

## Language Choice among Malaysian-Indians in Speech Repertoire of Tamil and English Language

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### Abstract

Multilingualism is a common occurrence in Malaysia, which is a pluralistic society. The Malaysian-Indians, are commonly exposed to three languages; Tamil language (mother tongue), Malay language (National language) and English (Second language). This study focuses on Malaysian-Indians with Tamil language as their mother tongue above the age of 21 years. After school education, Malaysian-Indians mainly use either English or Tamil language to communicate while in intra-ethnic group conversations. The language choice of predominant language in daily speech repertoire was investigated. In daily conversation, some speakers give more preferences to English language and less importance to Tamil language; while those who prefer Tamil language, withdraw from speaking in English language. This study is to create awareness in the usage of both Tamil and English Language among Malaysian-Indians. The study compared language choice among Malaysian-Indians speakers by comparing their Tamil and English language usage in social context within the same ethnic group. A descriptive comparative design using mixed research method of quantitative and qualitative were employed in this study on a group of 82 Malaysian-Indians from three major states in the central region of peninsular Malaysia. The results revealed that majority of the respondents were aware of the importance of Tamil language as mother tongue and their language choice. However, the results also showed that the importance of English language as global language is undeniable. Therefore, Malaysian-Indians in recent years have resorted in code-mixing in their speech repertoire to create a win-win situation to uphold their mother tongue as well to progress in career and education.

**Keywords:** Language Choice, Mother Tongue, Speech Repertoire, Tamil Language, Malaysian-Indians

### Introduction

Multilingualism is common among multi-ethnic Malaysians. Multilingualism occurs when there is a use of multiple languages within a speech community. Malaysian-Indians in this study referred to the Malaysian-Tamil community, who use Tamil and English language and also Malay language in various situations due to the multilingual context of Malaysia. Looking

into a more specific context of intra-ethnic communication within the Malaysian-Indian community, the multilingualism had led to a widespread approach of language choice during conversations. As for the Malaysian-Indians, this minority ethnic group are commonly exposed to three languages; Tamil language which is their mother tongue, Malay language as the National language and English as Second language of the nation. After secondary education, Malaysian-Indians mostly use either English or Tamil language to communicate within inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic groups. Some give more preferences to English and less importance to Tamil language, while those who prefer Tamil language, noticeably withdraw from English, while communicating with their same ethnic group speakers. The language choice of Malaysian-Indians in communication mainly influenced by the family background (parents education level), family values, traditions, beliefs, religious strictures, socio-economic status and also their surroundings.

Language choice occur in situations where the speakers have two or more languages to choose from in numerous contexts and also different reasons and purposes. Language choice also can be referred as the diction, wording or choice of words and style of expression used in communication (Holmes, 2013). Language choice is an important aspect used to express and convey the identity of the speaker as the choice of language made portrays one's social identity. A speaker may pose the ability to speak in multiple languages they have learned, but the choice of language made during a conversation shows the importance given to a particular language in speech repertoire. When speakers engage in active communication, the choice of language is very much reliant on the interlocutor or the person involved in the conversation. Decades ago, the choice of language used in speech repertoire was based on the purpose of the communication, the interlocutors and the effectiveness of using a particular language to communicate in daily life. However, in recent years, language choice, has become a concern in linguistics studies as changing trends in language learning and language shift due to multilingualism, global digitalization, intermarriages, migrations and also changes in lifestyles.

Past studies in Malaysia have been focusing on improving the mastery of English per se, or improving the mastery of Tamil language of itself. This resulted in mastery of one language and the other language being neglected. As such, this study is concern on creating awareness among Malaysian-Indians on the importance of balance in acquisition, mastery and improve the usage of Tamil language as mother tongue and English as international language, by giving equal importance to both languages. The study will compare the predominant language choice among Malaysian-Indians speakers towards Tamil and English language among the same ethnic group. Language choice of Malaysian-Indians is examined to get insights of the factors affecting the code choice.

Learning and mastery of English as second language is often regarded as need to be prioritize and necessary steps need to be taken, but at the same time, the policy of learning English as second language should not jeopardize the acquisition, mastery and usage of the learner's first language (L1) and in this case is the Tamil language. Too much emphasis is given to L2 have caused Tamil language has been often disregarded by the Malaysian-Indians users to certain extent. This deterioration in usage of Tamil language by Malaysian-Indian needs serious attention and necessary measures need to be enforced to ensure the identity of this users is preserved for their posterity.

In recent years, the usage of Tamil language among young Malaysian-Indians is rather declining as Malaysian-Indian children are exposed more to English than Tamil language. The usage of Tamil language is deteriorating among Malaysian-Indians and there is a language shift by adapting other languages. This issue has been discussed by Schiffman (2002) (as cited by Leo, 2013) predicted that the position of Tamil language in Malaysia, which is spoken by a minority ethnic group, is vulnerable for language shift and its survival largely dependable on the users in rural areas or marginalized urban underclass group with no economic value. Schiffman also noted that aspect of religion further divides the minority Tamil population, that eventually leads to language shift threat. Other past studies that also have mentioned regarding this issue include: Ponniah, Thamburaj, & Samuvell (2017); and Paramasivam (2018). The findings of a past study on this matter by Pawathy, Thanalachime, & Stefanie (2021), stated that there is an obvious declining pattern of Tamil language usage among young parents as they are inclined towards using English language with their children at home. This is prevalent among educated upper and middle-class urban Malaysian-Tamils or in other words families from M40 and T20 income group. Malaysian-Indian parents noticeably speak in English to their children right from the infancy phase. This resulted in their children's withdrawal and inability to speak in Tamil language, their own mother tongue, as there is no or less exposure to the language.

A past study by Leo (2013), among Malaysian Tamil Christian Indian Youths shows that they are more comfortable to communicate in a language that is not their mother tongue. This is a very serious issue that needs to be looked into when their language choice is not their own mother tongue. Exposure to mother tongue at young age is critical for children to acquire the first language. Children acquire their first language through developmental sequences right from the infancy stage until their pre-school age of six or seven (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The first three years of a child is crucial for the acquisition of the first language. The progress in acquisition continues to grow through developmental sequences by prediction and understanding the features of a language in accordance to the child's cognitive development. Children acquire grammatical competence of their first language at a very young age and, as in vocabulary development, comprehension skills outpace production (Fasold, 2006).

An alarming situation of language choice and language shift to second language especially English language as compared to mother tongue has become a threatening issue to many communities around the world, as English language is taking over their native language. This has been discussed in past studies by Alyami (2023) who mentioned about language shift from Hungarian language to dominant German language; another research by Rosdiana (2014), discussed about language shift from Jawa Ngoko language to dominant Indonesian Language; while Nishanti (2020) and Rauf (2023) mentioned on the importance of mother tongue; and David (2017), discussed about the reasons for language shift in Malaysia.

For those Malaysian-Indian who speak only Tamil language at home or with friends, English language is regarded as a difficult language, leading to many language issues; language anxiety, inability to pursue higher studies, failure to secure financial aids for tertiary education and also unemployment or inability to progress in career. This is noticeable among B40 Malaysian-Indian income group. B40 income group in Malaysia refers to household income

of less than RM4850 per month (Source: Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report 2019, Department of Statistics Malaysia).

A good command with high level of proficiency in English language is regarded as an asset for employment and higher positions. Graduates must be proficient in English to secure employment as well as to perform efficiently at work (Lan, Khaun, & Singh, 2011). On 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2022, Mohamed & Razawi reported in The News Straits Times that 'English Proficiency is Vital for Employment'. It reported that according to the President of Malaysian Employers Federation, Datuk Dr. Syed Hussain Syed Husman, good English proficiency among Malaysian employees can develop their knowledge and advance for better career path. It also reported that Malaysians despite having 12 years of primary to secondary education, they still have a poor grasp of English. Moreover, as noted by Malaiappan (2014), English language is also a criterion to prepare learners for further studies. The study also reported that Malaysian rural Malaysian-Indians with speaking proficiency only in Tamil language, faced difficulty in judging and producing grammatical relative clauses involving long movement extraction from other than the subject position.

Less researches have been done on the language needs of Malaysian-Indians. Thang (2004), mentioned that, Malaysian-Indian respondents were dropped from her study as the number was relatively small. Past researches emphasized on the language preferences mostly focused on Malay or Malaysian-Chinese in Malaysia include (Kamarudin & Abdullah, 2015), (Wong, Lee, Lee, & Azizah, 2009) and (Kim, 2003) to name a few. As a result, the language acquisition and language choice of Malaysian-Indians are less focused and discussed in past researches. Language researchers often emphasize on the needs to master the second language (L2) or the influence of mother tongue often known as first language (L1) on the learning of L2. Therefore, it is rather clear that little interest has been raised by past researches on the importance of acquisition, mastery and maintenance of mother tongue, Tamil language for Malaysian-Indians and at the same time to master the English language for economic growth. Focus should also be given on the acquisition of both Tamil language (as first language) and English language (as second language), to create a balance and win-win situation in language learning. The research objective of this paper is to identify the predominant speech repertoire language choice and usage of Tamil as mother tongue and English as Second Language among Malaysian-Indians. The paper compares language choice in speech repertoire among Malaysian-Indians by comparing their Tamil and English language usage preferences in social context within the same ethnic group.

The relevance or significance of the study is to create a positive attitude and mindset among young Malaysian-Indians, on the importance of acquiring and mastering Tamil language as their mother tongue. There is a great need to revive the sense of pride of their identity and roots through learning and using Tamil language. This study also give emphasis on the need to uphold and dignify the position of Tamil language as one of the oldest languages in existence. This study also relevant for Malaysian-Indians to understand the need for English speaking mastery as to enhance the desire for career and economic enhancement. Overall, the study is important to promote and enhance multilingualism without jeopardizing one's mother tongue which is an ongoing trend governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness.

**Literature Review***Tamil Language as mother tongue for Malaysian-Indians*

Tamil language is a classical language natively spoken by the Tamil people of Indian subcontinent. Tamil language is the official language of Tamil Nadu, India and also one of the official languages in Singapore and Sri Lanka (Rajan, 2018). Tamil language is the mother tongue of immigrants from Tamil Nadu, India and Sri Lanka who settled in various parts of the world including Malaysia. In recent years, there is a noticeable decline in the usage of Tamil language among Malaysia-Indians inter-ethnically in social context. Although the enrolment of students in Tamil schools (primary education) have increased as compared to decades ago, but the usage of spoken Tamil among young Malaysians in social context has declined. Past studies have drawn the several reasons for this declination. Among those reasons include, change in language faithfulness towards other dominant languages of the country and national language policy, language shift to English for professional growth, the increase of usage of other official languages of the country for political and business purposes, and Tamil diglossia in terms of literacy and prestigious forms (Paramasivam, 2018). Besides, Pillai (2009) also noted that the preferred language in daily lives affected by the speaker's socioeconomics and educational backgrounds.

Past studies by David & Ibtisam, (2002) and Pillai & Indira, (2009) show trends of language shift from among Malaysian-Indians from their own mother tongue to other languages. Malaysian-Indians seem to take this matter lightly as there are many distortion and influences. The lack of awareness, unity and support among the Malaysian-Indian community are the causes of this language usage deterioration. The community leaders and educationist should look into this matter seriously and draw guidelines to expose every Malaysian-Indian about the importance of Tamil language mother tongue. The importance of mastery of mother tongue and keeping it alive by using it frequently is discussed in detail in this study.

*English as Second Language for Malaysian-Indians*

The importance of English language is undeniable as the lingua franca in this region as well as in the global arena. However, there are some issues related to learning and acquisition of English as Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia. Speaking is the most important skills in learning and acquisition of ESL as it enables the user to carry on a conversation. Aziz & Kashinathan, (2021) stated that speaking is the most difficult skill as it requires proficiency in many areas, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. A good command in English language allows learners to communicate easily and effectively, especially in a multilingual community. Although English is one of the compulsory subjects being taught in schools, many Malaysian-Indian students from pre-school to university level, encounter problem to master this language especially in speaking competency.

In order to compete globally, ability to communicate effectively in English is vital. The issues related to the learning of English as Second Language are discussed and focus is given on speaking skills as Malaysian-Indian ESL learners, especially those from B40 group, exhibit poor speaking skills. This is largely discussed in social media, but neither proper research has given any focus on this issue nor to this group of learners. Some of these issues have been discussed by JohnHitch12 (2021) in his blog 'The Malaysian Indian Problem'.

Learning and use of English among Malaysian-Indians can be investigated in two ways. Some past researches claim that Malaysian-Indians communicate more in English (Ponniah, Thamburaj, & Samuvell, 2017) and while some other researchers argue that Malaysian-Indians need to improve the proficiency in English language, Murthy & Yeo (2018) and Paramasivam (2018). Malaysian-Indians from lower socio-economic status have low proficiency in English that has led to school dropouts, unemployment, inability to further studies or secure financial aid as proficiency in English language is a requirement.

### **Theories of Language Acquisition and Language Choice**

The term language acquisition is used in this study as 'acquisition' is not the same as 'learning'. Acquisition refers to incidental process where learners 'pick up' a language without making a conscious effort to master it; whereas 'learning' involves intentional effort to study and learn the language (Krashen, 1981 as cited in Ellis, 2015). As this is a sociolinguistic study on language choice for informal speaking in social context, which is related to speech repertoire of Malaysian-Indians, the term 'acquisition' will be used widely instead of 'learning'.

#### *First Language (L1) Acquisition – Mother tongue*

As for a child, language learning especially their first language (L1) requires a few basic skills and abilities. The first three years of a child is crucial for first language development. These language learning skills and abilities are discussed by Rowland, (2013) as the followings; *Ability to distinguish speech sounds from other noises.* This enables a child to know which sound to pay attention to such as human sounds and birds sounds or human speech and other human sound such as whistling or humming.

*Learn to produce the sounds.* This is done through manipulating the passage of air through their vocal tract and mouth using the precise sequences of lips, tongue and vocal cord movements.

*Ability to combine speech sounds into meaningful words.* This process of speech takes time as the child listens to the speech and observes what is referred to and slowly makes connections.

*Learn that sequencing of words changes the meaning of the speech.*

*Understand that adding certain endings to words changes the meaning.*

Finally, *able to learn how to express and understand the hidden meaning behind words and sentences,* that sometimes the speech not necessarily requires a reply but simply a request to carry certain action. So, these skills and abilities are the natural process of acquisition of language by children.

In the last two to three decades, there is a shift in Malaysian-Indian parent's socio-economic status. Female labors in manufacturing sector in the year 1990 peaked and showed a rate of 50 percent as reported in Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991). The increase of females in labor force also prevalent in other sectors (Bakar & Abdullah, 2007). Many Malaysian-Indian households witnessed both father and mother as working parents, as compared early industrialization era (before 1980's) whereby most of the fathers used to be the sole bread winner while the mother took care of the children at home. As more Malaysia-Indian parents are working nowadays, they had to opt to caregivers or daycare centers available to babysit their children while they are at work. The environment where the children are spending about 60-70% of the time in a day is greatly affecting the acquisition of mother tongue, the Tamil Language.

Two-way communication is vital for language acquisition among language learners. The famous scholar, Jean Piaget, described overall language development is the result of the children's interaction with their environment. Piaget argues that what children learn about language is determined by what they already know about the world. Children learn better the language they are exposed to as they hear it used in thousands of hours of interactions with people and objects around them. This is more suitable for L1 acquisition as the acquisition of L1, which is the mother tongue occurs from infancy stage of a child.

Language acquisition theories developed by Behaviorists focus on language learning through imitation and formation of habits (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The famous Behaviorist, B.F. Skinner, hypothesized that children often imitate language produced by those around them, when they receive positive reinforcement, such as praise for successful communication. When parents and teachers praise children when they attempt to speak in English, children get motivated to practice the language. Children always imitate sounds and patterns they are exposed to in their environment, and respond to get positive reinforcement. They tend to continue to imitate and practice until the habit forms a correct language usage. However, the quality and quantity of the language exposure and consistent reinforcement greatly influence the success of language learning among children. Therefore, Tamil language acquisition among Malaysian-Indian Tamil language speakers is highly dependent on a child's exposure to a language at very early stage of life. Malaysian-Indian parents should instill the importance of mother tongue to their children through regulation of emotion, motivation and attitude towards Tamil language. Besides, the practice of Tamil language at home or creating opportunities for the child to interact in Tamil Language in their daily lives can help them master their mother tongue further.

### *Second Language(L2) acquisition*

In pluralistic society like in Malaysia, it is common for speakers to learn to speak several languages. For Malaysian-Indians English language, Malay language or in some cases Mandarin language are regarded as 'second language'. The term second language also used to refer to any language learned after the first language regardless of 'third', 'fourth' or 'tenth' language (Ellis, 2015). He further added that, a common confusion language acquisition is to distinguish between a 'second language' and a 'foreign language'.

### **Interlanguage Theory**

Many scholars and educators believe that children's first language (L1) have a great impact on the process of learning their second language (L2). However, first language knowledge is not the main hindrance for learner to master another language. As noted by Cook, (2008), first language (L1) not necessarily affect the learning and acquisition of second language (L2) as each learner have their own independent language system. She argues that certain mistakes made by learners in the process of learning L2 can occur as they are not native speakers of the language. It is not appropriate to set the standards by comparing the language standards as per the level of the native speakers. Cook (2018) further explains that learners' sentences in their speech actually comes from their own language systems that carries its own rules and patterns. These rules and patterns constantly change according to the speakers 'independent language assumption'.

This argument is further supported by the concept of 'interlanguage' by Larry Selinker (1972, cited in Cook, 2008, p.25) whereby learners as they go along speaking L2 tend to use rules and structures which they invent for themselves. Interlanguage is the grammar that a learner constructs and reconstructs in the process of learning a second language. The dynamic qualities of language change led to the development of Interlanguage Theory in the 1970s and 1980s. This interlanguage concept is concerned with the fact that learner's repertoire is actually reflected their temporary language system instead of their flawed grasp of the target language. Mistakes made while speaking a second language are caused by mistake in audio-lingual drill; while grammatical mistakes are due to lack of understanding of the rules. In other words, interlanguage is the second language learners' interim grammar construction on their way to the target language. This interlanguage concept is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

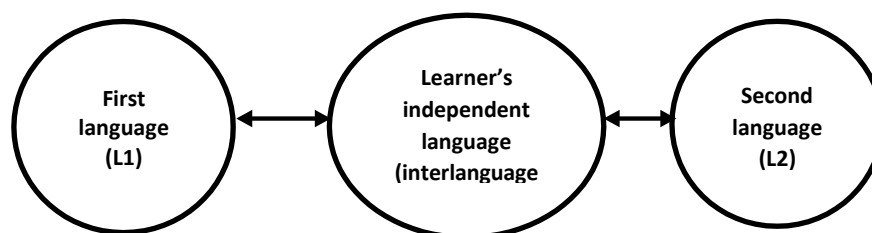


Figure 1 *The learner's independent language (interlanguage)*

(Source: Selinker (1972), cited in Cook, 2008, p.25).

From this can be concluded that, making mistakes while learning a second language is a common occurrence as a part of interlanguage. From Sociolinguistics view, through constant interaction in a target language as interaction can help to feed and fine tune input data. In either bilingualism or multilingualism, the learner should be consistent in using the language until the level of mastery or perfection is achieved in the target language. In the learning and mastery of second language, active involvement in interaction is necessary for the development and achieving communicative competence.

### Language Choice among Multilingual Users

In Malaysia, bilingualism or multilingualism is a common concept of speech repertoire as Malaysians are either bilingual or multilingual. In common, Malaysian-Indians are multilinguals as they can speak Tamil language, English and Malay language. Multilinguals who can speak more than one language are usually influenced by various factors for the language choice and language usage within the same ethnic group social settings. Language choice is usually made by judgement, though it is not completely precise (Coulmas, 2013). Language choice is the language, variety or code employed by individuals to perform a communication function or purpose in a speech community (Fishman, 1972 as cited in Hemat et al, 2015).

The scholars in the field of sociolinguistics have outlined a few factors that influence the language choice and usage;

*Domain:* the idea that each language or variety of language is circulated to a specific purpose, space, or group of people in society, such as the work domain, family domain, or religious domain (Genemo, 2021), whereby domain is appropriate in exploring individual and community language practice as stated by Spolsky, (2012) and Fishman, (1972).

*Interlocutors:* refers to a person who takes part in a conversation. They have a remarkable effect on language choice.



*Topic:* the topic of discussion also may influence the language choice as certain subject are better conveyed in one dialect than in another, in specific multilingual contexts (Fishman, 2000) and (Genemo, 2021). Using the concept of linguistics domain analysis proposed by Joshua Fishman (1972) as a main reference, researchers in the field of linguistics commonly used family, friendship, religion, education and transaction as domains correlated to language choice (Leo & Abdullah, 2013; Nugraheni et al, 2013; Hemat & Abdullah, 2017).

#### *Friendship Domain*

Social or friendship domain refers to the context of language(s) use in a casual interaction setting. The potential language use of Tamil language, English language or mix of both languages occur as a result of language choice made by the speaker in an intra-ethnic interaction. Interaction in the form of greetings, telephone conversation, small group gathering of friends, meeting up a friend over a drink or meal, exchange of voice notes in WhatsApp application, introduction of a new friend or simply a chatting session with a friend or colleague. The subject matter of interaction tends to be very informal, often related to sharing of personal stories, ideas, opinions, or even gossips.

#### *Family Domain*

Language choice and use in relation to family domain refers to language used in home settings which is usually a private space. The language spoken in a home among family members reflect the language choice of the particular family. Family members usually interact to ask and reply for matters related to daily life such as asking about meals, about health, greetings for special days, expressing feelings and emotions, discussing issues in the family, giving instruction, guiding, exchanging stories and so on.

#### *Education, Religion and Transaction Domains*

The language choice in this domain in relation to all the public places where commonly conversation may take place. In this study, the possible language use for interaction in general in daily life have been listed such as use of language for educational purpose or workplace while communicating with educators or superiors (e.g. school, colleges, university or educational centres, office), business settings (e.g. customer service, restaurants), and for religious or spiritual purposes at places of worship (e.g. temples, religious centres, churches).

#### **Context of Verbal Communication in Speech Repertoire**

Verbal or spoken communication refers to the use of sounds and language to convey a message between two people or more to express needs, ideas and concepts (Fer, 2018). In the study of speech repertoire among multilinguals which is related to language choice and use, the context of verbal communication also plays a role in the choice of language. The context of verbal communication that influences language choice and use are:

Interpersonal communication which involves face-to-face interaction either one-to-one (personal) or in a small group.

Mode of communication used based on verbal distance such as face-to-face mode for short verbal distance or using a device (telephone or handphone) for long verbal distance.

Purpose of communication as either the conversation is a casual chat (e.g. friendly chats, emotional talks) or a formal talk (e.g. business, educational, intellectual, or religious).

The relationship between the participants of the conversation also influence the usage of language and language choice, when the conversation occurs between a close family member, a known person (not personally), or a total stranger.

### **Methods**

The primary data for this study were collected from 82 Malaysian-Indian respondents in the state of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and federal territory of Kuala Lumpur. Three WhatsApp or Telegram groups for Indian community in the states of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur were selected. To obtain the information for research questions on the predominant speaking language choice and usage of Tamil as mother tongue and English as Second Language among Malaysian-Indians, a self-constructed questionnaire of 32 questions was administered (Appendix A1). The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Malay language. This questionnaire consists of four 2 sections, with Section A comprise of 8 items, and Section B with total of 24 items.

Section A is on general information to gather demographic information on the profile of the respondents. Section B to examine the respondent's language choice and usage domains of social, family and others, using 5-point Likert scale. The answer options in the 5-point Likert scale are; option 1 for only Tamil 100%, option 2 for Tamil 80% and English 20%, option 3 for Tamil 50% and English 50%, option 4 for English 80% and Tamil 20% and finally option 5 for only English 100%. The data for this study were collected using questionnaires through Google Form to obtain data about language choice and usage between Tamil and English language. The soft copy of the questionnaire in the form of Google Form have been prepared. The data were computed using descriptive analysis of crosstabulation between the domains of language choice and the two languages to find the frequencies and percentage of usage of Tamil language, English language or both languages equally. To compare the language choice based on the context of communication the statements have been further categorized under 4 main categories. Under each domain the language choice is further investigated based on context of verbal communication among Malaysian-Indians. The data were cross tabulated to get the number (frequencies) and percentage of respondents for each context of verbal communication.

### **Results**

Section A of the questionnaire covered the respondents' age, marital status, gender, highest academic qualification and employment status. The data in Table 1.1 help us to understand some background characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The majority of the respondents were from age group of 31 to 50 years old and suitable for the study as this age group are mostly working adults and have families. The respondents consist of females (62.2%) and males (37.8%) which is reasonably represented for the study. In terms of employment status, most of the respondents are either employed (63.4%) followed by doing own business or freelance job (19.5%), unemployed or housewives (11%) and a small percentage of the respondents are still studying (2.4%) and about 3.7% chose others as employment status. Majority of the respondents are graduates with a Bachelor's degree (39%) followed by either STPM, Diploma or Professional certificate holders (28%) and with SPM (15.9%). This shows the majority of the respondents have completed their secondary and tertiary education. Postgraduates master's degree holders are about 13.4% of the sample and

there is a respondent with PhD (1.2%). However, there is a small percentage of respondents have not completed their formal education (2.4%).

Table 1

*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents of the study*

Demographic data of respondents	<i>n</i> = 82	
	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
21-30 years	7	8.5
31-40 years	33	40.2
41-50 years	31	37.8
Above 51 years	11	13.4
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	31	37.8
Female	51	62.2
<b>Employment status</b>		
Studying	2	2.4
Working/Employed	52	63.4
Own business	16	19.5
Unemployed/ Housewife	9	11
Others	3	3.7
<b>Highest academic qualifications</b>		
SPM	13	15.9
STPM/ Diploma/ Professional certificate	23	28
Bachelor's Degree/Undergraduate degree	32	39
Master's Degree	11	13.4
PhD	1	1.2
Others (e.g. school dropout)	2	2.4

Overall, the respondents seem to be reasonably educated. This section of the questionnaire also helped to get certain detail about the respondents' family background such as information whether the monthly household income, religion, the type of school attended for primary education (choice of school by the parents or guardians) and the main home language. The responses for language choice were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard variation. The result of analysis presented in Table 1.2, which include the mean of Tamil language or English language as language of choice among Malaysian-Indians. The language choice is interpreted based on the overall mean of as shown below.

Table 2

*Most used language choice based on overall means in various domains*

Domains of language	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation of Predominant Language choice
Friendship	SFD 1 - 8	2.25	.933	Tamil language dominant with code-mixing
Family	FMD 1 - 8	2.00	.952	Tamil language dominant with code-mixing
Others (Education, Business, Religious or in public)	EBD 1 - 8	2.43	.872	Tamil language dominant with code-mixing

From the data in Table 1.2, it can be inferred that the most used language or the predominant language choice between Tamil and English language among Malaysian-Indians for friendship domain with mean of 2.25 means among friends, respondents preferred to use Tamil language as dominant language with a small percentage of code-mixing of English language with code-mixing of English language as the overall mean score for language choice for family domain is 2.00. The overall mean score for other domains is 2.43. In this domain the language choice in education, business transactions, religious places and in public shows that the respondents use more Tamil language as their dominant language with code-mixing of English language.

### Conclusion

Malaysian-Indians are very positive in choosing Tamil language as their language choice. Even though code-mixing is often employed in conversation in domains of family, friendship and other domains (education, business, religion, or public), Tamil language is the predominant language among Malaysian-Indians. It is clear that Malaysian-Indians in recent years have resorted in code-mixing in their speech repertoire to create a win-win situation to uphold their mother tongue as well to progress in career and education.

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