, they tried to include more Tamil words in their speech to identify themselves as part of the Tamil group. According to some of the participants, they were not confident conversing in what they referred to as 'good' Tamil, and thus, instead of using a standard variety of Tamil, which they could not speak fluently, they switched to English or Malay. For those who used Tamil with their Tamil friends, the data elicited through the three instruments indicated that this was to establish solidarity among peers of Tamil ethnicity and to forge a Tamil identity. It also allowed them to engage in friendly banter (Dealwis, 2008).

Language Use in the Education Domain

In the domain of education, the findings from the questionnaires indicate that Tamil was used by only 31.4 % of the participants, while 40% used English, 27.5% used Malay and about 1% used Chinese. The findings from the interviews and questionnaires suggest that teenage participants used more Malay. As mentioned in the previous section, this is perhaps because of the Malaysian education system, where Malay is the main medium of instruction in the national schools, particularly at the secondary level. Many courses in colleges or universities, including at the public ones, are also taught in English, and hence, the use of Tamil in this domain is likely to be confined to discussions among Tamil-speaking groups outside formal lessons or with their friends.

The audio recorded interactions of the participants in this domain show the use of a mixture of Tamil, Malay, and English. Participants used Tamil as a matrix language where Tamil is the dominant language in code-switching into which elements of a secondary language are embedded with more education-related Malay or English words (Paramasivam, 2006). Extract 4 shows the use of colloquial Tamil mixed with English and Malay when speaking to a classmate, but the use of formal Tamil when speaking to the teacher.

Extract 4

Context: 17-year-old Tamil male speaking to his Tamil friend and teacher during a Tamil lesson (education domain)

P7M: (to a classmate) intha *pembentangan*-e ni: seyyi. na: ella:m eluthittu vanthutte:n. aven **chart** ella:me varainjitta:n. **now your turn** *pembentangan*. **why creating hassle?**
(You'll have to do this.I've done my part in drafting out the presentation,and he has done his in creating all the charts.It's your part to present.What's your problem now?)

Classmate: na:n **computer**-le *bahan* ella: the:di kudththe:n.. paththa:tha:
(I have sourced all the materials online myself and provided to both of you. Isn't that sufficient?)

P7M: (to the teacher) inke pa:rungke aiyai. Avunke avungke ve:leyyai   pirichi   koduththa:cchu.a:na: ippo:pirachanai pannura:n, gobi.
(Please listen Teacher. Work has been equally divided amongst us, and now he is not cooperating.)

The analysis of the interview sessions revealed that participants used Tamil in intra-group communication with their classmates-cum-friends because they felt that it was more natural for them to do so. However, they used English in the presence of other ethnic groups, for ease of communication for terms related to their lessons or topics and assignments. The teenage participants said that they also used Malay as most subjects were taught in Malay, and they felt that they were more fluent in Malay than in English where academic or subject-specific discourse was concerned.

Language Use in the Workplace Domain

In the workplace domain, English is the language of choice among the participants although they used Tamil with Tamil-speaking friends. This is perhaps not surprising given that English is used extensively at the workplace, particularly in the private sector (Pillai et al., 2012; Zainuddin, et al., 2019). There were 38 working participants among the 109 participants who answered the questionnaire. Their audio recorded natural speeches were divided into two categories: participants with higher education degrees and those without degrees. This was done to see what influence higher education might have on peoples' choice of language. The two categories of participants show different patterns of language use. Those with degrees used more English while those without degrees used more Malay besides using Tamil with their Tamil-speaking co-workers. This can be linked to the type of jobs participants with and without degrees had. The ones with degrees tended to have more professional jobs or were employees in the private sectors that required them to use more English at the workplace. The percentage of Tamil language usage was slightly higher among those without degrees (33% of them) compared to those with degrees (24%). Only 7% of those with degrees reported that they used Malay while compared to 22% of those without degrees. The latter group included lorry drivers, taxi drivers, and general workers in the government

sector. One of the participants, who was a clerk, said in the interview that she used Tamil with her co-worker without mixing or code switching with other languages to talk about her non-Tamil co-worker. In fact, the interviews revealed that they chose Tamil for confidential talk in the presence of other ethnic groups. Thus, Tamil was used as an ingroup language to exclude those who did not speak it. None of them seemed to think that this could be construed as being rude and unprofessional. In fact, they felt that it was natural when communicating with Tamil colleagues to use Tamil to engage in small talk or even to explain work-related matters. According to the participants, speaking in Tamil also created a home-like atmosphere at the workplace.

Language Use in the Religious Domain

The findings show that Tamil is mainly used in religious activities and festivals celebrated by Hindu Tamil in temples. Based on the demographic information elicited from the questionnaires, 80.8% of the participants reported that they were Hindus, while 11.9% and 7.3% indicated that they were were Christians and Muslims respectively. It was found that 83.7% of the participants used Tamil for religious-related matters such as when praying. In the interview sessions, two Hindu participants who were interviewed said they had to communicate in Tamil at the Hindu temple since the temple gurukkals (priests) could usually only speak Tamil. In fact, most temple activities were conducted in a more formal variety of Tamil. The Christian participants who were interviewed also stated that their churches had Tamil mass or worship for the Tamil-speaking congregation. This was also in formal spoken Tamil. Those who are not fluent in Tamil or are not Tamil-educated had problems following the prayers and meetings in Tamil. As for Tamil Muslims, they sometimes went to mosques where most of the worshippers were Tamil-speaking. However, the main language used in mosques was Malay and Arabic.

Language Use in the Neighbourhood Domain

The environment where one lives is a contributing factor to the pattern of language use where there is daily communication. The results from

the questionnaire show that 63.4% participants used Tamil with their neighbours, while 33% used English, and only 1.8% used Malay. The analysis of the audio recordings confirmed that participants used Tamil with their neighbours. An example of this is shown in Extract 5.

Extract 5

Context: 16-year-old Tamil female speaking to her older Tamil neighbour (neighbourhood domain)
P76F: **Aunty**, Mani enke? ku:ppida mudiyuma:?
(Aunty, do you know where Mani is? Is it possible to call him)

Neighbour: irukka:n ennamo: **school** vele seyyira:n.
(He is here, attending to some schoolwork.)

P76F: ille… oru visayama: pa:kkanum.. .. aven eththanai manikku *padang*-kku po:va:n?
(Nothing urgent,just wanted to discuss something. What time will he be at the field?)
N: teriyilaye:
(I have no idea)

P76F: teriyileya:… ku:ppida mudiyuma? –
(Oh, I see, … Can you please call him him?)

[Note: Names have been changed.]

Interestingly, another 1.8% of participants used Chinese with their Chinese neighbours. In the interviews, it was revealed that these participants had learned Mandarin in private classes and liked to practise speaking it with their Chinese neighbours. Although the number of those who could speak Mandarin is small in this study, it should be noted that there has been an increase in non-Chinese Malaysians learning Mandarin and attending Chinese-medium primary schools mainly due to its perceived economic value (Vollmann & Tek, 2018).

Language Use in Domain of Business Transactions

As might be expected, the findings from the questionnaire reveal that 34.1% of the participants used Malay in this domain when dealing with Malay and Chinese vendors. What was surprising perhaps was that only 33.7% said that

they used Tamil with Tamil vendors. The interviews indicate that the choice of the language was due to purchasing typically Indian-related items and ordering food at South Indian restaurants. In the interviews, the participants stated that when they were unsure of the vendors' language background, they switched to English when speaking to them. Several participants, who did not have formal Tamil education and who were not fluent in the language, used English. Further, some said they were lost for exact words, and resorted to speaking in English or Malay. There was also a preference to use English and Malay terms when dealing with numbers with big values and for fractions.

However, regardless of the language used, the names of food and local produce were in local languages depending on the products. Examples of Malay words used included rambutan (a native fruit with a hairy exterior), durian (a local fruit with a thorny exterior), pisang (bananas), sawi (mustard greens), kubis (cabbage), kacang panjang (long beans) and cili (chillies). Chinese words were also commonly used for the names of produce and food such as kailan (Chinese kale), tauhu (tofu), pak choy (bok choy) and char kuew teow (a stir-fried rice noodle dish). Similar to the use of Malay for school-related matters, the use of words in local languages reflects the multicultural landscape of Malaysia, and when used when speaking in Tamil points towards the development of a local variety of Tamil unique to Malaysia.

Summary and Conclusion

The use of domains as a theoretical construct to explain language choice can be a powerful explanatory tool compared to more obvious (and observable) boundaries like topic, place (setting) and interlocutor (Haberland, 2005). The present study shows that Malaysian youths can be placed at the second stage of Fishman's (1972) domain overlapping model, which portrays the ability to communicate in dominant languages within the intra-group, in this case, Malay and English. This may be followed by the third stage of balanced bilingual capacity and lastly, in the generation to follow, the dominant language may well replace the mother tongue.

In terms of language patterns among the Malaysian Tamil youth in all the seven domains, the findings indicate that Tamil is still the chosen language

in the domains of family, friendship, religion in the predominantly Tamil neighbourhood. However, youth with highly educated parents and from higher income groups, showed a pattern of using more English in their homes. Those who were not fluent in formal Tamil, used a more colloquial variety of Tamil, especially in the friendship domain. I The friendship domain reflects the highest use of Tamil within participants even though with the mixture of English and Malay words in their spoken Tamil. In multilingual contexts, code-switching and code mixing is unavoidable, and this appears to be common among Tamils in Malaysia as it is among other language communities (Kanagaretnam, 1971; Lim, 2008; Paramasivam, 2006). In addition, many young parents showed an inclination towards using English with their children even if they thought that it was important for them to speak Tamil at home. In fact, a declining pattern of Tamil use from the older to younger generations appears to be taking place.

The reasons for the language choices in these domains are motivated by factors like in-group solidarity and intimacy, for example for the use of Tamil, even if it is the colloquial variety and mixed with Malay and English. Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that the friendship domain showed the highest usage of Tamil language. Familiarity with language is also another factor that influences the choice of language used as does the dominant language in a particular domain. As speakers enter domains with particular dominant languages, they are likely to accommodate and linguistically acclimatise to new language contexts, such as the national language Malay, in schools, and English at the university level and at the workplace. This also confirms previously reported trends of an increasing use of English in higher education and the workplace, particularly in urban areas in Malaysia (Pillai et al., 2012; Zainuddin, et al., 2019). The choice of language was also used to create a sense of distance (e.g., English with neighbours), and to signal one's socio-economic or educational status (English). The choice could also be motivated by the perception of one language being more important to know or having a higher status.

Given that the dominance of Tamil use is restricted to family-related, social, and religious contexts, while Malay and especially English are more dominant in other ones, if the future generations of Malaysia Tamils are not fluent in Tamil or cannot speak it at all, there is a possibility that the use of

Tamil will also dwindle in the other contexts. Further, the national education system and the expectations of employers, as well as the impact of globalization and digitalisation of knowledge, media, and the study and workspace has had and will continue to have an impact on the patterns of language choice among the youth. With the eventual demise of the older generation, the lack of intergenerational transmission coupled with its use in increasingly fewer domains, the use of Tamil as a home and dominant language may see a downwards decline over the years even in Tamil-majority locations in Malaysia, such as the research site.

In sum, this study has shown the patterns of language use in a small group of multilingual Tamil youth in Malaysia. The decreasing use of Tamil in the family domain among the younger generation is a worrying trend, particularly with only a small minority of Tamils attending Tamil-medium primary schools or attending formal Tamil classes. Despite evidence to the contrary, there seems to be a prevailing assumption among young parents that if their children learn Tamil and English at the same time, this will affect proficiency in the latter. There is also the belief that their children will not be able to speak English fluently if they learn it later in school. Language researchers and community leaders can educate young parents about the value of speaking Tamil at home so that future generations of Tamils in Malaysia do not lose their mother tongue to English. The findings also show that the use of Tamil, English and Malay is linked to concepts of identity, solidarity and perceptions about the prestige and usefulness of a language. The findings also point to the development of a localised variety of Tamil reflective of the Malaysian cultural landscape.

We acknowledge that this study was limited to one age group in one location. Thus, although the findings may mirror the wider group of Malaysian Tamil youth with similar socio-economic and education profiles, further exploration of different demographics of Tamils in Malaysia should be carried out as different patterns of language use and reasons for language choice might emerge in these contexts. A larger scale study of how Malaysian Tamils navigate the different languages (and their varieties) in their repertoires in different domains would be able to present a better understanding of how multilinguals negotiate meaning and identity in these different domains.

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MALAIZIJOS TAMILŲ JAUNIMO KALBOS VARTOJIMAS

Santrauka. Daugelis Malaizijos tamilų kalbos vartojimo tyrimų susiję su tamilų kalbos išlaikymu. Vis dėlto trūksta tyrimų apie jaunosios kartos kalbėtojų kalbos vartojimą daugiakalbystės kontekste, tad šiuo tyrimu siekiama užpildyti šią spragą. Taikant Joshua A. Fishmano (1972) srities modelį ir analizuojant tamilų jaunimo vartojamą kalbą bendraujant grupės viduje 7 srityse, buvo surinkti ir išanalizuoti 109 klausimynų, natūralių pokalbių 42 garso įrašų ir 40 pokalbių duomenys. Pasirodo, 4 srityse (šeimos, draugystės, religijos ir kaimynystės) tamilų kalba vartojama dažniau. Dažniausiai ši kalba vartojama tarp draugų. Vis dėlto jaunoji karta tamilų kalbą šeimoje vartoja rečiau; daugelis susituokusių respondentų teigė namuose vartojantys anglų, o ne tamilų kalbą. Tai rodo, kad ateityje tamilų kalba kaip pirmoji išsilaikys sunkiai. Rezultatai atskleidė, kaip dalyvių pasirinkimas vartoti tamilų, anglų ir malajų kalbas siejasi su tapatybės, solidarumo sąvokomis ir su šių kalbų vartotojų suvokimu. Išvadose taip pat pažymima, kad įvairiapusiškas tamilų kalbos vartojimas atspindi Malaizijos kultūrinį kraštovaizdį.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: kalbos pasirinkimas; kalbos sritys; kalbos vartojimas; Malaizijos tamilų jaunimas.