

**LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE AMONG
THE MALAYSIAN IYERS**

LOKASUNDARI VIJAYA SANKAR

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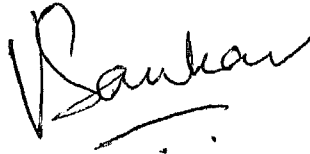
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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC WORK

I, **LOKASUNDARI NARAYANASWAMI**, Registration No: **THA 98006** hereby declare that this thesis entitled: **“LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE AMONG THE MALAYSIAN IYERS”** is my own academic work with the exception of citations which have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lokasundari', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Name: Lokasundari Narayanaswami

Date : October 2004

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO THE LOVING MEMORY OF MY PARENTS:

MR. AND MRS. K.NARAYANASWAMI IYER

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to study the extent to which the Malaysian Iyers, a minority group of Tamils living in Malaysia have shifted from their mother tongue of Tamil to include other languages in their daily linguistic repertoire. It also aims to find out if any maintenance efforts are being made to retain the Tamil language. The objectives of the study are:

1. To document language shift among the Malaysian Iyers.
2. To describe language maintenance efforts among the Malaysian Iyers.
3. To investigate possible causes for language shift and maintenance among the Malaysian Iyers.

The study was conducted on 291 Malaysian Iyers through a questionnaire requiring data on their language use in four domains : home, social, religious and the formal reading and writing areas. In addition, 115 respondents were audio taped in natural situations to study their linguistic patterns.

The questionnaire data was analysed using the SPSS 7.0 program. The data was studied through frequency counts of language used for different purposes. The audio taped data was analysed using a discourse analysis following the Hymes SPEAKING grid.

The findings show that the Malaysian Iyers have moved away from Tamil in the home, social and formal domains of reading and writing and have included English and

Malay in their linguistic repertoire in the above mentioned domains. Tamil is retained in the religious domain for the purposes of prayer. The extensive shift from the Tamil language is due to external pressures such as government language policies and the influence of English as the language of business and other career opportunities.

The results also show that the Iyer identity is not completely dependant on the ethnic language. Individual Tamil lexical items are retained for functional uses during conversations, especially to accommodate elders of the community.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menguji setakat mana kumpulan Iyer Malaysia, iaitu kelompok minoriti dalam komuniti Tamil yang bermastautin di Malaysia, telah mengubah penggunaan bahasa mereka daripada bahasa ibunda mereka iaitu bahasa Tamil kepada bahasa-bahasa lain dalam penggunaan harian. Objektif ujikaji ini adalah yang berikut:

1. Untuk mengkaji perubahan penggunaan bahasa di kalangan komuniti Iyer Malaysia.
2. Untuk menjelaskan cara-cara komuniti Iyer Malaysia cuba meneruskan penggunaan Bahasa Tamil.
3. Untuk menyiasat sebab-sebab penggunaan bahasa berubah atau diteruskan dalam komuniti Iyer Malaysia.

Kajian ini telah dijalankan ke atas 291 orang peserta daripada komuniti Iyer Malaysia. Mereka menjawab soalselidik tentang empat kumpulan data: penggunaan bahasa di rumah, penggunaan bahasa sosial, penggunaan bahasa untuk tujuan-tujuan keagamaan serta penggunaan bacaan dan penulisan formal. Selain itu, 115 responden dirakam dalam situasi sosial sejati untuk menguji pola penggunaan bahasa mereka.

Data daripada soalselidik ini telah diuji dengan program SPSS 7.0. Maklumat yang diperolehi telah dikumpulkan mengikut kadar kekerapan penggunaan bahasa bagi

tujuan-tujuan yang berbeza. Data daripada perbualan-perbualan yang dirakam pula dianalisa dengan cara “Hymes SPEAKING grid”.

Keputusan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa komuniti Iyer Malaysia telah menjauhkan diri dari penggunaan bahasa ibunda mereka dalam situasi penggunaan bahasa di rumah, penggunaan bahasa sosial, penggunaan bahasa untuk tujuan-tujuan keagamaan serta penggunaan bacaan dan penulisan formal. Mereka telah menyertakan penggunaan Bahasa Malaysia dan bahasa Inggeris dalam keupayaan bahasa hari-harian.) Bahasa Tamil tetap digunakan dalam situasi keagamaan contohnya dalam upacara-upacara ibadat. Salah satu sebab yang menyebabkan gejala ini ialah pengaruh-pengaruh luar seperti polisi bahasa Kerajaan, dan penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa utama di bidang komersial.

Penggunaan kosakata tertentu daripada bahasa Tamil masih digunakan dalam perbualan seharian sebagai tanda hormat kepada orang tua di kalangan kaum Iyer Malaysia. Istilah-istilah keagamaan dan kebudayaan yang sukar diterjemahkan juga masih digunakan.

Data yang diperolehi daripada kajian ini mungkin berguna kepada penulis-penulis kurikulum dan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. Perhatian telah diberikan kepada peri pentingnya pengajaran Bahasa Tamil dilaksanakan dengan cara yang sistematik agar warisan kebudayaan bahasa ini dapat diteruskan bagi semua penutur bahasa Tamil di Malaysia.

Kajian lanjut dalam dialek-dialek Tamil lain yang wujud di Malaysia, untuk mengkaji perbezaan-perbezaan yang ada tujuan-tujaun perbandingan akan membekalkan maklumat lanjut kepada pengetahuan yang sedia ada dalam bidang penerusan dan perubahan bahasa Tamil di Malaysia. Kajian lanjut mengenai hubungkait antara penggunaan bahasa dengan identiti etnik juga pasti menarik dan akan meningkatkan pengetahuan dalam bidang ini.

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