

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the methodology used to obtain and analyse the data relevant for achieving the research objectives stated in Chapter 1. The chapter will firstly outline the research approach used in this study, then it will describe the data collection and data analysis methods.

4.2 Research Approach

The approach used in the study includes quantitative methods used by sociolinguists for obtaining statistical information such as the questionnaire (see Appendix A) so that an approximation of the extent to which the subjects have shifted or maintained their ethnic language could be measured. In addition, qualitative research techniques were employed to analyse the dynamics of language use among the subjects, so that the process of language shift can be understood. This type of information was obtained through interviews (Appendix B), personal observations (Appendix C) and audio-taped conversations of authentic situations (Appendix D).

A synchronic study of three generations of Malaysian Iyers was made in order to obtain an overall picture of the extent of language shift among the subjects. A closer micro level study of language use among the Malaysian Iyers was also made in order

to obtain information that may reveal the reasons why the subjects shifted or maintained their ethnic language. Questionnaire (Appendix A) data from 291 respondents provided an overall picture of language use while audio-taped authentic conversations of 115 (Appendix D) provided evidence of language shift patterns. A background study of the community was facilitated through 50 home visits (Appendix C) and interviews with first generation elders of the community (Appendix B) while interviews with leaders of the Malaysian Tamil community supplemented information regarding the Tamil environment in Malaysia.

The questionnaire responses were subjected to statistical analyses (SPSS 7.0) to yield language shift patterns and areas of maintenance based on frequency counts and percentages of responses. The taped conversations were listened to, transcribed and studied for dominant and intrusive language patterns as well as the functions of the ethnic language. The above findings, when triangulated, are expected to provide possible answers about language maintenance and shift within the Malaysian Iyer community.

Quantitative methods such as the questionnaire when used on a large sample facilitates the large scale gathering of information and can provide very useful insights when gauging trends in language shift or maintenance patterns. Such a quantitative method does, however, present certain limitations. David (1996:60) reports that such information could reflect individual perceptions rather than

objective reality while Saxena (2002:37) thinks that findings could be 'distorted or misleading' if they are not scrutinized with the aid of another instrument. In order to overcome the limitations found in quantitative methods, a qualitative method such as audio taping of individuals will provide more authentic and accurate information about actual language use. When used together, qualitative and quantitative methods can support one another and results could be more reliable.

Due to the limitations of the questionnaire method (described in the preceding paragraph), qualitative methods were chosen for this study to complement statistical information on language shift among Malaysian Iyers because the nature of this study is better suited to a qualitative approach. The issue of language shift and reasons why people shift to another language depends on the perceptions of the people under study and the social and cultural environment in which they exist. Therefore the process of research in this study is data driven where patterns of language use are derived from the data collected. Generally when dealing in non-numerical data, ('usually linguistic units in oral or written form') a qualitative approach is used (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989: 201). Thus, this approach was selected for the purpose of attempting to find reasons why the subjects of this study shift or maintain their ethnic language.

4.3 Data Collection

As stated earlier, data was collected for this study in three different ways. In order to detail a socio-cultural history of the Malaysian Iyers, 50 home visits were made and interviews with first generation Malaysian Iyers were held. Then, to get an overall picture of language use among the Malaysian Iyers, a questionnaire was administered. Audio tapes were made of intra community conversations to get samples of authentic language use among the Malaysian Iyers. Interviews with professionals working on the maintenance of the Tamil language in Malaysia were conducted to supplement available information on the subject.

The sample studied is a small and close knit (3.2.4) urban (see 3.2.5) community. Access to the community was facilitated by the fact that the researcher is a member of this community. Due to the lack of information on the early arrival and migration of the Iyers to Malaysia, a number of first generation Iyers were interviewed during home visits to document the history of their migration to Malaysia (see 3.2.3). Home visits also aided in documenting traditions and customs practised by the community. The information obtained through the interviews and home visits enabled a study of the ethnography of communication (made possible through the audio taping and participant observation of social discourse between community members).

In the following section, the research samples used for the questionnaire, the audio taping, and the interviews are described in detail. The content of the

questionnaire and the method of audio taping the authentic conversations are also presented.

4.3.1 The Research Sample

The research sample used for each one of the research instruments that were used in the study, that is, the questionnaire, the observations and the interviews are described in this section.

4.3.2.1 The Sample used for the Questionnaire

All the participants of this study are Malaysian Iyer residents of Peninsula Malaysia. The names and addresses of the participants were made available through the Brahmana Samajam Malaysia (BSM) Membership Directory, 1999. This is an association of Tamil Brahmins in Malaysia (see 3.2.3.3). 600 questionnaires were distributed to the members of the community in September 1999. In total, 291 respondents or 48.5% sent back the questionnaires, duly completed (see Table 4.1).

Of the 291 respondents who returned the questionnaires, 28.5% were from the first generation, 40.9% were from the second generation while 30.6% were from the third generation (see Table 4.1). An age profile was not used in this study as it was felt that the languages that each generation started off with were more important than their age profile. The first generation are those who came from India and therefore came with a knowledge of Tamil and English. The second generation were born here

of first generation parents and went to school during the British times. These respondents used English as the medium of education and learnt Malay as a subject in school while the third generation used Malay as the medium of education and learnt English as a subject. Most of the first generation learnt Tamil in India while the second and third generation had to learn Tamil from relatives or through tuition as not many reported studying in the Tamil medium in Malaysia.

Table 4.1

	G1	G2	G3	Total
Gender				
Male	45	52	57	154 (53%)
Female	38	67	32	137 (47%)
Total	83 (28.5%)	119 (40.9%)	89 (30.6%)	291 (100%)

Key: 'G' stands for generation

Profile of the Questionnaire Respondents

Of the 255 members listed by the BSM Membership Directory of 1999, only 28 members (0.39%) are female members. The researcher was informed by the President of the Association (1999) that it is sufficient for the head of the household to become a member and it usually is a male member as the community works on a patriarchal system (see 3.2.5.6). However, all members of the family are entitled to attend functions in the Association, even if only one person in the family is registered as a member. The female members are mostly widows who become members of the Association as the next head of household on the death of the male head of household, or unmarried ladies who become members on their own accord.

The researcher consulted the Vice-President of the Association in 1999 to determine the number of people living in each member's household and sent out enough questionnaires for each member in a household to fill in individually. 600 people (above the age of ten) were identified in this way and questionnaires were posted to them together with a reply paid envelope. The rationale for choosing respondents above the age of ten is that at that age the participant would have spent enough years in school to have picked up Malay and English and therefore the dominant language used would be more noticeable with these individuals. As there were no members listed as living in Sabah or Sarawak, the study does not cover East Malaysia.

4.3.2.2 The Sample used in the Audio Taped Conversations

While questionnaires were sent out to every member listed in the BSM Membership Directory, the participants of the audio taped authentic conversations were selected so that three generations were included. There was a deliberate effort to include participants of both sexes. A total of 115 people were taped, of whom 47 (40.9%) were male and 68 (59.1%) were female. Of these, 13 women and 11 men (20.9%) were first generation, 16 women and 33 men (42.6%) were second generation while 22 girls and 20 boys (36.5%) were third generation (Table 4.2).

When taping conversations in the home, efforts were made to select those homes which had three generations living together so that inter-generational conversations could be observed and taped. In the social domain, attempts were made to tape peer conversations as well as inter-generational conversations. In this effort, first, second and third generation peer conversations were taped so that the dynamics of language use among different generations could be assessed or analysed. Conscious effort was made not to skew the conversations in any particular direction or to select particular participants for the event.

Table 4.2

Gender	G1	G2	G3	Total
Male	11	16	20	47(40.9%)
Female	13	33	22	68(59.1%)
Total	24(20.9%)	49(42.6%)	42(36.5%)	115(100%)

Profile of Respondents for Audio-Taped Conversations

The researcher attended two weddings, two *upanayanams* (initiation ceremony for young boys to be admitted into the Brahmin clan) ceremonies, a dinner at a member's house, a food fair organized by the BSM and made nine home visits. During these functions, permission was sought for conversations to be taped. It is customary during functions such as weddings and *upanayanams* to invite members of the community from various parts of the country to attend these occasions and many do attend. The

researcher accompanied about 80 members of the community on a social retreat organised by the BSM to the seaside resort town of Port Dickson for two days. During this time, several conversations among respondents of different generations and sexes were taped. All visits are shown in Table 3.3. Conversations in the home, social and religious domains were taped during intra community functions as detailed below (for information and rationale on selection of domains please refer 3.4.1.3). Permission was obtained from respondents prior to taping . One committee meeting was taped to find out if the formality of the setting had an impact on language choice.

Table 4.3

Function	Number
Interactions in the Home (Home Domain)	9
Interactions at Social Functions (Social Domain)	3
Interactions at Religious Functions (Religious Domain)	4
Formal Committee Meeting (Formal Domain)	1
Total	17

Functions attended for Observations and Audio Taping

4.3.2.3 The Sample used for the Interviews

Two sets of interviews were conducted for two separate reasons. First, seven first generation elders (see Appendix B) were interviewed in order to document the history of this community's migration patterns to Malaysia. The seven members were found with the help of the BSM. All the seven members were first migrants to Malaysia from India and were very elderly and had arrived early in the twentieth century. During the course of writing this thesis three of the seven members passed away. Although several other first generation Iyers were available they were not interviewed as several of them arrived after support networks had been set up.

Second, six senior members of the Malaysian Tamil academic community were interviewed in order to gauge the extent to which Tamil is maintained in Malaysia. This was done to supplement written documentation on the status and development of Tamil in Malaysia (see Appendix B).

Finally, a sociolinguistic expert on Tamil from the Oriental Research Institute of the University of Madras, Marina Campus; Professor Dr. Deiva Sundaram was interviewed to supplement available information on Tamil language varieties and their use.

4.4 The Research Instruments

Four instruments were used in the study in order to find answers to the research questions. They were:

- Observations
- Interviews
- Audio-taped recordings
- Questionnaire

4.4.1 Observations

Observations were made of the Malaysian Iyer community through home visits and audio taping in authentic and natural situations so that language patterns and language preferences could be studied. Observations were made personally by the researcher during home visits, while interviewing and during audio taping so that findings can be triangulated (see Appendix D). Personal observations and the taped conversations were documented from the field notes and the audio-tapes. In order to understand customs and practices observed by this community, visits were made to 50 homes (see Appendix B1) in Kuala Lumpur and the Petaling Jaya areas, where they were mostly concentrated (see 3.2.5). As a member of the community, she found that access to members' homes was not difficult.

As the main aim of the observations was to obtain ethnographic information about the community, the researcher visited the homes with an open mind to firstly observe commonalities in the way the homes appeared or were managed. Once these personal observations were made and many commonalities were observed especially

with regard to how the kitchen was managed and religious altars were maintained, further enquiries were made with reference to socio-cultural patterns such as joint/extended family arrangements and patriarchy so that patterns could be seen.

Observations were also made by the researcher while audio taping conversations among members of the Malaysian Iyer community. The audio taping of conversations was supplemented with participant observation of community interaction while engaging in social discourse. At most times, the researcher took on a silent role observing and making notes rather than taking part in the conversation. At times, though the researcher did take part in the conversations, especially if asked about something. The subject of language maintenance was brought up at every available occasion to gauge subjects' attitudes towards the maintenance of the Tamil language.

The observations were both open and unstructured for the most part. While observing, the researcher recorded any shifts in the use of language and noted down possible reasons for such shifts. For example, in several instances, a language shift or code-switching was seen from one language to another by younger speakers to accommodate older speakers who were not proficient in English. The same strategy was used by older speakers to accommodate younger speakers who could not follow the trend of a conversation conducted in Tamil due to low proficiency in the language. These instances were observed and recorded. Although the observations did not follow any rigid structured pattern and the researcher had an open mind with regard

to the data being recorded, the following checklist was formulated before the observations as a guide:

1. Did the speaker ask for a translation?
2. Was L1 (Tamil language) used with peers?
3. Was L2 (English or Malay) used with peers?
4. Did the participant shift to a different language to accommodate others?
5. Did the participant shift to a different language to fill gaps in language proficiency?
6. Did the participant show respect for a speaker through the selection of language?
7. Did the participant use terms in the ethnic language (Tamil) for any particular purpose?

The aim of these observations were to complement the audio recordings and to understand the actual language use.

4.4.2 Interviews

The purpose of the interviews (face to face interaction) was to obtain information by actually talking to the subjects. In this study, first generation respondents were interviewed in order to gauge information about the history of the Iyers' arrival in Malaysia. For this purpose, interviews were held with seven early migrants who were able to relate their experiences of how they arrived in Malaysia and their subsequent integration into Malaysian society.

The interviews were conducted with the specific purpose of discovering information leading to how they arrived, the purpose of migration, the networks that they formed, the difficulties faced and how they obtained employment. Although the researcher had specific aims to cover during the interviews, these interviews were made to resemble informal talks that allowed the respondent freedom of expression that sometimes provided unexpected information. Moreover, the interviewees were much older than the respondent and did not like to be interrupted as they spoke (it was considered rude to interrupt one's elders). The researcher listened and guided the interview towards information that she was looking for while at the same time allowing the respondent to deviate and speak at length about their experiences, their problems and so on.

A second round of interviews was held with six leaders of the Tamil community of Malaysia so that information on the background of the Tamil language in this country and the reality of how the language is used and their opinions on the future of the Tamil language in Malaysia could be gauged. These interviews supplemented available research information on the subject. A schedule of questions was used for this purpose:

1. Could you tell me something about the history of the Tamils in Malaysia: their migration, settlement etc?
2. How did Tamil survive in a foreign country like Malaysia?

3. Who are responsible for the growth of Tamil in Malaysia?
4. Some Tamils, like the Tamil Iyers in my study, are shifting away from Tamil. Do you have any thoughts on why this phenomenon is happening?
5. Is it possible to arrest this trend?
6. Are there any organised efforts being made to maintain Tamil?
7. What do you think is the status of Tamil in Malaysia?

The information derived from these interviews yielded information that aided in understanding the status of the Tamil language in Malaysia.

4.4.3 Audio Taping of Authentic Intra Community Conversations

32 conversations (see Table 5.2) among ethnic members were audio taped in order to get samples of authentic speech. Permission was obtained from all persons who were taped. Initially, when a tape recorder was placed, participants were a little shy or conscious about being taped. However, they warmed up after sometime and conversations flowed quite naturally.

While the researcher bore in mind the need to have members of all three generations as well as male and female members participate in the conversations, there was no forced attempt to have equal members of each generation or gender. Members were approached during community functions such as weddings or other social gatherings (see Table 5.2) and those who readily agreed to be audio-taped were included in the study. The aim of the tape recordings was to get a free sampling of

spontaneous language spoken by members of the community. The audio taped recordings were subsequently transcribed.

4.4.4 Questionnaire

A questionnaire (Appendix A) which sought information about language use in four domains was used. This section describes the four domains used and gives a detailed description of the different sections of the questionnaire.

4.4.4.1 The Home Domain

This is a domain where people can be themselves with the people whom they trust the most and where they can relax; that is the family unit (Fishman, 1972b). In this domain, very few members outside the family are admitted into the same kind of social discourse as the home plays a very important role in language interaction. This is the domain where children are raised and friends and other family members are entertained.

The home domain was included in this study in order to study the language that was used for intimate communication among family members. When a community is faced with the prospect of using languages other than their ethnic language outside the

		<p>First thing, I notice, he'll read a Chinese newspaper, before he reads the Straits Times or The Star. Muthalla, athu thaan padippa... <i>First that only reads</i> (Even the very rich Chinese do not abandon their language. They read the Chinese papers first).</p>		
78	S	There is no Chinese organisation without a Chinese newspaper. Never happens with our people.		
79	R	So they have successfully maintained the language, we haven't?		
80	K	Yes.		
81	S	Because to them their language is their identity. They don't bother about religion. Language and money are the only identity to them.		
82	K	So, now I suggest that Samajam should do something about Tamil speaking <i>(Association)</i> Brahmins.		6
83	S	I think the government should make Pupils' Own Language a compulsory subject. At least till standard 6. So that, it may not be an examination subject, but just like second or third language is done, the individual races will have their own identities. Even if it doesn't make any sense to them or what, at least the fact that it is compulsory will make it available. We can see openly the standard of Tamil, spoken by our people and people in Singapore.		

4.4.4.3. The Religious Domain

It is generally perceived that the the Iyers have made religion a very important part of their lives (Thurston and Rangachari, 1993). They were in charge of conducting prayers at Hindu temples and believed to be the guardians of the ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas. The researcher visited 50 Malaysian Iyer homes, as mentioned earlier (see Appendix C) and found a prayer altar in every one of them (see 3.2.6.1) where prayers are offered twice a day with food offerings. These visits were made in order to find out if religion still plays an important part in the lives of members of this community.

4.4.4.4 The Reading/Writing Domain

The background study of the Iyers in India shows them to be a literate and an educated community (see 3.2.1, 3.2.3.1). Irschick (1992) and Arooran (1980) say that the Tamil Brahmins held a pre-eminent position in education in Tamil Nadu and therefore easily obtained positions in the British administration because they were educated and well read.

This domain is included to investigate whether the tradition of involvement in reading and writing and other intellectual pursuits is continued here in Malaysia and, if so, what languages they are pursued in. This domain is useful in investigating the proficiency levels of the members of the community in the Tamil language. It was

seen in Chapter 2 (2.2.4) that although different varieties of Tamil exist, the language used for teaching and for writing purposes is only one – *cen-tamizh*. The Iyers, may speak the Brahmin or Iyer dialect or variety at home or among themselves but, they need to learn formal *cen-tamizh* if they wish to be involved in formal reading and writing activities. This section was included to measure the literacy levels of the Malaysian Iyers.

4.4.4.5 Sections in the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The four sections are:

- Personal Details
- Language Use (at home, at social, and at religious occasions)
- Personal Beliefs and Identity
- Reading/Writing

A. Personal Details

The information from this section was used to find out personal details of the respondents relating to gender, age and number of years spent in Malaysia as well as educational details. There are twenty questions in this section of the questionnaire. Questions 1 to 5 ask for details of name, age, sex, birthplace and marital status. Questions 6 to 8 ask for details of domicile such as the number of years spent in Malaysia, country of origin and whether the respondent is a first, second or third

generation Malaysian Iyer. These details were considered important in order to gauge the connection between language shift and maintenance and number of years lived in Malaysia.

Questions 9 to 12 ask for details of children and about the people the respondent lived with. These details are seen as important when looking for connections between language shift and maintenance and role relationships or the role that language plays in relationships. Greenfield (cited in Fasold, 1984) says that when studying habitual language use in the family domain, the investigator collects data regarding interactions between interlocutors such as husband-wife, parent-child and grandparent-grandchild. The type of family situation that the respondent lives in; for example whether he lives in an extended family system or a nuclear family would be useful in gauging information about where and from whom the respondent acquired the ability to speak languages.

The next section which examines the educational level of the respondent has eight questions. Question 13 asks for the number of years spent in school. Question 14 asks for information about the medium of instruction at the various levels of education, such as primary and secondary schools and tertiary or other levels. Question 15 asks the respondent where or from whom he or she learnt the mother tongue, Tamil. Questions 16 and 17 seek to find out if the respondent was literate in Tamil, that is whether he or she could read and/or write the mother tongue.

Questions 18-20 seek to discover the attitude of the respondent to the mother tongue and the choices that he or she has made in connection with the type of education that has been selected for his or her children, that is, Malay, English or Tamil medium of education. Question 18 asks for the medium of instruction selected for the respondent's children and Question 19 asks for reasons for the selection. Question 20 asks whether the respondent or his or her children have attended any Tamil classes.

The details from this section will be useful in gauging the relationship between language used, the educational level of the respondent and his/her literacy in Tamil.

B. Language Use

This section is divided into four areas: general language use, language in the home, language for social purposes and language for religious purposes. The section on general language use has seven questions, the section on language use in the home has five questions and the section on language use for social purposes has two questions.

a. General Language Use

Question 1 asks the respondent to state in order of proficiency, the three languages that the respondent is most proficient in. Question 2 asks if the respondent ever uses two languages in the same sentence and Question 3 asks what other language is used

together with Tamil if two languages are frequently used. These three questions are aimed at finding out what languages are frequently spoken and whether language shift has taken place and if it has, what languages are used when shifting from Tamil.

Question 4 through Question 7 deal with questions that will shed some light on choices made by the respondent with regard to the use of the Tamil language. Question 4 asks the respondent if conversations with fellow Iyers are conducted only in Tamil. This question should reveal whether Tamil is the chosen language of communication with other Tamil Iyers.

Questions 5 and 6 ask about personal choices made while watching television news and other entertainment programmes. The answers to these questions would reveal information about the language or languages the respondent is comfortable with.

b. Language Use in the Home

Question 1 attempts to find out if the first language spoken by the respondent is his/her mother tongue. Questions 2 and 3 ask questions about the languages spoken at home while questions 4 and 5 ask about the language of choice when speaking to various relatives and the languages used for close familial talk such as arguing, scolding and day to day talk about problems or achievements at work or school.

c. Language Use for Social Purposes

This section has four questions. The first one asks the respondent about the languages that he or she can understand when spoken by others while the second question asks them about their language of choice at social events when communicating with fellow Tamil Iyers and with other Tamils. The reason for including these questions is to gauge how fluent the respondent is in the mother tongue.

Questions 3 and 4 ask the respondent if he or she is involved in any way in maintaining the Tamil language in Malaysia. The answers to these two questions would reveal whether there is an organised effort to maintain the Tamil language or whether the efforts at maintaining the Tamil language is done purely on an ad hoc basis by individuals.

d. Language used for Religious Purposes

There is only one question in this section and it tries to establish the language of choice for various religious activities. The answers to this question will throw some light on whether the mother tongue is used for prayers and for talking to people such as the priest.

The background study of the Tamil Iyers in Malaysia shows them to be fairly religious and very conscious of the need to participate in religious activities, as this domain is considered an inherent part of their traditions (see 3.2.3.3, 3.2.6.1).

C. Personal Beliefs and Identity

There are seven questions in this section, and they ask for the respondent's feelings about his or her identity and beliefs. Questions 1 to 4 seek to find out if the respondent feels conscious of being an Iyer, whether his or her friends are all mainly Iyers and whether speaking the mother tongue, Tamil, gives him or her the identity as a Tamil Iyer. Criteria for establishing ethnic identity can be found this way.

Question 5 asks the respondent if he or she considered it important to preserve the Tamil language. The answer to this question will reveal the respondent's attitude as to whether the language should be maintained. This was then compared to the information on respondents' the level of education in Tamil and language use. This gave some insights to the need to preserve the mother tongue.

Questions 6 and 7 ask the respondent if he or she is involved in any maintenance efforts to preserve the Tamil language and if so what those activities were. If the answer to these questions were compared with Question 5, then it would be possible to gauge whether a respondent's feeling that his/her language should be maintained (or not) is followed up with the necessary action (or inaction) to put into practice what he/she feels.

D. Reading and Writing Activities

The questions in this domain will enable the analysis of the proficiency of the respondents in reading and writing in Tamil. The answers will show if the proficiency in the ethnic language is extended to the formal reading/ writing areas or whether the proficiency is restricted to speaking the language.

Question 1 asks the respondent the various publications that are read in Tamil. Question 2 asks the respondent if he or she writes in Tamil for any publications such as newspapers, magazines, books and so on.

4.5 Data Analysis

This section provides information on how the data that was collected through the questionnaires and the audio tapes were analysed. The observations made during the interviews, the home visits and during audio taping were useful in triangulating the findings.

4.5.1 Questionnaire Analysis

An analysis based on frequency counts and percentages of three generations of Malaysian Iyers was carried out. A statistical tool , S.P.S.S. 7.0, was used to calculate these frequency counts. The changes to language use across the generations was studied as research has shown that reduced use of the ethnic language across the generations point to language shift (Fasold, 1984:238).

Information from these sections would give insights into what language was spoken to whom and where. These answers were then cross-referenced with various sections in the questionnaires and frequencies computed so that emerging patterns will reveal a pattern of the language use among the community. Language proficiency of the respondents was measured through respondents' education in Tamil either in schools or through private education, such as tuition. Reduced levels of language proficiency across generations would account for language shift especially when the younger members of the community show lower proficiency in the ethnic language than older members. Language shift is also indicated if there is a decline in the use of the ethnic language across the generations.

4.5.2 Transcription and Analysis of Tapescripts

Approximately 720 minutes of language produced was audio taped. These audio tapes were later listened to and transcribed. The conversations were analysed for functional uses of the Tamil language, socio-cultural norms of interaction and interpretation and the reasons for language shift. To study the functional uses of the Tamil language, code-switches were studied so that the dominant language (or the matrix language) and the intrusive language (or the embedded language) could be studied and analysed using the Matrix Language Model Frame (Myers Scotton, 1993).

4.5.2.1 The Matrix Language Model Frame (MLF)

In order to interpret the functional uses of the Tamil language, code-switches from English to Tamil were studied. In order to do that, conversations were separated into matrix language and embedded language using Myers-Scotton's MLF Model (1993). The MLF was used as a device to separate the languages that were used in a conversation.

Matrix language refers to the main language used in the utterances while embedded language refers to the language that plays the lesser role. The basic premise is to establish the hierarchy of two or more languages used in a single conversation. When the frequency of morphemes in a language is more than another language, then that language is the matrix language. The embedded language is another language that is chosen by the speaker to use together with the dominant or matrix language in one conversation exchange. Once the conversations were separated into matrix or dominant and intrusive or embedded language, then the functions performed by the Tamil language and the reasons for language shift and/or language maintenance were analysed using the Ethnography of Speaking Model (Hymes, 1977).

4.5.2.2 The Ethnography of Speaking Model

After the conversations had been separated into the matrix or dominant language and the embedded or intrusive languages, they were then analyzed for information leading to:

- 1) Functions performed by the Tamil language
- 2) Speaker norms of interaction that were evident in the conversations
- 3) Reasons for language shift

The components for describing speech is shown mnemonically as follows:

S	Setting Scene	physical circumstances subjective definition of an occasion
P	Participants	speaker/sender/addressor hearer/receiver/audience/addressee
E	Ends	purposes and goals outcomes
A	Act sequence	message form and content
K	Key	tone, manner
I	Instrumentalities	channel (verbal, non-verbal, physical) forms of speech drawn from community repertoire
N	Norms	of interaction and interpretation specific proprieties attached to speaking Interpretation of norms within cultural belief system
G	Genre	textual categories

(from Schiffrin, 1994:142)

An ethnography of communication using all of the above techniques is capable of revealing information about the physical setting and scene of the speech act (S), the

speakers or participants (P), the purposes or goals of the speech act (E), the form and content of the message (A), the non verbal communication techniques used (K), the forms of speech (I), the norms of interaction and interpretation (N) and the genre (G) of the speech act. Any movements or shifts in any one of the components of speaking can signal that a community speaking rule is present. For example, a shift from a normal tone to a whisper, from formal English to slang, correction, praise, embarrassment, withdrawal, evaluative responses etc. could in fact mean that a rule of speaking is being observed.

4.6 Conclusion

The methodology adopted in this study included both quantitative and qualitative methods. An overall picture of language use was obtained through the distribution and analysis of a questionnaire that was distributed to 291 respondents. In order to obtain a closer, micro level picture of actual language use among the Malaysian Iyers, audio recordings were made of authentic conversations held at various settings.

Observations were also made through fifty home visits to study traditional and cultural practices of the community. As no written documentation is available about this community's migration to Malaysia, first generation elders of the community were interviewed in order to establish the pattern of migration from India to Malaysia. Available information on Tamil language maintenance in Malaysia was supplemented

through interviews of seven prominent Malaysian Tamil professionals who engage themselves in the active maintenance of the language.

The information from the questionnaires and the analysis of the conversations, when triangulated, is expected to reveal information leading to the language maintenance of and language shift from the Tamil language. In the event that there is language shift, the analysis should further reveal, possible reasons for this shift and maintenance.

Statistical evidence of language maintenance and language shift was investigated by using a questionnaire which was distributed among the Malaysian Iyer community and analysed using computer software (Statistical Procedure for Social Sciences or SPSS 7.0). In order to ratify and authenticate the questionnaire findings, samples of authentic intra ethnic conversations of the community in their homes and at social gatherings were taped and transcribed in order to study possible language patterns. The resulting picture obtained through the twin approaches of emic and etic methods helped to validate respondents' perception of their language use together with the researcher's analysis of language use. The next three chapters present findings derived from this study.