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Language Choice of Malaysian Chindians

Ainun Rozana Mohd Zaid, M.A., Mac Yin Mee, M.Ed., Kuang Ching Hei, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper focuses on a minority group of Malaysians called *Chindians*, a group comprising children of mixed marriages between mainstream Chinese and Indians. This paper aims to identify the language choice of the *Chindians* in four domains: family, education, employment and religion. In particular, this paper examines where *Chindians* are likely to use their native languages such as Chinese (including dialects) and Tamil (including sub-varieties) which are linguistically passed on by their parents and the two other languages of official status: Malay and English. Interlocutors involved, domains and their reasons for using or refraining from using these languages are explored. Little research has been done on *Chindians* due to their small demography in this country. In this study selected respondents were 18 children aged from 10 to 31 and 11 parents who are 6 Chinese and 5 Indians respectively. All are from an urban area located in the Klang Valley of Selangor, the biggest state of peninsular Malaysia. A questionnaire that has been refined from a pilot study was then administered. A structured interview was also conducted with the parents to validate the findings. Analysis of data was done based on the items of the questionnaire and these were then presented in percentages. Findings suggest that *Chindians*' main choice of language rests on English.

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Key words: domains, Chindians, interlocutors, language choice, minority, code-switch, Chinese, Tamil

1. Introduction

Research focusing on people of mixed cultural heritage, like the *Chindians*, is far in between in Malaysia and this is probably because they are of a very small minority group. In general, *Chindians* are descendants of mixed marriages between mainstream Chinese and Indians. A search on the internet indicates that the term has not even been classified as an ethnic minority although it is used broadly by Malaysians in the peninsular. A preliminary study of the *Chindian* community (see Ainun Rozana & Mac, 2009) suggests that *Chindians* use English mainly among themselves and with their parents with 47.4% of them using it most of the time while only 26.3% claim to use Chinese most of the time, and 15.8% claim that Tamil is used most of the time and only 10.5% claim that Malay is used most of the time. Although their reasons for saying so have yet to be verified, this particular study shows that 69.2% of the *Chindians* regard English as their native language. The same respondents also claim that they are unaffected by how other ethnic groups view them when using English. This is because they regard English as an important language that is used for communicative purposes with family, friends as well as for job applications. This paper aims to explore the domains other languages, including their parents' native languages, are used and it is hoped that the findings will fill in a gap that is rarely explored.

2. Aim

The aim of this study is thus to examine the language choice of *Chindians* in four different domains: family, education, employment and religion. The interlocutors involved in the respective domains are identified and their reasons for using/refraining from using other languages available to them are examined. The research questions formulated are:

1. In what domains do *Chindians* use English, Malay and their parents' respective native languages?
2. Who are the interlocutors in these domains?
3. What are their reasons for using/refraining from using their parents' native languages?

3. Background of *Chindian*

A term known only to Malaysians, *Chindian* is a coined word derived from Chinese and Indian. This is because parents of *Chindians* are mainstream Chinese or Indians who have been brought up and possibly educated in a different cultural environment including cultural practices

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and languages used. It is also a fact that many Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians, depending on which part of the country they come from, may be ethnically inclined but may not be linguistically inclined in using their respective native languages. Some Malaysian Chinese people (see Kuang, 2012) are Chinese educated and speak Mandarin and dialects of the language. Others may be Chinese educated but only speak Mandarin. Another group of Chinese can be English educated and they speak only English (see Pillai, 2003). The same also applies to Malaysian Indians who may be of different ethnic groups with respective ethnic languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, and Ceylonese. Some Indians are also from mixed parentage and they too have a different set of language use. Nonetheless, as official languages with particular prestige and status in this country, Malay and English are languages all Malaysians would have acquired through the education system in the country, thus it should be commonly used by majority of the people.

4. Definition of terms

Different studies have used various terms in language choice studies with slight variations. This paper will expand on the terms used by providing the definitions.

- a. Domain:
According to Fishman (1972, pp82) domain refers to "...a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships and interactions between communicators and locales of communication in accord with the institutions of a society..." and we adopt this term for our paper.
- b. Native language
Native language refers to the main language acquired and used in childhood (Gupta, 1998) and in the context of this paper it refers to the language of their parents who come from mainstream Chinese or Indian homes.
- c. Attitude
Attitude refers to the viewpoints and opinions of Chindian as well as their parents towards the children's language use in different domains.

5. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and data are derived from a questionnaire. Data presented are generally descriptive and findings are presented in percentages. The domains identified are: family, education, employment and religion because they are more common among individuals and language use. A questionnaire that has been refined from a pilot study was administered on 18 *Chindian* children who were between 10 to 31 of age and 11 parents who were made up of six mothers and five fathers. Four were mainstream Chinese and seven were mainstream Indians. Their educational qualifications ranged from doctorate holders to secondary education. Majority were professionals working in the education, medical, business

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and religious sector and only one was a housewife. Their ages ranged between 30 to 54. All were recruited from the Klang Valley, Selangor. A structured interview was also conducted with the parents of the *Chindians* to validate the responses retrieved from the questionnaire. Consent was acquired via a letter and through the email. Questionnaires (see Appendix) were then dispatched to the respondents electronically. Telephone and face to face interviews with the parents were then conducted subsequently.

5.1 Pilot study

The questionnaire was first pilot tested on 3 *Chindians* and the interview on 2 parents (1 Chinese and 1 Indian). After some feedback from the piloted respondents, amendments were made to the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three main sections which include information on biodata, language choice and domains. Under domain, questions on family, education, employment and religion are included. The total number of questions in the questionnaire is 48. The questions are a combination of structured and open ended questions.

The structured interviews were only for the parents and it was based on 17 open ended questions pertaining to their background and perception toward their children's use of native language.

The responses acquired from the questionnaires and interviews were analysed in terms of frequency counts and percentages. This served as our quantitative responses. Data from the open ended questions were then used to further support or explain the responses chosen by the *Chindians*. Responses from the parents were further explicated to supplement data acquired from the questionnaires. Based on the analysis, findings and conclusions were presented.

6. Literature review

Malaysia is a multiracial country comprising different ethnic groups, languages and cultures. The official and national language is Malay (Bahasa Melayu) with English serving as the second most important language. Both languages are taught in all Malaysian schools where those attending government schools are exposed to and expected to acquire. However, there are also vernacular schools which focus mainly on the vernacular languages of Chinese Mandarin and Tamil. Such schools are confined to only the primary level. For some interested in pursuing a tertiary education through Chinese, there are private Chinese schools which cater to their needs and these schools use Mandarin as its medium of instruction.

In a multiethnic community, mixed marriages are inevitable. Harding-Esch & Riley (2003) mention that there has been an increase in mixed marriages both nationwide and across international borders. This phenomenon has led to an increase in children of mixed parentages. Consequently, the younger generation of mixed marriages may grow up speaking many different

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languages and dialects. Malave (1997) points out that there are many families where children are at minimum, at least bilingual. Children from inter-ethnic marriages can pick up two different languages spoken by their parents, if parents use these languages with them on a daily basis. Nadarajan (1994) and Arumugam (1990) have indicated that the *Chindians* in Malaysia tend to be multilingual as a result of being exposed to languages like Malay, English, Tamil and Chinese by family members (Arumugam 1990).

David (2008) mentions that the general tendency for children of mixed parentage is to acquire the language of their mothers adding that the place of residence may also determine which of the two groups of languages the mixed children tend to identify more strongly with. As a minority group, some *Chindians* feel that there is a need to become assimilated into the majority group so that their sense of belonging is stronger i.e. as part of the 1Malaysia concept (see Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v3/newslite.php?id=418020>). It appears that the perception of other majority groups and the *Chindians'* own perception of their mixed ethnicity have led to a very complex situation for these children because of the difference in ethnicity. Thus, it is important that as the minority, *Chindians* can develop a sense of security and belonging which could be accomplished through the use of a particular language in order to develop that sense of identity.

Being of a different parentage, where there is the native language of their parents and the languages learnt at school, it is therefore important to locate where each of these languages are likely to be used and with whom hence locating the specific domains would be helpful.

Domain refers to the particular environment or area of activity or interest where respondents are exposed to in their daily lives. Fishman and Greenfield (1970) use the term domain as a concept in their study of the Puerto Rican community in New York. Their subjects were asked about the language they would use given a number of variables and it was found that Spanish was more regularly used in the family domain while English was used in the education and employment domain.

Besides identifying domains, the choice of using which language or native language(s) may also depend on the interlocutors in different settings. The Speech Accommodation Theory introduced by Giles (1977) has shown that interlocutors from varied ethnic backgrounds may be influenced by various factors when making a language choice. Giles (ibid.) explains that speakers tend to accommodate their speech partners for purposes of narrowing the relationship distance or for solidarity. In contrast, some speakers may seek to distance themselves through another language choice. Other times, a specific language choice is determined by their proficiency level or for gaining a particular communicative effect. More often, people like to speak in a language they are more proficient in because this not only eases communication but also provides confidence.

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Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory mentions that the relationship of speakers can determine their level of linguistic politeness saying that the closer the participants, the more 'bald on record' the requests made. The relationship between interlocutors can impact how they speak to each other but in the Asian context, the power difference between parents and children may be another factor which can determine how children talk to parents. For example, children may be required to use only the parents' preferred language within the home domain but in school, the same children may prefer the language of their friends. Thus, it can be seen that not only are relationships a factor determining a language choice, the setting like home or classroom in school may affect language choice. In the religion domain which is more somber, it is likely that children may have no choice but to resort to the common language used in such settings. David's (2001) study has shown how the older, middle and younger generation of Sindhi speakers shift in their use of language. In looking at the language choice of three generation of Sindhis, also a minority group in Malaysia, David (1996) found that the older generation (G1) tend to use their native language with their children (G2) who in return use only English with their children (G3). Their language choices were determined by various factors encompassing social status and economy.

In a study of urban Kenyans, it was reported that the mother tongue was more used at home or with members of the same ethnic group (Myers-Scotton, 1990). This is important as it was seen as way of maintaining their ethnic identity. Gumperz (1982) mentions that one reason for using a minority language is to 'code' with the others, and this is usually done with in-group and in informal activities.

In her work, Ervin-Tripp (1964) suggests that sociological attributes like one's status in the society such as at the workplace, places of worship and the education field may likely contribute to the interlocutors' choice of language. It seems that the status of a particular language in certain domains may also help to promote or discourage the use of the minority group's native language. For example, the language choice at work place for Kenyans with people of the same ethnic group is their mother tongue but Swahili is used with people from other groups (Myers-Scotton, 1990).

Language choice can also be linked to education. In the Malaysian context, more emphasis is given to the country's official and second language. These languages are usually associated with more formal, public interactions. Hence, native language usage is less commonly heard in the education domain as compared to the home domain. Nonetheless, in vernacular schools, it may be required to use the specific vernacular language such as Mandarin or Tamil. It cannot be denied that Malay is the official language, hence it is used in government agencies whereas in international functions, English tend to serve as the language of preference (see Asmah Haji Omar, 1997). Myers-Scotton (1990) mentions that a group of Kenyans identified Swahili and English as the two main languages that were more frequently used in the education

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domain compared to their own mother tongue. Likewise, most countries have a diglossia situation where some languages have a higher status than others and Malaysia cannot be excluded as it has a multilingual environment.

Within a population, minorities have had to succumb to change by using the dominant language of the country and this is often driven by the prestige associated with particular languages. It has also been found that speakers' low proficiency level in their native language can contribute to their refraining from using specific languages. During interactions, many may prefer to speak in the neutral language first unless their interlocutors are not proficient in it as strangers often do before finding a common ground. For instance, in Malaysia, English is seen as the neutral language because it is a language of the colonial days. A study by Gill (1983) revealed that the variety commonly used among English-speaking partners with their interlocutors depends mainly on the ability of the interlocutors to speak English. Only then is the native language chosen to ease communication. In short, the use of a particular native language is seen as unimportant unless necessity bounds and even when it is called upon it is often done for the purpose of seeking solidarity or to distance others (Gumperz, 1982).

7. Findings and discussion

This section discusses the language choice in general before moving on to the different domains identified.

7.1 Language choices of *Chindians*

In general, most *Chindians* claim to be using several languages when speaking at home. Among the respondents, 88.8% of the majority claim to use English as their common language and this is followed by 55.5% who claim to use Chinese (inclusive of dialects). Of the other languages spoken, 33.3% claim to use Malay and only 16.7% claim to use Tamil (16.7%).

Of the 4 languages identified, majority of the *Chindians* i.e. 77.7% of them say that they often speak English and only 16.7% claim that they sometimes speak the language with 5.5% claiming that they seldom speak English. None indicate that they have never spoken English. In addition, the study also revealed that about half or 44.4% of the *Chindian* respondents reported that they would use Chinese dialects while 22.2% say they speak the language, Chinese, sometimes. Only 11.1% say they seldom speak Chinese and 22.2 say they have never used the language. Of the Malay language, 33.3% claim that they would use it often and 38.9 claim to use it sometimes in their daily communication. In comparison, 66.7% of the *Chindians* claim that they have never spoken Tamil while 5.6% of them claim they may use Tamil in their communication. Others either use it sometimes (16.7) or seldom (11.1%) in their communication.

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Our data also indicate that 45% of the parents speak to their children in Tamil or Chinese but more *Chindians* (55%) respond to their parents in Chinese than in Tamil. In fact, 28% of parents indicate that their children may use either Tamil or Chinese for the purpose of excluding one parent during a conversation. This was done either to tease or to make jokes at the expense of one parent. However, this is not performed on grandparents or siblings. The majority of parents (75%) do not have any problem which language(s) their children speak. What is important to them is the effective communication so their *Chindian* children have the liberty to choose their own language(s) of communication.

The parents also reported that they are not worried about English being the first language of their *Chindian* children as it is an international language. They mention that they welcome the fact that their children can speak more than one language. In the report, 63.6% of parents mention that they made attempts to teach their children their respective native language(s) so that their children will not forget their roots. Half of the parents (50%) interviewed feel that their own attitude towards their native languages has not influenced their children. Majority of the parents speak English and they would like their children to be as multilingual as possible.

7.2 English as a mother tongue

In this study, half (55.6%) of the *Chindians* consider English to be their mother tongue. Another 38.9% regard Chinese as their mother tongue and only 5.6% regard Tamil as their mother tongue. Statistics show that 50% are uncertain if they were given the choice to select the languages spoken earlier. Half or 50% of the *Chindians* say they were given a choice in the selection of the languages spoken whereas the other half says that they were not. However, if given a choice, all (100%) claim that they would choose English while only 27.8% would choose Chinese. Malay is a choice for about a quarter or 22.2% of them and Tamil is the least chosen with only 5.6%. Reasons were provided by the respondents for choosing either English or other languages as their mother tongue.

Of the reasons cited, English was seen as their first language or mother tongue. They are also used to speaking it from young having grown up speaking the language thus they are more proficient in it. This made English a language which they are comfortable with when interacting with family members and friends as most of their family members also speak English. For this group, English cannot be divorced from their lives because they speak the language, breathe in the language and they learn, read and write in English. This seems to give them a certain sense of prestige since English is also an international language.

Majority of the respondents (88.9%) say that they have no problems deciding which language(s) to speak in. Only 11.1% say that they are unsure. Of these respondents, 83.3% are most confident that their choice of language or languages has not been influenced by other people. Only 11.1% say others influenced them while only 5.6% are uncertain about it. Half of

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them (50%) also say that even their parents do not influence their choice in the language(s) used while 33.3% think that their parents have some influence in their choice of language(s) and 16.7% is not sure.

7.3 Domains

I. Language in the family domain

Respondents were asked to identify one language that is mostly spoken at the home domain. Consistent to their choice of language indicated earlier, English was identified as the language mostly used and 72.2% of them substantiated this claim. Only 22.2% of *Chindians* speak Chinese while only 5.6% speak Tamil. Of the same respondents, 55.5% agree that their language choice depends on who their interlocutors are and what topics are being discussed.

In looking at the two native languages of Chinese and Tamil, 86.7% *Chindians* claim that they are most proficient in Chinese while only 13.3% claim to be proficient in Tamil.

The respondents were also asked for their reasons. Table 1 below summarizes their responses in their reasons for speaking the native language(s).

Table 1: Reasons why you choose to speak in Chinese or Tamil

Reasons	%
It's the language that my relatives speak in	86.7%
It's the language that my grandparent(s) speak in	66.7%
It makes me closer to one parent/grandparent	60%
I need to accommodate and get better rapport with my own family	60%
It's the language that my siblings speak in	53.3%
It's the only language that my parent(s) speak in	46.7%
I am more comfortable speaking the native language chosen	40%
To scold someone	33.3%
It's the only language spoken at home	26.7%
To make fun of other people	20%
To exclude certain family members from jokes or discussion	20%
It's important for me to show my cultural roots	13.3%
To keep secrets from my family members	13.3%
It's the only language that I can speak	0%

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As the figures illustrate, more than half of the respondents (86.7%) choose to speak the native language because their other relatives speak the language. Majority of them (66.7%) feel it is important to be able to interact with their grandparents in their native language.

In the home domain, *Chindians* were also asked about the importance of their native language. Less than half or 44.4% of the respondents regarded Chinese as important. *Chindians* equally treat Chinese as either very important (27.8%) or unimportant (27.8%). Majority of the *Chindians* or 72.2% do not regard Tamil as an important native language.

Code switching

Majority of the *Chindians* or 66.7% say that they code-switch when communicating with their family members at home. Among the people they code switch with are their mothers, siblings and both parents. However, there was more tendency to code switch with their mothers and this instance of switching was not confined to the native language alone as they may also interface their spoken native languages with English. Throughout their entire contact with their interlocutors, *Chindians* consistently use more English as the section below helps to substantiate.

Depending on the ethnic descent of their fathers, *Chindians* may choose to speak in Chinese, Tamil or English. Of *Chindians* whose fathers are Chinese, the paternal language is used with their fathers simply because their fathers speak the language fluently. Only one respondent whose father's native language is Tamil says that he would speak to his father in Tamil. The majority of *Chindians* claim that they use English to speak to their fathers because their fathers themselves cannot speak Tamil or Chinese. One *Chindian*, however, says that he had become confused as a result of his Tamil father's multilingual abilities in various Chinese dialects. Consequently, he would use only English with his father.

Our survey suggests that more *Chindians* are using Chinese to speak to their Chinese mothers as opposed to their Chinese fathers. Among the reason cited is because their mothers are more fluent in Chinese. In addition, their mothers also use Chinese with them. A few *Chindians* speak to their Indian mothers in Tamil because Tamil is used as a secret code whenever they are sharing a secret or whenever they do not want others to know about their linguistic exchange. When faced by other handicaps such as poor vocabulary, these *Chindians* may resort to English.

Of two *Chindians* whose parents have separated for many years, it was found that prior and after the separation the two respondents would use Chinese with their mother in their father's presence. This was used as a strategy to exclude their father from their interactions. The respondents also mentioned that it was used as a strategy to show disapproval of Tamil (father's native language) and to indirectly distance the father. They also mentioned that they identified more with their mother. As a result of the long exposure to the Chinese mother, the *Chindian* children reported that they refrained from using English with their mother. Occasionally, if they

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do not have the appropriate Chinese vocabulary, they may code-switch between English and Chinese. However, as they become more engrossed with work life, both *Chindians* have reverted to using English in most of their interactions.

This study also revealed that when *Chindians* are among their siblings, they could choose to speak more Chinese than Tamil. Their reasons for doing so include the reason that Chinese served as their habitual language in the family domain. Another reason cited is that they share solidarity when discussing trivial matters and jokes in Chinese. However, they use English when they argue or have any major disagreements. They may also code-switch from English to Chinese or Malay depending on what they are arguing about. Only one respondent reported using Tamil with her sibling and it was also because she was more proficient in the language.

One *Chindian* child mentions that he would not use Chinese when he is in the company of his younger brother and his younger brother's Chinese girlfriend. He would instead use English to distance himself from the brother's girlfriend. However, when in the company of his younger brother only, the *Chindian* respondent will speak in Chinese or alternate between Chinese and English. Likewise, the language choice of the younger brother when in the company of his Chinese girlfriend is Chinese but when he is with his Chinese mother who speaks English, he code-switches between both languages.

It appears that between the native languages of Chinese and Tamil, the former is preferred more as compared to Tamil when *Chindians* interact with their relatives. It is very likely that this has something to do with the mother whose native language carries more weight since she is the one raising the children. It is very unlikely that a Chinese speaking mother would raise her children speaking her husband's native language unless it is a language that she herself has proficiency in. This study revealed that contacts with relatives who speak a particular native language can help to increase awareness of the importance of that native language. Where one parent spends less time within the family, it is most likely that his/her native language will be neglected. In addition, language choice may be due to convenience when it serves speakers well. For instance, when a speaker of Chinese or Tamil finds him/herself more proficient in English, it is far easier to use this language with one's children although using all three languages would be more beneficial for the younger generation. However, as Anderssen (1992) says, it has to be a conscious effort of both parents in exposing their very young children to all languages accessible to them from a very young age.

II. Language in the education domain

This study revealed that 83.3% of the *Chindians* had their early education in English and 72.2% had their early education in Malay. Only 22.2% had their early education in Chinese and only 5.6% had their early education in Tamil. Of those who pursued higher education 72.2%

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claim that they were taught through English while only 27.8% claim to have been taught in Malay.

Most *Chindians* agree that the language they use at the school, college or university depends on their interlocutors and the topic of conversations and this is supported by 92.3% who were of this opinion. Only 52.9% *Chindians* agree that it may be dependent on topic alone whereas 47.1% disagree that the determining factor is the topic.

This study also revealed that 100% of the *Chindians* use mainly English with university of college friends and 55.6% claim that they would use Malay with their friends in the education domain followed by 38.9% who may use Chinese and 27.8% may use Tamil. Our study also found that *Chindians* have more Chinese friends (83.3%) as compared to Indian friends (50%) at school or college. Nonetheless, English is still their preferred language when speaking to their Chinese or Indian friends. Sometimes they may use a mixture of English, Chinese and Tamil and 77.8% of the *Chindians* affirmed this phenomenon.

While half of the respondents speak in either native language because of their intention to demonstrate their cultural roots, half also claim doing it because this is the language they are more proficient in. All disagreed that speaking their native language is the key to a good education. Many claim that their inability to speak in either native language is the main reason why they chose not to use it. Apart from that a lack of opportunity to use the language, in schools, they have also been advised by their teachers to use more English or Malay.

These reasons mentioned above illustrate the *Chindians*' perception of the importance of the native language in the education domain. In general, most of them (55.6%) feel that the native language is not important. Others feel that it is important (33.3%) or very important (11.1%). They also do not feel that by using their native language, they are able to identify more with their teachers or peers. This is reflected in the number of responses with 66.7% saying no and the other 33.3% feeling uncertain about it. Most of them (50%) also feel that using Chinese or Tamil with their friends will make their peers accept them more. Of these respondents, 31.3% feel that their peers accept them more because they use their native language to interact and only 18.8% *Chindians* are unsure of the influence of using the native language in their interaction with their peers.

III. Language in the employment domain

It appears that the language commonly used at work by *Chindians* is not their respective native languages. First, Tamil is not a language spoken to any of the interlocutors at their workplace. In fact, English is identified as the language most used when interacting with their interlocutors. To their superiors, 50% of the *Chindians* use English as a common language of communication. Malay is used 41.7% of the time and Chinese is spoken the least with only

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8.3%. This is similar to when they interact with their colleagues and deal with their clients as 63.7% choose to speak in English while only 27.3% use Malay to talk to their colleagues. Chinese is used only by 9.1% of the *Chindians*. However, when their interlocutors are the office support staff, Chindians indicate that they use more Malay (50%) than English (40%) and only 10% Chindians use the native language(s).

The *Chindians* are in complete agreement (100%) when saying that their language choice depends on who they interact with at work while 85.7% say that the choice of topic also helps to determine which language to choose from.

Most of the *Chindians* have almost an equal number of friends who are of Chinese and Indians. When speaking to their friends, they speak more Chinese (50%) than Tamil (33.3%) while others use English (16.7%) to interact with their friends. They, however, code switch mainly in English and Malay at their workplace. According to them, their respective native languages may only be called upon if they need it for interacting with their clients and 42.9% of them vouched for this and if it is to establish a better rapport with their colleagues and employers, 42.9% would also use it. For 14.3% of the *Chindians*, showing one's cultural roots is unimportant especially at one's work place. Of the total respondents, 57.1% claim that they do not have the opportunity to use their respective native languages is because they themselves are not proficient in their native language and 28.6% vouched for this). Also, 14.3% think that it is not a formal affair to use either Chinese or Tamil at the work place. In fact, the majority of them or 77.8% think that Chinese or Tamil is really not important at all at the work place.

IV. Language in the religion domain

Most *Chindians* (85.7%) identified English as the language most used at places of worship and not their native language. A very small percentage says that it is Tamil (7.1%) or Chinese (7.1%) that they mostly use at the church or temple they go to. This is mainly due to the fact that several languages are spoken at their place of worship. This occurs as they interact with own family, friends and church or temple congregations. However, to their friends, 53.8% would still use more English (53.8%) than those who would use more Chinese (25%). Occasionally, Tamil (2.5%) and Malay (2.5%) may also be used at the place of worship.

At the places of worship, they indicate that they have more Chinese friends (87.5%) than Indians (46.2%). In situations where the native language is used, *Chindians* are of the opinion (28.6%) that it is important to establish a better rapport with the congregation and to show their cultural roots (28.6%). For some (21.4%) it is also because the native language is the only language used at the worship place. Other than that, whatever choice of language they use at the place of worship is because that particular language is the only one they can speak in (14.3%). For a small percentage (7.1%), such a practice allows them to identify with the religious authorities.

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On the other hand, those who choose not to speak in either Chinese or Tamil is due to the reason that they are not proficient in their native languages and 45% of them vouched for this. Others claim that the native language is not used because religious rituals are conducted in mostly English (30%). Some (20%) also say that they feel embarrassed when having to speak Chinese or Tamil at the worship place. Another reason is that it is considered informal to use either native language at places of worship and 5% support this.

Of the *Chindians* who do use their respective native language such as Tamil at the place of worships, most say that this was evoked by the need to sing religious songs which are in Tamil. However, when praying, prayers can be performed in either Chinese or Tamil. Chanting is done in Tamil only but when making confessions, they admit to using the Chinese language more. Other *Chindians* use mostly English to pray, chant or make confessions. Finally, as shown in other domains, most *Chindians* or 55.6% of them feel that the respective native language is not important at places of worship. However, 27.8% of them think that it could be very important and only 16.7% think it is important.

8. Conclusion/Recommendations

The focus of this study is on the language choice made by *Chindians* in four different domains. Their reasons for doing so were examined and this was accomplished by looking at their reasons for using or refraining from using their respective native languages accessible to them.

The findings indicate that *Chindians* may use their ‘inherited’ languages that are both Chinese and Tamil or either one in all the four domains of family, education, employment and religion. There are however, some variations in the use. In the family domain, *Chindians* use either Chinese or Tamil for the purpose of excluding a family member or to establish rapport with relatives or to accommodate grandparents in their interactions. In the education domain, *Chindians* use either Chinese or Tamil specifically or they may code switch between Chinese and English and this occurs mostly among peers or friends. In the employment domain, the language choice depends on the situation, the topics discussed and formality of the setting. In places of worship, it was revealed that the *Chindians* use both Chinese and Tamil as well as English.

It also appears that language choice is dependent on interlocutors as well as setting. The *Chindians* clearly are discreet and they use whatever is appropriate for the purpose of communicating effectively with others.

The findings of this exploratory study also revealed that some *Chindians* could use or refrain from using their respective native language in particular domains in their need to adapt to the prevailing situation. Generally, using English is a common practice of the *Chindians* especially in the education and workplace domain.

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As there is a high possibility that parents influence their children's language choice, it is highly recommended that in mixed marriages, parents should be encouraged to use their respective native languages, if they know them, with their young from an early age so that their children can become more multilingual and this helps their respective native languages to be spread and learnt. In addition, as *Chindian* children do not seem to have an identity of their own since they are of mixed parentages, it is also recommended that the Malaysian government do not make emphasis on 'race' in all forms seeking the biodata of Malaysians since *Chindians* would find it difficult to position themselves in the national demography. This can encourage them to have a stronger sense of belonging and identity like all mainstream ethnic communities. The findings of this study are useful in that they shed insights into the language choice of the minority *Chindians*. The study has also highlighted that the *Chindians* need to be provided with more linguistic and cultural support so that they know where they belong to and that as a consequent of their mixed parentages, they should not be made to feel isolated. Instead, their rich background should serve as a model for multilingualism and multiculturalism to become more researched in this country. In the search of answers to the four research questions provided above, data show that *Chindians* use English predominantly in the workplace domain. They may alternate between Chinese and English in the home domain. In some rare cases, Tamil may be used rarely in the religion domain. Malay is hardly used in any of the four domains. As has been explained, interlocutors determine the language choice which is also dependent on the topics discussed. The reasons for selecting the various language choice of use such as English is primarily because *Chindians* are more proficient in it than their respective native languages such as Chinese and Tamil. Nonetheless, *Chindians* are more inclined towards using more Chinese than Tamil.

This study is small in comparison and so a bigger study involving *Chindian* participants from urban and rural areas should be conducted. Participants could be audio taped or videotaped for a more extensive interview into identity as this can provide a more in depth understanding of *Chindians'* perceptions of the nation, values, individual identity and their linguistic vitality.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Madam/Children,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify the different domains where Chindians use their heritage language (Chinese/Tamil) and why. The study also attempts to identify the interlocutors. Your data will be used for the purpose of this study only.

Your kind cooperation in completing the questionnaire is highly appreciated.

Thank you.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the questions and tick (✓) the appropriate answer(s). For each question, you can tick (✓) more than one answer.

BI ODATA

Name: _____

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Handphone: _____ Email: _____

Age: () 10 years & below () 11-20 years () 21-30 years () 31 years & above

Sex : () Male () Female

Race : () Father's race () Indian () Chinese

() Mother's race () Indian () Chinese

Profession / Employment : () Student () Working

1. Do you see yourself as mostly: () Chinese () Indian () Chindian

() Other (Please state) _____

2. How do you react to the term 'Chindian'? () Like () Dislike () Neutral

Why? (Please elaborate) _____

3. Are you conscious of being a 'Chindian'? () Yes () No () Sometimes

LANGUAGE CHOICE

1. What language(s) do you speak at home? (*you can tick (✓) more than one answer*)

() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

2. How often do you speak the language(s)?

Tamil: () Often () Sometimes () Seldom () Never

Chinese: () Often () Sometimes () Seldom () Never

English: () Often () Sometimes () Seldom () Never

Malay: () Often () Sometimes () Seldom () Never

3. Which language do you consider as your mother tongue?

() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

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4. Were you given a choice in selecting the language(s)?

Yes No Not sure

5. Given a choice, which language(s) will you choose to speak in?

Tamil Chinese English Malay

Why? _____

6. Do you have any problem(s) deciding which language(s) to speak in?

Yes No Not sure

7. Do what other people think of you influence your language choice?

Yes No Not sure

8. Does your father or mother or both parents influence you in your language choice?

Yes No Not sure

LANGUAGE DOMAINS

FAMILY

1. What language do you speak **MOST** at home? (TICK ONE ONLY)

Tamil Chinese English Malay

2. The language you use **MOST** at home depends on

a. **Who** you are speaking with Yes No

b. **What** you are talking about Yes No

3. Which heritage language (Chinese or Tamil) are you **MOST** proficient in?

Tamil Chinese

4. Why do you choose **TO SPEAK MOSTLY** in Chinese or Tamil?

Reasons why you choose TO SPEAK in Chinese or Tamil	Tick √	Reasons why you choose NOT TO SPEAK in Chinese or Tamil	Tick √
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It's the only language that my parent(s) speak in		It's the only language that my parent(s) speak in	
It's the language that my siblings speak in		It's the language that my siblings speak in	
It's the language that my grandparent(s) speak in		It's the language that my grandparent(s) speak in	
It's the language that my relatives speak in		It's the language that my relatives speak in	
It's the only language spoken at home		It's the only language spoken at home	
I need to accommodate my own family		I need to accommodate my own family	
I am more comfortable speaking the heritage language chosen		I am more comfortable speaking the heritage language chosen	
It's the only language that I can speak		It's the only language that I can speak	
It's important for me to show my cultural heritage		It's important for me to show my cultural heritage	
It's important to gain better rapport with family members		It's important to gain better rapport with family members	
It makes me closer to one parent/grandparent		It makes me closer to one parent/grandparent	
To make fun of other people		To make fun of other people	
To keep secrets from my family members		To keep secrets from my family members	
To exclude certain family members from jokes or discussion		To exclude certain family members from jokes or discussion	
To scold someone		To scold someone	

5. How will you rate the importance of Chinese or Tamil in the home domain?

Chinese () Very Important () Important () Not important

Tamil () Very Important () Important () Not important

6. Do you code-switch (use a mixture of different languages) at home?

If yes, to whom? _____

(State language) _____

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7. Which is the main heritage language (Chinese/Tamil) that you speak to the following people?

Father: Language(s) Used: Chinese / Tamil (Circle one)

Reason(s) : _____

Mother: Language(s) Used: Chinese / Tamil (Circle one)

Reason(s) : _____

Siblings: Language(s) Used: Chinese / Tamil (Circle one)

Reason(s) : _____

Relatives: Language(s) Used: Chinese / Tamil (Circle one)

Reason(s) : _____

Domestic Helper: Language(s) Used: Chinese / Tamil (Circle one)

Reason(s) : _____

8. Does speaking in Chinese or Tamil make you feel more accepted by your:

parents () Yes () No () Not sure

siblings () Yes () No () Not sure

grandparents () Yes () No () Not sure

relatives () Yes () No () Not sure

domestic helpers () Yes () No () Not sure

EDUCATION

1. Which language were you taught in

Primary /Secondary School () Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

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College/university () Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

2. The language you use at school/college/university depends on
 - a. Who you are speaking with Yes () No ()
 - b. What you are talking about Yes () No ()

3. What language(s) do you speak with your friends?
() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

4. Are most of your friends:
Chinese Yes () No ()
Indians Yes () No ()

5. What language do you speak to your Chinese/Indian friends?
Chinese () Tamil ()

6. Do you code-switch (use a mixture of different languages) at school /college/university?
If yes, to whom? _____
(State language) _____

7. Why do you choose **TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?
() It's the main language spoken at school / college / university
() I am more proficient in Chinese or Tamil
() It's the only language that I am fluent in
() It's important for me to show my cultural heritage
() It's important for me to get good education

8. Why do you choose **NOT TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?
() I am not proficient in either Chinese or Tamil
() I've been advised to speak English or Malay by my teachers
() I've no opportunity to use Chinese or Tamil
() I feel embarrassed when I speak Chinese or Tamil

9. How will you rate the importance of Chinese and Tamil in school?
() Very Important () Important () Not important

10. Speaking in Chinese or Tamil enable(s) me to identify with my teachers/lecturers.

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Yes No Not sure

11. Does speaking in Chinese or Tamil make you feel more accepted by your peers?

Yes No Not sure

EMPLOYMENT

1. What language(s) do you speak **most** at work?

To your employer Tamil Chinese English Malay

To your colleagues Tamil Chinese English Malay

To your customers Tamil Chinese English Malay

To your support staff Tamil Chinese English Malay

2. The language you use at work depends on

a. Who you are speaking with Yes No

b. What you are talking about Yes No

3. What language(s) do you speak with your colleagues?

Tamil Chinese English Malay

4. Are most of your friends:

Chinese Yes No

Indians Yes No

5. What language do you speak to your Chinese/Indian friends?

Chinese Tamil

6. Do you code-switch (use a mixture of different languages) at school /college /university? If yes, to whom? _____

(State language) _____

7. Why do you choose **TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?

It's the only language spoken at work

I am more proficient in Chinese or Tamil

It's the only language that I can speak

It's important for me to show my cultural heritage

I need to speak the language in order to get a good job

To communicate with my clients

To establish better rapport with my colleagues/employer

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8. Why do you choose **NOT TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?
- I am not proficient in either Chinese or Tamil
 - I've been advised to speak English or Malay by my employers
 - My company policy prohibits me from using Chinese or Tamil
 - I've no opportunity to use Chinese or Tamil with my colleagues
 - I feel embarrassed when I speak Chinese or Tamil
 - I want to impress people with my fluent command of English/Malay
 - It's considered informal to speak in Chinese or Tamil
9. How will you rate the importance of Chinese or Tamil at work?
- Very Important Important Not important

RELIGION

1. What language do you speak **MOST** at places of worship? (TICK ONE ONLY)
- Tamil Chinese English Malay
2. Is there more than **ONE** language spoken at the places of worship?
- Yes No (Please specify language spoken: _____)
3. Do you code-switch (use a mixture of different languages) at place of worship?
- If yes, to whom? _____
- (State language) _____
4. What language(s) do you speak with your friends?
- Tamil Chinese English Malay
5. Are most of your friends:
- Chinese Yes No
- Indians Yes No
6. Why do you choose **TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?
- It's the only language spoken at places of worship
 - I am more proficient in Chinese or Tamil
 - It's the only language that I can speak in
 - It's important for me to show my cultural heritage
 - It's establishes better rapport with the congregation

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It enables me to identify with religious authorities

7. Why do you choose **NOT TO SPEAK** in Chinese or Tamil?

- I am not proficient in either Chinese or Tamil
- The religious rituals are conducted in English or Malay
- I feel embarrassed when I speak Chinese or Tamil
- I want to impress people with my fluent command of English or Malay
- It's considered informal to speak in Chinese or Tamil

8. What language do you generally use when:

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Singing | Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> | Tamil <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Praying | Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> | Tamil <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chanting | Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> | Tamil <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Making confessions | Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> | Tamil <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. How will you rate the importance of Chinese and Tamil at places of worship?

- Very Important Important Not important

Thank you

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FOR PARENTS)

Name: _____

Parent of : _____

Hand phone No.: _____ E-mail address: _____

Sex : Male Female

Race : Chinese Indian

Highest Education level: _____

Profession / Employment : _____

1. How many children do you have? _____

2. What race do your children come under? _____

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3. What language(s) do you speak to your children?
() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

4. What language(s) do they speak to you?
() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

5. What language(s) do they respond to you?
() Tamil () Chinese () English () Malay

6. Do they use another language(s) when speaking/responding to your spouse?
() Yes () No () Sometimes

7. Do they use Chinese/Tamil in order to exclude:
Your spouse () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your parents () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your other children () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your domestic helper () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____

8. Do they use Chinese/Tamil in order to tease or make jokes:
Your spouse () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your parents () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your other children () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____
Your domestic helper () Yes () No () Sometimes If Yes, why _____

9. Do you consider your children 'chindian'? () Yes () No () Sometimes
Why? (Please elaborate) _____

10. How do you react to the term 'chindian'? () Like () Dislike () Neutral
Why? (Please elaborate) _____

11. Do you perceive your children as being conscious about being 'chindians'?
() Yes () No () Sometimes

12. Do you have problems deciding which language(s) your children should speak in?
() Yes () No () Sometimes
Why? (Please elaborate) _____

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13. Are you worried if you children use a neutral language (English/Malay)?

Yes No Sometimes

Why? (Please elaborate) _____

14. Do you make a conscious effort to teach your children in your native language?

Yes No Sometimes

Why? (Please elaborate) _____

15. Do you think your attitude towards language choice has affected your children's choice of spoken language?

If yes, why? _____

If no, why? _____

16. If the child uses neither the parent's language, do you consider it as a loss of self identity?

If yes, why? _____

If no, why? _____

17. Do you consider it rude, if the child purposely uses Chinese/Tamil to exclude other family members?

If yes, why? _____

If no, why? _____

***** THANK YOU *****

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