

CHAPTER FIVE

EVIDENCE OF LANGUAGE SHIFT

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present evidence of language shift among the Malaysian Iyers, which was gathered using two separate tools; the questionnaire and the audio taped conversations. The questionnaire sought to obtain information on language use by investigating four domains of language; i.e. the home, social, religious and the formal reading/writing domains. In order to validate the findings from the questionnaire, free flowing conversations that were not consciously directed towards any domain were taped in order to validate the findings from the questionnaire. Wherever possible, the evidence of language shift from both these tools is presented side by side so that a comparison from both the tools can be made. However, it must be reiterated that since the questionnaire has evidence pertaining to all the four domains, while the taped conversations do not, only those sections where a comparison is possible, is made.

A generational analysis was made of language choice in the four domains that were examined in the questionnaire. The first generation is referred to as G1, the second, G2 while the third generation is referred to as G3. Evidence from the audio taped conversations is also presented wherever applicable.

5.2 Evidence of Language Shift

The following sections describe the extent to which Malaysian Iyers had shifted from the Tamil language to include other languages such as English and Malay. The findings showed extensive language shift to English and a little to Malay. As stated earlier (Chapter 1) this study examines language shift from the Tamil language, and not the Malaysian Iyer variety. This is because, although the Malaysian Iyers speak Iyer or Brahmin Tamil, the language of education and reading/writing is standard Tamil or *cen-tamizh* (see 2.2.4).

5.2.1 Declining Proficiency Of Tamil Across The Generations

Table 5.1 shows a profile of the respondents who completed the questionnaire. There were a total of 154 men and 137 women, making a total of 291. Of these the majority were G2 respondents (40.9%) followed by G3 (30.6%) and finally G1 (28.5%). Table 5.2 shows a profile of the respondents who participated in the audio taped conversations (ATC). A total of 115 (47 male and 68 female) people were audio taped while in conversation (see Appendix D). Of these the majority was from G2 (42.6%), followed by G3 (36.5%) who made up slightly more than a third and finally G1 (20.9%) who comprised about a fifth of the respondents.

Analysis of the questionnaires showed that there was decreasing proficiency in the Tamil language not only in the ability to read and write the language (see 5.2.1.4) but also in the ability to understand the spoken language (see 5.2.1.3). The audio

taped findings also showed a very clear generational shift to English (see 5.2.1.3). A major shift to the English language was seen in community interactions as even G1 were observed using the English language quite extensively.

Table 5.1

	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%)

Profile of Respondents (Questionnaire)

Table 5.2

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 (Audio-Taped Conversations)

5.2.1.1 Decline In The Formal Study Of Tamil

An examination of the number of respondents (from the questionnaire) who had formal education in Tamil and those who did not (Table 5.4) revealed that all G1 respondents had learnt Tamil in schools (formally), when they were in India. However, less than half (42.37%) of G2 and less than one sixth (15.7%) of the G3

studied the language in Malaysian national schools where Tamil is taught on request. The rest learnt the language informally through relatives like their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. In other words, G1 (who had learnt the language in India as they are first generation migrants) would probably have the ability to impart the language informally at home to G2. This ability to impart Tamil knowledge and education got diluted with G2 and G3 when it came to teaching the language informally to their children as they had only 'picked up' the language informally through relatives. This could have contributed to further eroding the proficiency in the Tamil language (as seen in the next section).

Table 5.3

	Formal	Informal	Total
Generation			
G1	83 (100%)	0 (0%)	83
G2	50 (42.7%)	69 (57.3%)	119
G3	14 (15.7%)	75 (84.2%)	89
Total	148	143	291

Table showing respondents who had formal education in Tamil and those who informally 'picked up' the language.

5.2.1.2 Decline In the Proficiency of Tamil

Respondents (questionnaire) were asked to say if they considered Tamil to be their first language in terms of proficiency. The findings are presented graphically in Figure 5.1. The analysis showed that a substantial percentage (60.7%) of G1 thought

of Tamil as their first language in terms of proficiency. There was a sharp drop among G2 respondents (19.5%) and a further drastic drop to 4.5% among the G3. For G3, the Malay language had made a small inroad into their linguistic repertoire with 5.6% reporting that Malay was the language that they were most proficient in. This finding is significant in that it could direct future language shift to Malay rather than English, depending on conditions such as government policies regarding language education in Malaysia.

Figure 5.1

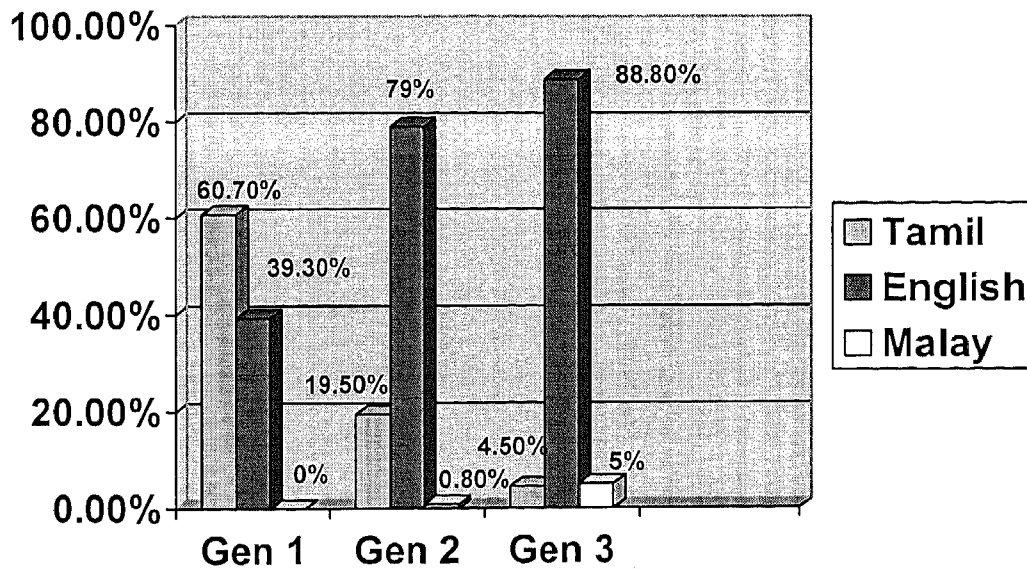


Diagram Showing Language Respondents are Most Proficient In

5.2.1.3 Decrease In The Ability To Understand Spoken Tamil

A substantial percentage of questionnaire respondents of all the three generations understood spoken Tamil either fully or partially as seen in Table 5.4. All of G1, and more than 80% of both G2 and G3 said that they were able to understand spoken Tamil. It is possible since the majority of the G2 and G3 said that they learnt the Tamil language informally from parents and grandparents (see 5.2.1.1), the emphasis could have been on spoken Tamil rather than on reading or writing. Table 5.4 also shows that the ability to understand spoken Tamil has decreased with successive generations.

Table 5.4

	Fully	Partially	No Response	Total
Generation				
G1	83 (100%)	-	-	83
G2	98 (82.3%)	15 (12.6%)	6 (5.1%)	119
G3	72 (80.9%)	14.(15.7%)	3 (3.4%)	89

Ability to Understand Spoken Tamil

Table 5.5

Generation	Tamil	English	Total
G1	12 (50%)	12 (50%)	24
G2	3 (6.1%)	46 (93.9%)	49
G3	0 (0%)	42 (100%)	42
Total	15(13.0%)	100 (87%)	115

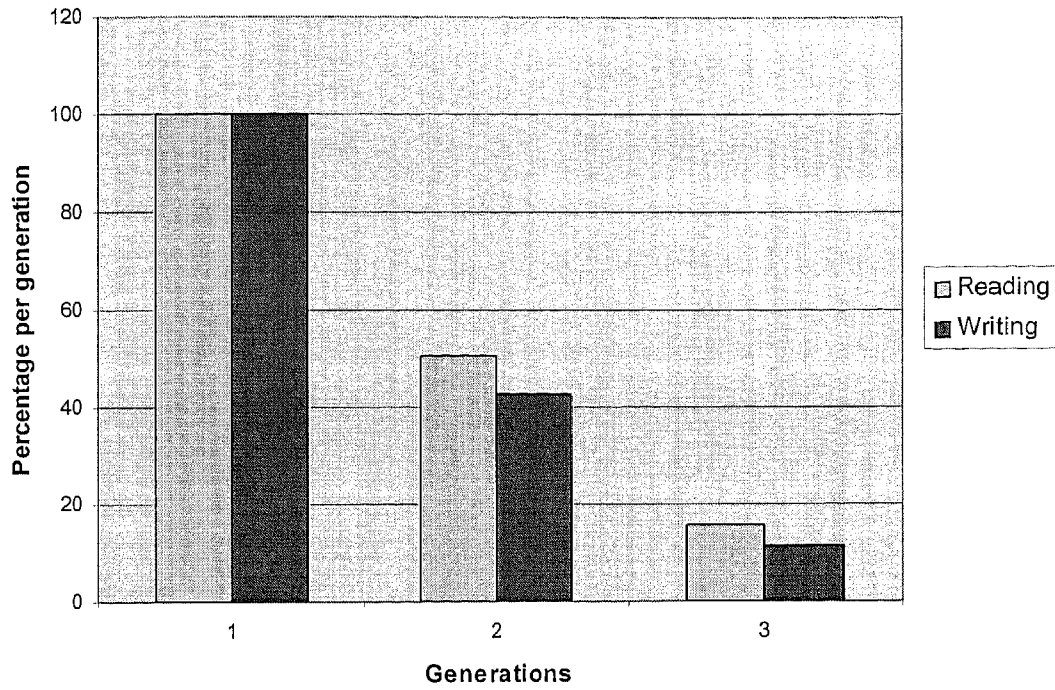
Dominant Languages Used by Speakers (according to ATC)

Although a majority of all three generations claimed that they could understand spoken Tamil (Table 5.4), a comparison of the above findings with the findings from the ATC (Table 5.5) showed that, in reality, Tamil was not really used very much. This can be seen in Table 5.3 as all the G3 respondents (100%) used English and a very large majority of G2 (93.9%) also used English while one half of even the G1 respondents (50%) used English in their everyday conversations. A clear generational shift towards English was seen as the preferred language for even intra ethnic communication . Malay was not used much at all.

5.2.1.4 Decrease In Ability To Read And Write Tamil

There was a substantial decline in the ability to read and write Tamil among the questionnaire respondents, as seen in Figure 5.2. The fact that less than half of G2 (42.7%) and less than one sixth of G3 (15.7%) had formal education of Tamil in schools (see 5.2.1.1) is a possible reason for the reduced ability in reading and writing Tamil compared to speaking Tamil . The generational decrease in the ability to read from all of G1 (100%) to half of G2 (50.4%) to less than a sixth of G3 (15.7%) and write from all of G1 (100%) to less than half of G2 (42.7%) to only slightly more than a tenth of G3 (11.2%) in Tamil showed that the process of language shift had set in. The shift can be seen clearly in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2



Ability to Read and Write Tamil

Table 5.6

Generation	Reading	Writing
G1	83 (100%)	83 (100%)
G2	60 (50.4%)	50 (42.7%)
G3	14 (15.7%)	10 (11.2%)

Respondents Who Are Able to Read and Write in Tamil

5.2.1.5 Reduction In Reading And Writing Activities In Tamil

When the results of the ability to read and write (Table 5.5) were compared to the actual reading and writing of materials (Table 5.6), they showed that those who could in fact read and write did not really put their ability or skill to much use. Although all of G1 could read and write, in actual fact they read only prayers and the almanac in Tamil.

There was reduced use of the Tamil language for reading all other types of materials though letters were read by more than half (60.7%) of G1. Although about half (50.4%) of G2 could read and slightly less than half (42.7%) of them could write, there was minimal reading in Tamil as can be seen in Table 5.7. There appeared to be a drastic drop in reading and writing activities among G3 respondents since only less than a sixth (15.7%) could read and a little over a tenth of them (11.2%) could write in Tamil but it is important to note that only a miniscule number (4.5%) said that they actually read material in Tamil.

Table 5.7

	Letters	News	Stories	Magazines	Prayers	Almanac
Generation						
G1	51 (60.7%)	39 (46.4%)	16 (9.0%)	17 (20.2%)	83 (100%)	83 (100%)
G2	10 (8.4%)	23 (19.3%)	5 (4.2%)	10 (8.4%)	23 (19.3%)	23 (19.3%)
G3	-	4 (4.5%)	-	-	4 (4.5%)	-

Table Showing Materials Read in Tamil By Respondents

The same trend was seen in writing Tamil, too. In fact, the actual act of writing in Tamil was very minimal even with G1 as very few wrote anything but letters, as seen in Table 5.8. The most preferred writing activity was letter writing for G1 (24.1%). This activity was drastically reduced to 4.2% for G2. Writing for magazines (3.6%), religious texts (2.3%) and newspapers (1.2%) was very minimal even for G1 while for G2, the trend was the same at 4.2% for newspapers and religious texts while a negligible 0.8% of them wrote for magazines. With G3, writing in Tamil was non-existent.

Table 5.8

	Newspapers	Religious Texts	Magazines	Letters
Generation				
G1	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.6%)	20 (24.1%)
G2	5 (4.2%)	5 (4.2%)	1 (0.8%)	5 (4.2%)
G3	-	-	-	-

Table Showing Materials That Are Written in Tamil

5.2.1.6 Evidence of Code-switching

There was evidence of wide code-switching among respondents and this showed the influence and existence of languages other than the Tamil language in their linguistic repertoire. Table 5.9 shows the number of respondents who said that they code-switched from Tamil to other languages while Table 5.10 shows the different languages that are switched to. Table 5.9 shows that a large number of G1 (81.9%) and G2 (79%) and a fairly substantial number of G3 (68.5%) use code switching.

Table 5.9

	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Generation				
G1	68 (81.9%)	14 (16.9%)	1 (1.2%)	83
G2	94 (79.0%)	23 (19.3%)	2 (1.7%)	119
G3	61 (68.5%)	27 (30.3%)	1 (1.2%)	89

Table Showing Count Of Respondents Who Answered Yes or No To Code-switching Tamil With Other Languages

Table 5.10

	English	Malay	English and Malay	Others	Total (of those who code-switch)
Generation					
G1	59 (71.1%)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	5 (6.0%)	68 (81.9%)
G2	86 (72.2%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.4%)	94 (79.0%)
G3	55 (61.8%)	2 (2.2%)	4 (4.5%)	-	61 (68.5%)

Table Showing Language(s) Code-switched With Tamil

Table 5.10 shows that more Indian languages were used by G1 and G2, than G3 who used only English and Malay to code-switch with Tamil. G1 and G2 reported using Indian languages such as Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi with Tamil. G1, as migrants from India, would have brought with them a repertoire of Indian languages which they would probably have passed on to their children. This could account for the small number of G2 (3.4% - see Table 5.10) reporting that they used other Indian languages as well.

Code-switching was mainly to the English language by all three generations (see 1.2.5). Most G1 respondents were already literate in English on arrival in Malaysia as it was an important language for obtaining jobs (see 2.2.3.1) during British

colonial times. This possibly accounted for the existence of this language even with G1. The other language shifted to is Malay which is the national language of Malaysia (see 7.2.1).

Evidence of extensive code-switching was seen among the ATC respondents too. The majority of the ATC respondents (86.9%) over all the three generations used English dominant speech, while only a small minority (13.1%) were Tamil dominant speakers (see Table 5.11). However, there was extensive code-switching from English to Tamil and Tamil to English in all three generations. Even the English dominant speakers over all three generations used the Tamil language for certain language functions such as accommodating elders (see Chapter 7 for functional use of Tamil language). Code-switching can indicate that the process of language shift has begun. However, the use of the Tamil language, even though it was at a functional level showed that the language had not been abandoned completely.

Table 5.11

Generation	Tamil Dominant Speakers		English Dominant Speakers		Total
	With English Intrusions	With No Intrusions	With Tamil Intrusions	With No Intrusions	
G1	10	2	6	6	24
G2	3	0	37	9	49
G3	-	-	29	13	42
Total	13 (11.3%)	2	72 (62.6%)	28	115

Code-Switching Among ATC Speakers

5.2.1.7 Declining Proficiency In Tamil as an Indication of the Process of Language Shift

The steady decline in the proficiency of Tamil across the generations in speaking (Table 5.4), reading and writing (Figure 5.2) indicates that language shift was in progress. The ability to pass on the Tamil language from parent to child was probably weak since G1 was the only generation that had indicated large scale formal education in Tamil. Very few members of G2 and G3 had learnt the language in school (see Table 5.2). The declining proficiency in Tamil across the generations (Figure 5.1) is to be expected in a country like Malaysia where two other dominant languages; Malay and English were taught formally in schools. Tamil was taught in government schools (1.3.6.1) only on request. It was seen in Chapter 1 that although Tamil medium schools were available at the primary school level, the problems associated with these schools such as lack of proper infrastructure and the transition that had to be made from Tamil medium to Malay medium education had prevented middle class Tamils from taking advantage of their existence (see 1.3.5).

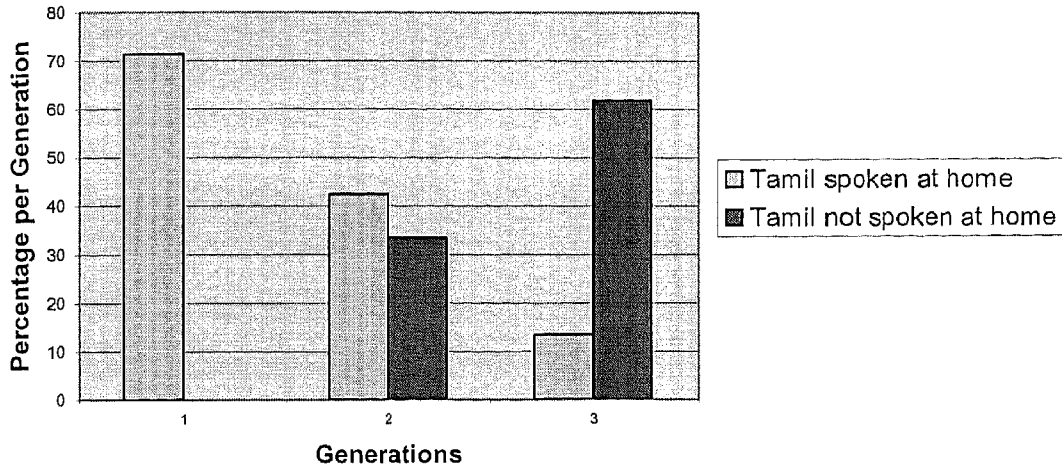
Evidence of English and Malay was seen in code-switching with the Tamil language. However, the ability of almost all respondents across generations to fully or partially understand spoken Tamil (Table 5.4) boded well for the language's survival at least at the spoken level. This community was able to understand the Tamil language at the spoken level but did not use it in reading or writing. Such a scenario raised questions about the continued use of the language in the future.

5.2.2 Generational Decline In The Use Of Tamil At Home

Examination of the questionnaire for language use among various generations in role relationships such as parent-child, child-parent, grandparent-grandchild and so on showed a decline in the use of Tamil in the most intimate and secure area of language maintenance – the home.

Figure 5.3 shows the percentage of respondents speaking Tamil at home. G1 showed that they were the leaders of language maintenance in the home with nearly three fourths of them (71.4%) of them speaking Tamil at home. The percentage fell sharply to less than half of G2 (42.7%) and to only one sixth of G3 (13.5%) speaking Tamil at home. The drastic decrease from 71.4% to 13.5% did not augur well for maintenance of Tamil in the home and signaled a definite language shift. Table 5.13 shows that the language that had intruded into the home domain was English.

Figure 5.3



Respondents Who Choose To Speak Tamil At Home

Table 5.12

Generation	Yes	No	*No Response	Total
G1	60 (72.3%)	-	23 (27.7%)	83
G2	50 (42.0%)	40 (33.6%)	29 (24.4%)	119
G3	12 (13.5%)	55 (61.8%)	22 (24.7%)	89

Table Showing Count Of Those Who Claim To Speak Tamil At Home

* Approximately a quarter of each generation did not respond to this question

Table 5.13

	Tamil	English	Others	No Response	Total
Generation					
G1	60 (72.3%)	20 (24.1%)	3 (3.6%)	-	83
G2	50 (42.0%)	60 (50.4%)	3 (2.5%)	6(5.0%)	119
G3	12 (13.5%)	71 (79.8%)	3 (3.4%)	3(3.4%)	89

Table Showing Languages Spoken In The Home

Table 5.14

	English
Generation	
G1	35 (42.1%)
G2	84 (70.5%)
G3	19 (21.3%)

Table Showing Respondents Who Studied in English Medium of Education

5.2.2.1 Language Used With Grandparents

Questionnaire respondents who answered the question of language used with grandparents showed that Tamil was still spoken with grandparents. Although there was a generational decline in the use of Tamil for communication with grandparents, Table 5.15 shows that almost all (96.4%) of G1, more than half (63%) of G2 and just slightly under half (47.1%) of G3 still used Tamil with their grandparents. The use of English together with Tamil however signaled code-switching which was an indication of the setting in of language shift especially among G3 (42.6%) who used a combination of English and Tamil to communicate with grandparents, though the figure was very much lower for G2 at 12.6%. The inability to communicate in Tamil

proficiently could be a possible cause for this phenomenon (see 5.2.1.7) where Tamil was used functionally (to express cultural and religious terms for example) and English was used to compensate for lack of knowledge in Tamil.

Table 5.15

	English	Tamil	English and Tamil	No Response	Total
Generation					
G1	-	80 (96.4%)	-	3 (3.6%)	83
G2	12 (10.0%)	75 (63.0%)	15 (12.6%)	17 (14.2%)	119
G3	2 (2.2%)	42 (47.1%)	38 (42.6%)	7 (7.9%)	89

Table Showing Language Spoken With Grandparents

5.2.2.2 Language Used With Parents

Most respondents of G1 (98.8%) used Tamil with their parents, but with the subsequent generations, the use of Tamil decreased. Less than half of G2 (40.3%) and less than a third of G3 (29.2%) used Tamil with their parents. The decreasing proficiency in Tamil across the generations and the increasing influence of English which was used in conjunction with Tamil may be responsible for the shift away from Tamil. There was less use of Tamil with parents (Table 5.16) when compared to grandparents (Table 5.15). Language shift would not have set in for G1 who were the first generation to migrate to a multilingual setting in Malaysia. The decreased use of Tamil among G2 and G3 is indicative of the onset of language shift from Tamil even in the home.

Table 5.16

	E	T	E and T	No Response	Total
Generation					
G1	-	82 (98.8%)	-	1 (1.2%)	83
G2	41 (34.5%)	48 (40.3%)	30 (25.2%)	-	119
G3	49 (55.0%)	26 (29.2%)	7 (7.9%)	7 (7.9%)	89

Table Showing Language Used With Parents

5.2.2.3 Language Used With Siblings

Respondents reported to more code-switching between Tamil and English in all three generations including G1, as seen in Table 5.17. Even G1 appeared to be using English with brothers and sisters, though Tamil was mainly used by more than half (53.5%) of them. Only about a quarter of G2 used Tamil (24.3%) compared to about half (51.2%) who used English while about a quarter (24.3%) of them reported code-switching between English and Tamil. There was a steady decline in the use of Tamil with less than a sixth (16.8%) of G3 using Tamil to communicate with siblings. Another feature was the use of Malay and English as a code-switching strategy among G3 respondents which signaled the influence of the national language which had also made inroads into the home domain. Although the percentage of the use of Malay is small at 2.2 % (Table 5.17), it did signal its entry into the linguistic repertoire of G3. The use of Tamil was less among siblings compared to parents (see Table 5.16) and grandparents (see Table 5.15). This is to be expected as there was a consistent decrease in the ability of G2 to pass on Tamil to their children. Interaction between siblings was usually that of communication at peer level as they are of the same generation and would have been exposed to the same influences. Since most G3

would had educated in Malay and English, the use of these languages was greater than that of Tamil.

Table 5.17

	English	Tamil	English and Tamil	English and Malay	No Response	Total
Generation						
G1	23 (27.7%)	45 (54.2%)	15 (18.1%)		-	83
G2	61 (51.2%)	29 (24.3%)	29 (24.3%)		-	119
G3	47 (52.8%)	15 (16.8%)	20 (22.5%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.4%)	89

Table Showing Language Used With Siblings

5.2.2.4 Language Used With Children

Table 5.18 shows language used by respondents with children. The results showed that even G1 used English to converse with children, though the percentage was small at 15.6%. However there was a huge increase in the use of English with G2 and G3 where more than half of these generations (G2-52.9%; G3-50.6%) spoke in English with children. There appeared to be a decline in the use of Tamil exclusively to speak with children with very slightly more than a tenth of G1 (13.3%) and G2 (10.9%) and an extremely small number of G3 (6.7%) reporting the use of Tamil to speak to children. However, switching between Tamil and English was frequent as can be seen in Table 5.18 where large numbers of G1 (69.9%), a third of G2 (31.9%) and about a quarter of G3 (25.8%) G3 used English and Tamil in interaction with children. Although code-switching between Tamil and Malay was not evident, there was code-switching between English and Malay among G3 (2.2%) according to Table

5.12. There was evidence of language shift because of the use of English as well as code-switching between English and Tamil across all the three generations.

Table 5.18

	English	Tamil	English and Tamil	English and Malay	No Response	Total
Generation						
G1	13 (15.7%)	11 (13.3%)	58 (69.9%)	-	1(1.2%)	83
G2	63 (52.9 %)	13 (10.9%)	38 (31.9%)	2 (1.7%)	38(31.9%)	119
G3	55 (61.8.%)	6 (6.7%)	23- (25.8%)	2 (2.2%)	3(3.4%)	89

Table Showing Language Used With Children

5.2.2.5 Decreasing Use of Tamil In Family Interactions

Spontaneous language use in the home was examined in the areas that were investigated by David (1996) in her study of the Malaysian Sindhis. There was a reduction in the use of Tamil in various situations at home where personal problems, achievements and other intimate discussions were held. Language use during such discussions showed that there was a generational shift away from Tamil very consistently with each succeeding generation. Table 5.19 shows this decline in the use of Tamil across the generations: when it involved scolding children, arguing with parents or spouse and discussing achievements and problems with the family. When scolding children, more than a third of G1 (39.8%) and G2 (37.8%) and about a sixth of G3 (16.9%) of G3 used Tamil. All of G1, understandably, argued with their parents in Tamil. As this generation was from India this finding was not surprising. However, when it came to G2 there was a big drop as less than half of them

(42.9%) used Tamil. With G3 there was an even sharper drop to less than a sixth of them (16.9%) who used Tamil for interaction in the home.

When arguing with spouses, most G1 (95.2%) used Tamil while only about two thirds (60.5%) of G2 used Tamil. However, the percentage fell drastically to a miniscule 1.1% with G3. The same trend was seen when respondents discussed their achievements as the percentages fell very consistently with each succeeding generation. Less than half of even G1 (41%), about a fifth of G2 (21%) and a little more than a tenth of G3 (12.4 %) reported discussing achievements in Tamil. The pattern continued with discussing problems, as the use of Tamil decreased with each succeeding generation from approximately half of G1 (49.4%) to a little less than a third of G2 (28.6%) to about a sixth of G3 (16.9%).

Table 5.19

	Scolding children	Arguing with parents	Arguing with spouse	Discussing achievements	Discussing problems
Generation					
G1	33 (39.8%)	83 (100%)	79 (95.2%)	34 (41.0%)	41 (49.4%)
G2	45 (37.8%)	51 (42.9%)	72 (60.5%)	25 (21.0%)	34 (28.6%)
G3	15 (16.9%)	15 (16.9%)	1 (1.1%)	11 (12.4%)	15 (16.9%)

Table Showing Use of Tamil In Family Interactions

5.2.2.6 Overview of the Declining Use of Tamil In The Home

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that there was a decreasing role for Tamil in the home. The home is often seen as a safe haven for the mother tongue, where it can grow or at least be maintained away from outside pressures. A consistent generational shift from Tamil was seen in various role relations within the domain. There was intrusion by the English language and some Malay into the home which is a definite sign of language shift.

5.2.3 Reduced Role of Tamil in Social Interaction

There was increasing use of English across the generations when interacting socially among the Iyers and with other Malaysian Tamils. The increasing role of the English language pushed the Tamil language to the sidelines, slowly edging Tamil out as the language of interaction across the generations.

5.2.3.1 Increased Role Of English In Community Interaction

There was increasing usage of English during social interaction among ethnic community members. The percentage use of English increased from slightly more than a third of G1 (32.5%) to a substantial increase of more than three quarters of G2 (77.3%) to an astounding high of 88.8% of G3. The use of English was quite high compared with the use of Tamil as seen in Table 5.20. Although only 1.1% of G3, reported using Malay for social interaction, this finding is significant in that it could signal a trend for future language shift.

Even in the audio taped conversations, the dominant language of conversation between members of this community was English, with Tamil used functionally (see 7.3.1) to accommodate, show respect to elders and so on. The fact that a very large majority (87%) of the ATC respondents (see Table 5.6 reproduced below) spoke in English during intra community interactions spoke volumes of the widespread use of English within this community. Even G1, who were expected to use Tamil the most appeared to use English heavily as half of them (50%) used the language. A huge proportion of G2 (93.9%) used English, while all the G3 respondents used English.

Table 5.20

	Tamil	English	Malay	Total
Generation				
G1	56 (67.5%)	27 (32.5%)	-	83
G2	27 (22.7%)	92 (77.3%)	-	119
G3	9 (10.1%)	79 (88.8%)	1 (1.1%)	89

Language Spoken With Fellow Iyers

Table 5.6

Generation	Tamil	English	Total
G1	12 (50%)	12 (50%)	24
G2	3 (6.1%)	46 (93.9%)	49
G3	0 (0%)	42 (100%)	42
Total	15(13.0%)	100 (87%)	115

Dominant Languages Used by Speakers in the ATC

5.2.3.2 Use of Tamil and English In Social Interaction With Other Malaysian Tamils

Questionnaire respondents reported greater usage of Tamil during social interaction with the larger community of Malaysian Tamils than among themselves. This can be quite clearly seen when Table 5.21 is compared with Table 5.20. While the finding for G1 is the same with 67.5% of them who used Tamil to speak with all Tamil speaking Malaysians whether Iyer or not, the same could not be said for G2 and G3. A greater percentage of both G2 and G3 claimed to use Tamil with Tamils who were not Iyer Tamils. About three quarters (74.8%) of G2 used Tamil with all Tamils while only slightly more than a fifth (22.7%) used Tamil with Iyers. With G3 as well, nearly half of them (47.3%) used Tamil for communicating with all Tamils while only about a tenth of them (10.1%) used Tamil with fellow Iyers.

Table 5.21

	Tamil	English	Malay	Total
Generation				
G1	56 (67.5%)	27 (32.5%)	-	83
G2	89 (74.8%)	29 (24.4%)	1 (0.8%)	119
G3	42 (47.3%)	46 (51.6%)	1 (1.1%)	89

Language Spoken With Tamils During Social Interaction

5.2.3.3 Increased Use of English At Work

When interacting with Tamils in the work domain, English, Tamil and Malay were used. In a multi-ethnic setting like Malaysia, the use of English and Malay could not be discounted as seen in Table 5.22. It is significant, however, that both G1 and G2 respondents used more Tamil than English with other Malaysian Tamils at work. With G3, the pattern was different as they used English to a greater degree than

Tamil. Table 5.22 shows that approximately a third of both G1 (31.3%) and G2 (35.3%) and slightly more of G3 (42.6%) used English in the work domain. The Malay language was used only minimally (not to the extent of English) with very small percentages of G1 (3.6%), G2 (5%) and G3 (6.7%) using the language at work.

Table 5.22

	Tamil	English	Malay	No Response	Total
Generation					
G1	36 (43.4%)	26 (31.3%)	3 (3.6%)	18 (21.7%)	83
G2	51 (42.9%)	42 (35.3%)	6 (5.0%)	20 (16.8%)	119
G3	30 (33.7%)	38 (42.6%)	6 (6.7%)	15 (16.9%)	89

Language Spoken With Tamils At Work

5.2.3.4 Use of English In School Interaction

About two thirds of G1 (60.2%) used Tamil mainly in school, as seen in Table 5.23. However G1 went to school in India where Tamil was learnt as part of the school curriculum and so Tamil usage was considerably higher with G1 than with the other generations. A large number of G2 (69.7%), however, used English. Many of G2 would have attended English medium schools during British colonial times. The use of English decreased slightly for G3 to 64.1% while the use of Malay increased to 11.2 % showing inroads made by the national language. With the introduction of Malay as the medium of education after independence from the British, this trend was to be expected. However, English was seen as a language of status (see 1.3.2)

and this explained why English was still used extensively by all three generations of respondents.

Table 5.23

Generation	Tamil	English	Malay	Total
G1	50 (60.2%)	33 (39.8%)	-	83
G2	29 (24.4%)	83 (69.7%)	7 (5.9%)	119
G3	22 (24.7%)	57 (64.1%)	10 (11.2%)	89

Language Spoken With Tamils In School

5.2.3.5 Summary of Language Use In the Social Domain

There was a very obvious presence of the English language in social interactions among the Malaysian Iyers. Intra community interactions were mainly in English while there was more use of Tamil in interaction between Iyers and other Tamil speaking communities during social interaction, in school and at work. Respondents claimed that their identity did not depend solely on language as their culture and traditional practices provided them with an identity that was not solely dependant on the Tamil language (see 6.2.1.2). The use of the English language, therefore did not appear to rob them of their identity. The greater use of Tamil with the larger Tamil community could be an expression of solidarity as Indians in Malaysia. The Tamil language which was a common symbol of the Malaysian Indian identity could be a powerful reason for communicating in Tamil with the larger Tamil community as seen in Table 5.21 .

5.2.4 Use of Tamil In The Religious Domain

There was retention of the Tamil language in the religious domain in both oral communication with the priest as well as saying prayers and singing religious hymns. There was evidence of the use of Sanskrit as the language of prayer and Telugu, as the language of hymn singing in this domain (see also 2.4.1).

5.2.4.1 Retention of the Tamil language To Speak With Priests

There was an overall maintenance of Tamil across all the three generations when communicating with priests at the temples with substantial percentages showing the use of Tamil. Many of the Hindu priests working in temples in Malaysia were brought from India (see 1.3.5.5) and so many of them speak only Tamil. Accommodation, respect and necessity could be possible reasons for the maintenance of Tamil in this area. A very large majority of G1 (96.4%), G2 (92.4%) and even G3 (89.8%) reported that they used Tamil to communicate with priests. The role of English was very minimal with only 1.2% of G1, 7.6% of G2 and 10.2% of G3 using English to communicate with priests. The BSM, which had its own temple, employed a priest from India for members' use as well as to facilitate the management of their temple. The President of the BSM (2004) said that efforts were made to bring in priests who were bi-lingual in Tamil and English so that all members were adequately supported by the priest.

Table 5.24

Generation	Tamil	English	No Response	Total
G1	80 (96.4%)	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	83
G2	110 (92.4%)	9 (7.6%)	-	119
G3	80 (89.8%)	9 (10.2%)	-	89

Table Showing Languages Used To Communicate With Priests

5.2.4.2 Use of Tamil For Prayers

A great majority of respondents used Tamil when saying their prayers. This was reflected in more than three quarters of all three generations (80.7% of G1, 79.8% of G2 and 80.9% of G3) reporting that prayers were said in Tamil. The increased use of Tamil among G3 for prayers could be the result of the prayer and *bhajan* classes that were held in the BSM for children and young adults. There was a small minority among all the three generations (9.6% of G1 8.4% of G2 and 3.4% of G3) who used Sanskrit for prayers as seen in Table 5.24. A surprising finding was the use of English in prayers. Approximately a quarter of even G1 (26.5%) used English for prayers as did about a third of G2 (29.4%) and slightly more than a third of G3 (33.7%). The influence of Sanskrit in prayers was diminishing while English was slowly creeping into even the realm of prayers. The role of Tamil, nevertheless remained high in this domain.

Table 5.25

	Tamil	English	Sanskrit
Generation			
G1	67 (80.7%)	22 (26.5%)	8 (9.6%)
G2	95 (79.8%)	35 (29.4%)	10 (8.4%)
G3	72 (80.9%)	30 (33.7%)	3 (3.4%)

Table Showing Languages Used For Prayers

5.2.4.3 Use of Indian languages for Singing Hymns (or *Bhajans*)

When it came to singing hymns, Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and other languages such as Malayalam and Kannada were used. Tamil topped the list of languages with about three quarters of all three generations using it (71.1% of G1, 72.2% of G2 and 73% of G3). Telugu came next with half (53%) of G1, slightly more than a third (37.8%) of G2 and slightly less than a third (28%) of G3 using the language for hymns. Sanskrit was the next choice with about a fifth (21.6%) of G1 and slightly less than a fifth (19.3%) of G2 choosing the language. A very small percentage (4.5%) of G3 reported that they used Sanskrit for hymns. Other languages such as Malayalam and Kannada were used by very small percentages of the different generation (9.6% of G1, 11.8% of G2 and 3.4% of G3) for hymn singing. The language used for hymn singing has not changed from its usual repertoire (see 2.4.1) of languages because the Iyers have had this affinity as seen in Chapter 2 to use certain types of Indian languages for music and prayer. Therefore language shift was not really seen in this area. The status quo appeared to be maintained. The use of the various ethnic Indian languages that were used for singing hymns was very evident in this domain. However, singing in

languages that one may or may not understand did not really point to maintenance of the Tamil language because religious singing has a very limited use and did not really involve much communication.

Table 5.27

	Tamil	Telugu	Sanskrit	Other Indian Languages
Generation				
G1	59 (71.1%)	44 (53.0%)	18 (21.6%)	8 (9.6%)
G2	86 (72.2%)	45 (37.8%)	23 (19.3%)	14 (11.8%)
G3	65 (73.0%)	25 (28.1%)	4 (4.5%)	3 (3.4%)

Languages Used For Singing *Bhajans*

5.2.5 Reduced Involvement In Teaching Children the Tamil Language

Although most respondents indicated that they wished their children to learn Tamil, they did not act on this desire as indicated in Table 5.28 where only 7.2% of G1 and 5.9% of G2 chose a Tamil education for their children (see also 1.2.5). Table 5.29 shows that parents did not choose to send their children to Tamil classes either. Therefore while the intention to maintain Tamil was there, this intention was not put into practice.

Table 5.27

	Tamil	English	Malay
Generation			
G1	6 (7.2%)	56 (67.5%)	47 (56.6%)
G2	7 (5.9%)	51 (42.9%)	76 (63.9%)
G3	-	9 (10.1)	12 (13.5%)

Table Showing Type of Education Chosen For Respondents' Children

Table 5.28

	Yes	No
Generation		
G1	39 (47.0%)	34 (41%)
G2	38 (31.9%)	54(45.4%)
G3	17 19.1%)	44(49.4%)

Table Showing Respondents' Answer To 'Do Your Children Attend Tamil Lessons'?

5.2.6 Lack of Involvement in Activities To Preserve The Tamil Language

Most respondents thought that it was important to preserve the Tamil language. Table 5.30 showed that a very large majority of all three generations (83.1% of G1, 93.2% of G2 and 93.2% of G3) said that it was important that the Tamil language be maintained. However, there was very little involvement in activities that could help maintain the language as seen in Table 5.24 where only a very tiny section of the three generations (7.2% of G1, 4.2% of G2 and 3.4% of G3) were actually involved in such maintenance inducing activities.

Table 5.29

	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Generation				
G1	69 (83.1%)	8 (9.6%)	6 (7.2%)	83
G2	111 (93.2%)	5 (4.2%)	3(2.5%)	119
G3	83 (93.2%)	4 (4.5%)	2(2.2%)	89
Total	263 (90.4%)	17(5.8%)	11(3.8%)	291

Respondents' Answer To 'Do You Think It Is Important To Preserve The Tamil Language'?

Table 5.30

	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Generation				
G1	6 (7.2%)	72(86.7%)	6	83
G2	5 (4.2%)	99(83.2%)	16	119
G3	3 (3.4%)	79(88.8%)	7	89

Respondents' Answers To 'Are You Involved In Any Way To Maintain The Tamil Language In Malaysia'?

5.2.7 Understanding Language Shift

The findings from this study show a high level of shift in all the areas except for the religious domain where the nature of the domain was such that Tamil needed to be maintained. The shift in the formal reading and writing domain appeared to have occurred because of a feeling that Tamil was not an economically important language. An example from one of the conversations is as follows:

" When I force them [children] to learn or write Tamil, they ask me 'What do I get if I learn this language?'"

Dr. S
(Tapescript 12)

To succeed as migrants , minority communities, like the Malaysian Iyers, appeared to place survival in a competitive world above emotional attachments to the ethnic language, especially where the problem was further compounded by the feeling that the language was not important in furthering career prospects. For example:

" When I was small, the emphasis was English and Malay. My parents said that its good for you to survive here - so you have to learn the language"

Mr. S
(Tapescript 4)

The National Language, though the medium of instruction in schools, had not replaced Tamil in language shift. It was in fact English that had taken the place of Tamil, possibly because it was seen as a 'more important' language than Malay. This finding concurs with the views put forward by Fishman (1989) in a paper discussing problems of 'smaller' national languages.

Fishman (1989) says that 'small' national languages have to cope with competition from International languages as well as sub-national languages. In the Malaysian situation, the Malay language had to compete with English (international

language) as well as the Chinese languages and Tamil ('sub-national languages'). The study revealed that the shift was clearly from Tamil to English and not to Malay and the reasons for the shift seemed to be that English was perceived as more important for economic success. Furthermore, the fact that the Malay language was now the medium of instruction in public schools, seemed to have caused some fears that the proficiency in the English language might suffer as a result. There appeared to be a fear that career opportunities could be lost if the proficiency in the English language was not maintained.

"..... we made a decision that we will speak to them (children) more in English because with Bahasa (Malay) education - whether they will be left out of English".

Mrs. P
(Tapescript 1)

As the medium of instruction in Malaysia was Malay, and bearing in mind the fact that English would clearly be maintained, due to its status as an international language, it was possible that the language that was being compromised was Tamil. With the re-introduction of English into the Malaysian school system as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics, the language can only gain more importance over Malay and Tamil.

Both the questionnaire and the ATC findings showed a shift from Tamil to English. The questionnaire findings showed the level of shift to be at a lower level for

the religious domain, compared to the other domains. However, the conversations showed a near total shift to English except with first generation speakers. The questionnaire respondents appeared to have reported the shift in more conservative terms than was apparent in the conversations. These findings pointed to two possible causes for this. Firstly, the Malaysian Iyers as migrants could be placing a very heavy emphasis on economic success and were prepared to pursue the language that would help them achieve such success. Second, although language played an important role in identity, this community appeared to derive its identity from a variety of sources apart from language (see 7.2.1.1). This could be a reason why the shift is drastic. David (1996) reported that questionnaire findings come with a limitation that respondents reported what they wish for rather than what was the case.

In a study done in the Philippines, Pascasio and Hidalgo (1979) found that the amount of English and Filipino used varies with the domain as a whole. In the home, more Filipino was used while in the social domain, an equal amount of English and Filipino was used. In this study, too, there appeared to be a similar trend of more Tamil being used in the home while more English was used for social purposes. While the settings in the Philippines and Malaysia are not necessarily the same since the Philippines has a more homogenous society than Malaysia, which is multi-racial in nature, it should be noted that both Malaysia as well as the Philippines share a colonial past which could have impacted on the level of shift to English and the level of maintenance of the mother tongue.

In the final analysis, it appeared that the Malaysian Iyers have shifted rather extensively to the English language and use Tamil for areas where they 'had to', such as for religious purposes or for communication with elders who speak no English. Bearing in mind the fact that only the large majority of those the first generation were competent in Tamil, it does not seem possible that the shift to English will be reversed in the near future given the fact that Tamil was not an international language and at best it came in as the third most important language for Malaysian Iyers after English and Malay. Furthermore, to study Tamil formally one needed to move out of the mainstream schools and go into a national type Tamil primary school. Even if one did that, at the secondary level, he or she would be forced to go into a national school where the medium of instruction would be in Malay and English. Unless the need for a Tamil linguistic identity was urgent, it was all too easy to give up on Tamil, especially if maintaining that identity proved too troublesome.

5.3 Conclusion

The questionnaire analysis presented a macro picture of language shift patterns of Malaysian Iyers. Evidence of language shift was seen in the reduced use of the Tamil language in successive generations, the reduced use of Tamil for various role relationships within the home and the use of English in the social and friendship domains. The Malay language had made very small inroads especially with the third generation signaling a possible future direction for language shift. There was also extensive code-switching between English and Tamil showing that English had now become part of the community's linguistic repertoire.

There was also evidence to show that while respondents felt that the Tamil language needed to be preserved, the minimal involvement in activities that could preserve the ethnic language showed that these thoughts were not acted upon for effective maintenance of Tamil. Further, there was also evidence to show that language was not seen as the only indicator of ethnic identity as various factors involved with culture and tradition also gave the community their identity. When ethnic identity was tied up with language, the language was usually maintained, otherwise it was not (Fishman, 1989).

Maintenance of the Tamil language was seen in the religious domain, in communication with the priest and for religious activities such as hymn singing. However, even in these areas, there were other languages present such as Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada.

While the proficiency in the Tamil language had declined considerably and there was a reduction in home and social interactions in Tamil, the findings also showed that all respondents understood the ethnic language either partially or fully. This fact was an indicator that the Tamil language would not be completely lost in the near future.