

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter will firstly look at the background of the study. Then it will list the research objectives, research questions, the significance and the limitations of the study. The focus of this study is on the language choice among the Ceylonese community in Klang who are one of the ethnic Indian groups in Malaysia.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multilingual country comprising a population of 28.31 million in 2009. Out of this total population in Malaysia, Bumiputera comprise 66%, Chinese 26.2% and Indians 7.8% (Census 2009, found at the Department of Statistics, Malaysia website). Although the citizens of Malaysia have been quantified into three main races, yet this is not a total representation of the diverse languages, religion, dialects and cultural practices in each sub-division within the races. For example, the Malay community consists of the Arabian, the Javanese and even the Indian Muslims who have inter-married into a singular group called Malays (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malays>). The Chinese on the other hand have distinct dialects such as Cantonese and Hokkien although in the mainland, Mandarin is accepted as the inter-region and national language.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian\\_Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian_Chinese))

The Indians too are very diverse in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds for example you have the Tamils, the Malayalees and Telugus from Southern India and the North Indians, principally Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, and Sindhi.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_Malaysians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Malaysians)).

However, the focus of this study is the small minority community who hail from Sri Lanka but predominantly practice Tamil culture and speak a varied dialect of Tamil. They are also referred to as the Ceylonese Tamil community.

Since the study is focused on Tamils, the researcher will first differentiate between the Ceylonese Tamils and the Tamils of India. Basically, there are two kinds of Tamils who exist in Sri Lanka today. The first are the Sri Lankan Tamils who either descended from the Tamils of the old Jaffna kingdom or those who migrated to the East Coast. The second are the Indian Tamils or Hill Country Tamils who are descendants of bonded labourers sent from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to work in the tea plantations. They are divided by their time of geographical relocation. The Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka are Tamil people of relatively recent Indian origin in Sri Lanka. They are also known as Hill Country Tamils, Up-country Tamils or simply Indian Tamils. They are descended from people brought by the British colonial rulers, from South India to Sri Lanka in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to work in coffee, tea and rubber plantations ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu)).

The Tamils of India on the other hand reside in Tamil Nadu which is the cradle of Tamil civilisation. It has been the home of the civilisation since at least 1500 BC, as attested by numerous archeological sites in and around Adichanallur. Its classical language Tamil has been used in inscriptions and literature for over 2500 years. Tamil Nadu is home to many natural resources, grand Hindu temples of Dravidian architecture and multi-religious pilgrimage sites. Although the Tamils of both these locations stay in different geographical areas, yet they share the same thread of culture and usage of the Tamil language as their mother tongue ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu)).

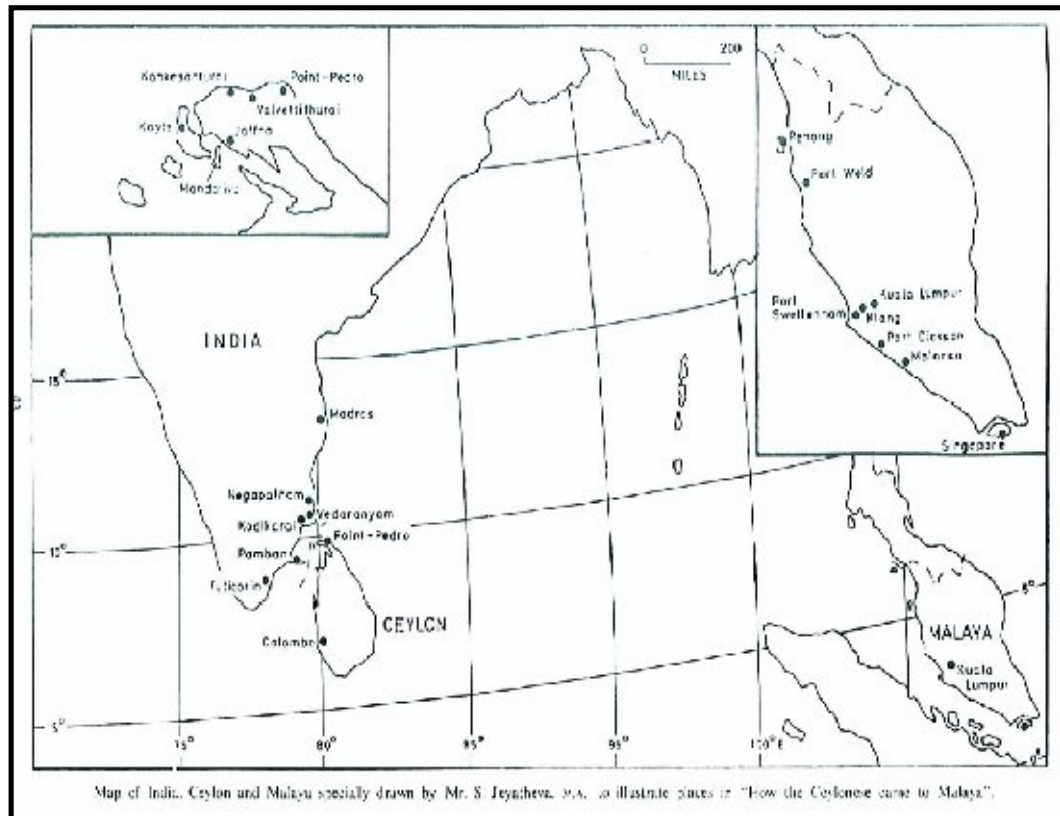
Malaysian Ceylonese are made up predominantly by Tamils from Ceylon. Although genetically, the Tamils of Sri Lanka are of the same stock as the Dravidians of South India yet they possess very distinct and peculiar characteristics of their own and thus fashioned an individual identity of their own however close their linguistic, racial and religious similarities may be (Singam, Durai Raja, 1968:28).

Although the medium of instruction in Tamil schools is the Tamil language, nonetheless there is a distinct difference between this Tamil which is the Tamil Nadu Tamil as opposed to the written and speaking style of Ceylonese Tamil. The Sri Lankan Tamil dialects or Ceylonese Tamil dialects form a group of Tamil dialects used in the modern country of Sri Lanka by Sri Lankan Tamils that is distinct from the dialects of modern Tamil Tamil Nadu and Kerala states of India. Tamil dialects are differentiated by the phonological changes and sound shifts in their evolution from classical or old Tamil ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_Tamil\\_dialects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Tamil_dialects)). The first question that needs to be addressed is what would impel the Ceylonese Tamil to leave their homeland and come to what was then known as Malaya. Most of all, economics seem to be the strongest of all motives for this decision. Not all of Ceylon was a rich nation and the Jaffna Peninsula from which many Tamils came is made out of hard barren stretch of land which provided a scanty living even for those who toiled hard and was skilful. The promise of Malaya was that with the same amount of effort they could enjoy better living conditions and greater economic return. The men of Ceylon found their crowded island was not able to reward their earnest hard work. They were also fed stories on the glories of Malaya which was pictured as the land of opportunity and wealth. This situation caused a steady drop of immigrants to start coming and eventually it formed a steady river of Tamil immigration (Singam, Durai Raja, 1968:29).

Besides this, other added advantages of Malaya in terms of weather were that it was very similar to the weather of Ceylon and this made acclimatisation easy. Besides this, an important tenet that inspired the Tamils to come to the shores of Malaya was the fact that these immigrants had knowledge of English which would be a major asset to them. The new land would also allow them the freedom to practice their religion and also the freedom to transfer money home. The successful Tamil immigrants often returned home from Malaya and spread the good news of job opportunities waiting for them in Malaya. (Singam, Durai Raja, 1968:33).

The Ceylonese Tamil community have their origin in the Jaffna Peninsula and islands to the West which together form the territory of Jaffna which covers most of the Northern Province of modern Sri Lanka. The majority of this community came to Malaya during the pre-war period of 1941 to 1944 (Singam, Durai Raja, 1968:37).

This small community of English educated Ceylonese Tamils were sought after by the British to assist in the administration of the British government of Malaya. The British offered them readily available appointments in its service because of their educational background. Most of the Ceylonese Tamils were employed as clerks, surveyors, hospital assistants, teachers and technical assistants. The Ceylonese Tamils started arriving in Malaya with the advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and have placed themselves all over Malaya, i.e. Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Malacca and Port Dickson (Singam, Durai Raja, 1968:38). The map below illustrates this.

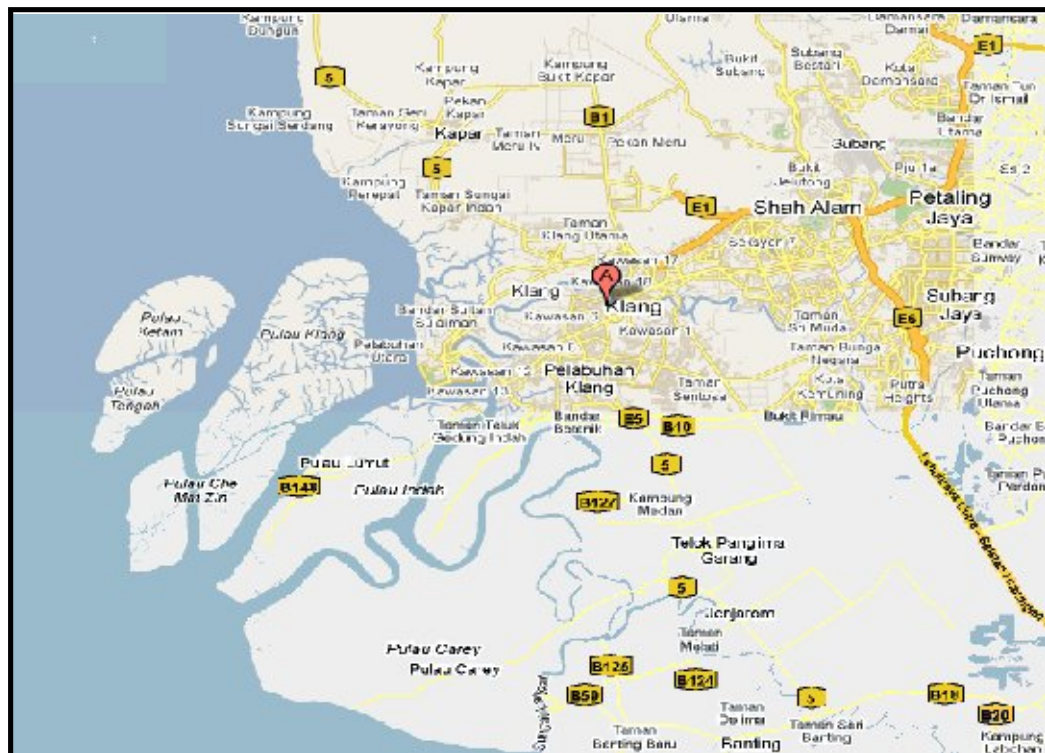


Map 1 : Distribution of the Ceylonese community in Malaysia

Since the study focuses on the Ceylonese community in Klang, we will look into the history of Klang. Klang is a district in the State of Selangor which is about 32 kilometres south-west of Kuala Lumpur which is the capital of Malaysia. It is distinct comparative to other towns in the State because of its standing as the Royal town of the State of Selangor. The district area includes a few islands namely Pulau Ketam, Pulau Kelang, Pulau Tengah, Pulau Selat Kering, Pulau Selat Gedung, Pulau Che Mat Zin and Pulau Indah. It covers roughly about 630 square kilometres of land with a 55 kilometre coastline. It is bounded on the North by the Kuala Selangor District, on the East by Petaling District and by the South by Kuala Langat district. Another feature of Klang is that it is one of the main entrances to Malaysia via sea and has one of the nation's premier ports which is located 8 kilometres to the south-west of Klang town.

The progressive growth of this port over the past decades has enormously contributed to the robust economic growth of the state and nation (Yazid, Mohd Jamil, 2005:5).

Klang is one of the oldest towns in Malaysia. In fact, pre-historic artefacts known as Mawas bones which were used in the Iron Age have been found there. This indicates that civilisation appeared in Klang some two thousand years ago. Historians note that the first written account of Klang started during the rule of the Majapahit Empire about six hundred years ago. When Malacca was just a fishing village, Klang was already a bustling centre for commerce and famous for its high quality tin. This tin was found in large amounts in-stream and along the Klang river. The Klang river was already marked and named on the earliest maritime charts prepared by navigators who accompanied the Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho on his visits to Malacca from 1409 to 1433. Klang was the state capital before the seat of government shifted to Shah Alam in 1977 (Yazid, Mohd Jamil, 2005:12).



Map 2 : Map of Klang

As at 2000, according to Census 2000, found at the *Department of Statistics, Malaysia website*, the Klang population amounted to 840,000 people.

Race	Total (in %)
Malays	49%
Chinese	31%
Indians	15%
Others	5%

Table 1.1 Racial composition in Klang

In Klang, the manufacturing sector employs the most workers, followed by the government and business sectors. As for the number of Ceylonese people in Klang, according to Jaffnese Cooperative Society (JCS), there are about 573 registered members in Klang. However, the number of Ceylonese including those unregistered is believed to be closer to about 800 people.

We shall now take a look at the objective of the study – language choice. By definition, language choice is the behaviour through which bilingualism or trilingualism is expressed (Li Wei, 1994:2). The study will focus on the language an individual chooses to use in the selected domains. Though this sounds simple enough, yet in the course of the study, the complexities in making this choice both at a subconscious and conscious level will be viewed as well. We will investigate how the Ceylonese Tamil community responds to language change within various social settings and environments.

The focus of this study is the Ceylonese community in Klang. The aim of the present study is to examine the choice of language of the Ceylonese community. It would be interesting to discover if there is a preference to use another language or whether they have made effort to maintain their ethnic language, Ceylonese Tamil.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study will examine the language choice of the Ceylonese people in Klang.

The objectives of the study are to:

- a) investigate the main choice of language among the Ceylonese community in Klang.
- b) investigate if there is a difference in language choice across the different domains.
- c) investigate if there is a difference in language choice across the different generations.
- d) examine if there has been a language shift from Ceylonese Tamil to Tamil or other languages by the Ceylonese community in Klang.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the above mentioned objectives, the research questions that guide the study are framed. The main research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What is the language choice among the Ceylonese community in Klang?
2. Is there a difference in language choice across the different domains?
3. Is there a difference in language choice across the different generations?
4. Has there been a language shift from Ceylonese Tamil to Tamil or other languages?



#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The Ceylonese community in Klang are a minority ethno-linguistic community whose culture has not been fully documented except for personal documents. They are a unique group because they follow the traditional Hindu religion of India and speak the common language of Tamil Nadu, yet they have created a distinct form of Tamil and also culture which is similar yet different from the ones found in India.

This documentation of their linguistic preferences would be an indication to the community of the status of Ceylonese in the community in Klang.

#### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

This study has several limitations which will be addressed below.

The limitations are as follows:

- a. The truthfulness of respondents could also be a limitation to the study. Some might feel embarrassed by the fact that they do not know their mother tongue and others could feel the same way because they have not yet gained proficiency in the National language and English, although having been in the country for so many years.
- b. Results of the study in Klang may not be representative of the total Malaysian Ceylonese community and their language choice.