Language Shift Among Singaporean Malayalee Families

Anitha Devi Pillai, Ph.D. Candidate

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Introduction

This paper describes the language shift among Singaporean Malayalee community by examining language choices and beliefs of three generation of Singaporean Malayalees. The changes in language choices of Singaporean Malayalees are a result of several sociopolitical factors that have taken place in the last 70 to 80 years. Several perspectives on language shift are analyzed in light of the data in this study. The study reveals that the members of the community who are below 50 years old are shifting from Malayalam to English and that Singaporean Malayalees are shifting from standard Malayalam to a hybrid variety of Malayalam described as Singaporean Malayalam.

Singaporean Malayalees and Language Education

Singaporean Malayalees are the second largest sub-group within the Indian community. The first Malayalee immigrant arrived in Singapore in the 1930s and 1940s. In the immediate post-war years, there was an influx of Malayalee immigrants from Kerala who came to Singapore to work (Turnbull 1996). Out of the 7.9% (257, 791) of the Indian population here, there are 21, 736 Singaporean Malayalees in Singapore (Leow 2001). The rest of the Indian community comprises of 64% Tamils and speakers of other languages such as Telugu, Hindi, Marathi and Punjabi.

In order to accommodate to the multi-ethnic composition of Singapore, there are four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. While an institutional label such as Tamil provides a convenient ethnic label to assign a designated language, this label does not capture the heterogeneity of the linguistic composition existing within the Indian community.

Malayalees learned different languages that they came into contact with such as Malay (which was the principal inter-ethnic lingua franca between Chinese, Malays and Indians till 1965 and a compulsory subject in schools during the Federation of Malaya), English (which the British used for administration from 1819-1961) and Tamil (being the mother tongue of the majority of Indians, became the community language of people of Dravidian origin). Subsequently, Malayalees became multilingual in these languages and began to use English and Tamil alongside with Malayalam.

Before English medium schools became compulsory in 1987, the Chinese community had Cantonese, Teochew and Hokkien-medium schools which catered to the sub-minorities. But there were no Malayalam-medium schools and many of the Malayalees were enrolled in Tamil schools. On one hand Indian students were given an opportunity to mingle among Tamils and

other sub-minorities. On the other hand, Malayalees were unable to learn more about their own culture and the language was not transmitted as the primary language to children.

When all schools reverted to the English medium, Malayalee students took up other languages with the majority opting to take Tamil and Malay and a small group opting to take Mandarin as a second language. However, in 1987, the government restructured the entry into 'mother-tongue' lessons and Malayalee students were only allowed to study Tamil. The government reasoned that since 'mother-tongue' lessons were culturally related to one's ethnic background, Dravidian language speakers have much more in common with the Tamil community than with the Malay or Mandarin speaking communities.

The language policies in Singapore propel the assimilation of the Malayalees into the Tamil community. The school policy requires students to take up a second language that is ethnically related to them or in the case of mixed marriages, to the father of the child. Although Gomez (1997) points out that there were efforts by the ministry to boost minority Indo-Iranian languages such as Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu and Hindi, Malayalam was not given the same status despite being the language of the second largest group of Indians in Singapore. South Indian students have to study Tamil (Gupta 1997). There is an incorrect presumption that all Malayalees speak Tamil and share the same culture with the Tamils. Labeling Tamil as the mother-tongue for Malayalees in Singapore places them in a precarious situation since Tamil promotes the loss of Malayalee culture and aids in the assimilation of Malayalees into the mainstream Tamil culture.

Other Socio-Political Factors that Shaped Language Use

Hoffmann (1991) states that political, social, demographic, cultural and linguistic factors could either encourage language maintenance or result in language loss. Among these factors that inhibit the transmission of ancestral language, the support from the government and schools has been discussed in the earlier section. The remaining relevant factors are: low status of Malayalam, well dispersed speakers, lack of utilitarian value of Malayalam in religious rituals, languages used in the media and the lack of motivation by members.

The low status of Malayalam in Singapore is one of the contributing factors that affect language maintenance among Malayalees. Furthermore, they do not have the numerical strength in comparison to the Tamils to maintain their language. Neither does Malayalam have any economic or vital instrumental value in Singapore. The lack of practical support and opportunities to acquire the language ascribe to the low profile of Malayalam in Singapore. This, in turn, may alienate Malayalam speakers from their language.

One government policy that has led to the minimal use of Malayalam is the implementation of ethnically mixed neighborhoods. According to the 2001 census (Leow 2001b), 88% of Singaporeans live in Housing Development Board (HDB) flats. The sale of HDB flats is controlled by the government in order to prevent the formation of ethnic ghettos. Limits have been placed on the percentage representation of the races in each neighborhood. This

isolates Malayalees from one another. The speakers are dispersed and it becomes difficult to maintain the language when the lingua franca of the neighborhood is English rather than Malayalam.

Furthermore, Malayalees do not require knowledge of the language for religious rituals. None of the main religions of the Malayalees uses Malayalam as their language medium in religious rituals. The Hindus use Sanskrit, the Christians use English and the Muslims use Arabic. 'Onam', a harvest festival which is celebrated by Malayalees of all religions is an outdated festival in Singapore. As Anandan (1995) points out, since Onam is not a public holiday it goes unnoticed by most Malayalees in Singapore. Apart from having traditional associations with the Malayalee culture, Onam is also an outdated cultural festival that seems to have lost its appeal with the younger generation.

In addition, the media in Singapore predominately broadcasts American and British serials and movies. These programs facilitate the language shift to English. Furthermore, Malayalam is virtually absent from the media and both television and radio programs are only available in the official languages. 'Cable television station' from Kerala was only available in Singapore from 2005 onwards. Till which time, Singaporean Malayalees had minimal access to newspapers and magazines for the last two decades, as shopkeepers did not bring supplies from India due to low demand. These have stifled the transmission of Malayalam to the next generation. Ironically there has been an influx of materials available in the recent years on the internet but this medium is sought largely by expatriate Malayalees as the majority of Singaporean Malayalees below 40 years old are illiterate in Malayalam.

Purpose and Scope of Study

Taking the above-mentioned factors into account, this study chooses to examine language use of Singaporean Malayalees from the sociolinguistic point of view. It limits itself to Malayalees who have lived in Singapore for at least 30 years and those who were born in Singapore. The study specifically aims to investigate language use patterns and attitudes towards various languages they use. It will also identify any synchronic differences or similarities between participants of the same age group or with similar group affiliations. This study is then of potential relevance to language shift and maintenance issues.

Language Shift

'Language Shift' refers to changes in language use among a community of speakers such as when a community starts to use one language in domains and functions in which its members had previously used another language (Fasold, 1984:213) and a shift in the number of speakers of a language (Baker, 1996:42). Similarly, Weinreich (1968:79) defines language shift as 'the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another.' This could either be a "gradual or sudden move from one language to another" (Crystal, 1997:215). Furthermore, this shift is unavoidable when two languages compete for use in the same domains (Romaine, 2000:49).

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In order to facilitate a discussion in language shift, one must also take into account that the various degrees of language shift in speech communities in the world and within one community. When the cycle of language shift is completed, speakers will be monolingual (Hoffmann, 1991:186).

When language shift is incomplete, only one section of the community may be affected to a lesser degree and maintain some degree of proficiency because they continue to use it in some domain. Hence, being monolingual in a language or a variety is an indication of complete language shift. Since the identification of the degree of language shift in the community bears implications for the future of the language, the present study will examine the degree of language shift among Singaporean Malayalees as well.

There are also many inter-related dimensions to language shift. One dimension of language shift is the inter-ethnic group communication shift. This may promote 'stable bilingualism' (Fase et. al., 1993:7) and is usually brought about by necessity. Another dimension of language shift is for intra–ethnic group communication. The language used in inter-ethnic communication can lead to a shift in intra-ethnic group interaction as illustrated by the Indian community in Singapore. Kuo (1985:47) reports that the Indian community has experienced more pronounced language shift in the home domain than the other ethnic communities.

The current study hence begins by examining language choices of Singaporean Malayalees to ascertain if they are truly using English in most domains of language use and with members of their community.

The future of stable bilingualism among Singaporean Malayalees is bleak. It is unlikely that speakers will maintain two languages indefinitely when they are able to use one language for all domains (Edwards, 1995). This form of shift will destabilize language proficiency as well. Singaporean Malayalees are not effectively bilingual in English, Malayalam and Tamil either. They have shifted to English, the dominant lingua franca in Singapore for inter-ethnic group communication and to Tamil for intra-ethnic group communication among South Indians. This hypothesis is further tested during the analysis of the questionnaires where I examine language choices of participants.

Factors affecting Language Shift

Since language is an integral tool in our communication, a community or individual may choose to change one set of linguistic tools for another (Hoffman, 1998:187). This change may also be accompanied by external pressure or other subtle factors. Sociolinguists classify the causes for language shift as economic status, demography and institutional support and the languages present in the school domain (Hoffmann, 1991). Baker (1996:42) argues that deliberate decisions directly or indirectly have an impact on economic, political, cultural, social and technological changes. All these factors have a bearing on the current research.

Schermerhorn (1970:15) attributes language shift to the degree of integration of ethnic groups into the surrounding societies. The nature and degree of integration in return, is dependent upon a composite function of three independent and three intervening variables. The three independent variables are the nature of interaction, the degree of enclosure, the degree of control (Schermerhorn 1970:15). These three variables are relevant in the discussion of language choices of Singaporean Malayalees as government policies on education and housing have shaped their language choices.

Language allegiance has often been identified as an important criterion in language shift. Dorian (1982:147) argued that language loyalty would persist as long as the economic and social circumstances are conductive to it, but if some other language proves to have greater value, a shift to that language would begin. Williams (1992:58) adds that economic circumstances are more important than the cultural circumstances. In order to investigate the presence of language allegiance, the participants of this study are asked about their views of their home language.

Likewise, an investigation of attitudes towards Malayalam, Singaporean Malayalam and other languages is also incorporated into the interview with the participants. When languages are in contact, there are bound to be attitudes favoring or disfavoring the languages involved. These can have profound effects on the psychology on the individual and on the use of the languages (Grosjean, 1982:118). Attitudes to "both threatened and threatening languages" (Wardhauge 1995:18) by the society at large and the interlocutors, is one of the primary reasons for the decline and maintenance of languages. Languages in decline "often evoke negative attitudes" (Edwards, 1995:111), primarily because a decline in the existence and traditional life styles invariably entails that there would be a decline in languages as well (Edwards, 1995). Hence the prestige associated with the language would also have a bearing on the rate and degree of language shift among speakers.

However, a lack of prestige associated with the language does not necessarily mean that the community "lacks affection for the their maternal variety" (Edwards, 1995:107), on the contrary they could actually cherish their maternal variety buy it would merely remain the symbol of their heritage and shift away from this variety for other reasons such as for practical and progressive purposes.

There exists a widespread belief that a shift in language brings about a change in identity and speakers might be resistant to this because the new identity is unwelcome (Wardhauge 1995:5). This new language and identity can be actively promoted and pursued. This is an important criterion in understanding the future maintenance or loss of the language as such it is necessary to examine the attitudes of members towards languages used by Singaporean Malayalees.

The abovementioned factors play a vital role in the present study. Although, Malayalam does not have an extrinsic value in Singapore, it is still maintained by the community. With a wide repertoire of languages available to the community, it will worthwhile to investigate the language choices in order to establish language shift within the community.

Studies on Language Shift among Singaporean Indians

There are many studies that have dealt with language patterns of the Non-Mandarin Chinese languages, Malay and some Indian languages. Mani and Gopinathan (1983: 106) refuted Kuo's (1985: 140) claim that Tamil was one language which was showing 'declining communicativity even for intra-ethnic communication among Indians'. They point out that by 1980, the situation had reversed and more people were speaking in Tamil.

Later, Sobrielo (1986) conducted an exploratory study with a sample group of informants from the ages of 12 to 60 and established that Tamil is being maintained in many domains such as schools. Both Sobrielo (1986) and Ramiah (1991) point out that Tamil is being replaced by English in the home domain. The latest survey by Saravanan (1994), which was based on the census report and surveys, found that there was a decrease in the number of Tamil speakers. She concluded that Tamil will remain the predominant language only in the school domain. Unlike other North Indian languages such as Hindi and Gujarati, Malayalam has not been recognized as an 'O' level or 'A' level subject despite being the language of the second largest group of speakers among the Indian community. Without institutional support, the Malayalee community is susceptible to language shift.

To date two studies have been conducted on the language shift phenomenon among Singaporean Malayalees. Anandan (1996) investigated the language patterns of Hindu Singaporean Malayalee families and concluded that if language shift towards English continues, the language may die a natural death in Singapore. However, Malayalam can hardly be classified as a dying language as there are approximately 20 million speakers of this language in the world (Finegan et.al. 1992). It would be appropriate to claim that Singaporean Malayalees are shifting to English and Tamil due to factors such as education policies and the lack of official recognition of Malayalam. Hence the participants in this study are also likely to choose between these two codes in their conversation.

Fernandaz's (1998) study was both qualitative and quantitative in which she reaffirms through questionnaires and interviews that the Christian Malayalee community is increasingly shifting towards English. She concluded that religion is not a variable in the process of language shift. Both the Hindu and Christian Malayalee community exhibited similar tendencies. Hence, religion was dismissed as a factor that accelerated language shift. This has a bearing on the present research. The participants of this study need not differ in their religious affiliations; instead interlocutors who are in constant contact with each other were selected for this study.

Selection of Informants

The participants were chosen mainly on the basis of their availability and willingness to be part of this study for all three methods of data collection. All interlocutors are part of the same speech community and are in constant contact with one another. This is a close knit community which exhibits an intense sense of language and cultural group allegiance among all three

generations. All the interlocutors participate in religious and cultural activities of the Singaporean Malayalee community. The participants of the study are categorized into three different generations:

a.   First Generation Singaporean Malayalees   (migrants from India)
b.   Second Generation Singaporean Malayalees   (born and brought up in
                                                        Singapore)
c.   Third Generation Singaporean Malayalees   (children of 2nd
                                                        generation Malayalees)

First Generation Malayalee Singaporeans - There are fourteen first generation participants in this study. Ten of them completed the questionnaires only. Mr. and Mrs. Nair have lived in Singapore for thirty-six years while Mr. and Mrs. Nambiar have lived in Singapore for the past thirty years. Both Mr. and Mrs. Nair and Mr. and Mrs. Nambiar have similar backgrounds. All four of them are graduates who have also received formal education in Malayalam.

Second Generation Malayalee Singaporeans - There are twenty-nine second generation participants in this study. Unlike the 1st generation participants, the 2nd generation participants differ in their age groups, knowledge of Malayalam and the level of involvement with the local community. The older members who are above 50 years old have ties with India and continue to actively participate in the community's events while the younger members are less involved in in-group activities. Furthermore, members who are above 50 years old had some form of instruction in Malayalam in the 60's from their parents and other members of the community. The rest of the community took up Tamil as a second language/mother tongue in schools and have no access to Malayalam script which is different from the Tamil script.

Third Generation Malayalee Singaporeans - There are sixteen third generation participants in this study. Fifteen participants completed the questionnaires. This group is least active and detached from the community as they are visibly absent from all group gatherings due to work or school commitments. They proved to be the most difficult participants to study as most of them are still studying or are heavily committed to extra curricular activities. While many of them are willing to complete the questionnaires, they were not present when I visited their homes. Mr. Revi (a participant who completed the questionnaire) comments that the younger generation is usually present for gatherings only during the vacations or during major religious festivals. As a result of that only one third generation participant was interviewed.

Table 1 provides an overview of all the participants who were interviewed. The questionnaires were completed by 10 first generation participants, 20 second generation participants and 15 third generation participants. The background of all the respondents in the same age group is similar. The only difference among first generation participants over the age of sixty is that the females claimed that they could not speak English fluently. Many of them commented that they could speak a spattering amount of English in order to speak to neighbors

and their grandchildren. On the other hand, they added that their spouses were able to converse in English since it is the lingua franca of most work environments in Singapore.

Table 1:   **Personal Background of Participants (Interviews)**

	Respondent	Gender	Age	Generation	Educational Background/Place	
1	Mrs Nair	F	58	1st G	B.A.	India
2	Mrs. Priya Suresh	F	39	2nd G	M.A.	S'pore
3	Mrs Kurup	F	50	2nd G	'A' Level	S'pore
4	Mr. Mano	M	47	2nd G	'A' level	S'pore
5	Ms. Sumi	F	19	3rd G	Student/ 'A' level	S'pore

Semi-Structured Interviews & Questionnaires

For the first medium of data collection, I interviewed five members of the community. During the interviews I was able to elicit their attitudes towards code-switching between Malayalam and other languages, language use and the current position of Malayalam in Singapore (see Appendix A for interview questions). The interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes.

For the second medium of data collection, 45 participants completed the questionnaires. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: background information, language ability and language use. (See Appendix B). As mentioned earlier the majority of the respondents completed the questionnaires in my presence, except for the third generation respondents. All the questionnaires were administered in the homes of the respondents.

The questionnaires were divided into three sections: background information, language ability and language use. The interview questions are divided into three sections: perception of the role of Malayalam in Singapore, the future of Malayalam in Singapore and code switching between languages in order to explore how members of the Malayalee community use their languages especially Malayalam and why they do so. Data from the interviews are integrated with the questionnaires.

As I was present when the participants completed the questionnaires I was able to clarify what they meant when they claimed that they spoke Malayalam. All first generation members stated that they would term the Malayalam spoken by them and those from India to be Malayalam and the variety spoken by younger members to be Singaporean Malayalam. Most second and third generation members refer to Singaporean Malayalam as Malayalam although they are aware that they use a different code from that of their grandparents, parents and Indian Malayalees.

Reported Language Use

The questions in this section relate to the interlocutors' language ability in Malayalam, Tamil and English and language use. In the transcribed extracts, the square brackets indicate translations, Malayalam words or phrases are in italics and bold sequences denote Tamil words or phrases. As all the questionnaires were completed in my presence, I have incorporated some revealing comments that the respondents made as they completed the questionnaires into the data analysis.

Reported Language Ability

Table 2 describes respondents' language ability in all three languages. Respondents are asked to rate their language proficiency on a scale of being very fluent, fairly fluent and not fluent in spoken and written Malayalam, Tamil and English.

Table 2:   Fluency in Malayalam, Tamil and English

	1st G (10)	2nd G (20)	3rd G (15)
Written Malayalam			
Very Fluent	10	8	0
Fairly Fluent	0	10	0
Not Fluent	0	2	15
Spoken Malayalam			
Very Fluent	10	17	5
Fairly Fluent	0	3	8
Not Fluent	0	0	2
Spoken Malayalam			
Able to converse completely in Malayalam	10	20	5
Able to converse using short Malayalam phrases	0	0	10
Able to converse using single Malayalam words	0	0	0
Written English			
Very Fluent	4	18	20
Fairly Fluent	6	2	0
Not Fluent	0	0	0
Spoken English			
Very Fluent	6	20	15
Fairly Fluent	4	0	0
Not Fluent	0	0	0
Spoken English			
Able to converse completely in English	6	18	15
Able to converse using short English phrases	4	2	0
Able to converse using single English words	0	0	0
Written Tamil			
Very Fluent	0	2	15
Fairly Fluent	2	7	0
Not Fluent	8	11	0
Spoken Tamil			
Very Fluent	0	2	15
Fairly Fluent	10	18	0
Not Fluent	0	0	0
Spoken Tamil			
Able to converse completely in Tamil	7	20	15

Able to converse using short Tamil phrases	3	0	0
Able to converse using single Tamil words	0	0	0

I ask the questions for Table 2 to examine if there is a correlation between the generations and language fluency. There are marked differences between language patterns of 1st generation and 3rd generation. The first generation respondents reported that they are able to read and write Malayalam fluently but none of the third generation respondents were able do so. Neither can all the third generation respondents speak fluent Malayalam. Kuo's (1985) claim that the Indian community is shifting away from their mother tongues definitely holds true among Singaporean Malayalees. The shift can be attributed to the demands of coping with a heavy workload at school as well as lack of official recognition that discourages parents from supporting Malayalam lessons. Mrs. Priya suggests that despite the stress from the current workload, Malayalam needs to be given a third language status at school in order to be maintained. (See quote below).

Mrs. Priya: Like it is that kind of a motivation huh is not there you know. First you have complete you English you have to complete your Tamil okay… So you will find that you are putting in more energy towards those subjects. You won't (study) Malayalam, unless you know unless you are taking it as a third language but it is not offered anyway in Singapore. … if a third language is offered huh… it must be recognized of course whereas if it is not recognized and it is an extra burden then again people will think twice.

However, Mrs Kurup who is an active member of Kerala Association retorted that it was the lack of support from the parents that foiled plans for implementing Malayalam as an official mother-tongue in Singapore. While some parents, like Mrs Priya seem to be willing to embrace Malayalam as a third language for their children, the majority of Malayalees are not forthcoming in accepting a language that serves no academic or economic purpose in Singapore. This spells a bleak future for educating the next generation in Malayalam in the near future.

Tamil serves more utilitarian purposes than Malayalam in Singapore. As a result, in place of Malayalam, every third generation respondent indicates that they are very fluent in both written and spoken Tamil due to the education policy that designates Tamil as the mother tongue for all South Indian students. As a result of the official status of Tamil in Singapore and the high level of exposure that Tamil receives, second generation respondents are also fluent speakers of Tamil.

Mrs. Priya: …because they learn Tamil as their second language. They have no choice. They have to use Tamil… I think some of the Malayalee kids are so much better in Tamil than Malayalam itself. Why? Exposure, their environment, their priorities.

Both second and third generation respondents have become increasingly fluent in English as a result of the education system in which English is the medium of instruction. Second generation respondents differed in their ability to read or write in the three languages but they all

indicate that they are fluent speakers of Malayalam, Tamil and English indicating a clear pattern of shift from Malayalam to Tamil and English.

Reported Frequency of Interaction with Other Malayalees

Table 3 shows the languages that are most frequently used by the three generations within the community. Respondents are asked to rate the languages in terms of the language they use the most to the language they use the least in order to establish their language use patterns.

Table 3: Most Frequently used Language

	1st G (10)	2nd G (20)	3rd G (15)
English	4	13	15
Malayalam	6	7	0
Tamil	0	0	0
Malay	0	0	0
Mandarin	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0

The data documents that Malayalam is losing grounds to English among the latter generations. This can be attributed to the lingua franca status that English has in Singapore. Furthermore, as all the 3rd generation respondents are either students or working adults they were more likely to use English as a medium of communication with their peers and fellow community members. None of the three generations indicate that they use Tamil most frequently.

As none of the respondents indicate that they used Tamil most frequently, it can be deduced that respondents either had less contact with Tamils or used English as a means of communication with their Tamil friends. Mrs Suman and Mrs Varijaa, both of whom are housewives among the 1st and older 2nd generation respondents who completed the questionnaires, comment that they used Malayalam most as they interact with their family members and predominantly mingle only within the Malayalee and Tamil community. Drawing from Sobrielo's (1996) study where she concludes that Tamils only use Tamil in the school domain, it is likely that Tamils are more likely to use English as a medium of communication among themselves and with Malayalees.

On the other hand, all the 2nd and 3rd generation interviewees claim that they use Tamil predominantly in their interaction with Tamils. Mr Mano claims that as Malayalees are increasingly marrying Tamils (see below), and are provided with more opportunities to mingle with Tamils predominantly this provides more opportunities to interact in Tamil than in Malayalam. This finding does not correlate with the findings from the questionnaires. It is more likely that the younger 2nd and 3rd probably use a combination of English and Tamil in their interaction.

Mr Mano: *…we are minority group and mostly all mixed marriage and everywhere we go people speak Tamil and all these… All my friends also Tamil… so my Tamil is better than Malayalam…*

Sumi, a 3rd generation respondent told me that she hardly uses any other language apart from English in her interaction with her peers as they all belong to different ethnic groups, she speaks in Tamil in the Tamil language classroom and Malayalam only with her grandmother at home. Interestingly, during all three of my visits, she primarily conversed in a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil with me and her family members, code-switching to English occasionally. This is an indication that respondents can be unreliable in answering questions about their own language use. From my observation, during this study, Sumi's language choice at home is parallel to many of the other third generation members of the community.

Table 4 shows the frequency of language use of Malayalam, Tamil and English by the three generations. Respondents are asked to rate the frequency of language use of Malayalam, English and Tamil on five different frequencies; everyday, 5 times a week, less than 5 times a week, during weekends and others.

Table 4:   Frequency of Language Use

	1st G (10)	2nd G (20)	3rd G (15)
Malayalam			
Everyday	10	10	9
5 times a week	0	0	6
Less than 5 times a week	0	0	0
During weekends	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0
English			
Everyday	5	10	15
5 times a week	5	0	0
Less than 5 times a week	0	0	0
During weekends	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0
Tamil			
Everyday	0	1	15
5 times a week	1	8	0
Less than 5 times a week	9	11	0
During weekends	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0

The frequency of language reaffirms that English and Tamil have more utilitarian purposes than Malayalam among third generation Malayalees. At the same time none of the respondents indicate that they do not use Malayalam at all in their interaction indicating that

respondents have become increasingly multilingual. It is also vital to note that spoken Malayalam has been maintained to some extent by all three generations. Drawing from Edwards (1995) observation, it is unlikely that Malayalam will be maintained when speakers are able to use English and Tamil for all domains.

As speakers emotional attachment also plays a vital role in maintaining and preventing language loss I asked the interviewees whether they thought it was necessary to know Malayalam. With regard to this issue the subjects can be divided into two groups, some (Mrs Nair and Mrs Priya) who explicitly mention a positive emotional attachment to their mother tongue, some (Mr Mano and Ms Sumi) who have some attachment but are pragmatic and less emotional of maintaining it and others (Mrs. Kurup) who reject it for its lack of utilitarian purposes. (See quotes below.)

Sumi   English is more important. Not everybody would love to learn their mother tongue as in Malayalam. And as for me from primary school till secondary school I have been learning Tamil and not Malayalam. But at home I do speak Malayalam but not much.

Mr Mano   If you are born as a Malayalee it is important but in Singapore not necessary…if you are a Malayalee then you should…Good to know but not necessary lah, not necessary.

Mrs Priya I think as a Malayalee you should know your mother tongue. It is important. It gives you an identity.

Mrs Nair Malayalam is important means, *Malayaleekaluku, Malayalam* important *aanu (Malayalam is important for Malayalees)*. Mother tongue. So *Malayalam arainchirindethu athiyaavishiyam (It is vital that one knows Malayalam).*

Mrs Kurup I think not really it is important to know Malayalam because it's only our mother tongue, because you know in Singapore we are going to work and so on, you need English, if you think you know Malayalam there is no such thing as they will give us work and so on lah.

Reported Language Use with Other Members within the Community

Table 5 is a description of the quantity of Malayalam, Tamil and English that is used within the Singaporean Malayalee community. I ask this question to examine the interlocutor effect had on code choices among all three groups.

Table 5: Interlocutor effect on Code choice of 1st Generation Respondents (10)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
Parents	10		

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
Grandparents	10		
Elder members of the Community	10		
Siblings	10		
Spouse	10		
Children	10		
Friends		4	6
Relatives	10		
Acquaintances		4	6

Table 6: Interlocutor effect on Code choice of 2nd Generation Respondents (20)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
Parents	20		
Grandparents	20		
Elder members of the Community	20		
Siblings	12	10	
Spouse	17	3	
Children	17	3	
Friends		16	4
Relatives	20		
Acquaintances		20	

Table 7: Interlocutor effect on Code choice of 3rd Generation Respondents (15)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
Parents	6	14	
Grandparents	8	12	
Elder members of the Community	6	14	
Siblings		20	
Spouse *	2	12	
Children	2	18	
Friends		20	
Relatives		20	
Acquaintances		20	

* Only 14 respondents answered this question as 6 of the 3rd generation respondents were unmarried.

The data corroborates with the findings of Tables 5, 6 and 7. There is a shift in language use among all three generations. Both first and second generation respondents indicate that they only use Malayalam with parents, grandparents, elder members of the community and relatives. Hence Malayalam is maintained in the home domain for this group.

Second generation respondents differ in their language use patterns from the first generation respondents. Second generation respondents state that they use English as well as Malayalam in the home domain with their spouse, children and siblings. It is not surprising then

that third generation respondents mirror their parents' language choice by using English or a mixture of Malayalam and English in their homes.

Furthermore, the only marked difference between the three groups is the third generation respondents' response that they use only English and Malayalam within the community. Despite being very fluent in Tamil none of them indicate that they use Tamil with fellow Malayalees. On the other hand, many of the respondents and interviewees assert that their children speak a hybrid variety of Malayalam which is heavily influenced by Tamil. Hereafter this variety shall be referred to as Singaporean Malayalam.

Reported Language Use at Different Occasions

Table 8 portrays the language choices that one makes at different occasions. I ask this question to determine if place of interaction had an effect on interlocutors' code choice.

Table 8: Place effect on Code choice of 1st generation Respondents (10)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
At home	10		
At religious occasions	10		
During family gatherings	10		
During social functions in the community	10		
Wherever one met a fellow Malayalee	10		

Table 9: Place effect on Code choice of 2nd generation Respondents (20)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
At home	17	3	
At religious occasions	14		6
During family gatherings	17	3	
During social functions in the community	15	5	
Wherever one met a fellow Malayalee	10	10	

Table 10: Place effect on Code choice of 3rd generation Respondents (15)

	Malayalam	English	Tamil
At home	6	9	
At religious occasions	8		7
During family gatherings	6	9	
During social functions in the community		15	
Wherever one met a fellow Malayalee		15	

The choice of languages that is used within the community by the third generation also show that Malayalam is being maintained to a small extent only within the home context. These findings correlate with the conclusions drawn from both Anandan's (1996) and Fernandaz's (1998) studies. Even so, first generation respondents are the main users of Malayalam within the community as they use Malayalam in all their interaction within the community. The interviewees reiterate these views by stating that that they use both English and Tamil more than Malayalam.

Sumi   At home it is English… It is with Malayalam because I need to talk to …granny in Malayalam because she does not understand English, with my parents I prefer to talk in English than Malayalam…

Mr Mano   Okay, Malayalam or English, about there lah, 50 , 50 lah

Mrs Nair   *Malayalam mum paraiyum, Englishum paraiyum. (I speak both Malayalam and English)* Children also speak in Malayalam. My grandchildren also Malayalam *paraiyum.* (*My grandchildren speak in Malayalam too).*

Mrs Priya English then Malayalam, or both together.

Mrs Kurup At home I speak mostly English, Tamil and Malayalam

The data indicates that second and third generation respondents use a mixture of English and Malayalam within the community. With decreasing fluency in Malayalam coupled with education in and exposure to Tamil, the present generation is much more fluent in Tamil than in Malayalam.

Attitudes on the Future of Malayalam in Singapore

The Singaporean Malayalee community is undergoing many changes in their patterns of language use and attitudes. Unlike Wardhaugh's (1987) and Edwards' (1995) observation that languages in decline evoke negative attitudes, speakers of Malayalam do not display any form of negativity towards Singaporean Malayalam or its speakers. Instead they are pragmatic about its lost of importance within the community. Their views emphasis that a shift towards English, Tamil or Singaporean Malayalam will not be resented even if Mrs Nair and Mrs Kurup are nostalgic about maintaining Malayalam.

With many of the younger generation marrying out of the community and a lack of institutional support, I wanted to know how Singaporean Malayalees feel about the future of Malayalam in Singapore as this would shed light on the survival of Malayalam in Singapore. Respondents feel that if at all Malayalam is to be maintained in Singapore it has to be kept alive by the tertiary educated Singaporeans. However with the increasing sense of alienation from

native Malayalees, and being economically and academically driven, the locals do not deem Malayalam as a viable language to keep alive (see eg. below).

Sumi	I think it is going to end up, with the children all talking English more maybe or Tamil but not much Malayalam. Maybe they will end up just like us a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam.
Mr Mano	It (Malayalam) will be there lah. Because we have so many organizations lah, like Kerala association… As long as Tamil, and English is there, Malayalam will be there… The group will be small… High caliber one they want … some place in society they will be joining all these…like me all not involved one… people will just fade away and these people will be there lah, socializing and all these lah, doctor, lawyer, teacher, *koraichu* (a little bit of), some position in Singapore then they will like to join secretary for Kerala association in Singapore and this kind of thing, so this group will carry on lah…
Mrs Priya	But if you have no contact with Kerala itself huh, in Singapore Malayalees alone huh…we are totally another group I should say, … we are Malayalees yes… but don't know how to write…don't know how to speak yeah…if it is not enforced as a curriculum subject, then it is very difficult to find younger generation people taking up the subject.
Mrs Nair	I think Malayalam slowly will disappear. Because *Malayaleekal inggine korainchu varunu, then the, njankilinde generation kazhinchu aduthe generation padipikendathu* not Malayalam you know. (Because there are fewer Malayalees. After my generation, the next generation is not being taught Malayalam you know). English, Tamil, sometimes third language like French, Japanese all. So Malayalam *Singapurile athire* popular *alla. Malayalees engine avarunde makkale padipichu, koraichu koraichu* and that will disappear. (So Malayalam is not very popular in Singapore, with fewer Malayalees teaching their children Malayalam, Malayalam will disappear.) *Ethu Malayaleeinde* grandchild *aathu parainde kathi varam Singapurilu.* (Eventually one would identify themselves as a grandchild of a Malayalee).
Mrs. Kurup	I think in the future, it will slowly will fade away, because now people of the older generation are holding the backbone, then slowly slowly the elders are going off, so the second generation is not picking up, so they also slowly slowly drifting away. So the third generation will be out.

Attitudes towards Linguistic Proficiency of Third Generation Malayalees

The results from the questionnaires indicate that third generation Malayalees do not use much Malayalam nor do they claim to be fluent speakers. I also wanted to know what other Malayalees felt about the linguistic proficiency of third generation Singaporean Malayalees as this will also indicate Malayalam's survival possibilities in the future. Mrs Nair likens

Malayalam to a 'side dish' in a meal, which serves to compliment the meal if it is present but remains an unnecessary luxury (see extract below).

I wish to emphasis that most of the respondents feel that there is no trace of native like proficiency among younger members especially among those who have no reading or writing knowledge of Malayalam (see extract below). This result correlates with the findings from the questionnaires in which most second generation and all third generation Malayalees are not able to read or write in Malayalam. As a consequence first generation Malayalees are often the guardians of the language and the rest of the community are speakers of Singaporean Malayalam.

Sumi	I think it is not pure, because if you compare it with people who are actually talking real… pure Malayalam, it is totally two different ways of talking and the words that the meanings and the words used, like me I usually mix up Malayalam words with Tamil words and I do that all the time till today.
Mr Mano	If the mother and father can speak reasonably good Malayalam I think the children can catch up. I think later as you go further down I think maybe cannot.
Mrs Kurup	Even the second generation like me also I am not speaking proper Malayalam.
Mrs Nair	*Ooruru thalamura kazhiyunde thorum avarunde Malayalam arivu korainchu kondu varunu.* (With every generation, Malayalees' knowledge of Malayalam is diminishing.) So *Ende Malayalamthilu unde arivu ende childrenu illa, korainchu koraichu, avaruku ulla arivu avarinde childrenu illa ende* grandchildre*nu*. (So my children do not have the knowledge of Malayalam as much as I do, and my grandchildren do not have as much knowledge of Malayalam as my children). Because they are learning English, Tamil so Malayalam is only a side language like that… like a side dish.
Mrs Priya	So if let's say three generations are living together then the older generations are the ones who actually bring this to the kids. If it is just the parents and the children they will only want their children to learn English and the second language that they are taking in school which may be Tamil.

Are Singaporean Malayalees Experiencing Language Shift?

Language shift is evident among Singaporean Malayalees. The findings from the questionnaires and the interviews correlate with each other in many aspects. Based on the gradual shift in linguistic proficiency over the three generations, it is evident that language shift is in progress among the Singaporean Malayalee population. It gets progressively more apparent from those who are below 40 years old. The majority of second and third generation Malayalees are less proficient in Malayalam and more proficient in Tamil and English.

Two forms of language shift have been thrown up from the data derived from self-reported questionnaires and interviews. Firstly members are shifting from Malayalam to English.

First generation members are the main users of Malayalam in the community. They are the most fluent users of the language. As the main users of Malayalam, first generation members help to maintain the language when they are present in the same households as their grandchildren. Second generation members are distinguishably different from first generation members in their increased fluency in English and Tamil as they were educated in Singapore. This group is made up of some members who are very fluent in written and spoken Malayalam. But they are inclined to use more English with their children. There is a slight decrease in their fluency level of written Malayalam though most of them are very fluent speakers of the language. Third generation members are markedly different from the rest of the community as they have no knowledge of written Malayalam and are able to converse using short Malayalam phrases. On the other hand this group is effectively bilingual in both Tamil and English.

Secondly, members are shifting from standard Malayalam to a hybrid variety of Malayalam. Phonological and lexical interferences from Singaporean Malayalees' stronger language (Tamil) are noted in speakers' weaker language (Malayalam). This does not pertain to English which is another strong language of second and third generation interlocutors since it is distinctly different from Malayalam but it adds to the amount of code-switching that takes place in the community.

Both types of language shift are a result of the same factors: lack of institutional support for Malayalam, socialization patterns of Malayalees, acquisition of only Singaporean Malayalam by younger learners, low status of Malayalam/Singaporean Malayalam as a result of a lack of utilitarian purposes, pragmatic attitude of speakers and low proficiency of third generation members.

What is crucial to the matter on language shift is the fact that while changing linguistic competence have propelled the shift to a new code, Tamil can in no way be seen to threaten the dominance of Singaporean Malayalam, as almost all speakers including younger speakers profess to be able to converse in their mother tongue.

What languages or language varieties do Singaporean Malayalees use with each other and with others in the community?

According to the data, there are age-related and group related differences in which language is used in a conversation. First generation and female members above 50 years old are the most consistent users of Malayalam and are perceived to be the main users and transmitters of the language by the community. This is especially true if the grandparents live in the same households as their children and grandchildren.

Second generation male members who are above 50 years old use more English in their speech than first generation members in the presence of younger members and among themselves. Furthermore, the male members of this group select the language of discussion based on its appropriateness to the topic of discussion. According to my self-reported

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questionnaire data they also perceive themselves to use more Malayalam than the spontaneous tape recordings suggest.

The 30-49 age group is the group with language choices most in flux for depending on the topic or interlocutor, these members are likely to either favor Malayalam or English. This group uses code-switching as a language variety in order to accommodate the different kinds of speakers based on gender, age and generation. Members are likely to use Malayalam in trying to express their agitation and when conversing with older members of the community.

Members belonging to the youngest group use English almost exclusively in group interactions with their peers. Like members from the 30-49 age group, this group admitted to using a Singaporean variety of Malayalam. Knowledge of Malayalam is valued by all members of the community but non-fluent speakers are not stigmatized by the older generation who expressed that the younger members are not provided with an opportunity to acquire the language and neither do the 18-29 year old group display a desire to learn Malayalam. Although this group indicates that they speak with older relatives in Malayalam, they do not use Malayalam with their peers in the community. This group claims to have the least use for Malayalam.

Implications for Further Research

Two types of language shift have taken place. A shift from Malayalam to Singaporean Malayalam, and a shift from Malayalam to English. Although the shift from Malayalam to English has been noted among almost all Singaporean Indians as well, due consideration should also be given to the maintenance of their identity in the form of Singaporean Malayalam in future studies.

This study shows additional categories that could prove to be useful for studies in language shift and language maintenance. An examination of linguistic competence, attitudes, social background, choice of matrix language, accommodation patterns and contact induced changes in language of speakers can highlight relevant issues. The changes in Singaporean Malayalam need to be analyzed from a microscopic perspective in order to document contact induced changes in detail as well as track future changes to the language if any. As such changes have a bearing on research on language shift and maintenance.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Do you think it is important to know Malayalam? Why?
2. How do you identify yourself? (Eg. as a Malayalee, Singaporean Malayalee, Indian, Hindu etc.)
3. Is it important for your children to know Malayalam?
4. In your opinion can the third generation Malayalee population in Singapore speak Malayalam?
5. What do you think about the future of the Malayalam language in Singapore?
6. How do you feel about using both English and Malayalam simultaneously in a conversation?
7. Do you use more than one language in a conversation? Why?

Appendix B: Questionnaires

Please complete all the questions in this questionnaire. Your personal views and identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Age   a. 19-25 b. 26 – 35   c. 36 -45 d. 46 – 55   e. 56 and above   [   ]
Sex   a. female b. male   [   ]

Place of birth _____ (please complete the next question if you were not born in Singapore)

How long have you been in Singapore? _____

What languages do you speak? _____

1. Which category describes you the best?
   a. first generation Singaporean (migrant from India)
   b. second generation Singaporean (born and brought up in Singapore)
   c. third generation Singaporean (parents were born and brought up in Singapore)
                        [   ]

2. How fluent are you in Malayalam?
   a. very fluent (able to read and write very well)
   b. fairly fluent (able to read and write a few words and sentences)
   c. not fluent (unable to read or write)
                                                        [   ]
3. How fluent are you in spoken Malayalam?
   a. able to converse in complete utterances all the time
   b. able to converse in complete utterances most of the time
   c. able to converse in complete utterances sometimes   [   ]

4. How much Malayalam do you use?
   a. able to converse completely in Malayalam
   b. able to converse in Malayalam using short phrases
   c. able to converse using single Malayalam words   [   ]

Please rate the answers according to the frequency of use. For example, if you speak Malayalam most of the time, please indicate it with [1] and English next most frequently then indicate [2] beside it.

5. Which language do you use the most?
   a. English   [   ]
   b. Malayalam   [   ]
   c. Tamil   [   ]
   d. Malay   [   ]
   e. Mandarin   [   ]
   f. Others: _____   [   ]

Please tick the appropriate boxes.

6. With whom do you use Malayalam?
   a. with parents   [   ]
   b. with grandparents   [   ]
   c. with elder members of the community   [   ]
   d. with siblings   [   ]
   e. with spouse   [   ]
   f. with children   [   ]
   g. with friends   [   ]
   h. with relatives   [   ]
   i. with acquaintances   [   ]

7. When do you use Malayalam?
   a. at home   [   ]
   b. at religious occasions   [   ]
   c. during family gatherings   [   ]
   d. during social functions in the Malayalee community[   ]
   e. whenever you meet a fellow Malayalee   [   ]

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