

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at theories and relevant studies pertaining to the process of language shift and maintenance. Such a task has been an uphill one due to the confusion that arises due to the varied use of terminology. The terms are subject to individual researchers claims making them difficult to interpret. However, an attempt is made to understand the range of terminology connected to the issue of language shift and maintenance and apply it to this study.

#### 3.2 Language Shift and Maintenance – A Brief Description

Language shift studies have shown that two types of changes can occur to minority languages that come into contact with majority community languages.

The first type of change is linguistic change to the ethnic minority language. Such changes affect the grammar and pronunciation of the language. For example, studies conducted by Dorian (1981), Milroy (1992) and Roksana Bibi (2002) have investigated language shift and maintenance through linguistic analysis. One study shows linguistic changes to the ethnic language which has absorbed parts of the dominant language (Roksana Bibi, 2002), another shows that patterns of variation in speech can be motivated through social variables such as prestige while a third shows that words from the dominant or more prestigious language are incorporated into the

ethnic language and made to conform to the rules of word formation and pronunciation of the ethnic language (Dorian, 1981).

The second type of change is sociolinguistic in nature. This type of change occurs when the ethnic language use is gradually reduced for certain functions or in certain domains (area of language use; see also 3.3.1). In such studies the social factors governing language maintenance and shift are studied. For example, Gal's study (1978) revealed that prestige alone is not a compelling reason for language shift from one's ethnic language while studies like Weinreich (1963), Kundra (2000) and Ravichandran (1996) found that prestige of the language shifted to was a compelling factor in cases of ethnic language shift. Clyne and Kipp (1991) found that migrant communities in Australia shifted to English when the cultural distance between English and ethnic languages (mainly European) is small. Ethnic languages were maintained more successfully among those migrants (mainly Asian and Middle Eastern) if cultural distance was great.

A movement away from the ethnic language is known as language shift. Fishman (1968) refers to this movement as a demonstrable change in the habitual use of a language. He uses the concept of the domain (see 3.3.1) as a gauging factor to analyse language use in various settings to discover changes to habitual language use. This concept was further explored by Pandaripande (1992) who says that language shift refers to the stage at which a language exists while in contact with another or other languages where it is 'in the process of being partially or fully replaced' to the extent

that it becomes 'dysfunctional in one or more domains of use' (Pandarihande, 1992:253).

Change in the habitual use of language can also be seen as stages in the disappearance of a language. It can lead to 'the gradual disappearance of a language' (Fase, Jaspaert and Kroon, 1992:3) although the language does not 'vanish completely leaving a vacuum'; it is replaced by another language with which it is in contact. Fasold (1984:213) says that the disappearance of a language is dramatically referred to as 'language death'. This means that an entire community shifts to a new language totally so that the old language is no longer used.

It is seen from the preceding paragraphs that the term language shift can refer to different stages in the reduced use of a language; that is from the reduced use of a language in one or more domains of language use to the complete cessation of its use. This study will attempt to investigate the movement away from the Tamil language by the Malaysian Iyers.

### **3.3 Factors That Influence Language Shift**

Investigations into language maintenance and shift have been conducted over the last forty years and many efforts have been made to discover the variables or factors that affect language maintenance and language shift. Scholars have identified several factors that govern language contact situations (Sercombe, 2001). Some common factors that influence language shift, as seen in several studies, are bilingualism or

multilingualism, the economic power of language, socio-economic changes, the impact of education, government regulations and migration. These factors are explored in detail below.

### **3.3.1 Bilingualism/Multilingualism**

One condition for a minority language to shift is bilingualism or multilingualism (Fasold, 1984; see also 1.3.2). Bilingualism/multilingualism points to the existence of two (or more) languages that are dominant within a society. It refers to the 'presence of at least two languages within one and the same speaker, remembering the ability in these two languages may or may not be equal' (Baetens Beardsmore, 1982:2). We can therefore say that a person who uses two languages is bilingual and more than two as multilingual.

Bilingualism can in fact be the catalyst for language shift. It exists in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies and is the mechanism for language shift where 'parents speak the original language to grandparents and the new language to children' (Paulston, 1992:121). Some studies, in Malaysia, of minority ethnic communities concur with the above statement. David's (1996) study showed that the Sindhi language was used for accommodation with grandparents while Malay or English was used with children, while Kundra's (2001) study of the Punjabis in Malaysia showed the same trend.

Countries that have been colonized may still use the language of the colonial masters together with their own ethnic language(s). This is seen, for example, in India (Pandari pande, 1992; Apte, 1979), the Philippines (Pascasio and Hidalgo, 1979), Singapore (Saravanan, 1992; Roksana Bibi, 1989; Sobrielo, 1985) and Malaysia (David, 1996, Ramachandran, 2000, Kundra, 2000) as these countries have a colonial history. The existence of several communities co-existing results in an interaction of languages which creates the platform for language shift as seen in Malaysia.

In Malaysia several languages interact with one another. The national language, Malay, which is the language of the government and schools, co-exists with English, taught as the second language. The history of Malaysia has resulted in the country being multi-ethnic due to immigration policies during British colonial times (see 1.3.2). This has resulted in the co-existence of several minority languages (see 1.3.1) such as Iban (Noriah, 1991), Tamil (Ramachandran, 2000 and Lim, 1997), Punjabi (Kundra, 2000), Sindhi (see David, 1996), and Kristang (Ravichandran, 1996), to mention a few. This interaction has resulted in a melting pot of languages within the country. The minority communities in the above studies tend to compartmentalize the use of each language depending on the function it performs in different domains in order to derive the most benefit from each language (Asmah, 1987).

### **3.3.2 Economic Power and Language**

The use of an appropriate language in a bilingual or multilingual situation is usually based on the function that it performs. The more powerful functions that a language is able to perform, the more the language is shifted to as seen in the following studies. For example, the ethnic Iban speakers of Sarawak use Malay for official reasons and for obtaining government jobs (Noriah, 1991) while other communities use English for obtaining jobs in the private sector or to exhibit status or prestige such as the Melaka Chitty (Ravichandran, 1996), the Punjabis (Kundra, 2001) and the Sindhis (David, 1996). The ethnic language can disappear into the home realm or is used only for religious purposes or to accommodate elders in the community, (Ramachandran, 2000, Kundra, 2000, David, 1996) when the language does not wield power outside of the home. However, the above trend is not seen if the users of the minority language wield economic power. This is seen among the Chinese in Malaysia, where the ethnic language can be maintained not only in the home but also in business circles (Kong, 1999).

Paulston's (1992) idea (seen in 3.3.1) that bilingualism is in fact the mechanism for language shift (where parents make a concerted effort to speak the new language to their children) is possible because the new language is very typically associated with progress, wealth and prestige and is viewed as the ' language of education and

wage-earning future' (Brampy, 1996:54). This could then result in parents not transmitting their ethnic language to their children as seen in Dorian's study (Dorian in Fasold, 1984 ) of East Sutherland Gaelic where the local language was deliberately not transmitted to children because it had no practical value. In Dorian's opinion 'if some other language proves to have greater value, a shift to the other language begins' (1982:47).

Dorian's view of the effects of the power that a language wields is also reflected in Gal's (1979) study of the Oberwart community. In her study, the peasant Hungarian community being studied preferred the dominant language, German, over the minority ethnic Hungarian language because the German language symbolized an urban, future oriented society while Hungarian was stigmatised as the language that symbolized an old way of life.

### **3.3.3 Socio-Economic Changes**

A third factor that is related to language shift is socio-economic change. In Gal's study (1979) she reports that language shift in Oberwart is related to socio-economic changes. A peasant Hungarian community slowly transformed to an industrialized one in Oberwart. This industrialization brought about social and economic changes for the residents. When speakers wished to establish their social status, it was done

through German (the dominant language) since Hungarian (the minority language) represented a stigmatised language associated with poverty and low status.

The above finding is supported by Saravanan (1994) who did a study of the Tamils in Singapore. She found that her respondents linked their low socio-economic status to their poor command of the English language. Kundra (2000) also found in her study of the urban Punjabis in Malaysia that English was associated with a high socio-economic status making speakers abandon their ethnic language in public domains while Ramachandran (2000) found that the Portuguese Eurasians of Malaysia found no pragmatic value in Kristang, their ethnic language, and abandoned it in favour of English for status and power.

Higher prestige for the language being shifted to is another feature of economically powerful languages especially if the language being shifted to is an international language like English (see 7.3.1.1). This was seen among several communities in India which shifted to English (Pandari pande, 1992) because of the status and prestige associated with the language and also because of the window of opportunity that the language provides, especially in the job markets. This was also seen in Malaysia (Kundra, 2000, Ramachandran, 2000, David, 1996) and Singapore (Li Wei, 2002).



### **3.3.4 The Impact of Education**

As parents become aware of the importance of education as a passport to a better life, they will ensure that their children are educated in the dominant language. Such a development can only mean a further shift from the ethnic language.

Parents typically want their children to receive the benefits of the more powerful language and therefore would ensure that their children are educated in the dominant language of the country. Studies conducted in Singapore by Saravanan (1992) and Gupta and Siew (1995) show that parents of minority groups ensured that their children received education in the dominant language. This education would then lead to opportunities that resulted in social prestige as well as economic benefits.

Minority communities that know of the benefits of education in the majority language sometimes, try to compensate through language classes in the ethnic language for their children so that the ethnic language is maintained. Minority communities in Australia, such as the Germans (Putz, 1994) and the Dutch (Bennett, 1992) however, found that even when support was provided through minority community language schools, language shift could not be prevented as their children shifted towards the language of the dominant community.

### **3.3.5 Government Regulations**

A further impetus to language shift is seen in governmental regulations and pressures. When a migrant community is forced by the host country's school and government language policies (see 1.3.6 and 5.2.1.1) to use a language other than the ethnic language, then language shift can occur because the proficiency of the ethnic language diminishes through the generations (David, 2001).

Language shift can occur even among the dominant community of a country through government policies and pressures. This is seen among the Singapore Chinese who make up 78% of the population. The government of Singapore's attempts to shape the country as a 'rational, modernizing society which has access to world markets and better living standards' (Li, 2001:122) has resulted in the acceptance of English as a national language in the island state.

### **3.3.6 Migration**

Another factor or condition that is commonly associated with language shift and maintenance studies is migration (see also 1.3.2 and 2.3.1). Language shift can happen when small groups of people migrate to an area where their language no longer serves them fully.

The migration of a community into a more dominant community very often results in the shifting of the ethnic language towards the more dominant language of the country. Several migrant communities arrived in Malaysia during colonial times

in the early decades of the twentieth century (see 1.3.2) resulting in a setting where several languages co-exist, as explained earlier. This has resulted in language shift for some minority communities. For example, some migrant communities, in Malaysia have shifted towards English or Malay in order to obtain jobs or for business purposes (see David, 1996, David and Nambiar, 2001, Kundra, 2000, Noriah, 1999) since their own ethnic languages do not serve this purpose well.

In other countries, too where ethnic minority communities have migrated in search of jobs such as in Australia (Putz, 1994; Smolicz, 1992; Clyne and Kipp, 1991) and Singapore (Sobiello, 1984, Saravanan, 1992; Li, 2002) language shift from the ethnic language occurs so that jobs could be found and maintained. The extent to which these communities maintained their ethnic languages depended on factors such as government support for the maintenance of the ethnic language and the involvement of the migrants themselves to keep the ethnic language alive.

Language shift is not only forced on those who migrate. It can be forced on the local population if the immigrants arrive in large numbers and populate the region. Migrants who out-populate the local population bring in a new language and if they are economically stronger or more powerful, are able to impose their language on the local population. This was the case with the Tiwa Indian community of New Mexico, when they found that the Spanish and English languages were slowly making inroads and taking over certain functions which were previously carried out in Tiwa (Fasold,

1984). The Ibans of Sarawak in Malaysia also found that the Malay language was forcing itself on them when Malays out-populated the Ibans (Noriah, 1991). This brought in the use of Malay for several functions previously conducted in Iban.

### **3.3.7 Resistance to Change**

While it is true that changes to minority language use occur frequently and are taken over by the language of the dominant community, there are some languages that are resistant to change and are being maintained by ethnic minorities at least in certain areas or domains (Smolicz, 1992). This can be seen in situations where language is essential for the practice of orthodox religious practices as seen among the Greek and Turkish minorities in Australia (Clyne and Kipp, 1996). The Punjabis (Kundra (2000) and the Sindhis (David (1996), two ethnic minority Indian communities of Malaysia, also maintained their ethnic languages in the religious domain. For a minority community like the Malaysian Iyers, who have a strong orthodox religious background (see 2.3.3.1), maintenance of the ethnic language in the religious area is examined in this study (see 5.2.4).

When a minority community is not dependant on the dominant community for jobs such as the Malaysian Chinese (Kong, 1999), the maintenance of their language is ensured even in the business domain as business is transacted in Mandarin. Other languages such as Malay and English are used only when necessary with non-Chinese clients. *This community resists changes to its language through the establishment of*

private schools which teach their ethnic language, thereby ensuring its survival (see 1.3.2) not only in the home but outside the home as well.

Attitudes to language can also signal either language shift or a resistance to it by minorities. When several languages co-exist in a multilingual environment, attitudes of favour or disfavour could exist. These attitudes can have a profound effect on whether a minority language is maintained or not (Grosjean, cited in Brampy, 1996). For example the French in Montreal maintained their ethnic language because of a nationalistic pride for their language (Lieberson, cited in Fasold, 1984) and used English only for work purposes.

#### **3.4 Concepts Relevant to the Study of Language Shift and Maintenance**

In this section, different theoretical applications to determine language shift and maintenance will be discussed. The domain construct, which is traditionally used to measure language shift, is discussed. The social network theory which proposes that close and dense networks maintain their ethnic language is also studied. Other applications such as the use of code-switching to determine the extent of language shift and Hymes' Ethnography of Communication are also discussed too.

It is seen from the preceding paragraphs that when a migrant group moves to an area where another language is dominant, the ethnic group's language use undergoes some changes. When the Iyers first migrated to Malaysia during the

British colonial times several factors that influence language shift existed: they were migrants who had arrived in a country where several languages were used: English was important from the point of view of obtaining jobs while Malay was the language of the dominant majority: government regulations prescribed the languages that were to be used for different purposes (see 2.3.1).

Fishman's (1968) pioneering work on language maintenance and shift has been a platform or starting point for subsequent researchers who have tried to understand and explain the relationship between change in habitual language use and the cultural, social, economic and psychological factors that cause this change to happen. Certain concepts have been associated with language shift and language maintenance in several studies. These are discussed in the following sections.

### **3.4.1 Domain**

The concept of the domain was made popular by Fishman. He describes domain as:

“ .... a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community , in such a way that individual behaviour and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other”.

(Fishman , 1972a:249)

The domain is the traditional theoretical construct that is used to analyse language shift (Fasold, 1984). The concept of domains in language usage was first introduced by students of language shift and maintenance among Auslandsdeutsche in pre World

War 2 multilingual settings. German settlers were in contact with many different non-German speaking populations in various types of contact settings and were exposed to various kinds of socio-cultural change processes. Fasold (1984:183) says that when there is a decline in the use of the ethnic language in domains where it is normally spoken then language shift from the ethnic language to a new language has begun.

A very important feature that determines the appropriate domains for language behaviour is an insight into the socio-cultural dynamics of the speech community being investigated. Different domains might be appropriate for different people at different settings and also at different times. For example, in immigrant-host contexts where only the host language is recognized in governmental functions, one would require domains other than the ones originally prescribed by Schmid-Rohr (Fasold, 1984) and perhaps even fewer domains.

Domains are important to the study of language shift and maintenance since communities are expected to be sensitive to the domain in which interactions take place. Use of language in each domain depends on the interlocutors, their relationships, the topic being discussed and the setting of the interaction (Fishman, 1972a).

### **3.4.1.1 Domain Analysis**

Domain analysis has been a favoured method of measuring language shift. This method can be described as a macro approach and is very useful in describing language variation and identifying societal norms. However, macro studies often rely on questionnaire surveys or on interviews with inherent limitations, such as respondents' answers not always reflecting actual behaviour (Vassberg, 1993:29).

A study of the language used in different domains aids in the understanding of language spoken among different people especially in cultures where there is bilingualism or multilingualism. Understanding the language of intra community talk and inter community talk by investigating language use in different domains, can also aid in the investigation of language shift and/or maintenance of the ethnic language. Domain analysis is common in language shift and maintenance studies and has been used in several studies about minority communities not only in Malaysia such as David (1996), Ramachandran (2000) and Kundra (2001) but also in studies abroad such as Putz (1994), Nannes (1996) and Clyne and Kipp (1996) in Australia, Greenfield (cited in Fasold 1984) and Fasold (1984) in the United States and Gal (1979) and Dorian (cited in Fasold, 1984) in Europe.

While domain analysis is an oft used method for analysing language use in different areas or domains of language use, researchers have also found that domain analysis can sometimes be rigid and demarcate an area for language use that may not



be so easily identifiable in reality (David, 1996). David argues further that the domain theory assumes that only one language is used in a domain consistently all the time while in reality that is not so as speakers make informed decisions of the appropriateness of a language during interactions or could code-switch from one language to another depending on the situation. Saxena (2002) adds on that the findings from quantitative approaches such as domain analysis can be misleading or can be manipulated if they are not supported by other methods that complement them through the study of actual language use.

Therefore, the study of the domains of language use is very useful when used with another research method which is ethnographic or qualitative in nature such as the examination of authentic taped speech events. This means that information obtained through domain analysis provides a macro picture of language use while a complementary approach that studies actual language use provides a micro picture of actual language use. When the two methods are used together, a more accurate picture language use is available. In the present study a domain based questionnaire is used together with the study of authentic audio taped conversations (see Chapter 5) so that both a macro and micro picture of language use is obtained.

### 3.4.1.2 Domains of Language Behaviour

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that an understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of a community is important when determining the appropriate domains to study language shift and language maintenance. Different domains might be appropriate for different people in different settings and at different times. The original domains recommended by Schmidt-Rohr (Fasold:1984) were the following nine: (1) the family, (2) the playground and street, (3) the school, (4) the church, (5) literature, (6) the press, (7) the military, (8) the courts and (9) governmental administration. Other researchers have subsequently added to this original list to include the workplace domain.

Researchers have used domains that were appropriate to their studies. For example, Parasher (cited in Fasold, 1984) used seven domains: family, friendship, neighbourhood, transactions, education, government and employment, when studying language use among educated people in two cities in India, while Greenfield (cited in Fasold, 1984) used only five domains; family, friendship, religion, education and employment, to study the use of Spanish and English among Puerto Ricans in New York. In Malaysia, David (1996) used the home, work and religious domains for her study of language shift among the Sindhis, a minority Indian community. Therefore it would appear that the number of domains to be included in a study is dependant on the profile of the 'community being studied and the larger environment in which it exists' (David, 1996:40).

Although the type of domains that are examined depends on the study and its objectives, certain domains, however, have been consistently examined. For instance the family domain is a very crucial domain for the study of language shift and maintenance. It appears consistently in language shift studies while other domains such as social, religious and workplace domains are not consistently investigated. The ethnic language very often depends on the family for encouragement and protection and therefore the family and home may be considered the bastion of language maintenance. When an ethnic language has been displaced from other domains, it withdraws into the security and intimacy of the home domain and therefore an examination of language use in the home domain is considered important. For example, Ninnes' (1996) study of Vietnamese students in Australia found that Vietnamese was used more with parents and grandparents in the home than in other domains. Pascasio and Hidalgo (1979) found the same with Filipino college students as they used more Filipino at home and more English in school and social settings. Noriah's (1991) study of the the Ibans of Sarawak showed that they used Malay at work and in school while they used Iban at home. A decline in the use of the ethnic language or the intrusion of another language into the home domain can signal the process of language shift.

Other domains such as the workplace, school and places of worship are also important if the community being investigated places importance on them. For example, a migrant community would normally be faced with the more dominant

language of the majority community in the school and workplace while the ethnic language is expected to be used in places of worship. Kundra (2000), in a study of urban Punjabis in Malaysia found that they used Punjabi in the religious domain but that they had shifted to English in all other domains examined including the home domain. In Australia, Clyne and Kipp (1996) report that the religious domain was important for communities with a strong orthodox religious background such as the Greeks and the Turks. These communities were successful in the maintenance of their ethnic language in this domain. In Malaysia, the Malay community uses Arabic for Muslim prayers while religious lectures are in Malay (Nor Hisham, 1991). So two languages can be used for one domain depending on the role that each language plays.

Social relations are very important in every speech community (Kerswill, 1994:8) and therefore a measurement of the language used among ethnic members when they socialize would be indicative of how much of the ethnic language is maintained. The social domain would be important to a community such as the Malaysian Iyers which has close and dense network ties (see 2.2.4) with one another. The social domain is one where language among friends can be examined. A decline in the use of the ethnic language in the social or friendship domain would be indicative of the process of language shift.

In a study where the measurement of language proficiency is important, the formal domain of reading and writing is important. This information will allow

speculation or prediction of future maintenance trends. A decline in the language proficiency of the ethnic language among members of the community will indicate the possibility of language shift, especially if the older generation is more proficient in the ethnic language than the younger generations. A generational decline in the proficiency of the ethnic language and in the use of the language in the domains used would indicate language shift.

The background study of Malaysian Iyers shows that they have formed an association to cater to their social and religious needs (2.4.1). In the light of such information it was decided that apart from the home, as the 'last bastion of a subordinate language' (Dorian, cited in Fasold, 1984:225), the language of religious and social domains have to be examined. A decline in the habitual use of the ethnic language in the religious domain could be indicative of language shift since religion is an important part of the Malaysian Iyer heritage (see also 2.3.3.7).

Having taken into consideration the lifestyle of the Malaysian Iyers (Chapter 2) and the importance that they have placed on religion, the religious domain was examined. The reading/writing domain has also been selected for investigation to find out if, as immigrants in a new country, the education which they coveted in India is being pursued in Malaysia and if so in which language it is undertaken. The home and family which has been identified as a crucial domain in the investigation of language shift and maintenance has also been included. Finally, the social domain was included to examine language used to communicate among themselves as a

community. The four domains mentioned above i.e. home and family, religious, social practices and reading/writing activities have been examined in this study.

#### **3.4.1.3 Role-Relations within Domains**

When a domain is studied, the language used in that domain needs to be examined through the people who play a role within that particular domain. Fishman (1972a) says that each domain can be differentiated into role-relations that are typical of it. This means that the language used in each domain by a person is examined against all the different people with whom he or she interacts with in that domain. For example, in the home domain, the language used by a person with his/her father, mother, grandparents, siblings, etc. is examined to examine if there is a difference in the language used for each relationship that is examined. In communities where religion plays an important part, the religious domain may reveal language use among the different persons playing roles within that domain to see if there are differences in the language used with different people.

Gal (1979) found in her research study of Hungarian peasants in Oberwart in Austria that language choice could be predicted on the basis of interlocutor only. She used an implicational scale which listed interlocutors and marked the respondents' choice of language against the scale. Older friends and relatives were addressed in Hungarian while younger ones were addressed in German showing that the ethnic language was maintained in communication with older people but not so much with

the younger ones. Therefore a difference in the language used for different persons in any one domain could signal language shift.

Topics of conversation, relationship between communicators and the locales where communication takes place can have an effect on language choice as individuals act with consideration and thought and not on momentary impulses (Fishman, 1972). Variance in language use by different speakers in different situations occur because interlocutors are socially motivated and this motivation plays an important role in language choice (Gal , 1979).

### **3.4.2 Social Networks**

Milroy (1992:182) suggests that a close-knit network structure is:

an important mechanism of language maintenance in that speakers are able to form a cohesive group capable of resisting pressure, linguistic and social, from outside the group.

The concept of the social network as a factor in language maintenance was advanced by Milroy (1992) who showed that the existence of social networks among minority ethnic communities, living among a more dominant social group, is a factor that aids ethnic language maintenance. The concept of a network is that 'people interact meaningfully as individuals in addition to being part of a structured institution such as class, caste or occupational group'. The term network refers to the 'informal social relationships contracted by an individual'. The term network refers to the 'informal social relationships contracted by an individual' (Milroy, 1992: 178).

A social network may be formed through informal values and everyday social relationships of the inhabitants of a neighbourhood or geographical area. The social network can be used to explain social behaviour of individuals (Boissevain cited in Milroy, 1992). A close-knit network can act as a norm enforcement mechanism by protecting its members from outside linguistic pressures (Milroy, 1982:212).

#### **3.4.2.1 Open and Closed Networks**

Belonging to a network or a group where people have strong ties to one another can have an impact on language use. These networks may have limited value when they are used only for transactions. If the network is used for social purposes where one's individuality is emphasised, then the social network has wider value attached to it (Gumperz, 1964).

'Open' networks where groups interact with people outside of one's group usually prompts the shifting of language while 'closed' networks where people communicate within their own group aids in maintaining the ethnic language (Labov, 1968, Ervin – Tripp, 1971). The extent to which a network is 'closed' or 'open' aids in determining the extent of shift away from the ethnic language (Affendras, 1974). Members of a closed network (see 2.4) interact primarily within a defined territory (2.3.2) and usually know all members of the network (2.4.1) whereas members of an open network tend to move outside of the territorial boundaries and have contacts who do not necessarily know each other.



Blom and Gumperz (cited in Milroy, 1992:20) found that low status workers moved in closed networks while upper middle classes moved in open networks. The ones who moved in closed and dense networks were found to have loyalty to non-standard dialects. Labov (in Chambers, 1995:69) studied young black teenagers who belonged to street gangs and found that they shared a non-standard vernacular that was understood only through membership to the gangs. The fact that these teenagers belonged to a network aided the maintenance of a vernacular that was not the standard. Linguistic norms that could be understood only through membership to these gangs were enforced by these closed networks.

#### **3.4.2.2 Dense Networks**

Closed and open networks are also called high density or low density personal networks. The density of the network was connected to status based on whether one was affluent or a wage earner. In a dense network individuals are linked to one another as 'co-employee, kinsman and friend' (Milroy, 1992:21). It was also found that this is especially so with low income groups. The 'low status' wage earner usually formed a kind of network tie called a multiplex tie (2.4.2) where they mingled in several capacities (such as friend and co-worker) in contrast to uniplex ties of the elite who associated with locals in a single capacity only (usually in a business capacity).

A dense social network is able to maintain its ethnic language. For example, Hungarian peasants in Oberwart valued their network structure more than social

status when it came to language loyalty. Despite the high status assigned to German, there was no shift from Hungarian to German because the Hungarian language was a symbol of their group identity (Gal, 1979). According to Gal, group identity can be measured in several ways depending on the subjects' conception of the relationship between linguistic and social facts. In her study, the extent of 'peasantness' (1979:131) of the subjects was taken into account to measure group identity.

Germans in Canberra who belonged to a social network system through an organization maintained their ethnic language better than those who did not. This organization forged a close and dense network tie for its members through regular meetings and social get-togethers (Putz, 1994). The situation is similar to that of the Malaysian Iyers, who have also formed an association (see 2.4.1), which has aided in the forging of a close and dense network among its members.

Milroy (1992) worked on the network concept further when she studied three working class communities of Belfast that were highly insular and dense in their network patterns. A numerical score, called the network score, was used to measure the personal relationships of individuals within the community. The networks were categorized according to geographical location, status and religion. She found that those with strong network ties used the 'stigmatised' and low status vernacular the most because the network systems helped in maintaining the communities' ethnic language (Milroy, 1992:213).

She further suggests that, the social network concept is capable of 'universal applicability' (1992:178). By this Milroy suggests that closely knit communities, no matter which part of the world they are from, and who have strong network ties among themselves should be capable of maintaining their ethnic language. The idea of the universal applicability of this theory is explored in the following section.

### **3.4.2.3 Social Networks in Malaysia**

The social network theory of language maintenance has been tested in three dense and close communities in Malaysia. In the first study, David (1996) found that the Malaysian Sindhi community, a close and dense network community linked by kinship and occupational ties, were shifting away from their ethnic language to English and Malay due to the economic value attached to these two languages in comparison to Sindhi.

Another minority community, the Portuguese Eurasians of Melaka (Ramachandran, 2000; David and Faridah, 1997) were found to be shifting away from their ethnic language of Kristang to English despite residing as a close-knit community in the Portuguese Settlement of Melaka. This was due to the socio-economic value placed on English when compared to Kristang, which was spoken mainly among the elderly within the settlement.

A third study of another ethnic minority community, the Malayalees of Malaysia (Govindasamy and Nambiar, 2003), who are linked by migration and friendship ties,

are shifting away from Malayalam to English as it (English) is considered the language of economic mobility.

In the Malaysian context therefore, the question of the universal applicability of Milroy's social network theory of language maintenance needs further investigation. Sometimes, for a very small minority community which struggles for integration within a dominant culture and faces government regulations regarding the maintenance and promotion of the national language, the ethnic language may not survive despite the close and dense networks that exist; especially so, if an international language such as English is considered an essential ingredient for the job market. This was the case for language shift among some Malaysian ethnic minorities as seen with the Sindhis (David, 1996), the Portuguese Eurasians (Ramachandran, 2000, David and Faridah, 1997) and the Malayalees (Govindasamy and Nambiar, 2003).

The Malaysian Iyer community was studied through home visits and interviews. They were found to have close ties with one another through migration and kinship ties (see 2.4.2). They also belonged to an organisation that aimed to promote social, cultural and religious activities. It can therefore be hypothesised that this community too, should be able to preserve their language as seen in both Milroy's (1992) and Putz's (1994) studies where communities with strong ties preserved their ethnic language when faced with the threat of a more dominant language overtaking their ethnic language.

The Malaysian Iyers are, in fact, in a better position to maintain Tamil than the other minority communities such as the Sindhis, Malayalees and Portuguese Eurasians. This is because Tamil is offered in primary schools and secondary schools for those who wish to pursue it. The comparison is nevertheless made because firstly, the Malaysian Iyers are in fact a minority community in Malaysia and minority communities generally find it difficult to maintain their ethnic language and be integrated with the rest of the populace and be developed economically at the same time (Kundra, 2000; David, 1996; Ravichandran,1996).

### **3.4.3 Code-switching**

Language shift from one language to another does not take place overnight. It is in fact a process that occurs over an extended period of time. Code-switching from one language to another is likely to occur in the interim phase of language shift and is a common characteristic in bilingual or multilingual settings (David, 1996).

When there is a shift from one language to another in bilingual or multilingual situations, two (or more) languages can often be used in a single conversation through code-switching. The decision to use two languages usually stems from a desire to reap the rewards that accrue from using the two languages (Myers Scotton, 1979). Code-switching or the use of different codes (of language) for different reasons such as lack of adequate knowledge of a particular subject in a particular language, the need to exclude certain persons from a conversation or to signal a change in the tone

of the conversation (for example from informal to formal) is often seen as a safe choice by speakers who wish to reap rewards from the use of two languages (Pride, 1979).

The phenomenon of code-switching is sometimes seen as a safe choice by Myers Scotton (1979:71). She reasons that 'code-switching often takes place because the switcher recognizes that the use of either of two languages has its value in terms of rewards and costs which accrue to the user. The switcher chooses the 'middle road' in terms of possible rewards and decides to use both languages in a single conversation''.

#### **3.4.3.1 Reasons Why People Code-switch**

Four main reasons for codeswitching have been put forth in the past by sociolinguists such as Gumperz (1982) and Fishman (1972c). Lack of knowledge or understanding of one language or the lack of facility in that language on a particular subject is one reason. Switching will be necessary from one language to another for some parts of a conversation to fill in the gaps in the knowledge or understanding of a language. Code-switching is also useful in excluding certain persons present from a portion of the conversation if it is known that these persons have no knowledge of the language used for switching. Code-switching is sometimes used as a stylistic device to indicate change in the 'tone' of the conversation at a certain point. This could occur when a person wishes to be more or less formal – using a formal language for serious talk and a less formal one for casual or less serious talk. Lastly, a person could use code-

interactions (Hymes, 1977). Part of communicative competence is the understanding of such rules or traditions of the community.

Rules of interaction can be understood when a community's socio-cultural practices are investigated (Hymes, 1977; see also 2.3.3). Interpretation of a community's speech patterns would depend on the belief system of a community. The communicative competence of a community should include the understanding of the rules of interaction and interpretation of community values. When a community shifts from its ethnic language to another more dominant language for reasons of survival and economic necessity, they do not lose their identity completely. Part of a community's communicative strategies includes what is said and done within a framework of cultural knowledge because what is said and done has meaning only within such a context. Schiffrin (1994:185) explains this well when she says:

The ways that we organize and conduct our lives through language are thus ways of being and doing that are not only relative to other possibilities for communicating, but also deeply embedded within the particular framework by which we – as members of our own specific communities – make sense out of experience.

An understanding of the rules of communication that exist within each community is important to interpreting them. Rules regarding face saving devices such as non-confrontation and avoidance of a direct affront can be found in some communities such as the Vakinankaratra of Madagascar (Keenan, 1974:126). Other customs such as visiting neighbours daily just to check that all is well exists with Eskimos in Iceland (Coulthard, 1985:56), politeness and power strategies to maintain

is more proficient in as seen among Malay students in secondary schools (Ong, 1990).

Metaphorical code-switches occur when speaker motivation contributes to language choice. For example, code-switches can be made so that some can be excluded from a conversation or for group intimacy (Dorian, 1991). Metaphorical code-switches can also be made for various reasons such as for quoting, for distancing oneself from a person or a group, for intimacy, for repeating a message or for withholding information, (Gumperz, and Cook-Gumperz 1982).

There is a longstanding and multiplex discussion on how to draw a line between code-switching, code-mixing, borrowing and transfer. This indicates that the problem is a heuristic one, which links up to linguistic theory (Franceschini, 1998). Usually, the notion of a “code” or a “language” is presupposed in the literature on code-switching. However, seen from the perspective of the language user (and the intuitions of the members of a speech community), this pre-supposition is sometimes questioned. While single word borrowings from one language to another in which the conversation is being conducted does not always mean a complete switch to another language, this mixing of codes or code-mixing as it is more commonly known can be seen as a variety alternation rather than code-switching (Alvarez-Caccamo, 1998). For the purposes of this study, all switches from one language to another are considered code-switches. A distinction is not drawn between code-switching, borrowing, transfer and code-mixing.



In this study transcripts of authentic conversations held during intra community gatherings were studied to investigate the extent of language shift from the Tamil language to other languages. The incidence of code-switching was examined to discover the 'dominant' or main language used during conversations and the 'embedded' or intrusive languages that intruded into conversations so that the extent to which language shift was occurring could be examined.

#### **3.4.4 The Ethnography of Communication**

While domain analysis is capable of providing a macro picture of language maintenance and language shift, and code-switches tell us more about individual language choice, neither method facilitates an examination of what is said or meant beyond the words used in communication. Language maintenance and language shift should be investigated beyond what is said because different societies speak differently. These differences reflect different societal values and norms (Wierzbicka, 1994). In this study, one of the objectives is to investigate possible reasons for language shift. A study of the ethnography of communication will aid in finding answers to this research objective.

##### **3.3.4.1 Shared Community Norms**

Community differences make a difference to the ethnography of communication because 'every society has a shared set of norms' (Wierzbicka, 1994:83) which only they understand. These differences can lead to very different 'expectations and rights

among speakers' (Gumperz, 1982:12). If one wants to know reasons why people shift from one language to another, then one needs to be aware of the rules that govern speaking in the second language (Bamgbose, 1994). To achieve native-like competence in a second language one has to shift from one's native culture to the culture of the second language, otherwise there is bound to be interference in communication.

However, if one were to acquire a second language, it can disrupt the basics achieved in the first language. This can result in bilinguals losing a part of themselves in the process of acquiring another language because membership to a community makes language functional for communication (Ehlich, 1994:115). This then brings about the question of language as a measure of one's identity. Researchers such as Pandaripande (1992) found no co-relation between loss of language and loss of identity in her study of language shift in India. David (2001:194), too found the same with the Malaysian Sindhis. She states that 'The Malaysian Sindhis...fiercely proud of their ethnicity.....do not appear to see language maintenance as critical for the preservation of their culture and identity'. Therefore the fear that the acquisition of a second (or third) language could erode one's ability in the first language needs to be investigated although some research shows, as seen above, that identity is not necessarily affected in the process of acquiring a second language.

#### **3.3.4.2 Societal Rules of Interaction and Interpretation**

Variation in a community's speech patterns can sometimes hinder proper communication of the speaker's intentions. Communicative intent could sometimes be unsuccessful due to a lack of understanding of the speech patterns used by the speakers. This is because the cultural background of the speakers plays a role in communicative patterns (Clyne, 1994). In order to understand differences or variations in communicative intent, a 'communicative competence' (Hymes, 1977:60) is required. Communicative competence refers, broadly, to the acquisition of the ability to understand the grammatical system of a language as well as the system of its use such as the attitudes and beliefs regarding language use. A member of a community has communicative competence when 'he is able to participate in it as a communicative member' (Hymes, 1977: 61).

The above views do not mean that communication across different communities is not possible. Cross cultural communication is made possible because a 'universal conversational contract' (Keesing, 1994:4) makes such communication possible to be understood despite the differences in culture.

Each community will attach specific behaviours and proprieties to speaking. These may be considered to be the unwritten rules which govern speaking. Rules on appropriate behaviour during speech events such as one should not interrupt or one may do so freely, turn taking rules etc. will be enforced by the community during

interactions (Hymes, 1977). Part of communicative competence is the understanding of such rules or traditions of the community.

Rules of interaction can be understood when a community's socio-cultural practices are investigated (Hymes, 1977; see also 2.3.3). Interpretation of a community's speech patterns would depend on the belief system of a community. The communicative competence of a community should include the understanding of the rules of interaction and interpretation of community values. When a community shifts from its ethnic language to another more dominant language for reasons of survival and economic necessity, they do not lose their identity completely. Part of a community's communicative strategies includes what is said and done within a framework of cultural knowledge because what is said and done has meaning only within such a context. Schiffrin (1994:185) explains this well when she says:

The ways that we organize and conduct our lives through language are thus ways of being and doing that are not only relative to other possibilities for communicating, but also deeply embedded within the particular framework by which we – as members of our own specific communities – make sense out of experience.

An understanding of the rules of communication that exist within each community is important to interpreting them. Rules regarding face saving devices such as non-confrontation and avoidance of a direct affront can be found in some communities such as the Vakinankaratra of Madagascar (Keenan, 1974:126). Other customs such as visiting neighbours daily just to check that all is well exists with Eskimos in Iceland (Coulthard, 1985:56), politeness and power strategies to maintain

privilege among church leaders (Pearson, 1988), expressing social status through different modes of greeting (Irvine, 1974) and direct confrontation strategies among Arabs (Watson and Graves, cited in Coulthard, 1985) exist among different ethnic communities. Therefore, without a clear understanding of the underlying rules of each community's social norms it will be difficult to interpret language use.

In order to investigate possible reasons for language shift and to understand the efforts put in to maintain the ethnic language, it is important to have an understanding of the community's socio-cultural practices as these will give insight into the community's value system. The Malaysian Iyers' social and cultural practices were studied (see 2.3.3) so that better insights can be had on their motivations to shift from their ethnic language or their efforts to preserve the Tamil language.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Language shift is a common phenomenon which occurs among minority immigrant communities that live in the midst of a more dominant society. Bilingualism and/ or multilingualism, economic power of a language, socio-economic changes, government regulation and migration can act as catalysts for language shift. In order to maintain ethnic language and preserve it for posterity, a community needs to resist internal and external pressures and put in place maintenance efforts.

Studies, conducted by some researchers, such as Gal (1989), Milroy (1992) and Putz (1994) have shown that ethnic minorities that have forged close ties with one

another through social networks are able to maintain their ethnic language. However, in Malaysia some minority communities have found that maintenance of their ethnic language has disappeared into the realm of the home or religion although the communities belong to a close and dense social network. The relevance of the social network as a mechanism for language maintenance is an issue that is worth studying as it has produced conflicting results in different societies.

The phenomenon of language shift occurs mainly when the setting is right – that is, when a community migrates to a place where their language no longer serves them fully and when external pressures force language choices on them. To what extent they are successful in maintaining their language is dependant on their own motivation to preserve their language and the extent to which assistance is provided through the government and political system that they live in.

The selection of the approach to assessing language shift depends on the objective of the study. The approaches to measuring language shift are several both qualitative and quantitative such as network analysis and domain analysis for example. Qualitative approaches have been used by researchers to provide general information about language use among a community. Quantitative approaches aid in providing statistical information that helps researchers make generalizations on the patterns of language use for example language use in different domains. Qualitative approaches are used when individual language choice and motivations need to be studied such as

the need to maintain a social network, status and so on. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to investigate language shift.

The most traditional approach used by researchers to investigate language shift is domain analysis. This approach requires the investigation of language use in the different domains where language is used. Role-relations, settings and locales are thought to have an impact on language use. This method, though useful, is thought to be an inadequate tool that could provide misleading results. Therefore, in order to get a clearer and more accurate picture of language use, other methods such as the incidence of code-switching and the ethnography of communication are used together with domain analysis in this study. This ensures that the discourse patterns that are studied go beyond what is said and investigate possible motivations and reasons that motivate language shift. Efforts put in to maintain ethnic language use can also be examined using the methods mentioned earlier that is, domain analysis and ethnography of communication.

A macro picture of the language use of the Malaysian Iyers was obtained through statistical analysis of questionnaires while tapescripts of authentic intra community conversations were analysed using the qualitative approach to investigate individual language choice and the underlying motivations so that a micro picture of language use is also obtained for a better and clearer understanding of the possible reasons for language shift and the motivations for maintaining language. The methodology used in this study is explained in the next chapter.