# Language use and language shift among the Malays in Singapore*

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*With active language planning policies in force since its independence as a nation, the linguistic situation in Singapore has received a substantial amount of scholarly attention. Yet, the focus has traditionally been on Singapore English, with issues regarding maintenance and shift of the other official languages of the republic. Malay Singaporeans have often been enviously described as guardians of their ethnic language, apparently resisting the push and pull factors of English more successfully. This study aims to investigate to which degree the Malays are indeed still maintaining their community language. In this study a total of 233 participants from 12 to 72 years of age were asked to report on their language use across different domains, topics and interlocutors in semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that for Singaporean Malays the age of interlocutor is the most important factor when deciding on the language(s) of interaction. While Malay is still unrivaled in interactions with senior members of the community, English is making inroads everywhere else. The influence of English is particularly strong for young adults (18–24 years), young women and people of high socio-economic and educational status. This leads to the conclusion that domains that were traditionally considered safe havens for Malay in Singapore are slowly being eroded.*

*Keywords: language maintenance; language shift; Malay language; bilingualism; language policy; Singapore.*

## 1.   Introduction

Multilingual societies, such as Singapore, offer great opportunity for detailed sociolinguistic studies. However, getting a firm grasp on the issues involved in studying the use of two or more languages by the same social group or between social groups is never easy, all the more so when the sociolinguistic situation is as complicated and fluid as it is in Singapore. Issues focusing on

language maintenance (from now on LM) and language shift (from now on LS) and their consequences are very significant aspects of situations where different languages come into contact. This is particularly so because very often through social and/or political processes one or more language(s) become dominant at the expense of the others as is the case in Singapore.

The last fifty years or so have seen a rapid growth in the study of LM and LS and more specifically, of the factors associated with shift or maintenance. The literature points to a number of clear-cut factors for or against LM and some that are ambivalent. That is, they can either lead to LS or support LM according to the circumstances of the group in question (see Kloss 1966; Clyne 1982, 1991, 2003; Fishman 1991; see also Cavallaro [forthcoming] for a summary; and Giles et al. [1977] on 'ethnolinguistic vitality'). Some of the most important ambivalent factors are the numerical strength of a minority group in relation to the majority, the status of the language in a given society, generation and the institutional support. Tollefson (1991; and see discussion in Kamwangamalu [2006]) suggests that the older generation's decision to pass down a language to subsequent generations depends, in particular, on the socio-political status of the language and the government's policies and community support. However, Kamwangamalu (2006) relates the South African experience as a counterexample. Nine African languages are recognized alongside English and Afrikaans as official languages of the state, but none can compete against English and Afrikaans in terms of prestige and with English in terms of economic value, to the extent that many black South Africans are actively encouraging their children to speak only English in all facets of their community life. Moreover, Reagan (2001) points to similar signs of rapid shift to English for Afrikaans speakers, and thus one can imagine what the prognosis is for the fate of other minority languages. It is clear in these cases that social mobility strongly outweighs the values of the traditional languages of these communities.

The gradual erosion of Afrikaans in South Africa bears some resemblance to the situation for Malay in Singapore. Malay is a language that for a long time has been maintained much better than the other minority languages spoken in Singapore. However, the rise of English as the global financial language worldwide and the emphasis on English as the language of instruction in Singapore has meant that even the Malay community is displaying strong signs of a shift away from their traditional language. Various authors have discussed language shift in various Singaporean communities, e.g., Li et al. (1997) for Teochew; Schiffmann (2007) for Tamil; and Gupta and Siew (1995) for Cantonese. Up till now, LS in the Malay community in Singapore has not received a great deal of attention because the assumption has always been that it is not a language under threat. This paper presents an in-depth study into the language use of the

Malay community with the specific aim to document whether the community is undergoing a shift to English. It will focus on language use with family members, since the family has been defined in the literature as the stronghold of Malay in Singapore (Chew 2006; Vaish 2008). The investigation aims to ascertain in more detail to which degree this is still true. In the first section a detailed demographic and linguistic analysis will be given using the latest census data. The second part of the article will present and discuss our data on the language use of Singaporean Malays of different ages, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The findings will be compared to earlier studies on language use in Singapore. The main factors affecting LM or LS will then be discussed in the final section.

## 2. Singapore's multicultural make-up

Singapore is a multiethnic and multilingual society of 4.8 million people. Of these 4.8 million 75% are residents and 25% non-residents (Department of Statistics 2009a). The total population has been growing steadily over the years (Table 1), which is mainly due to an increased influx of non-residents, and is expected to reach 6.5 million in the next ten or so years according to government projections.

*Table 1.* Singapore's population ('000)

|                      | 1980    | 1990    | 2000    | 2008    |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total population     | 2,413.9 | 3,047.1 | 4,027.9 | 4,839.4 |
| Resident population  | 2,282.1 | 2,735.9 | 3,273.4 | 3,642.7 |

Source: Department of Statistics 2009a

Yet despite dynamic demographic changes, the ethnic composition of Singapore's resident population has remained relatively stable throughout the last fifty years (Kuo 1980a; Department of Statistics 2001a). Recent figures (Department of Statistics 2006, 2009a) depict Singapore's society as an ethnic mix of 75.6% Chinese, 13.6% Malays, 8.7% Indians and 2.1% so-called Others, most of whom are of Eurasian, European or Arab decent (Table 2). There has been a very small decline in the number of Chinese and Malays while the Indian population has increased slightly.

Singapore is truly a multilingual country. Table 3 shows that there are at least 23 living languages spoken in this country of only 692.7 square kilometers and this number does not include the languages spoken by non-residents living, studying and working in Singapore.

*Table 2.* Ethnic composition of Singapore residents (%)

|      | Chinese | Malay | Indian | Others |
|------|---------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1990 | 77.8    | 14.0  | 7.1    | 1.1    |
| 2000 | 76.8    | 13.9  | 7.9    | 1.4    |
| 2005 | 75.6    | 13.6  | 8.7    | 2.1    |

Source: Department of Statistics 2001b, 2006

*Table 3.* Most spoken (local) languages in Singapore (adapted from Gordon [2005])

| Indian | Chinese | Malay | Others |
|--------|---------|-------|--------|
| Tamil | Mandarin | Malay | English |
| Bengali | Hakka | Javanese | Malaccan Creole |
| Gujarati | Hainanese | Baba Malay | Portuguese- |
| Hindi | Min Nan (Hokkien) | Bazaar Malay | creole – Papia |
| Malayalam | Teochew | Orang Seletar |    Kristang |
| Panjabi, Eastern | Yue (Cantonese) | Madura (Boyanese) | Singapore Sign |
|    Sinhala |  |  |    Language |

The 13.6% Malays account for 484,600 people according to the 2005 General Household Survey (Department of Statistics 2006). The Malay community in Singapore has also gone through significant changes, particularly in its linguistic make-up.

## 3.   Language policy

Besides its colonial history and the politico-pragmatic circumstances before and after independence in 1965, the island nation's language policy has been described as the result of ensuring the cohesion of its multi-ethnic fabric (e.g. Bokhorst-Heng 1998; Gupta 1998; Wee 2003). In rather stark contrast to Kuo's (1980b) account of the natural diversity of languages spoken within and across ethnic lines before independence, the Republic of Singapore adopted four official languages, promoting English as the language of public administration, interethnic communication, education and commerce; and establishing Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as the home languages, officially referred to as 'mother tongues', of the three major ethnic groups.[1] While these languages may well

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1. Note that the term 'mother tongue' in the Singapore contexts refers to Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil even if one's mother tongue is English. Henceforth, the Singaporean usage of the term 'mother tongue' will be flagged by single quotation marks.

be bona fide mother tongues for many, they are L2s for many others. In effect, for many Singaporeans who have shifted to English as a mother tongue, their ethnic languages are technically second languages.

Singapore's bilingual education policy was instituted in the late 1950s emphasizing equality for all the official languages. In its original form, the language policy stated that the four official languages were also the media of instruction. In the time following independence, while most schools were English-medium, there were a number of Tamil, Malay and Mandarin medium schools. However, by 1987 all of them were closed because of falling student numbers (Tan 2007). This reduced Mandarin Chinese, Tamil and Malay to being taught as second languages in primary and secondary schools, and English has since dominated the country's education system (Pakir 2004).

Although the assigned ethnic language may come unnaturally to some, proficiency in it is considered very important socially, as the 'mother tongues' are deemed to function as "an anchor in their [students] ethnic and cultural traditions" in opposition to the Western values and world view supposedly imparted through the English language (Gopinathan 1998: 21). Regardless of how one judges such efforts at language planning, one can safely agree with Pakir's (1991) prediction that post-independence-born Singaporeans today have become English-knowing bilinguals, confident in their use of the varieties of Singapore English plus their ethnic language. Yet, as Wee (2003) illustrates, the functional separation between English and the 'mother tongues' in Singapore has been shaken within the wake of economic globalization, so that now the utilitarian value traditionally assigned exclusively to English has also been extended to Mandarin Chinese. This shift in emphasis has been promoted by government policies and educational reforms. Public initiatives have been implemented to strengthen the position of Malay and Tamil, so as to preserve the equality between the 'mother tongues'. Wee (2003), however, regards these efforts as futile, due to lack of practicality and bottom-up support.

Since the 1980s, economic success has helped convince the majority of Singaporeans that a good knowledge of English is the basis for better career opportunities for themselves and their children. In actual fact, we can argue that due to the economic power of China, and Singaporeans' innate sense of linguistic pragmatism, mastery of Mandarin is now also seen as an essential path to economic success, both at the individual level and for the country. The widespread use of English among all ethnic groups and the majority (in numbers) of the ethnically Chinese have essentially elevated English and Mandarin to the status of majority languages, and relegated Malay and Tamil to the rank of minority languages. This general perception and attitude has led significant numbers of Singaporeans to shift to using English as their home language. This

is happening despite the government's support of the teaching of the 'mother tongues' (David et al. 2009).

## 4.    The special role of Malay among the other ethnic languages

Malay has always had a special status among the languages spoken in the Straits region and retains this status even in modern day Singapore. As the language of the indigenous rulers, Malay used to be the administrative language as well as the language of trade and commerce in the region. Even after the establishment of the colonial rule in the Malaysian peninsula, starting with the Portuguese in the 16th century, Malay continued to function as the language of wider communication among the ethnically diverse population. Kuo (1980b) still ascribes this function to Malay for the 1950s in Singapore. Apart from Bahasa Melayu, Malay-lexified pidgin languages such as Bazaar Malay and Baba Malay were widespread. Bazaar Malay is reportedly still used by a significant number of older Singaporeans today (Aye 2005). Baba Malay is on the verge of disappearing as mostly only elderly people still speak it (Lee et al. 2009).

Yet, apart from being the traditional lingua franca in Singapore, Malay is also the national language of the republic. The reasons can again be found in history. The status of Malay as the language of the people and the nation found its ultimate expression as the language of the anticolonial movement in post-World War II Malaysia. Speaking and learning Malay was institutionally supported in Singapore in the 1950s leading up to Singapore joining the Federation in 1963 (Abdullah and Ayyub 1998; Lowenberg 1988). This was politically motivated as it was then critical for Singapore to find a place within the Federation of Malaysia.

Even though all efforts to promote it were stopped immediately after Singapore's independence in 1965, Malay was kept as the national language, supposedly because of its widespread use among the people, as an expression of their identity, and its political value within the region (Alsagoff 2008). However, this value is largely symbolic and the only remnants of Malay's national language status today can be found in Singapore's national anthem, its coat of arms and in some military commands in parades (Lowenberg 1988; Llamzon 1978).

## 5.    The Malay speech community in Singapore

From these historical records it becomes evident that speaking Malay in Singapore has never been a purely ethnic Malay affair. These historical circumstances have their contemporary consequences. As in the past, in contemporary Singapore, speaking Malay is not necessarily indexical to ethnic Malay community

membership. Data from the 2005 census (Department of Statistics 2006) prove that 10.5% of Indian Singaporeans and 12.2% of the category 'Others' also regard Malay as their home language. This paints a slightly more heterogeneous picture of the Malay speech community in terms of its ethnic composition as compared to the other language groups in Singapore. Data from the 2000 census verifies this. The Malay speech community is comprised largely of Malays (91.2%) with a significant proportion of Indians (6.0%), Chinese (1.3%) and Others (1.5%) (Department of Statistics 2001a).

According to the latest census data, in 2005 13.2% of Singapore's resident population 5 years and above speaks Malay at home most frequently (Department of Statistics 2006). This figure has remained relatively stable throughout the past 15 years (14.3% in 1990 and 14.1% in 2000). Interestingly the proportion of Malay home language speakers is highest for the younger cohorts. The 2005 census reports that 16.9% of 5 to 19-year olds and 16.3% of 20 to 24-year olds prefer Malay as compared to 11.5% of 25 to 44–year olds and 11.6% of 45 and above (Department of Statistics 2006).

Since Malay is not only the politically assigned ethnic mother tongue of Malay Singaporeans, but as figures in Kuo (1980b) show, also historically the dominant variety among them (85% in 1957), it is not surprising that Malays have been described (e.g. Stroud 2007) as more resilient to language shift in contrast to the Chinese or Indian communities, whose 'mother tongues' have had proportionally fewer speakers. In 1990 93.7% of Malays indicated to use Malay at home with other varieties such as Javanese and Boyanese almost totally eradicated (Department of Statistics 2001a). Since then figures have dropped to 86.8% (Department of Statistics 2006). Census data suggest that this shift is due to the influence of English, as we will see in more detail below.

An even more varied picture of the Malay speech community appears when literacy figures for Malay are considered. Of the total literate population above 15 years of age in Singapore, 16.4% can read and understand Malay, a number which is expectedly higher than the proportion of Malay home language speakers. Of those literate in Malay, more than three quarters claim to be at least bilingual in English and Malay (83.6%). Not surprisingly the bilingual literacy rates are particularly high for those under 45 years of age (15 to 24: 97%; 25 to 44: 89.6%), as compared to those 45 and above (61.4%), partly because the majority of the former group will have received their education in English with Malay as a language subject. Interesting is also the distribution of people literate in Malay across ethnic groups. Non-Malays make up a quarter of Malay literates (24.9%), with the Chinese accounting for the biggest portion (12.3%), followed by Indians (10.6%). This makes Malay by far the most

widely understood language among the 'mother tongues' and thus the most ethnically inclusive language besides English.

Nevertheless, like the other 'mother tongues' in Singapore, Malay seems to be on its way to becoming a more exclusive ethnic language. Unfortunately, no direct comparison with earlier data is possible due to changes in statistical sampling, but undoubtedly Malay literacy among Singaporeans has decreased sharply. Surveys discussed in Kuo (1980b) show that in 1957 almost half of all Singaporeans (48.0%) were able to speak Malay and in 1978 more than two thirds (67.3%) were still able to understand it. Additionally, contemporary language education does little to entice non-Malays to study the language. Although, Malay is offered as a third language option for non-Malays at Singapore's schools, it has been the practice to allow only the very best students to enroll in a third language (top 10% of each cohort), thus limiting the number severely. Here, Malay also has to compete with other, traditionally more popular modern languages such as Japanese, French, German and, recently, Arabic. However, this regulation has now been somewhat relaxed. Kassim (2008) reports that Malay can now be taken up as an additional language by any student who would like to learn it.

## 6.    Language maintenance and language shift in Singapore

Pakir (1998) assigns three roles to the English language in contemporary Singaporean society: utilitarian, unifying and universal. In other words, English serves as a code for international transactions and for interethnic communication. Moreover, these roles mean that it is present in all domains of life, and thus has encroached on territory traditionally occupied by the ethnic 'mother tongues'. The 28% of Singaporeans that indicated using English as a home language in 2005 (Department of Statistics 2006) might not seem significant, but it presents an enormous increase within only two generations from the 1.8% in 1957 (Kuo 1980b). Similarly, an overall literacy rate in English of 64.4% for the year 2000 (Department of Statistics 2001a) indicates that a third of the population is not able to read English, but a closer look at the data shows that this affects primarily the older generation. English literacy rates for the 15 to 24 year-olds (96.4%) and 25 to 44 year-olds (75.5%) confirm that English-knowing bilingualism is becoming the norm or in Riney's (1998) terms, Singapore is fast moving towards linguistic homogeneity.

One doesn't need to venture very far to find the reasons for this shift. Models on variation in Singapore English (Platt and Weber 1980; Pakir 1991; Gupta 1994) identify two variables as crucial for acquiring and using the full spec-

trum of English, namely level of education and socio-economic status of the speaker. The models claim that the higher speakers' education and professional status, and thus the variety of speech situations they are exposed to, the better their ability to master and use the different registers of Singapore English appropriately. Similarly, Bokhorst-Heng (1998) views English proficiency as a prerequisite to perform well academically and professionally in Singapore. As she pointed out, mastery of English "is directly associated with social mobility and socioeconomic status" (1998: 300).

That Singaporeans are speaking more and more English is not a new phenomenon. Kong (1977) reported how, in the 1970s, parents were choosing to enroll their children in English-medium schools despite the possibility to enter Tamil, Malay or Mandarin Chinese-medium schools. For many Singaporeans, the struggle for economic success transcends their loyalty to their ethnic tongue. English has become the language of economic success for Singaporeans and with it come all the attractive material gains money and power can buy. However, there is a social cost to all gains. The cost borne by communities shifting to English is the loss of their traditional language.

As shown earlier in this article and clearly seen in Figure 1, when compared to the other ethnic groups in Singapore the Malays display a better record of maintaining their language. But, as we will see later in this article, they are showing signs of greater alternation between Malay and English, and an accelerating rate of shift to English.
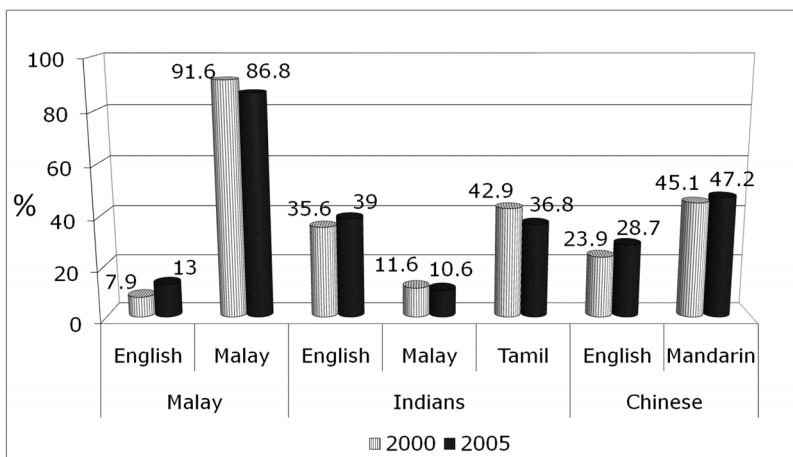


*Figure 1.* A comparison of English and mother tongue use in Singapore in 2000 and 2005 (Source: General Household Survey, Singapore Department of Statistics 2006)

Language maintenance and language shift have been little researched in Singapore. The few studies that have been carried out have ranged from detailed studies of the census data (Kuo 1980b, Kuo and Jernudd 2003) to only a few others that have analyzed the shift of particular ethnic groups in detail, such as Saravanan (1995, 1999) and Schiffman (1998, 2002) who have looked at the shift to English of Tamils; Vaish (2007) who studied the general Indian community; Li et al. (1997) the Teochew; the Cantonese were investigated by Gupta and Yeok (1995); and the Chinese community by Kwan-Terry (1989, 2000) and Xu et al. (1998). Very few have investigated the language used by the Malays in Singapore in great detail. In fact past research has reduced the issue of language maintenance in the Malay community in Singapore to its association with Islam (Saravanan 1999; Stroud 2007).

## 7.    English use among Malay Singaporeans increases significantly

In line with the increased use of English in Singaporean homes nationally, there has been a steady increase in the use of English in the homes of Malay Singaporeans over the years. However, Malay Singaporeans show some of the most drastic developments in embracing English, as Table 4 shows. In comparison with the other ethnic groups, the proportion of Malay Singaporeans who use English as a home language has more than doubled within 15 years, whereas the increase among Chinese and Indians, while large, has not been as significant. Data from 2005 show that among the Malays the highest proportion of English users is to be found among the cohorts of 5 to 14 year-olds (17.2%) and 25 to 44 year-olds (16.1%) (Department of Statistics 2006).

*Table 4.*  English as home language (%)

| Year | Total | Malay | Chinese | Indian |
|------|-------|-------|---------|--------|
| 1990 | 18.8  | 6.1   | 19.3    | 32.3   |
| 2000 | 23.0  | 7.9   | 23.9    | 35.6   |
| 2005 | 28.0  | 13.0  | 28.7    | 39.0   |

(Calculated from Department of Statistics 2001a, 2006)

On the other hand, these same figures have often been used to suggest that Malay Singaporeans still manage to maintain their mother tongue more effectively than other ethnic groups. However, we would argue otherwise. As outlined above there is no doubt that English is recognized among Singaporeans as the language of economic success and social mobility. Thus, a doubling of the number of English users among Malays is in practical terms a very dramatic increase.

A correlation between English and socio-economic advancement in Singapore has been posited by some scholars. Analyzing data from the 1990 census, Bokhorst-Heng (1998) highlights that only one out of ten low-income families use English at home. Her analysis also reveals that the use of English as a home language has increased in higher income brackets. Data from the 2000 census (Department of Statistics 2001b) sees three quarters of English language households with incomes above $4000. In comparison, only one quarter of Malay language households has incomes of this level. If one then examines the type of professions the heads of Malay language households are engaged in, a similar picture emerges (Department of Statistics 2001b). Almost three quarters of English language household heads work in high income positions (managers, professionals, technicians), as compared to slightly more than one fifth of Malay-speaking household heads. Malay-speaking household heads are over-proportionally represented in occupations such as clerks and sales staff (28.7%), and almost half of them work in low-income jobs such as craftsmen, machine operators or cleaners. This has important bearings for the Malay community. The real and perceived economic values of English might motivate a shift to English, since it is recognized that not speaking English at home is a factor against upward social mobility. The fact that the median monthly income of Malays has only risen by 1% between 2000 and 2005, while those of the other communities did so more significantly (Chinese +7%, Indians +15%), may support this assumption (Department of Statistics 2006).

Statistical data (Department of Statistics 2001b) from the education sector points to similar discrepancies between speakers of English or Malay as a home language. The data shows that 80% of Malay home language users aged 15 years and above have only graduated with secondary school qualifications and below. While almost two thirds of English home language users have obtained a college or post-secondary school degree. More equity between home language use and education exists only among the population 5 years and older that is still schooling. Here little difference between users of Malay and English as a home language exists. The only exceptions are institutions of higher learning: only 0.5% of Malay language users were attending a university in the year 2000, in comparison to 4.8% of English language users.

If we look at this issue within the Malay and Indian communities, a similar pattern emerges. According to data from the *General Household Survey 2005* (Department of Statistics 2006), 80% of Malays above the age of 15 who use Malay as a home language have not obtained a qualification higher than secondary school. In contrast, 50% of Malays who indicate using English as a home language have qualifications higher than secondary school. Among Indian Malay speakers the proportions are almost identical. If Malays and Indians who

are still schooling above the age of 5 are considered, the difference between Malay and English home language users again dissolves. However, the figures for all Malays and the Malay-speaking Indians in institutions of higher learning are still significantly lower than the national total. Therefore, one may conclude that in education the home language has been and still is significant when it comes to high levels of educational achievement.

## 8.   The study

A total of 233 Malay Singaporeans took part in this study. The participants were divided into four age groups. Table 5 shows the demographic details of all the participants.

*Table 5.*  Participants – Descriptives (by age group)

|                    | 12–17 years  | 18–24 years  | 25–45 years  | > 45 years   |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| *N*                | 45           | 65           | 64           | 59           |
| Male (*N*)         | 22           | 25           | 27           | 28           |
| Female (*N*)       | 23           | 40           | 37           | 31           |
| Min. Age           | 12           | 18           | 25           | 46           |
| Max. Age           | 17           | 24           | 45           | 72           |
| Mean Age / *SD*    | 14.76 / 1.75 | 20.22 / 1.64 | 33.97 / 7.25 | 52.49 / 5.94 |

A questionnaire was designed to map the language use of the participants in different domains, with different topics and with different interlocutors. Participants were asked to indicate their language use for a particular situation on a 7-point Likert scale with English only (1) and Malay only (7) at its extreme end points. The middle of the scale (4) represents an equal use of Malay and English. The domains were those of the home and in a crowded public place, for example a train or bus stop. The topics ranged from family affairs to the discussion of English and Malay TV or radio programs. The interlocutors ranged from the members of the immediate family, relatives, to close Malay friends. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section contained 78 questions on language use and the second section elicited the demographic data of each participant.

The questionnaires were administered to the participants in semi-structured interviews conducted by Malay research assistants in Malay or English according to what the participants preferred. In the examples below, for Question 1 the setting is at home. The interlocutors are the participant's parents and the topic is a family matter. For Question 24 instead, the discussion is with the partici-

pant's younger sibling in a public place (in this case a shop) over a newspaper article (English Media). The participants were asked to circle or indicate to the interviewer whichever number they thought best reflected their use of English and Malay.

1    You are at home alone with your mother or your father; if you are talking about buying a present for a relative, what language do you use?

|  | Malay only | Mostly Malay | More Malay than English | 50/50 | More English than Malay | Mostly English | English only |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mother | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Father | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

24    You are in a shop with your younger sibling; if you are talking about an article that you have just read in the *Straits Times* or the *New Paper*, what language do you use?

| Malay only | Mostly Malay | More Malay than English | 50/50 | More English than Malay | Mostly English | English only |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

## 9.   Results

The results from the questionnaires were coded into Excel and SPSS and then analyzed. All the results are plotted in the line graphs and tables below. Each line graph shows the average language use in the y-axis. The higher the number (maximum of 7) means the higher the Malay used. The x-axis shows the two domains and the topics of the conversations. The first three topics are presented in the home domain, and then these three topics are repeated in the public domain.

### 9.1.   Age

When taking a look at the different age groups' language use with their immediate family members (Figure 2), the most striking features are the clear demarcations between the lines depicting the interlocutors and the lowering of the lines as the interlocutors' age decreases in each subsequent chart.

Results of the statistical analysis (Table 6) prove that Malay is still used very frequently with grandparents and parents, but significantly less with siblings. Although they use mostly Malay, the > 45 group also follows this trend. The greatest stratification can be found for the 25–45 and the 18–24 age groups.
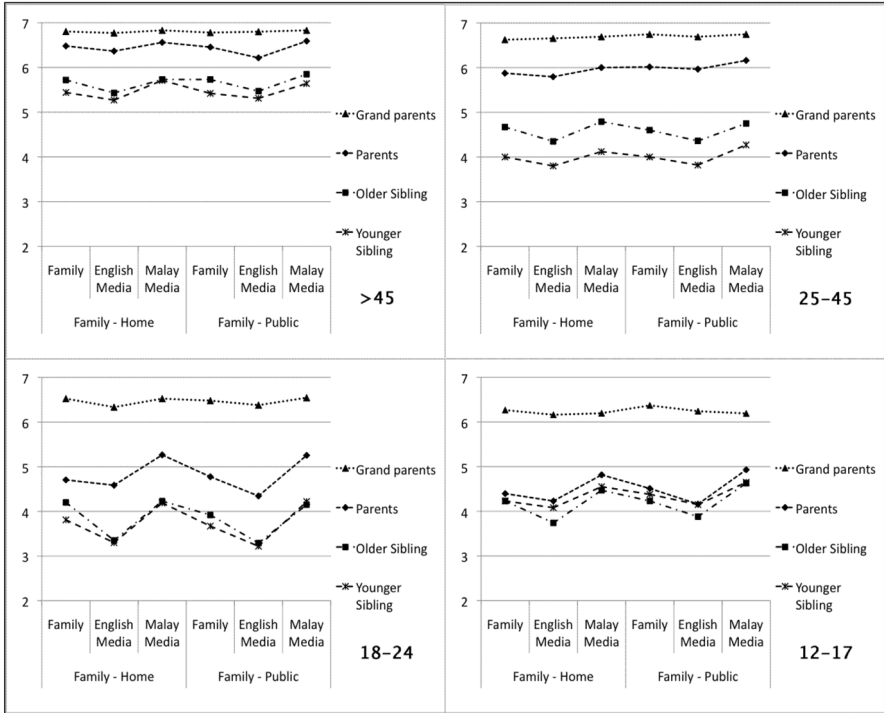
*Figure 2.* Language use within the family by age group

Both groups show a declining use of Malay along the three age levels of inter-locutors, grandparents, parents and siblings. The youngest age group (12–17), interestingly, does not seem to significantly alter their language use when talking to parents and siblings, while sticking to a high use of Malay with their grandparents (see also Figure 3).

Topic is mostly not a significant factor for the older age groups, but for the younger groups it is significant for some topics with certain interlocutors (see Table 7). When they talk to their parents in a public setting, 18 to 24–year olds use more Malay when discussing a topic which was triggered by a Malay media input as compared to an English language one. They react the same way in conversations with their older siblings in public and at home. Additionally, this group uses more Malay with older siblings at home, if the topic is family-related. Similarly, 12 to 17-year olds' use of Malay increases with their younger siblings in public and at home, when the topic is a Malay TV or radio program as compared to an English one.

*Table 6.* Group statistics, family – total language use by age group ($p < 0.05$ = statistically significant)

| Group | Interlocutor | | | | | | | | Oneway ANOVA Results | Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test Results Significant multiple comparisons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Grandparents | | Parents | | Older Sibling | | Younger Sibling | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| >45 | 54.04 | 6.6 | 51.27 | 8.92 | 45.72 | 11.45 | 44.49 | 12.18 | $F(3, 197) = 9.31, p < .05$ | 1) Grandparents > Older Sibling; 2) Grandparents > Younger Sibling; 3) Parents > Older Sibling; 4) Parents > Younger Sibling |
| 25–45 | 53.8 | 4.67 | 48.41 | 9.18 | 37.45 | 12.34 | 32.95 | 12.48 | $F(3, 219) = 46.82, p < .05$ | 1) Grandparents > Parents ; 2) Grandparents > Older Sibling; 3) Grandparents > Younger Sibling; 4) Parents > Older Sibling; 5) Parents > Younger Sibling |
| 18–24 | 51.95 | 6.66 | 39.6 | 10.8 | 32.08 | 11.09 | 31.19 | 11.3 | $F(3, 249) = 57.61, p < .05$ | 1) Grandparents > Parents; 2) Grandparents > Older Sibling; 3) Grandparents > Younger Sibling; 4) Parents > Older Sibling ; 5) Parents > Younger Sibling |
| 12–17 | 50.08 | 7.71 | 37.2 | 12.38 | 34.51 | 13.05 | 35.53 | 13.8 | $F(3, 167) = 15.78, p < .05$ | 1) Grandparents > Parents; 2) Grandparents > Older Sibling; 3) Grandparents > Younger Sibling |

Note: the symbol '>' in the last column denotes a greater use of Malay with the interlocutor on the left of the symbol.

*Table 7.* Group statistics, family – topics ($p < .05$ = statistically significant)

| Age group | Interlocutor | *Oneway* ANOVA Results | *Tukey* HSD Post Hoc Test Results<br>Topics with Significant multiple comparisons |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18–24 | Parents | $F(5, 384) = 3.82, p < .05$ | 1) Public Malay Media > Public English Media |
| 18–24 | Older Sibling | $F(5, 365) = 4.56, p < .05$ | 1) Home Family > Home English Media; 2) Home Malay Media > Home English Media; 3) Public Malay Media > Public English Media |
| 12–17 | Younger Sibling | $F(5, 372) = 4.82, p < .05$ | 1) Home Malay Media > Home English Media; 2) Public Malay Media > Public English Media |

Note: the symbol '>' in the last column denotes a greater use of Malay on the topic to the left of the symbol.

The charts in Figure 3 are used to compare the overall amount of Malay used by the different age groups with different members of their core family. While grandparents trigger a uniformly high use of Malay, Table 8 shows that the youngest age group uses noticeably less Malay as compared to their peers aged 25 and above. Interactions with parents show the greatest differentiation. Again, the 12 to 17 year old group speaks less Malay than the two oldest cohorts, while there seems to be no difference between them and the 18 to 24–year olds. The latter group also shows a significantly reduced amount of Malay with the two older cohorts. However, this clear demarcation is not present when we look at the charts of the language used with siblings. The statistical analysis (Table 8) shows that there appears to be no difference in the amount of Malay used with siblings among those aged 45 and below. However, all of them use noticeably less Malay with their siblings as compared to the oldest age group.

Figure 3 shows that it is the 18–24 group that uses the least Malay with their siblings and that they are statistically on a par with the 12–17 age group in the use of Malay with their parents.

Language use with relatives (Figure 4) bears some resemblance with the interactions with core family members discussed above, but the graphs also highlight interesting differences. The graphs visualize the expected assumption that generally less Malay is used by the younger cohorts. It was also expected that old relatives trigger the highest use of Malay. However, it is interesting to note that the older relatives do not elicit the same high amount of Malay as grandparents. Moreover, age of interlocutor effects are only significant for the > 45 group and the 25–45 group, while the two youngest cohorts do not adjust their patterns of language use to the age of their relative (Table 9). Unlike

*Table 8.* Group statistics, family and relatives – total language use by age (*p* < 0.05 = statistically significan;, ns = not significant)

| | Age Group | | | | | | | | Oneway ANOVA Results | Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test Results Significant multiple comparisons |
| | 1217 (N = 45) | | 18–24 (N = 65) | | 25–45 (N = 64) | | >45 (N = 59) | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grand parents | 50.08 | 7.71 | 51.95 | 6.66 | 53.8 | 4.67 | 54.04 | 6.6 | $F(3, 192) = 3.54, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < 25–45; 2) 12–17 < above 45 |
| Parents | 37.2 | 12.38 | 39.6 | 10.8 | 48.41 | 9.18 | 51.27 | 8.92 | $F(3, 222) = 23.06, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < 25–45; 2) 12–17 < above 45; 3) 18–24 < 25–45; 4) 18–24 < above 45 |
| Older Sibling | 34.51 | 13.05 | 32.08 | 11.09 | 37.45 | 12.34 | 45.72 | 11.45 | $F(3, 208) = 13.48, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < above 45; 2) 18–24 < above 45; 3) 25–45 < above 45 |
| Younger Sibling | 35.53 | 13.8 | 31.19 | 11.3 | 32.95 | 12.48 | 44.49 | 12.18 | $F(3, 210) = 13.05, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < above 45; 2) 18–24 < above 45; 3) 25–45 < above 45 |
| Older Relative | 38.62 | 11.24 | 34.14 | 11.19 | 43.02 | 9.21 | 49.95 | 8.35 | $F(3, 225) = 26.44, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < above 45;  2) 18–24 < 25–45; 3) 18–24 < above 45; 4) 25–45 < above 45 |
| Same Age Relative | 33.6 | 12.92 | 30.03 | 11.13 | 34.39 | 11.73 | 45.74 | 11.21 | $F(3, 226) = 19.78, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 < above 45; 2) 18–24 < above 45; 3) 25–45 < above 45 |
| Younger Relative | 36.87 | 13.92 | 30.2 | 11.53 | 28.75 | 10.59 | 38.41 | 12.47 | $F(3, 229) = 9.35, p < .05$ | 1) 12–17 > 18–24; 2) 12–17 > 25–45; 3) 18–24 < above 45;  4) 25–45 < above 45 |

Note:the symbol '>' in the last column denotes a significantly greater use of Malay and '<' denotes significantly less Malay.
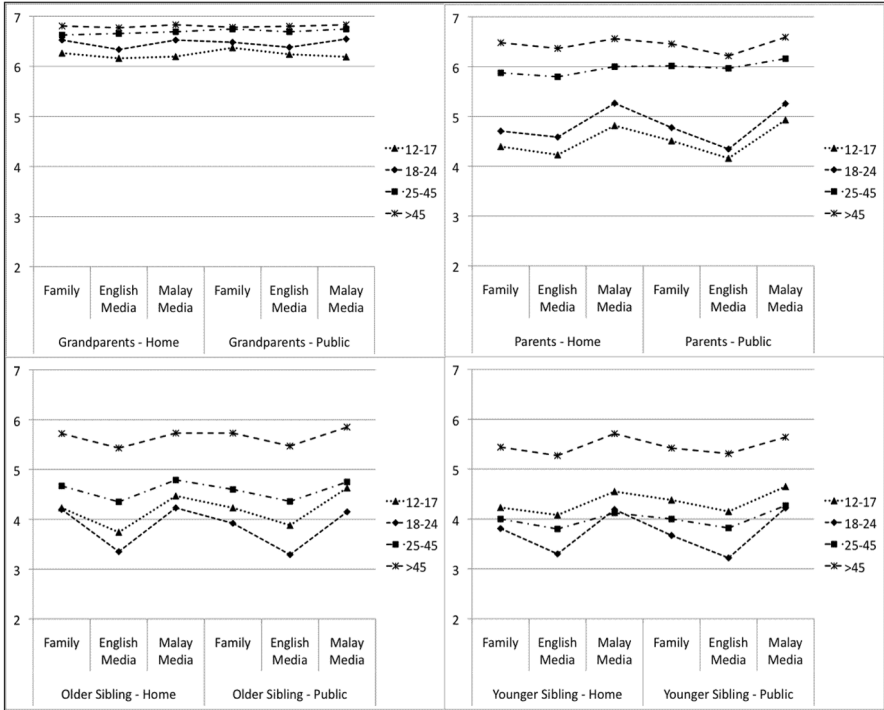
*Figure 3.* Language use within the family (All age groups)

in conversations with family members, topic does not alter the language of interaction with relatives.

When one compares the amount of Malay used by the different age groups with relatives, an interesting result emerges. We see in Figure 5 that the 12–17 group shows a consistently higher use of Malay than the 18–24 group and even of the 25–45 group when speaking with younger relatives. Table 8 proves that this trend is statistically significant. This high use of Malay by the 12–17 age group is consistent with the census data reported above and is very likely due to these teenagers' social networks being still more family- and (ethnic) peer group-oriented. Moreover, many students in this group are still taking compulsory Malay language classes in school and might therefore use their 'mother tongue' more actively. The use of English increases when these people start higher schooling or find employment. The lower Malay scores for the 18 to 24–year olds support such an interpretation.

*Table 9.* Group statistics, relatives – total language use by age group ($p < 0.05$ = statistically significant; ns = not significant)

| Group | Interlocutor | | | | | | *Oneway ANOVA* Results | Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test Results Significant multiple comparisons |
| | Older Relative | | Same Age Relative | | Younger Relative | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| >45 | 49.95 | 8.35 | 45.74 | 11.21 | 38.41 | 12.47 | $F(2, 169) = 16.72, p < .05$ | 1) Older Relative > Younger Relative; 2) Same Age Relative > Younger Relative |
| 25–45 | 43.02 | 9.21 | 34.39 | 11.73 | 28.75 | 10.59 | $F(2, 189) = 29.63, p < .05$ | 1) Older Relative > Same Age Relative; 2) Older Relative > Younger Relative; 3) Same Age Relative > Younger Relative |
| 18–24 | 34.14 | 11.19 | 30.03 | 11.13 | 30.2 | 11.53 | $F(2, 190) = 2.72, ns$ | Not applicable |
| 12–17 | 38.62 | 11.24 | 33.6 | 12.92 | 36.87 | 13.92 | $F(2, 132) = 1.80, ns$ | Not applicable |
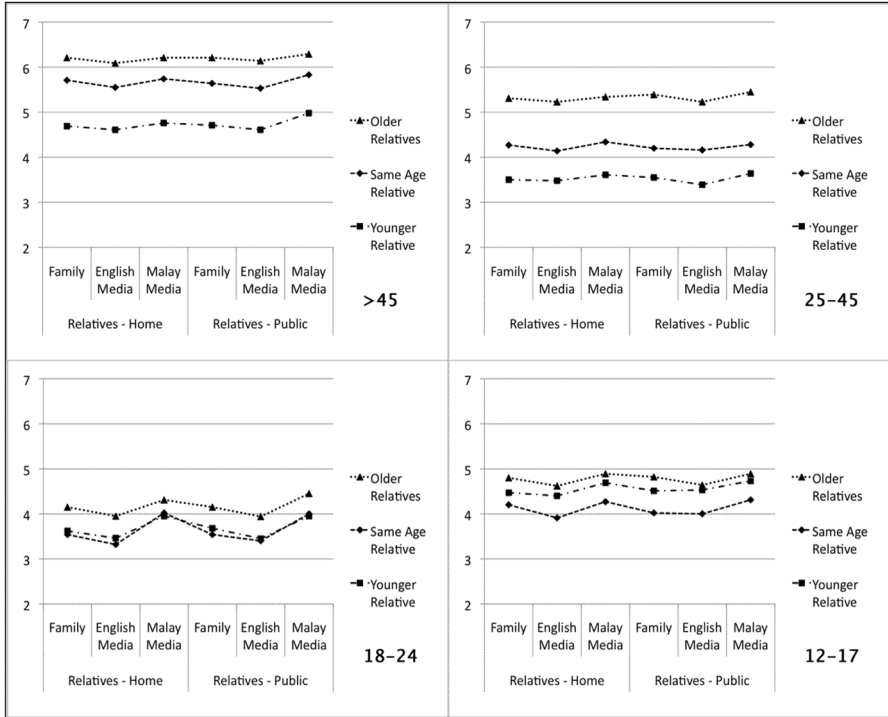
*Figure 4.* Language use with relatives by age group

The high use of Malay by the older participants and to the older members of the family is not surprising. Kloss (1966) and Clyne (1982, 1985 and see 2003: 29) placed grandparents as crucial factors in the promotion of LM. Dorian (1977, 1980) reported high maintenance rates of Gaelic in families with living grandparents. Numerous studies around the world have highlighted grandparents and older relatives as important factors in language maintenance (Tosi 1986; Luo and Wiseman 2000; Ishizawa 2004). In an investigation on the Chinese community in England, Li (1994) found that the Chinese dominant are the older speakers and the bilingual or English dominant are the younger speakers. Cavallaro (forthcoming) found the same in his investigation of the Sicilians in Australia. That is, the members of the community who speak the most Sicilian and Italian are the older members of the community and the younger generations are either bilingual or almost totally monolingual in English. A similar process seems to be underway for the Malays in Singapore.
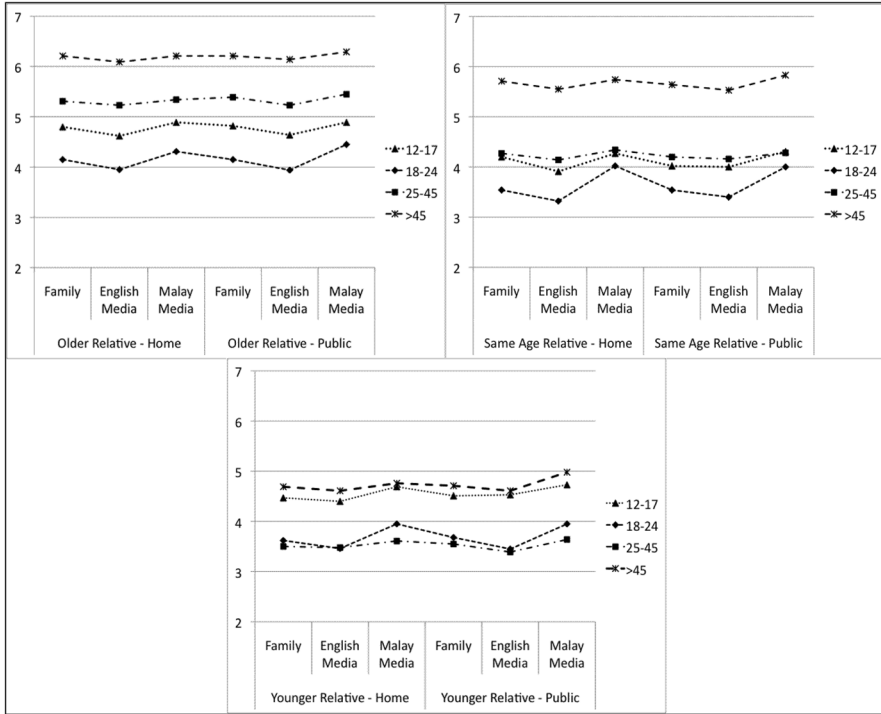
*Figure 5.* Language use with relatives (all age groups)

## 9.2.    Income

Figure 6 relates monthly family household income to the respondents' language use with immediate family members. According to the latest detailed government sources, 78.6% of Singaporean households have a median monthly income of between S$2700 and S$5400 (Department of Statistics 2009b). This is why our indices assume a low-income household to be below $2000, while a high-income household will earn above $7000.

   Our data indicate a number of interesting aspects. Similar to findings above, interactions with grandparents are almost an exclusive Malay affair regardless of the speaker's household income, the domain or topic. For all other interlocutors some significant stratification across income levels is visible (Table 10) and, as expected, the amount of Malay decreases with decreasing age of the interlocutor, but no difference between older and younger siblings appears. The statistical data presented in Table 10 proves that speakers from families with a household income of $1999 and below use significantly more Malay with all core family
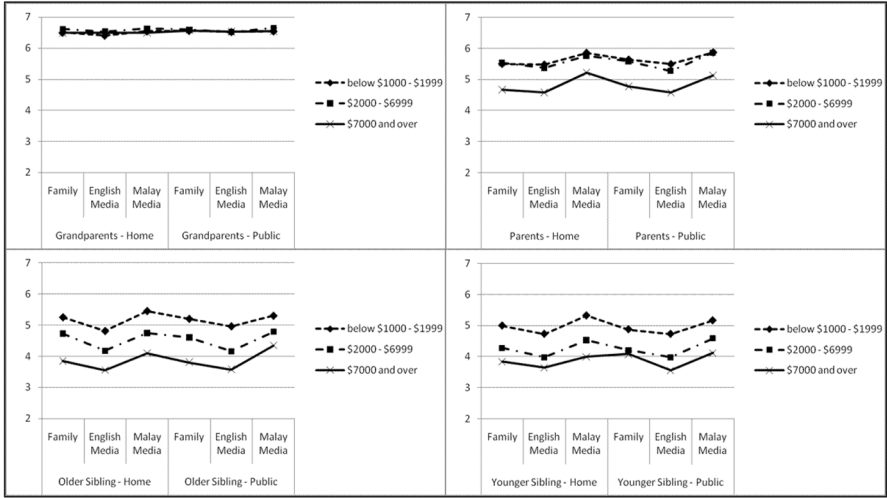
*Figure 6.* Language use with family by income (all age groups)

members compared to speakers from other income levels. Only in conversation with parents do middle and low income groups not show any differentiation, but together they use more Malay than the high income group.

This echoes our analysis of data concerning Malay households from the 2001 census (cf. above) and Bokhorst-Heng's (1998) findings for earlier census data that English proficiency and household income are directly correlated. However, our results paint a more nuanced picture, because, regardless of their income bracket, speakers report adjusting their speech style to the interlocutor. Among our participants, it is the speakers from high-income families who exhibit the greatest range of variation. Low income families show less variation, but there is a notable amount of English used within the family contrary to what results from the official population censuses suggest.

Domain bears no influence on language choice, while the topic is significant only for the middle-income group ($2000–$6999). This group uses significantly more Malay than the other income groups only when the topic is Malay Media in public, rather than English Media, and the interlocutors for this topic are parents ($F(5, 884) = 3.19$, $p < .05$), older siblings ($F(5, 837) = 3.86$, $p < .05$) and younger siblings ($F(5, 834) = 3.04$, $p < .05$).

Language use with relatives over income (Figure 7) resembles the findings on the family. There are no differences between income groups in interactions with the oldest group of relatives, but with same-age and younger relatives members

*Table 10.* Group statistics, family and relatives – total language use by income ($p < 0.05$ = statistically significant; *ns* = not significant)

| | Household Income | | | | | | *Oneway ANOVA* Result | *Tukey* HSD Post Hoc Significant multiple comparisons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | below $1000–$1999 | | $2000–$6999 | | $7000 and over | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| Grand-parents | 51.54 | 8.58 | 52.92 | 5.68 | 52.24 | 6.67 | $F(2,184) = 0.65$, *ns* | None |
| Parents | 46.33 | 11.66 | 45.24 | 10.67 | 39.59 | 15.14 | $F(2,213) = 3.32$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > C 2) B > C |
| Older Siblings | 42.64 | 11.83 | 36.86 | 12.75 | 32.12 | 14.39 | $F(2,199) = 5.53$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > B 2) A > C |
| Younger Siblings | 40.93 | 12.23 | 35.09 | 13.25 | 31.76 | 14.67 | $F(2,202) = 4.37$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > B 2) A > C |
| Older Relatives | 43.10 | 11.18 | 41.27 | 11.75 | 40.11 | 12.23 | $F(2,216) = 0.60$, *ns* | None |
| Same Age Relatives | 41.98 | 11.90 | 34.59 | 12.83 | 33.75 | 15.00 | $F(2,217) = 5.78$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > B 2) A >C |
| Younger Relatives | 37.77 | 11.99 | 32.18 | 12.16 | 30.50 | 15.48 | $F(2,220) = 3.96$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > B 2) A >C |
| Malay Friends | 39.3 | 12.24 | 35.01 | 12.79 | 31.29 | 13.32 | $F(2,219) = 3.54$, $p < .05$ | 1) A > C |

Key: A = below $1000–$1999; B = $2000–$6999; C = $7000 and over
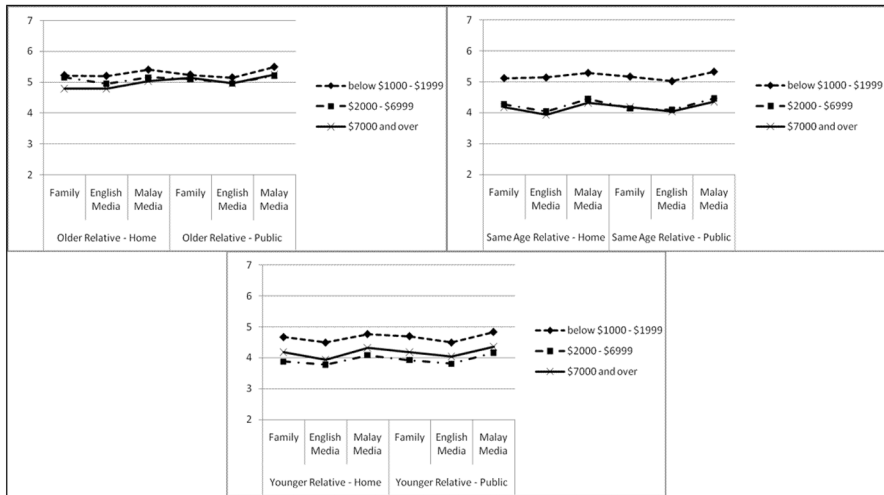


*Figure 7.* Language use with relatives by income (all age groups)

of the lowest income group speak more Malay than the middle and high income households (Table 10).

On the other hand, the amount of Malay used is only marginally affected by the age of the relative. The most senior relatives appear to encourage the use of Malay, while same-age and younger relatives are addressed equally in English and Malay. Interestingly, speakers from the lowest income bracket have almost identically high scores for older relatives and same-age relatives. Overall, they exhibit the least variation in comparison to the other groups in this category. Generally, the graphs suggest a move towards a more balanced use of English and Malay for all income groups. Topic is only a significant factor ($p < .05$) in the language choice for the \$2000–\$6999 group again. Similar to their results with immediate family members above, they demonstrate a significantly higher use of Malay than the other income groups, when the topic is Malay Media in public, as compared to English Media, with their older relatives ($F(5, 837) = 3.86$, $p < .05$) and younger relatives ($F(5, 834) = 3.04$, $p < .05$).

### 9.3.   Educational level

To measure the influence of speakers' education onto their language use, four indices where constructed from the eight questionnaire items. Since respondents were asked to indicate their education level currently attained, the first category "Primary School" includes those with a minimum of six years of education and a proportion of the youngest age group (12–17 year-olds), who have not completed secondary school yet. The second category "Secondary School" is made up of those respondents who have completed a Singaporean secondary school qualification, as well as those with vocational qualifications. Graduates from institutions that offer post-secondary degrees are grouped under "Post-Secondary". Finally, university graduates of any level are considered in the category "Tertiary". Respondents without any educational qualification and those with degrees from religious schools are not considered here, because the numbers were not substantial in our sample. Figures 8 and 9 show the graphs for language used with different family members and relatives by the educational level currently attained.

In line with findings above, grandparents receive almost purely Malay input from all respondents, independent of their education level. However, when the interlocutor is a sibling or a relative there are significant differences between the languages used according to educational level achieved (Table 11). Figures 8 and 9 reveal similar trends for education to the ones on income mentioned above. The group with the lowest education level uses more Malay with all siblings and relatives than any other group. Those with secondary, post-
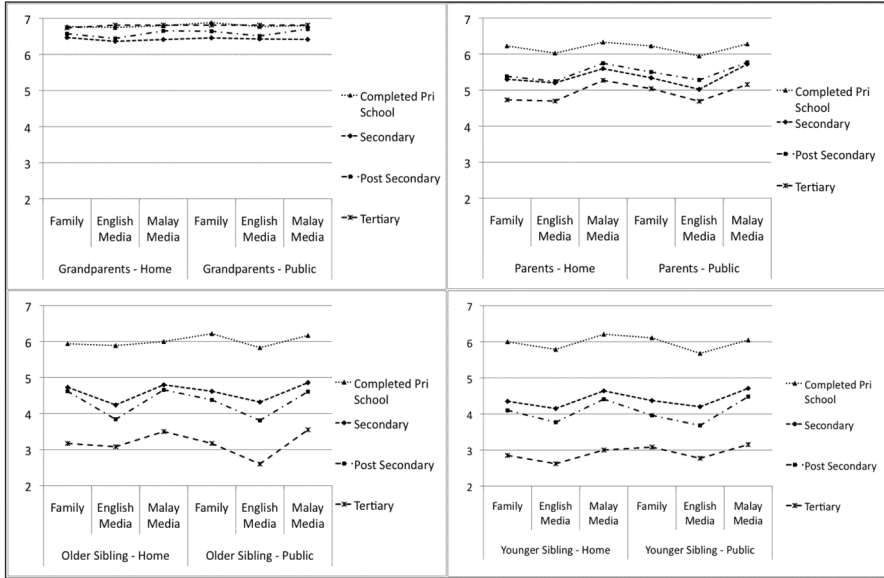
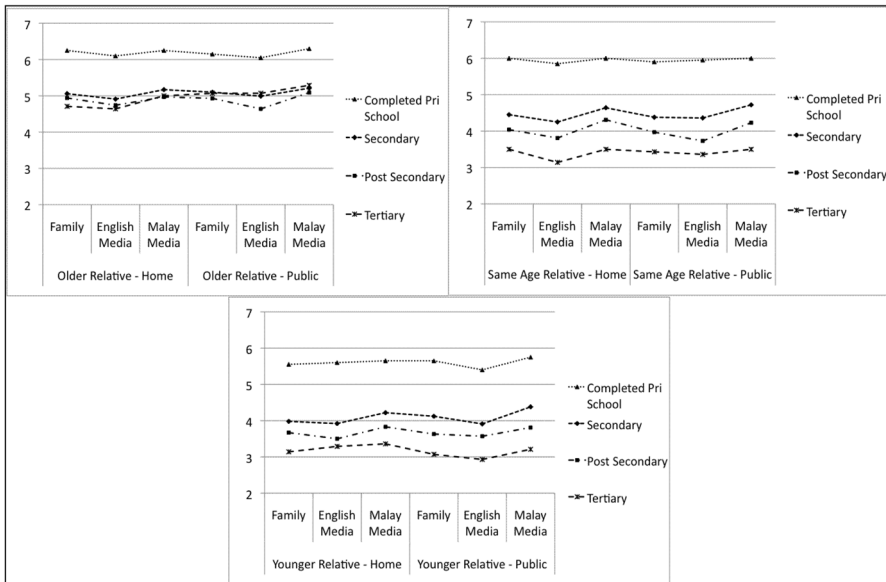*Figure 8.*  Language use with family by educational level (all age groups)



*Figure 9.*  Language use with relatives by educational level (all age groups)

*Table 11.* Group statistics, family and relatives – education ($p < 0.05$ = statistically significant)

| Interlocutor | *Oneway* ANOVA Results | *Tukey* HSD Post Hoc Test Results Groups with Significant multiple comparisons |
|---|---|---|
| Older Sibling | $F(3,190) = 8.34, p < .05$ | 1) A>B; 2) A>C; 3) A>D; 4) B>D |
| Younger Sibling | $F(3,194) = 11.41, p < .05$ | 1) A>B; 2) A>C; 3) A>D; 4) B>D |
| Older Relatives | $F(3,207) = 4.10, p < .05$ | 1) A>B; 2) A>C; 3) A>D |
| Same Age Relatives | $F(3,206) = 9.28, p < .05$ | 1) A>B; 2) A>C; 3) A>D |
| Younger Relatives | $F(3,2068) = 10.59, p < .05$ | 1) A>B; 2) A>C; 3) A>D |

Key: A = Completed Primary School; B = Completed Secondary School; C = Completed Post-Secondary School; D = Completed Tertiary Studies

secondary and tertiary education exhibit the same patterns of language use. Yet, secondary school graduates tend to speak more Malay with their siblings as compared to university degree holders. Most probably due to their close proximity in age there is no significant difference between speakers who have completed secondary school and those who have completed post-secondary education.

Considering the degree of language variation between the different groups, it can be detected that when interacting with family members and relatives those participants with secondary school qualifications and higher show more adaptability than respondents with only primary school qualifications. The latter group scores consistently high on the scale, which means that they use mostly Malay. The participants who have attained the next three highest levels of education seem to adjust their choice of language according to the age of their interlocutors. The greatest variation in language choice is found among respondents who have completed tertiary education, though a clear shift towards more English is noticeable here.

While domain is not significant, topic does seem to influence the language use of only the post-secondary degree holders when speaking to siblings. This group uses significantly more Malay when the topic is Malay Media versus English Media at home with their older sibling ($F(5,377) = 3.90, p < .05$) and Malay Media versus English Media in public with their younger sibling ($F(5,408) = 3.50, p < .05$).

## 9.4.    Gender

Since Gal's (1979) classic study, gender as a factor in LM or LS has been investigated in a number of studies worldwide (Pauwels 1995). Previous studies report that in more established communities older males shift to the majority language faster than older women (Clyne 2003: 34–35). This has been attributed to the high rates of exogamy or the more traditional practices that see the males going out to work and women staying at home to raise the family. Mukherjee (1996), for example, studied the situation among the Panjabi and Bengalis in New Delhi, where the men (of all ages) shifted to Hindi faster than the women. He attributed this to the fact that most of the women in these groups did not work and, therefore, were not under any pressure to shift to the majority language. He posits that in some cases employment and the language associated with it prevail over other factors. An analysis of our results presents a complex and dynamic situation.

The analysis of our data points to a slightly different situation for the Malays in Singapore than those reported in the studies cited above. For example, there is hardly any variation due to gender for the oldest group in our sample (> 45) and the youngest (12–17). The 25–45 group also shows little variation according to gender when the interlocutor is an older member of the family. However, Figure 10 illustrates that in the cases when the interlocutor is a younger relative ($t(62) = 3.31$, $p < .05$) or a relative of the same age ($t(62) = 3.50$, $p < .05$), women seem to speak much more English than males do. This pattern in the use of English is also apparent in the next younger group (Figure 11).

The 18–24 year old female participants use more English than their male peers when interacting with all members of their families and relatives except for grandparents (Figure 11). Although the higher use of English by the women is only significant when the participants are speaking with their parents ($t(62) = 3.05$, $p < .05$).

Figure 12 shows significant differences between the amount of Malay and English used by males and females when the participants are in the middle-income group and they speak to their older siblings ($t(136 = 2.76$, $p < .05$) and younger siblings ($t(138 = 2.76$, $p < .05$), with the women speaking more English than the men.

It is interesting that in our study women from the middle-income group show a significantly higher use of English than men. Among our participants in the lower- and higher-income groups the men seem to use more Malay than the women, but statistically the difference was not significant.

Other studies have also reported differences in language behaviour between women of different ages. For example, in a study carried out in Malaysia,
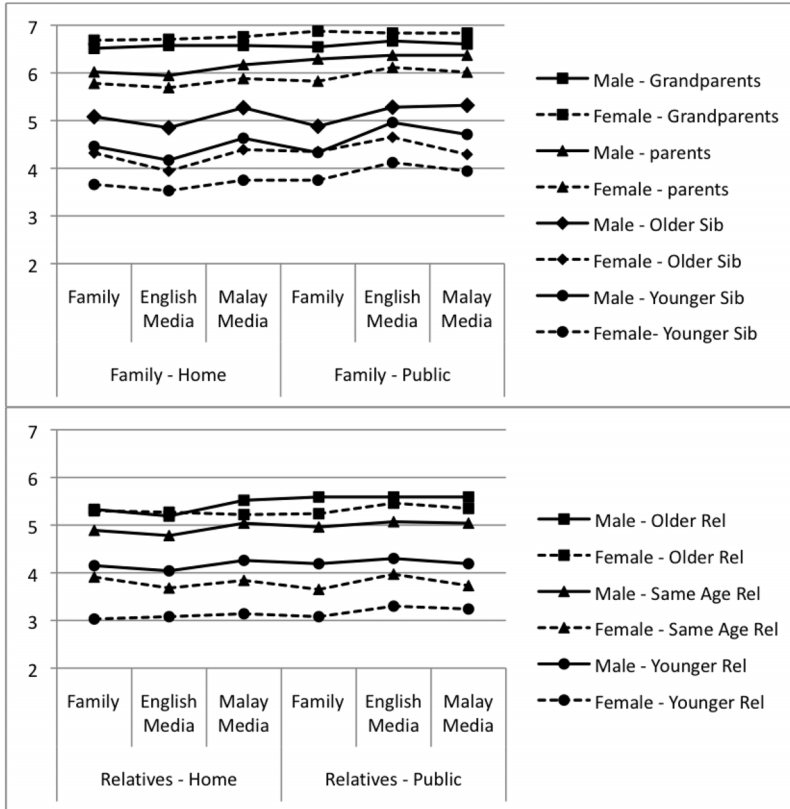
*Figure 10.* Language use by gender (25–45)

Mukherjee (2003) reports that her older Bengali participants who did not work had a higher rate of maintenance than the younger women who were pursuing a professional career. She also found that the older Bengali women in Malaysia identify themselves more as Bengalis than Malaysians and saw themselves as the bastions of Bengali culture and traditions. Hence they had a sense of pride in maintaining their linguistic heritage. The younger women instead adopted English quite openly and consciously as a means to access its economic power. In migrant groups or communities with a younger profile and among the younger people in more established communities, usually it is the women who speak the majority language more and shift to it faster than males (Pauwels 1995). This seems to be what is reflected in our data. All the women in our study use Malay with the older members of the community because it is what the older members
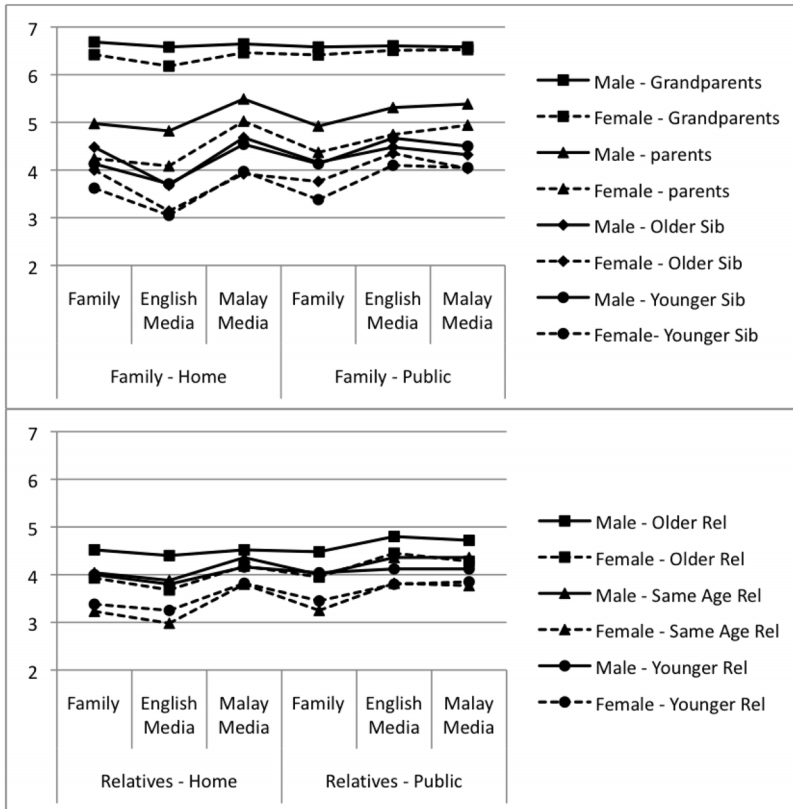
*Figure 11.* Language use by gender (18–24)

expect. At the same time, the younger women who have higher aspirations as far as educational and career prospects are concerned use more English with people of the same age or younger.

Bourdieu (1991) made the claim that the language we use can improve our social standings and increase our material gains. There is no doubt that in Singapore the English language enjoys a much higher status and prestige than Malay, and English is associated with higher economic values and education. Studies have linked women's use of more standard speech norms with women's sensitivity to prestige varieties and their more apparent drive for upward social mobility. Nichols (1978) found that the Gullah-speaking African American women in her classic study used far more prestige or standard forms than the men. She attributed this linguistic behaviour to the women's effort to move up
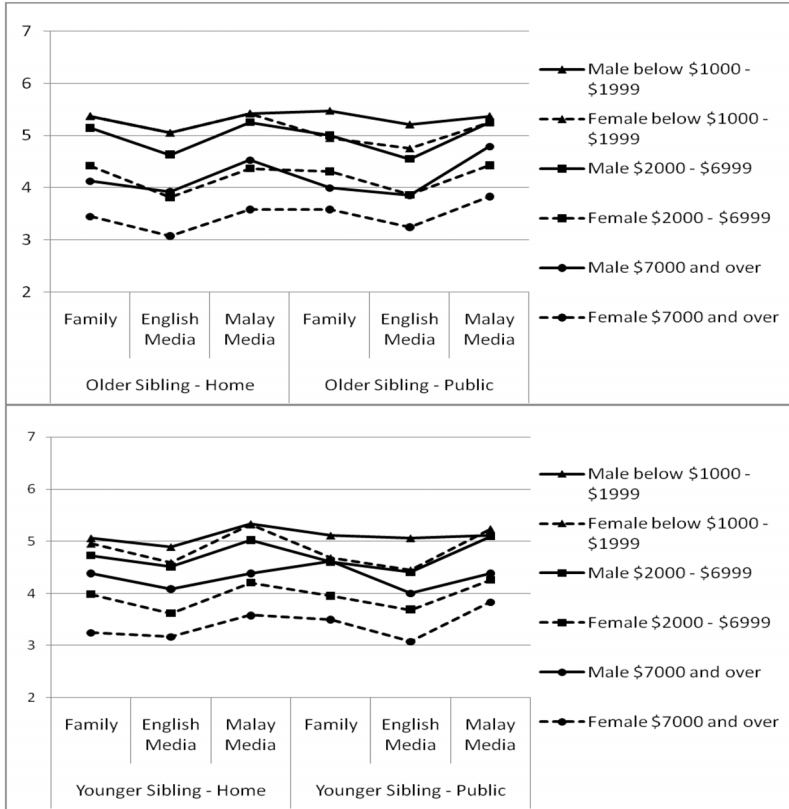
*Figure 12.* Language use by gender and income (all groups)

the social ladder. Gal (1979) found that younger women rejected the 'peasant' status of Hungarian in favour of German, and more importantly of German-speaking men. Though these views which portrayed women as 'social climbers' have been critiqued (see Cameron and Kulick 2003), it is an incontrovertible fact that there is robust evidence that women are more sensitive to prestige varieties and more likely to converge to socially preferred norms even though there are many socially motivated reasons for these observations. Smith-Hefner (2009) asserts that young women in Java "cultivate forms of speech which afford them greater opportunities for social and economic advancement" (2009: 71). Women's receptiveness to these social issues does not always mean that they shift to the majority language faster than the men. Herbert (1992) reported how in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa the women among the Thonga immigrants

from Mozambique shifted to Zulu much later and more slowly than the men, and when they did speak Zulu, they spoke it with a very noticeable Thonga influence. According to Herbert, this was due to the fact that the women were accorded a much higher status within the Thonga groups than did women in Zulu groups.

## 9.5.   Other domains

One of the aims of this study was to identify whether a domain exists that is naturally more Malay. Figure 13 plots the language used with other Malays in the wider community. Participants were asked to state how much Malay or English they would use when interacting with Malay staff at work or school; with Malay teachers (but not Malay language teachers); Malay professionals (doctors, lawyers, dentists), and Malay and non-Malay religious scholars.
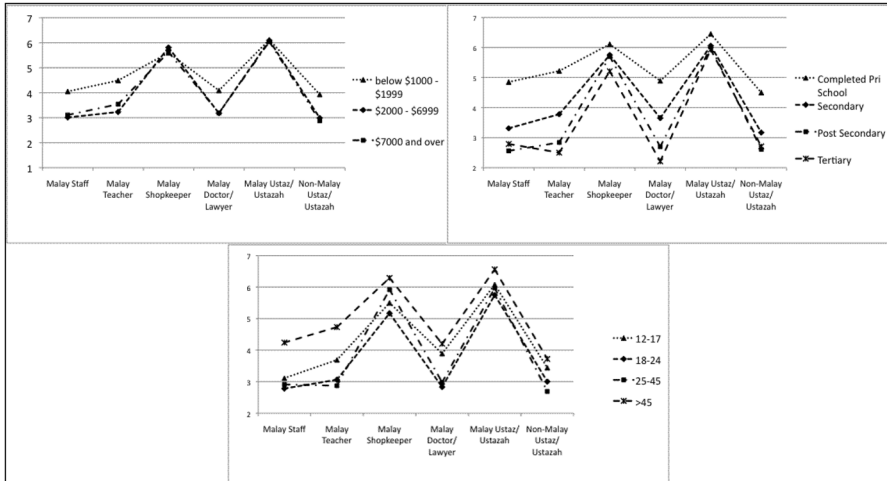


*Figure 13.*  More general language use (all age groups)

Again we observe a similar stratification among all age groups as reported with the family and relatives. The participants in this study have identified two interlocutors with whom they clearly speak more Malay. One group of people is the Malay shopkeepers and other service providers, such as hawker stall workers, barbers and cleaners. The other group of people is the Malay Ustaz or cleric. As observed in the analysis above, the highest users of Malay are the older participants, the participants from the lower socio-economic group and those with the lowest educational qualifications. The highest users of English instead are those from the highest socio-economic group and those with the higher

educational qualifications. As far as age is concerned, the 18–24 and the 25–45 groups seem to show a similar pattern of language use, while the 12–17 show a higher use of Malay in comparison to the 18 to 24-year olds ($F(3, 221) = 8.76$, $p < .05$).

Some introspective data from the participants of all age groups corroborates the trends discussed above (Figure 14). Again we observe similar stratification among all groups according to age, income and education, as reported earlier in this article. The $> 45$ group maintains a fairly high level of Malay use except when counting. The other groups only show a significant increase in Malay use when they pray. That is, when they do not pray in Arabic.
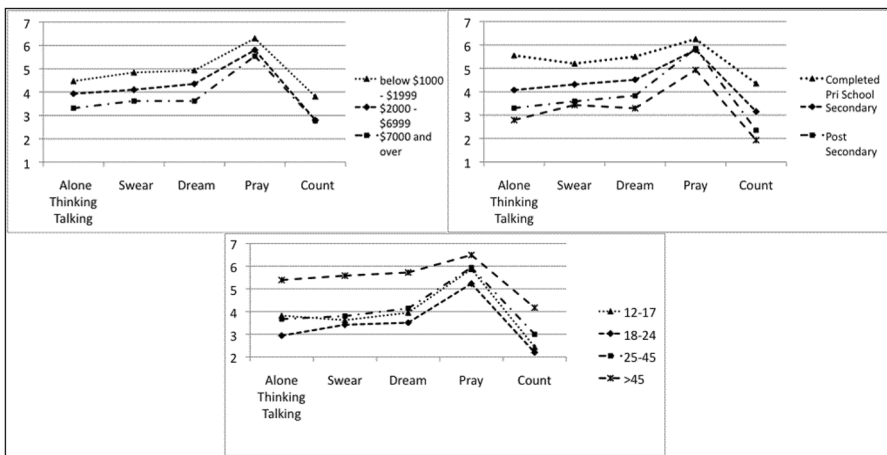


*Figure 14.* Personal language use (all age groups)

## 10.  General conclusions

The census data reporting that 13.2% of the Malays in Singapore use Malay as their home language, and the many studies based on this data cloud the extent to which code variation is taking place within the Malay home, and somewhat obscures the real extent of the LS that is going on in the community. This is due to the specific wording of the census question, which only asks for the *home* language. The results from this study clearly show that the home or family settings are not 'natural triggers' for the use of Malay. Indeed there seems to be a substantial amount of English spoken within the immediate family and close relatives. The age of interlocutor seems to be the most important factor with

regard to choosing the language of interaction. Grandparents serve as the catalyst for almost total use of Malay independent of any topic, place, or any socio-economic variable. This clearly underscores the importance of grandparents in LM discussions in the Malay community. Yet, our results also show that for certain groups media input in Malay is significant and encourages the members of the speech community to use their ethnic language rather than English.

The results of this study show an increase in the use of English to and by the younger people, with the lowest Malay use reported by the 18–24 year olds. The youngest group (12–17) consistently reported a higher use of Malay than the next older group and at times of the 25–45 year olds as well. This could be due to this group using Malay as an in-group language, or simply because they are currently actively studying Malay at school. However, as they grow and join the workforce or pursue higher education, their social network goes through further transformation and they then tend to use more English.

The results also demonstrate some gender differences. Our data fall in with that from studies on gender issues. That is, older Malay women in Singapore speak more Malay than younger ones, but whether this is significantly more than the men will need further investigation and analysis. However, our data do seem to show that younger women from the middle-income group are leading the shift to English. The women in this study from the age groups that contain the most working people, the 18–24 and 25–45 age groups, use much more English with their siblings and relatives of the same age or younger than do the men.

Speakers from the highest socio-economic level and highest education level show the highest rates of English use in the domains explored in this study. The results of our study also support Bokhorst-Heng's (1998) observations that English use is highly correlated with academic success. Our results clearly indicate that those with higher educational levels use much more English than those with lower educational levels. This group also shows the greatest range in use across both languages. They seem to be at ease with speaking almost totally in Malay with their parents and grandparents and very high levels of English to the younger members of the family. This behavior mirrors Platt and Weber's (1980) as well as Pakir's (1991) models for English that claim that education and socio-economic status is crucial for acquiring all the varieties of Singapore English. While Platt and Weber (1980) and Pakir (1991) thought of the speaker's assessment of formality as the deciding factor in their choice of English, our data identifies age of interlocutor as the overarching determinant for Malay Singaporeans in their choice of language. It is also apparent that within the context of the immediate family, this group of speakers with higher educational levels exhibits a sensitivity and flexibility to adjust their language(s) of interaction to the different interlocutors and, occasionally, the topics. Therefore, one may con-

clude that the home language has been and still is important when it comes to high levels of education achievement, and the English language will guarantee these achievements to Singaporean much more than Malay.

A relationship between language use and income proposed by Bokhorst-Heng (1998) is partly supported by our data. Respondents from low income households tend to use more Malay with their family members and relatives, while speakers from high income families report using significantly less Malay. However, we cannot report a shift away from using Malay for the latter. Rather, these speakers demonstrate greater degree of adjustment of their language repertoire according to the interlocutor and the topic of the discussion than the participants from the lower income group; much in the same way as those participants with higher educational qualifications. All participants report high use of Malay with older interlocutors. However, it is the younger participants and those with a higher education and household income that demonstrate greater proficiency in English. From an LM point of view the question here is what will happen when these older family members and relatives pass on? Our data shows that once the obligatory domain of the grandparents is gone, the only people left that elicit high rates of Malay are the shopkeepers, such as hawker stall owners, and Malay religious clerics.

Effective language maintenance is a very difficult issue, as we can see from the poor LM results in the U.S. (Veltman 1984; Fishman, et al. 1985; Hakuta 1986) and in Australia (Clyne 2005; and see summary in Cavallaro [forthcoming]). However, the more positive results from Canada (Swain and Lapkin 1986) and Europe (Baetens Beardsmore 1993) highlight the fact that with careful planning LM is possible. Singapore's linguistic landscape today is a product of its language policies. These policies were set into practice in the tense 1950s and 60s when the country was just finding its feet. The English plus 'mother tongue' policy was implemented to reduce the interethnic divisions, to promote a common Singaporean identity and promote economic growth (Gopinathan 1988, 1998, Gopinathan et al. 2004).

Rapid growth and economic success have come hand in hand with and are vindications of the country's emphasis on English and, later, Mandarin. English is today the de facto national language in Singapore and is perceived as the key to access world markets. The status of English against that of all the other languages in Singapore has meant that there is no domain in Singapore where English is not spoken. The Malay community relies on extensive codeswitching for all its functions and once the older generation dies out, there will be much less need to speak exclusively in Malay. Many linguists around the world have put forward compelling arguments for the maintenance of minority languages (see Cavallaro [2005] for a summary). However, it is undeniable that official

sanctions, together with economic forces, have created a sweeping momentum in favour of English and at the expense of the other languages of Singapore.

Our study confirms that young Malays in Singapore speak a notable amount of Malay, but that they then shift to using more English when they join the work force or attend a tertiary institution. Projecting this trend further down the time line, one can only see continuing erosion of the domains where Malay used to be a stronghold and decreasing use of Malay across all age groups. Can something be done to address some of these concerns? Information should be made more readily available to these young people and their parents on the benefits of bilingualism, stressing that acquiring a language other than English does not jeopardize the children's acquisition of English. Research studies have shown that transgenerational language shift among minority communities is almost inevitable (Veltman 1984; Fishman et al. 1985; Hakuta 1986; O'Bryan et al. 1976; and Wardhaugh 1983). However, as pointed out by Cavallaro (2005) language shift is no more natural than language maintenance. In other words, we should resist the attitude to view LS as a natural consequence of progress and globalization. Though the present generation may not experience LS as a loss, when they finally realize it, it may be too late. We believe that scholars and academics have the duty to provide the community with the necessary information to enable them to make informed decisions regarding their linguistic heritage. This way of thinking has, in recent times, been derided as instigating linguistic 'moral panic' (Heller and Duchêne 2007). However, it remains that LS in such situations is never totally voluntary and though the speakers are active agents in the process, they may choose another course of action, if presented with the relevant information and facts.

If we were to be fully committed to the idea of bilingualism, the next phase of educational policies in Singapore should be directed at practical, effective and achievable strategies to reverse the language shift among speakers of all non-English languages spoken in the community. As far as Malay is concerned, there are still enough speakers in the community that if the right steps are taken, the shift to English can be arrested and a more stable form of bilingualism be achieved. In Singapore there is some urgency to promote additive bilingualism and to ensure that minority languages continue to be relevant in the contexts of the speakers' environment. While speakers will always be motivated to make pragmatic choices, enlightened agencies can help by making the environment more conducive to choices that enhance linguistic diversity.

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