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LANGUAGE CHOICE AMONG YOUNG INDIAN PROFESSIONALS IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY OF TAMIL AND OTHER LANGUAGES

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, linguistic and cultural diversity thrives within its varied population, with languages such as Tamil, Malay and English being spoken. This study focused on the 'lived experiences' of young Malaysian Indian professionals ('yuppies') as they navigated the use of their mother tongue and other languages within their professional speech networks amidst a rapidly changing and globalised economy. Balancing the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage with the demands of dynamic workplaces, these young professionals faced the risk of being misunderstood and labelled as 'fakes', potentially leading to a loss of cultural identity within their family circles. The use of Tamil, English and Malay languages among this demographic prompted crucial inquiries into language practices, proficiency levels and associated challenges. Despite the prevalence of these language dynamics, minimal research has been conducted on the use of Tamil and other languages among young Malaysian Indian professionals. Grounded mainly in Fishman's domain-related theory (1965/1986), this multi-instrument qualitative study explored how the professional domain influenced the speech networks of six young Malaysian Indian professionals. Specifically, the study explored the impact of diverse domains on professional identity construction and the strategies employed when using Tamil in the workplace. Employing qualitative analysis through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, written narrative frames and 'Live' focus group discussions, this research illuminated the experiences of these young Indian professionals as they engaged in their different speech communities. The data, collected from professionals aged 20 to 30 working in a busy private hospital in the state of Selangor, contributed to the understanding of the dynamic nature of professional identity in a globalised and multicultural context, particularly among an under-studied minority ethnic population in Malaysia. The findings revealed that language choice in the workplace was influenced by factors such as professional hierarchy, audience expectations and workplace contexts. Whilst English was commonly associated with professional communication and career advancement, Tamil remained an important marker of cultural identity and heritage preservation, whereas Malay facilitated interethnic communication and national integration. The participants also demonstrated strategic code-switching practices to balance professional expectations with their ethnic identities. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of multilingual language practices among young Malaysian Indian professionals and highlight the importance of culturally inclusive communication practices within diverse workplace environments.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalisation, language choices among young professionals have become a key facet of their identities, particularly within multicultural contexts such as Malaysia. This study explored the intricate dynamics of language choice among young Indian professionals in Malaysia, specifically focusing on their usage of Tamil and other languages in their immediate surroundings. Guided in the main by Fishman's (1965/1986) 'Domain Construct Theory', which posits that language use is framed by and intricately tied to, social contexts this research aimed to unravel the complex interplay between language choices and professional identity construction within the Malaysian workplace.

1.1 Background of the Study

The Tamil language belongs to the Dravidian language family, specifically the South Dravidian branch, which also includes Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu (Kaladevi et al., 2022; Murugaiyan, 2023). Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions dated between the third and first centuries BCE provide the earliest written evidence of the Tamil language, demonstrating one of the world's longest continuous literary traditions (Kaladevi et al., 2022; Murugaiyan, 2023). Owing to its antiquity and extensive literary heritage, Tamil became the first Indian language to be officially recognised as a Classical Language by the Government of India in 2004 (Government of India, 2024). Tamil is also widely believed to have been one of the languages used by a significant South Indian civilisation (Shulman, 2016).

The origins of the term Tamil and the ancestral roots of its speakers continue to be debated among linguists and historians (Shulman, 2016; Murugaiyan, 2023). For instance, while a medieval dictionary entry defines 'Tamil' as meaning 'sweetness' or 'coolness', a renowned Tamil linguistics scholar has claimed that the word 'Tamil' "developed from '*taku*' through elision or shifting" (Shulman, 2016, p. 4). The historical development of Tamil is commonly classified into several major stages, namely Old Tamil, Middle Tamil, Modern Literary Tamil and Contemporary Spoken Tamil, reflecting its continuous linguistic evolution over more than two millennia

(Kaladevi et al., 2022). Notably, pre-Tamil, which predates Old Tamil (approximately 450 BCE to 700 CE), is thought to have existed during the 1st to 3rd centuries BCE (Kaladevi et al., 2022). Presently, the Tamil language holds official status in its primary strongholds, namely the Indian Territories of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu in South India. Additionally, it is recognised as one of the twenty-two scheduled languages of India. Tamil has also gained official language status in countries with substantial Indian diasporic communities, such as Singapore and Sri Lanka (previously Ceylon), although these decisions were influenced by unique circumstances and political considerations. In Malaysia and Mauritius, Tamil is spoken as a minority language by the originally overseas Indian population who planted their ethnic roots in these countries (this will be further explained next). At this moment in time, the Tamil language is believed to have approximately 80 million speakers globally within the Tamil diaspora, making it a remarkable case of an ancient language that continues to thrive as a mother tongue for tens of millions of people (Shulman, 2016).

1.1.1 Tamil Language and/in Malaysia

Malaysia is widely known as a multiethnic nation encompassing not just diverse cultures, but also various religions, ethnicities and customs. With numerous ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Ibans, as well as ethnic minorities such as the Siamese and *Orang Asli* (the indigenous minority living in Peninsular Malaysia), Malaysians have learned from past experiences to accept and respect each other's uniqueness and beliefs, allowing them to live in relative harmony. With more than 80 ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia and on the island of Borneo, the Malay, Chinese and Indian populations are believed to constitute the majority, comprising approximately 70.1% *Bumiputera* (predominantly Malay ethnics in Peninsular Malaysia and other indigenous groups on the island of Borneo or East Malaysia), 22.6% Chinese and 6.6% Indians (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Before Malaysia developed its current multicultural and multiethnic identity, Indians migrated from various parts of South Asia to *Tanah Melayu*, or literally 'the Malay Lands', during British colonial rule in the 19th century. This migration is believed to have occurred as Indians sought to escape their caste system and pursue a better life. The migrants primarily consisted of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Hindus and Parsis and they became local labourers, miners, traders and plantation workers under British

colonisation. Concurrently, with the expansion of government services, a significant number of educated Tamil immigrants were transported to Malaya from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) towards the end of the 19th century to serve in governmental agencies (Nalliannan et al., 2021). Presently, Tamil speakers constitute the largest segment of the Malaysian Indian community, accounting for over 80% of Malaysian Indians, who in turn represent about 7% of Malaysia's total population. The arrival of Tamil-speaking migrants from Sri Lanka increased the number of Tamil language users in Malaya, subsequently raising the number of people speaking Tamil as their first language or mother tongue.

Due to Malaysia's diverse communities, national education policies and other socio-economic factors, the Tamil language spoken in Malaysia has undergone numerous modifications. Factors such as language and education policies, socioeconomic mobility and limited intergenerational language transmission have influenced patterns of Tamil language maintenance and shift among Malaysian Tamil speakers. Language shift and language loss have frequently been associated with weakened intergenerational language transmission, particularly when heritage languages are no longer consistently passed on within families (Ong, 2021). Previous studies have documented a gradual shift from Tamil to English among educated upper- and middle-class urban Tamil-speaking Malaysians (Nalliannan et al, 2021). Similar language shift patterns have also been reported among other Malaysian Indian communities, including the Punjabis, Malayalees and Sindhis (David & Nambiar, 2002; Nambiar, 2007).

Therefore, several reasons might explain why young Indian professionals in Malaysia tend to switch languages when speaking to different people in varying contexts. Additionally, it raises questions regarding their attitudes and beliefs towards the Tamil language as part of their ethnicity, psyche and identities. Given that younger generations play a crucial role in language change, language maintenance and identity construction, this study focused specifically on young Malaysian Indian professionals (Nalliannan et al., 2021).

1.2 Problem Statement

In a rapidly globalising world, individuals increasingly find themselves learning and using languages within domains representing diverse sociocultural contexts

(Fishman, 1965/1986). Within these domains, each individual develops unique speech networks shaped by social interactions and multilingual experiences. These speech networks, influenced by factors such as region, ethnicity, social class and occupation, play a significant role in shaping language use and identity (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). While participation in various domains provides new avenues for communication and understanding, it also raises critical questions about how this multifaceted linguistic landscape affects individuals' sense of self, belonging and the negotiation of their professional identity (Forbes, 2021).

Several forms of identity have been discussed in the sociolinguistic literature, including ethnic, linguistic, social, national, multilingual and cultural identities (see Adnan, 2013; Block, 2006; Piller, 2024). Certainly, professional identity represents another significant permutation of identity explored by scholars such as David Block. Professional identity refers to how people's jobs or professions shape their sense of self and how they interact with others (Block, 2006). In this context, language assumes a crucial role in shaping professional identity. The proliferation of domains has challenged traditional views of singular, monolithic professional identities. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), when individuals interact within different speech communities, they encounter distinct linguistic norms, expressions and communicative styles. Consequently, individuals often adapt their language use to conform to each context, leading to an intricate interplay between belonging and alienation (Goffman, 1959). While some domains may resonate deeply with an individual's cultural background, others might feel foreign and unfamiliar, prompting questions about authenticity and acceptance within each domain (Adnan, 2013; Duranti, 1981).

The impact of navigating diverse domains has been particularly evident among young professionals fluent in global lingua francas such as English, vis-à-vis their native language or regional dialect (Francisco et al., 2023). The dynamics of language adaptation and code-switching in professional settings, especially where English is commonly employed, potentially lead to feelings of 'disconnect' from their cultural heritage (Tannen, 1989). Despite growing interest in multilingualism, language choice and identity, limited research has examined how young Malaysian Indian professionals negotiate language choices within workplace environments where professional and cultural identities intersect.

Recent studies have further illuminated how linguistic hierarchies shape language use in both social and professional domains. Alakbarova (2025) emphasised that English continues to dominate globalised professional spaces, often marginalising the use of minority or heritage languages. In the Malaysian context, this dominance is echoed in the speech behaviour of Malaysian Indians, who frequently alternate between Tamil, English and Malay depending on domain and interlocutor (Sathiah et al., 2025). Their study highlighted that Tamil retains emotional and cultural resonance but is increasingly limited to informal or familial interactions, while English is prioritised for upward mobility and professional credibility. Similarly, Abdul Wahab and Ngadiman (2024) found that Malay functions as a unifying linguistic bridge across ethnic boundaries, particularly in educational and institutional domains. Studies conducted among Malaysian university students have also demonstrated the relationship between language use and identity negotiation. For instance, Su (2024) found that English-dominant Malaysian Chinese university students actively negotiated their cultural identities while balancing the influence of English and their ethnic heritage. Collectively, these studies underscore the complexities faced by multilingual individuals who must negotiate multiple linguistic expectations while balancing career aspirations, professional identity construction and cultural belonging.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Previous studies have largely focused on language maintenance, language shift, ethnic identity and multilingual practices among broader Malaysian communities, university students, or participants drawn from multiple ethnic groups (e.g., Su, 2024; Su & Al-Saggaf, 2024). While these studies have generated valuable insights into language dominance and cultural identity, they have paid comparatively little attention to young Malaysian Indian professionals operating within workplace environments. Existing research has also tended to examine language use across multiple domains, such as family, education and social settings, with comparatively less attention given to the workplace domain despite its importance in shaping professional identity and language practices. Furthermore, limited research has explored how Tamil, English and Malay are simultaneously negotiated by young Malaysian Indian professionals in their everyday workplace interactions. Given the increasing prominence of English in professional communication and the multilingual nature of contemporary Malaysian workplaces, a focused investigation of language choice within the workplace domain is both timely and necessary. Addressing this gap may contribute to a deeper

understanding of professional identity construction, language maintenance and multilingual communication among minority language communities in Malaysia.

Hence, the present study seeks to extend these insights by examining how language choices involving Tamil, English and Malay shape identity expression, attitudes towards language use and professional identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals within the workplace domain.

Indeed, the choices that individuals made regarding language use within these networks are largely influenced by factors such as career advancement, social integration and the desire to fit in, further confounding the negotiation of their linguistic identity (Wardhaugh, 2006). Hornberger and Vaish (2009) argued that understanding the implications of participating in multiple domains is crucial for educational institutions, policymakers and communities in fostering inclusive environments that acknowledge the richness of linguistic diversity. Additionally, investigating the challenges and benefits of navigating diverse speech communities might also shed light on how individuals perceive and position themselves within their overarching speech community. The ability to adapt and communicate effectively across various domains can enhance intercultural understanding and appreciation, while also promoting a sense of belonging and pride in one's linguistic heritage (Heller, 1994).

Collectively, society may question when and why young Malaysian Indian professionals use one language over another in specific settings, possibly to express or showcase their professional identity. Society might also wonder about their perceptions and attitudes toward the Tamil language in contemporary contexts. These questions could be addressed by Fishman's domain model, which examined the languages used by young Malaysian Indian professionals in seven different intra-group contexts.

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the problem statement above, three research objectives are formulated as follows:

a) To examine factors related to language choice and language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals in Malaysia, specifically in the workplace domain.

b) To investigate young Indian professionals' attitudes and personal beliefs mainly toward Tamil language use in Malaysia and other languages like English and Malay, with reference to their social and professional identities.

c) To explore the experiences of young Malaysian Indian professionals when making language choices in the workplace and how these choices relate to the expression of their social and professional identities.

1.4 Research Questions

From the research objectives, three research questions are formulated as follows:

a) What are the factors related to language choice and language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace domain?

b) What are the attitudes and beliefs of young Malaysian Indian professionals toward Tamil and other languages like English and Malay, with reference to their social and professional identities?

c) How does the experience of young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace domain contribute towards their social and professional identities?

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the language choices of young Malaysian Indian professionals within the workplace domain, specifically examining how Tamil, English and Malay are negotiated in relation to professional identity construction and language attitudes. The study was conducted in a private healthcare institution in Selangor and involved six Malaysian Indian professionals aged between 20 and 30 years old. The site was purposefully selected due to the researcher's familiarity with the organisational setting, which facilitated access to participants, rapport-building and the collection of rich, in-depth accounts of their lived experiences. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged.

As the study was confined to a single workplace setting and a relatively small group of participants, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of all young Malaysian Indian professionals across different industries, organisations or

geographical locations. Furthermore, the participants were not intended to constitute a homogeneous group, as differences in individual backgrounds, language proficiencies, workplace experiences and personal identities may have influenced their language choices and perceptions. As a qualitative inquiry, the study does not seek to produce statistically generalisable findings; rather, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of language use and identity negotiation within a specific professional context.

1.6 Significance of Study

The findings of this study should contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of applied linguistics, specifically regarding the understanding of primary language usage and preference trends among young Malaysian Indian professionals. This research aims to reduce ethnic distance and conflict while simultaneously enhancing economic opportunities. These findings have practical implications that extend to four main parties. Firstly, the general audience would greatly benefit from this study. They might be interested in exploring language choices and attitudes towards language among young Malaysian Indian professionals. Additionally, this research could shed light on the history of the Tamil language in Malaysia, contributing to a deeper understanding of language shifts within Malaysian society. Students of applied linguistics should also find value in this study. It would serve as a valuable reference for studying human language and various aspects of language in their academic pursuits, research and assessments. Lastly, scholars in the field of applied linguistics should find the findings of this study to be a significant source of current knowledge. They could utilise this research to foster language learning interest among young students by showcasing language choices among Indians of their own generation. In summary, the findings of this study hold practical implications for the general audience, linguistic students and scholars in the field. These findings have the potential to enhance our current understanding, spark interest in the future and contribute to the broader knowledge base in applied linguistics.

1.7 Definition of Terms

This section aims to enhance clarity by defining the key terms utilised throughout this academic document. In order to foster coherence and facilitate efficient communication, each key term is elucidated to build shared understanding. The

provided definitions serve as a fundamental point of reference, allowing examiners to explore the text with a thorough understanding of the terms of references that are in use in this document.

1.7.1 Domain

In the context of sociolinguistics, “domain” was a concept introduced by the American linguist Joshua Fishman in 1965/1986. According to him, a domain refers to specific social situations or settings where language is used and it encompasses various institutional contexts and socio-ecological occurrences. The concept of domain helps in understanding how languages are used in different aspects of life and how multilingualism manifests in specific environments. The correlation between domain and speech network refers to how various domains in multilingual settings influence communication patterns and social interactions among individuals or groups within those domains. Domains shape the structure and composition of speech networks, affecting who interacts with whom and the nature of their communication exchanges.

1.7.2 H Variety and L Variety

There are two main varieties associated with diglossic language use. According to Ferguson (1959), diglossia comprises a High (H) variety and a Low (L) variety, each serving distinct social functions. The High variety is typically reserved for formal domains such as education, official communication, writing and public discourse, whereas the Low variety is used in everyday conversations and informal interpersonal interactions (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Munawaro et al. (2025) further explain that the High variety is generally associated with educated speakers and institutional settings, contributing to its continued prestige and maintenance. In contrast, the Low variety is acquired naturally through daily communication and is commonly used in informal contexts such as family interactions, casual conversations, markets and other everyday social settings (Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

1.7.3 Speech Networks

In this study, ‘speech networks’ refer to the different linguistic communities or social groups with distinct cultural and social contexts in which individuals engage and

communicate. These networks are characterised by factors such as region, ethnicity, social class, occupation and language use norms (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). People participate in multiple speech networks when interacting with various groups in their daily lives, each with unique language patterns, expressions and communicative styles.

1.7.4 Professional Identity/ies

Professional identity, as defined by scholars, is the subjective understanding and sense of self that individuals develop in relation to their chosen profession or occupation (Charmaz, 1995; Holmes & Marra, 2005a, 2005b). It encompasses a unique combination of values, skills, beliefs and behaviours that align with the norms and expectations of the professional community (Matthews et al., 2019). This identity emerges from a complex interplay of personal experiences, social interactions and cultural contexts, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and engage within their professional roles.

1.8 Summary

Chapter one sets the stage for the research by providing an overview of the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study and definition of terms. The globalised nature of workplaces demands a nuanced understanding of language dynamics, especially among minority populations such as Malaysian Indians. The problem statement highlights the unique challenges faced by young professionals in preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage while adapting to dynamic work environments. The research objectives and questions articulate the specific aims and inquiries guiding the study. The significance of the study underscores its contribution to understanding the interplay of language, culture and professional identity. Lastly, key terms are defined to ensure clarity and consistency in the discourse throughout the research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores previous research on language choice among young Malaysian Indian professionals, guided by Fishman's Domain Construct Theory. The review delves into historical narratives, language policies, high and low varieties and the roles of Tamil, English and Malay languages. This literature review sets the stage for the empirical exploration in Chapter 3.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Construct Theory as its primary theoretical framework, supported by Ferguson's (1959) Diglossia Theory, Bourdieu's (1991) concept of Linguistic Capital and Norton's (2000) Identity Framework. Collectively, these theories inform the examination of language choice, language attitudes and professional identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals.

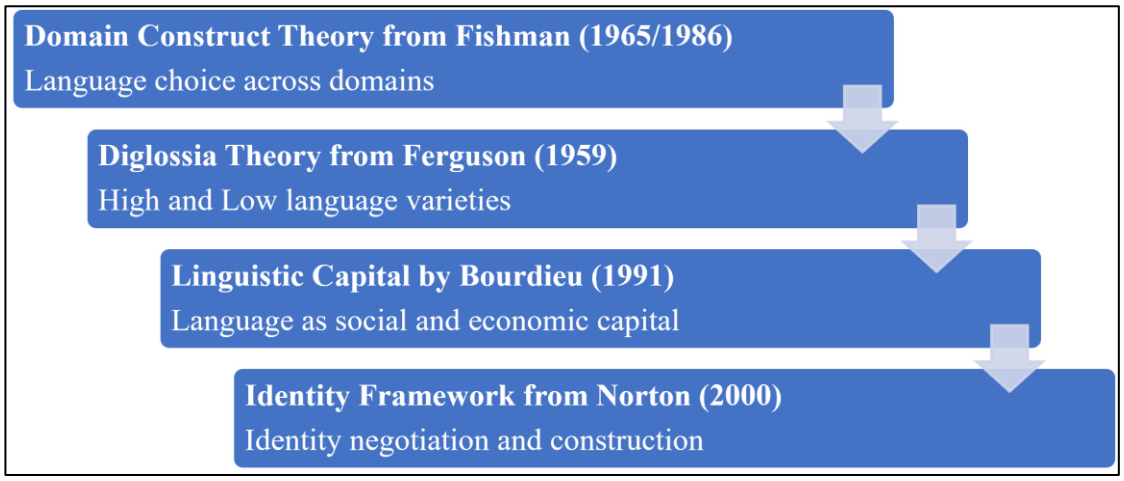


Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Fishman (1965/1986) introduced the idea of a domain as a means and method to describe "higher order generalisations from congruent situations" (p. 445). This concept entails examining combinations of elements such as location, subject and participant, as outlined by Dagamseh (2020). For example, a typical family domain would involve a speaker being at home and conversing with another family member

about everyday matters. It is assumed that certain varieties or languages are more suitable for specific domains.

Domain analysis has long been regarded as a useful framework for describing patterns of language distribution within multilingual communities. By employing domain analysis, researchers are able to identify and explain language use norms across different social settings. Language choices are expected to vary according to domain, leading to functional distinctions between different language varieties. Family, friends and neighbourhood interactions are typically associated with “low” (L) domains, where dialects and heritage languages are more commonly used, whereas education, business, government and employment constitute “high” (H) domains, where standard language varieties are generally preferred because of the formality of these settings. Fishman's Domain Theory (1965/1986) continues to provide an influential sociolinguistic framework for examining language choice, language shift and language maintenance and its continued relevance has been demonstrated in recent studies of multilingual communities (Sathiah et al., 2025).

Although Fishman’s Domain Construct Theory was originally developed in 1965 and later refined in 1986, it remains highly relevant in contemporary sociolinguistic research due to its enduring ability to explain language choice across different social contexts (Kusumaningrum, et al., 2026; Tufan, 2026; Zainuddin, et al., 2025). The present study adopts Fishman's framework because it closely aligns with the research objectives, particularly in examining how young Malaysian Indian professionals select and negotiate the use of Tamil, English and Malay within workplace environments. Recent studies on multilingualism, language maintenance and language shift continue to draw upon Fishman’s domain-based approach, demonstrating its continued relevance in understanding language practices within increasingly multilingual societies (Lykke & Rocker, 2025 ; Sathiah et al., 2025). Furthermore, the framework provides a focused analytical lens for examining language use within a specific social domain, namely the workplace, which constitutes the primary focus of the present study.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The present study adopts an integrated conceptual framework comprising Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Construct Theory, Block's (2007; 2014) Identity

Framework and Asmah Omar's (1992; 2007) concept of Linguistic Scenery. As illustrated in Table 2, these perspectives are combined to examine language choice, language attitudes and professional identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals within the workplace domain.

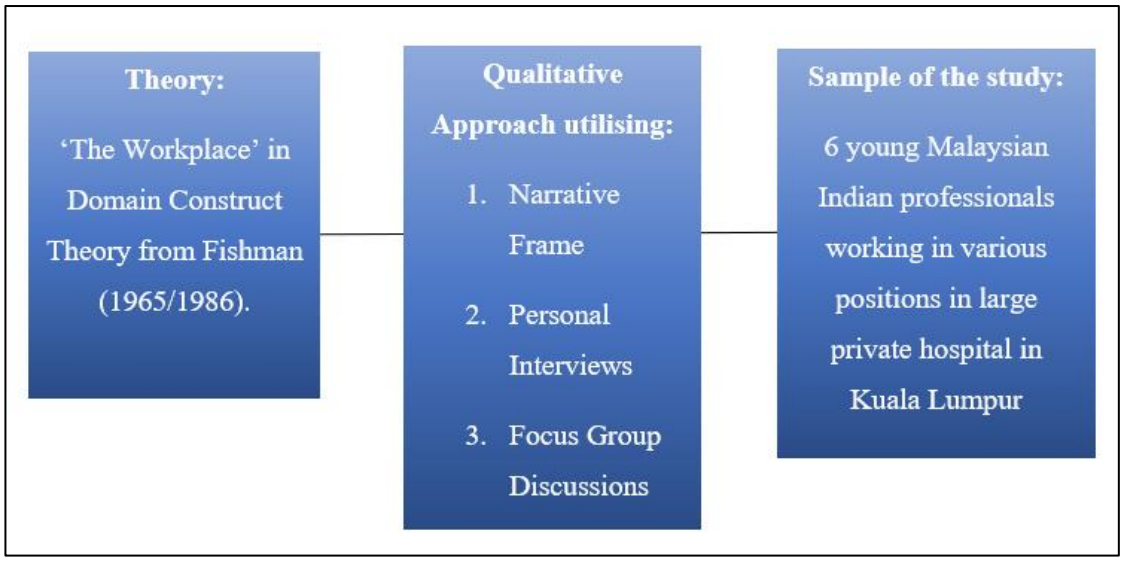


Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Fishman's Domain Construct Theory serves as the primary analytical lens of the study. The framework proposes that language choice is influenced by the social context in which communication occurs. As the present study focuses specifically on workplace interactions, Fishman's theory provides a useful basis for examining how young Malaysian Indian professionals negotiate the use of Tamil, English and Malay within professional settings. The workplace domain is particularly significant as it often requires individuals to navigate multiple linguistic expectations while balancing professional and social relationships.

Block's Identity Framework complements Fishman's perspective by highlighting the close relationship between language and identity. Block (2007; 2014) argues that identity is not fixed but is continuously shaped and negotiated through social interaction and linguistic experiences. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study as it facilitates an understanding of how participants construct and express their professional identities through their language choices. The framework is further contextualised through Asmah Omar's concept of Linguistic Scenery, which situates the study within Malaysia's multilingual environment where Tamil, English and Malay coexist and fulfil different communicative functions. Collectively, these perspectives

provide a multi-layered framework for understanding how workplace contexts influence language choice and how these choices contribute to the construction of professional identities among young Malaysian Indian professionals.

2.3 The Arrival of the Indian Community in Malaysia

At the height of early Malay nationalism, which was in the early 20th century BC, 'mixed blood' Malays from either India or Arabia were separated from the 'pure' Malays to be recognised as a Malay country. They were in two distinct groups at the same time, according to a passage from 'The Malays: A Cultural History' by Winstedt (1950). The first group of Malays were the native inhabitants of the area surrounding the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. The Malays were specifically the inhabitants of the Malay Archipelago, Formosa, the Philippines and a number of tribes in the Indo-China region. In general, everyone who lived on the Malay Peninsula before the Aborigines (original natives or the Orang Asli) was considered Malay. On the other hand, a Malay is also described by the Malaysian Constitution as someone who must be "a Muslim, speak Malay and adopt a Malay way of life" (Halimi, 2008, p. 8).

Even though there is historical proof that Indians have been coming to Malaya as traders and merchants for over 2000 years, Kumaran (2011) claims that they did not start settling here until the 19th century. When the British colonised and kept the state of Penang under their power in 1786, they imported Indians as cheap labourers from India to Malaya. Francis Light entered Penang on August 11th, 1786, raised the Union Jack flag and named Penang Island after the Prince of Wales (Merican & Amin, 2021). Indians were brought over in large numbers to work as farmers and infrastructure builders as part of the British coloniser's plans to start building up Malaya's economy. Interestingly, the vast majority of Indian immigrants to Malaya settled in a multiethnic, working-class area as the British government at the time made efforts to integrate the various ethnic communities. The British brought Tamils, particularly from South India, as 'coolies' primarily because of the industrial activity in Malaya. Because they were skilled manual labourers, the British classified the people of India as rubber tappers and infrastructure builders. There were also educated Indians working as administrators and small company owners at the same time.

2.4 Language Policy in Malaysia

Malaysia's linguistic landscape is characterised by the presence of Malay, English, Chinese dialects, Tamil and many indigenous languages (David, Dealwis, & Kuang, 2018). This diversity stems from historical influences, including the colonial legacy of English. Post-independence, there has been a notable shift from English to Malay as the primary medium of instruction, shaping national identity and language dynamics (Gill, 2005). Language policies within the education system have undergone several transformative shifts. The transition from English to Malay as the medium of instruction aimed to promote a unified national identity while strengthening the status of the national language (Pillai et al., 2021). However, this transition posed challenges for ethnic minorities seeking to maintain their cultural heritage through mother tongue education. Government policies and legislation have played a vital role in shaping language policies. The National Language Act of 1963/67 formalised Malay as the national language, fostering unity while maintaining linguistic diversity among different ethnic communities (Kaur & Shapii, 2018).

These language policies have cultural identities and social interactions. While promoting the national language aims to foster social cohesion, tensions persist among ethnic minorities striving to preserve their linguistic heritage within the broader language policy framework. Globalisation and economic considerations have further complicated language policies in Malaysia. The push for English proficiency aligns with economic aspirations, yet maintaining the integrity of the national language remains crucial (Omar, 1992). As aforementioned, Malaysia’s linguistic diversity extends beyond major languages to encompass Chinese dialects, Tamil and indigenous languages. The challenge lies in preserving these minority languages amidst the broader policy landscape. Debates surrounding language policy are ongoing, fuelled by the push for English proficiency and the need to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity (Omar, 1992). Striking a balance between these aspects remains pivotal as Malaysia navigates a changing global landscape.

Collectively, these language policies reflect Malaysia's continuous effort to balance national integration with linguistic diversity. While Malay remains the national language and an important symbol of national identity, English continues to occupy a significant position in education, business and professional communication. Consequently, minority language communities such as Tamil speakers often find

themselves navigating multiple linguistic expectations simultaneously. This complex linguistic environment is particularly relevant to the present study, as young Malaysian Indian professionals frequently operate within workplaces where Tamil, Malay and English coexist and fulfil different communicative functions.

2.5 Domain- H and L Varieties

The construct of 'Domain' explains how languages are used differently across social settings. Different domains, such as family, education, government and media, require distinct linguistic norms and forms. Fishman's domain-oriented language behaviour theory adds depth to our understanding of how individuals adapt their language use based on context. Ferguson's concept of 'High and Low Variety' (1959) complements Fishman's domain analysis. Ferguson's approach categorises language varieties into formal 'high' and informal 'low' varieties. The High Variety is used in formal situations like literature, education and official communication, while the Low Variety is employed in everyday conversations and cultural expressions.

The interplay between Fishman's Domain theory and Ferguson's High-Low variety concept is evident. The domains identified by Fishman align with the contexts where High and Low Varieties are employed. For instance, formal domains like education and government often correspond to the use of High Variety, while informal domains such as family and friends correlate with the use of Low Variety. Together, Fishman's Domain theory and Ferguson's High-Low variety concept enhance our understanding of language variation. They reveal how languages adapt to diverse contexts, highlighting the dynamic nature of language use. This understanding has practical implications for language policy and education and there is a need for a nuanced approach to analysing and understanding language use in society (Che Wan Roslan, 2020).

Although Fishman's Domain Theory and Ferguson's concept of High and Low varieties provide valuable explanations for language distribution across social contexts, contemporary multilingual societies often demonstrate more fluid language practices than these frameworks originally envisaged. Individuals frequently move between languages and varieties depending on context, audience, purpose and social relationships. Nevertheless, both frameworks remain useful in explaining how language

choices are influenced by social expectations, institutional norms and communicative functions within particular domains.

2.6 Tamil Language in Malaysia

The preservation and use of Tamil language in Malaysia have been significantly aided by Tamil-medium education. Due to the fact that Tamil schools and their schoolteachers and Indian immigrant workers in plantations worked and lived together in their common areas, their histories are intertwined. In accordance with the Labour Ordinance of 1912, Tamil schools were established in many Malayan plantations to provide basic education for the children of the workers (Omar, 2015). Speaking Tamil, the community's mother tongue, has improved even more through communal living. Only a relatively small fraction of affluent urban Tamils was able to attend English medium schools because they were mostly found in urban areas. Following independence from British colonial rule, the New Education Policy was put into place and the number of Tamil primary schools with a national curriculum expanded (Omar, 1992). Currently, national secondary schools and primary schools without Tamil as a primary language can both offer Tamil as an elective course (Omar, 2015). That being said, despite the existence of Tamil-medium primary schools in Malaysia, many parents prefer to enrol their children in national schools where Malay is the language of instruction, viewing proficiency in Malay as integral to national identity, economic opportunities and societal integration (Ibrahim, 2018).

Recent studies suggest that the maintenance of Tamil among younger generations continues to face challenges arising from urbanisation, socioeconomic mobility and the increasing dominance of English in education and professional settings (Pillai, 2022). While Tamil remains an important marker of cultural and ethnic identity, its use is often confined to familial, religious and cultural domains (Nalliannan et al., 2021). Consequently, concerns regarding language shift and reduced intergenerational transmission continue to be raised by scholars examining minority language communities in Malaysia (Nalliannan et al., 2021; Pillai, 2022). These developments underscore the importance of examining how young Malaysian Indian professionals negotiate the use of Tamil alongside English and Malay within contemporary workplace environments.

2.7 English Language in Malaysia

The current context of English within Malaysian history begins in the 18th century with the arrival of the British colonialists in the Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Melaka, where all the legal system, business and public administration were conducted in English (Pillai, 2022). During the British colonial period, more and more English-medium schools were built and these schools tended to be formed by Christian missions. Moving forward in history, the Malay language was declared the national and official language of Malaysia (formerly Malaya) upon its independence from British colonial rule in 1957. Over the years, English started to be replaced by Malay in government offices and courts and as the primary language of instruction in public universities and national schools. However, according to Azman (2016), English is still required in primary and secondary schools today up to form five when Malaysian students are about 16 to 17 years old. Additionally, English is frequently used in the media, industry, private higher education and the private sector. English is also becoming the primary language of instruction at an increasing number of private colleges, universities and international schools (Ravindran et al., 2022). Additionally, it is typical to find English-language news websites and print publications in Malaysia such as The Star, The New Straits Times and The Malay Mail. Contrary to some other nations, English-language television shows and films are not commonly dubbed into Malay language in Malaysia (Azman, 2016).

Most Malaysians are able to speak English because it is taught in schools, albeit some are more proficient than others. Since they spoke English at home growing up, a small percentage of Malaysians of different ethnicities have started to 'claim' English as their mother tongue (Pillai, 2022). To boot, fluent English speakers from Malaysia can effortlessly switch from the more formal version of English to the regionalised variety of everyday Malaysian English. For instance, they may use a more formal variety of English in professional or business settings but readily shift to Colloquial Malaysian English ('Manglish') when communicating with friends and family. Since independence, Malaysian English has developed distinctive linguistic features, incorporating local lexical items, discourse particles and expressions that reflect Malaysia's multilingual and multicultural society (Hashim, 2022). The term *Malaysian English* refers to the localised variety of English spoken in Malaysia. At the colloquial level, it is often referred to as *Manglish*. Malaysian English exists along a continuum

ranging from Standard Malaysian English to informal colloquial varieties, with speakers adjusting their language according to the communicative context, interlocutor and level of formality (Hashim, 2022). Their first languages, such as Malay, Chinese, Tamil and other heritage languages, together with their social, geographical and educational backgrounds, may influence their language practices and patterns of English use in Malaysia (Pillai & Nalliah, 2022).

In contemporary Malaysia, English continues to be associated with educational achievement, professional mobility and global competitiveness (Jiang, et al., 2026). The growing importance of English within corporate and professional environments has reinforced its status as a highly valued linguistic resource (Rahmat, et al., 2021; Salim, et al., 2025; Shah, et al., 2025). From Bourdieu's (1991) perspective, proficiency in English may be viewed as a form of linguistic capital that provides access to social and economic opportunities. As a result, many multilingual Malaysians increasingly rely on English in workplace settings while simultaneously maintaining varying degrees of attachment to their heritage languages.

2.8 Malay Language in Malaysia

According to historians, the Austronesian language family includes the Malay language. The grouping of the section belongs to the phylum of Austronesian languages, which, along with the Tibeto-Chinese language family, that emerged from Yunnan. The ‘Proto-’ or Ancient Malays, who migrated to the Archipelago of Malaysia in a protracted sequence of migrations between the years 2500 and 1500 BC, are considered the ancestors of the Austronesian people (Boon-Peng et al., 2022). The Proto-Malays dwelt close to river confluences and the sea. It is believed that the Malays of contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia are descended from them. At the same time, the Malay language spread via mariners throughout the Indonesian islands and other areas because the Strait of Malacca served as the main maritime route. The Austronesian language eventually evolved into what is now known as Old Malay.

Kader (2021) claimed in her writing that Old Malay, Classical Malay and Modern Bahasa Malaysia are the three eras into which scholars have split the history of the Malay language and its evolution. Sanskrit and the Tamil linguistic system, as well as Indian cultures and beliefs have had a great impact on Old Malay. From 1402 to 1511 BC, the Malay language, which was spoken in West Malaysia, the Riau Archipelago

and Sumatera, became the official language of the Melaka Sultanate people (Boon-Peng et al., 2022). The southern Malay Peninsula dialect, which serves as the foundation for standard Malay and Indonesian, the official language of the Republic of Indonesia, are the most significant of several Malay dialects (Kader, 2021). Since no literary works from the Hindu era (4th to late 15th centuries) have survived, (Zikri et al., 2023) in their article believed that Malay literature technically started with the arrival of Islam in the late 15th century. Malay literature can be divided into two categories: That which was written in classical Malay, the written language of Malay-speaking Muslim communities dispersed starting in the 15th century along all the coasts of Southeast Asia but centred primarily on the straits of Malacca; and that which was written in modern Malaysian Malay, which started to replace classical Malay in Malaya around 1920.

2.9 Identity

Block (2006) extensively explored contemporary language identities, particularly within the realms of sociolinguistics and second language acquisition and in the context of urban and public spaces. That being said, language identity is but one facet of this unique construct we term as ‘identity’. Block suggests that there are other facets or subtypes of identity as well, for instance ‘political identity’, which explores how language aligns with an individual’s political beliefs and affiliations, influencing their engagement in political discourse. ‘Workplace or professional identity’ delves into how language use is shaped by an individual’s profession, contributing to their identity within the workplace. ‘Generational identity’ investigates how language reflects an individual’s connection to and identification with their generational cohort. ‘Regional identity’ focuses on how language use can signify attachment to a specific geographic region or place. ‘Gender identity’ explores the relationship between language and an individual's sense of gender, encompassing expressions of femininity, masculinity, or even so-called non-binary identities. These dimensions underscore the multifaceted nature of language and its profound influence on various aspects of individuals’ identities in diverse contexts (Block, 2006). Some ideal types of identity can be seen in **Figure 2.3**.

Interestingly, social and professional identities are viewed as closely intertwined aspects of an individual's sense of self. Block’s research sheds light on the dynamic relationship between these two facets of identity. Social identity refers to how an

individual sees themselves within various social groups based on factors like culture, ethnicity, gender and more. This facet of identity is often expressed through language, clothing, behaviour and affiliations. In a parallel manner, professional identity revolves around an individual's sense of self within their chosen occupation or career. It encompasses the values, skills and beliefs associated with a specific professional role.

Professional identity refers to how individuals understand and position themselves within their occupation, workplace roles and professional communities. Rather than being a fixed characteristic, professional identity is continuously constructed and negotiated through workplace interactions, experiences and organisational expectations (Reissner, 2024). Language forms an important component of this process, as workplace communication often reflects professional norms, values and expectations. Consequently, language choice may contribute to how individuals present themselves as competent professionals while simultaneously maintaining other aspects of their social and cultural identities.

Block's (2015) work further highlights that language plays a pivotal role in and across both social and professional identities. For Block (2007; 2014), identity is not a fixed attribute possessed by individuals but rather an ongoing process shaped through social interaction and linguistic experiences. This perspective is particularly relevant to multilingual speakers whose identities are continually negotiated across different social and professional contexts. The way individuals communicate, the jargon they use and their communication practices are shaped by the group that they identify.

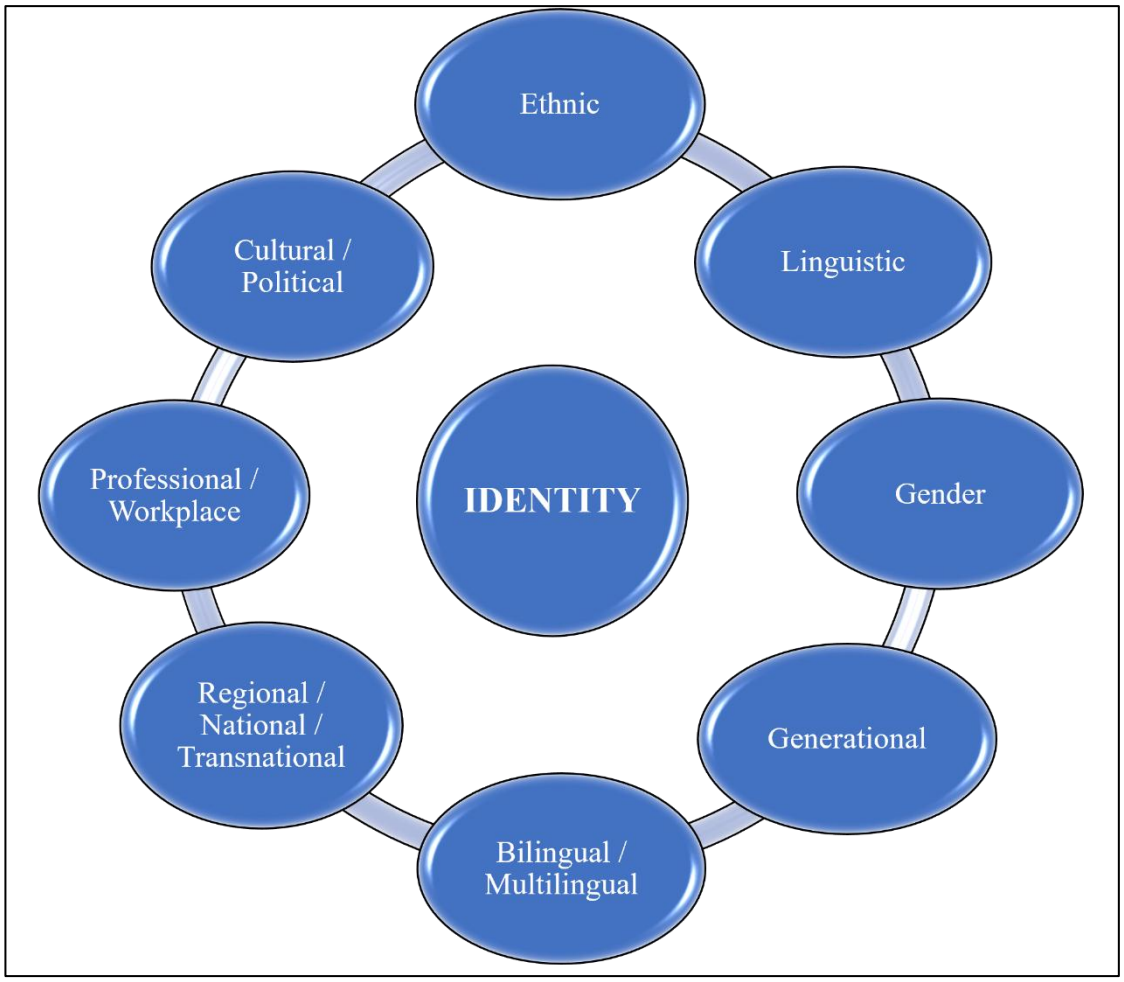


Figure 2.3 Some 'Ideal Types' of Identity

While Block's (2006; 2015) work highlights the close relationship between language and identity, Norton (2013) approaches identity as dynamic, multiple and continually negotiated through social interaction and relations of power. Both scholars recognise language as central to identity construction; however, Norton places greater emphasis on investment, social positioning and power relations, whereas Block focuses on the lived experiences and narratives through which identities are constructed. Together, these perspectives suggest that language functions not merely as a tool for communication but also as a resource through which individuals construct, negotiate and project social and professional identities.

Moreover, social and professional identities can intersect. For example, a person's social identity might influence their choice of profession, or their professional identity might be influenced by the norms and values of their broader social group. Language serves as a bridge between these identities. The specialised language used within a profession also reinforces a professional's sense of belonging and distinction

from other groups. Additionally, the language choices professionals make can signal alignment with certain social values, further linking social and professional identities (Holmes and Marra, 2005a). For instance, using inclusive and culturally respectful language may convey a commitment to fostering a diverse and welcoming workplace. Opting for formal and professional language may reflect values associated with professionalism, competence and credibility in workplace interactions (Piller, 2024). Furthermore, selecting language that promotes collaboration and teamwork signals a commitment to fostering cooperative and effective workplace relationships.

Holmes (2006) further argued that workplace communication plays a significant role in the construction and negotiation of professional identity. Through everyday workplace interactions, individuals continuously position themselves and are positioned by others within professional communities. Language therefore functions not only as a means of communication but also as a resource through which professionalism, expertise, authority and group membership are constructed and maintained. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, as workplace language choices may reflect how young Malaysian Indian professionals navigate both professional expectations and cultural affiliations.

For Beatty-Martinez et al. (2020), the ability to adapt language use, including appropriate code-switching, may reflect an individual's flexibility and adaptability in diverse professional settings. Embracing language that reflects creativity and innovation could align with values associated with forward-thinking and progressive professional environments. Indeed, the nuanced social values signalled by language choices contribute to the complex interplay between professional and social identities in the dynamic landscape of the workplace. How individuals communicate, the languages they use and the way they express themselves are all influenced by the interplay of their social and professional identities. This perspective is further reinforced by Li (2023), who argues that multilingual speakers strategically draw upon their linguistic repertoires to negotiate identities and respond to varying communicative demands across different social and professional contexts.

Recent empirical studies continue to demonstrate the close relationship between language use and identity negotiation in multilingual societies. Ting and Zainol Abidin (2023), for instance, found that Malaysian university students adjusted their language choices according to different social domains, with English and Malay dominating formal interactions while ethnic languages remained important markers of cultural

identity. Similarly, Su (2024) observed that English-dominant Malaysian Chinese university students continued to negotiate and maintain aspects of their cultural identity despite English occupying a dominant position in their daily lives. These findings suggest that language dominance does not necessarily result in identity loss but instead encourages individuals to continuously negotiate their identities across different social contexts. However, much of the existing literature focuses on educational settings, leaving workplace environments comparatively underexplored. These findings collectively suggest that identity negotiation remains an important feature of multilingual speakers' experiences, particularly in contexts where multiple languages carry differing social, cultural and professional values.

A dimension of identity that deserves particular attention and one that is especially relevant to the experiences of young Malaysian Indian professionals, is the relationship between language, identity and power. Bourdieu (1991) argued that language is never a neutral instrument of communication. Rather, it operates within fields of power, where certain linguistic varieties carry more symbolic capital than others. In multilingual societies such as Malaysia, this means that the choice to speak English, Malay, or Tamil in a given moment is never entirely free. Instead, it is shaped by the power relations embedded within the social and institutional contexts of interaction. Speakers of dominant or high-prestige languages often enjoy greater professional advantages, whereas speakers of minority or heritage languages may navigate linguistic environments in which their repertoires simultaneously represent cultural pride and social marginalisation. These power relations have a profound influence on how multilingual speakers construct, negotiate and sometimes suppress aspects of their identities through language (Piller, 2024; Norton, 2021).

Closely related to the question of power is the dimension of identity fluidity. Earlier theoretical accounts of identity tended to treat it as a relatively stable and coherent entity, something that individuals possess and carry with them across contexts. Contemporary sociolinguistic and poststructuralist scholarship has significantly complicated this view. Norton (2013) found that identity is not fixed but is instead multiple, contradictory and subject to change across time and space. This means that the same individual may perform very different versions of themselves depending on who they are speaking to, which language they are using and what social stakes are involved in the interaction. For a young Indian professional in a multilingual Malaysian workplace, this fluidity is experienced daily. The recognition of identity fluidity is

therefore not a complication to the study of language identity. It is rather, one of its most revealing and important features.

Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) proposed that identity is produced through social interaction rather than simply possessed by individuals. Their sociocultural linguistic approach emphasises that identities emerge through linguistic practices and are continuously shaped by social relationships and contextual factors. This perspective further reinforces the view that language choices are closely intertwined with identity construction and negotiation, particularly in multilingual settings where individuals navigate multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations.

Alongside fluidity, the concept of hybridity has also emerged as a significant lens for understanding identity construction among multilingual and postcolonial communities. Bhabha (2012) highlighted the notion of the 'third space', a conceptual zone in which individuals who navigate two or more cultural worlds construct a hybrid identity that does not belong wholly to either. For young Malaysian Indians who are simultaneously Tamil, Malaysian and professional, the third space is not a metaphor. It is a lived reality, expressed most vividly through the kinds of linguistic mixing, code-switching and selective language choices that characterise their everyday communication. Their identities are not simply the sum of their Tamil heritage and their Malaysian civic belonging and their professional aspirations. They are something new, something that emerges precisely from the negotiation among all three. This hybrid dimension of identity is often overlooked in accounts that focus too narrowly on language choice as a binary decision between heritage and dominant languages and it is a dimension that the present study is positioned to illuminate.

It is also important to acknowledge that identity construction through language is not always a conscious or deliberate process. While individuals do make strategic choices about which language to use in particular contexts, much of the identity work that language performs happens at a less conscious level, embedded in habitual patterns of speech, tone and address that are shaped over years of socialisation (Wenger, 1998). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) have shown how communities of practice, the groups within which individuals regularly interact and share activities, play a central role in shaping these habitual language patterns. For the young professionals in this study, the hospital workplace constitutes one such community of practice, within which particular norms of language use have been established and internalised over time. Understanding identity in this context therefore requires attention not only to the

moments of deliberate language choice but also to the background structures of social interaction that make certain choices feel natural and others feel marked or risky.

Finally, identity construction through language must also be understood as a contested process. Individuals do not simply choose their identities at liberty. They are also assigned identities by others and these externally imposed identities do not always match the ones individuals wish to project (Tajfel, 1978). In the context of this study, young Indian professionals may find that their language choices lead to being labelled in ways they do not intend, whether "not Indian enough" or even "trying too hard to be Western". These contested identity assignments reflect the social pressures that attend language use in a multicultural and multilingual society and they add another layer of complexity to the already intricate picture of identity construction that this study seeks to explore. As Block (2006) highlighted, identities are not isolated, they interact and impact one another. Understanding these connections provides valuable insights into the complex ways that language shapes and reflects an individual's place within both social and professional contexts, particularly for young ethnic minority professionals navigating the demands of a rapidly globalising world. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, as language choices made by young Malaysian Indian professionals may influence not only how they perceive themselves but also how they are perceived by others within workplace environments.

2.10 Identity Masking

Identity masking, a nuanced sociolinguistic phenomenon, involves the intentional concealment or modification of aspects of one's identity to align with specific social contexts. Goffman (1959) explores the idea that individuals strategically manage their identities to control the impressions they make on others. Goffman's insights into dramaturgy, impression management and the performative aspects of identity lay the foundation for understanding how individuals navigate and adapt their identities in different social contexts. Individuals may engage in identity masking for various reasons, such as the need for social acceptance, career advancement, or navigating multicultural environments. As highlighted by Goffman (1959), individuals strategically manage their identities to control the impressions they make on others. This aligns with the concept of identity masking, where people adapt their linguistic and behavioural expressions to fit into particular social settings.

In the context of this research on language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals, identity masking becomes a crucial lens through which to examine the intricate dynamics of communication. Young professionals, faced with the challenge of balancing cultural heritage and workplace expectations, may employ identity masking strategies to navigate the complexities of multicultural workplaces (Piller, 2024). For instance, code-switching between languages or modifying linguistic features may constitute a form of identity masking, enabling individuals to negotiate their professional identities while preserving important cultural ties.

2.11 Communities of Practice and Sociolinguistics

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's seminal work 'Communities of Practice: Where Language, Gender and Power All Live' (1992) offers a compelling exploration of the intricate interplay between language, gender and power dynamics within communities of practice. The concept of communities of practice, as introduced by (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and expanded upon by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, illuminates the ways in which individuals, bound by shared interests and activities, collaboratively construct and negotiate meaning through language use.

The central argument posits that within communities of practice, linguistic patterns not only mirror social structures but actively contribute to the creation and reinforcement of gendered identities. By examining the language choices and interactions within distinct social groups, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) unveil the performative nature of language, shedding light on how linguistic practices both shape and are shaped by individuals' roles and statuses within communities. The intersections of language, gender and power emerge as dynamic sites of negotiation and contestation, influencing not only individual identities but also the broader social fabric (Bucholtz, 2010).

2.12 Young Urban Professionals (Yuppy/ies)

The term "yuppie," a blend of "young urban professional," emerged during the 1980s and became synonymous with a specific demographic group characterised by affluence, urban residence and a career-focused lifestyle (Aalst & Nortier, 2018; Zhang, 2005). While the concept reached its zenith in the 1980s, discussions surrounding yuppies persist in contemporary discourse. Yuppies are often recognised for their

distinctive behaviours, values and aspirations, such as an intense focus on career advancement, an affinity for urban living and a penchant for materialistic pursuits. The stereotypical yuppie is associated with markers of success, including high-end consumer goods and a preference for cosmopolitan living (see Gotham, 2019). Over time, the concept has evolved, with variations of yuppies found in different cultural and economic contexts. Despite potential shifts in the characteristics attributed to yuppies, the term remains relevant for understanding certain segments of the young, upwardly mobile professional population.

For this research that focuses on language choice among young Malaysian Indian professionals, exploring the concept of yuppies offers a lens through which to understand their social and cultural identities. Investigating how yuppies in Malaysia navigate language in their professional spheres can signal to communication styles, linguistic choices and identity construction.

2.13 Empirical Studies on Language Choice, Language Shift and Identity

Existing studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of language choice, multilingualism, language maintenance and identity construction in multilingual societies. Research conducted among Malaysian communities has shown that language use is often influenced by factors such as social context, educational background, ethnicity and perceived socioeconomic value. Recent studies have further highlighted the growing dominance of English in formal and institutional settings, while ethnic languages continue to play important roles in expressing cultural belonging and identity (Ting & Zainol Abidin, 2023; Su, 2024).

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain within the existing literature. First, much of the research has focused on students, families, or broader ethnic communities rather than young professionals operating within workplace environments. Second, previous studies have frequently examined language use across multiple domains, including family, education, friendship and media, with comparatively less attention given to workplace interactions. Third, while studies have explored language maintenance, language shift and ethnic identity, limited research has examined how language choices involving Tamil, English and Malay contribute to professional identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by focusing specifically on the workplace domain and examining how young Malaysian Indian professionals negotiate language choices, language attitudes and professional identities within multilingual workplace settings. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of research on language, identity and multilingualism in contemporary Malaysia.

2.14 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to language choice, language policy, multilingualism, identity and workplace communication. Drawing upon Fishman's Domain Construct Theory, Block's Identity Framework and Asmah Omar's concept of Linguistic Scenery, the chapter established the theoretical and conceptual foundations underpinning the present study. The review also examined empirical studies relating to language maintenance, language shift, multilingual identity and language choice within multilingual communities. The review identified several gaps in the existing literature. While previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding language use and identity, they have largely focused on students, broader ethnic communities, or multiple social domains. Comparatively little attention has been given to young Malaysian Indian professionals and their experiences within workplace environments. Furthermore, limited research has examined how language choices involving Tamil, English and Malay contribute to professional identity construction. Consequently, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining language choice, language attitudes and professional identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals within the workplace domain.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter unfolds the methodological framework employed to investigate language choices among young Malaysian Indian professionals. Grounded in a qualitative research tradition, the chapter delineates the chosen research design, the strategic use of research triangulation, data analysis methods, the carefully selected sample and setting, ethical considerations and the meticulous approach to managing quality in qualitative research.

3.1 Research Tradition / Approach

Qualitative research has developed into a prominent approach to understanding the world around us, making substantial contributions to the field of social sciences as well as other academic fields. It is possible to trace its historical roots back to the early anthropological and sociological studies that were conducted in the late 19th century (Mohajan, 2018). During this time period, social scientists such as Franz Boas and Emile Durkheim utilised qualitative methods in order to investigate cultures and social phenomena. Over the course of the early 20th century, the Chicago School made major advancements in qualitative research methodologies by employing participant observation and in-depth interviews to investigate urban life (Holmes, 2020).

Qualitative research is useful because it may dive deeply into the nuances of human experiences, behaviours and social circumstances. Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, places an emphasis on a holistic understanding and provides rich, nuanced insights that quantitative data alone might not be able to capture. It gives scholars the opportunity to investigate topics such as subjective meanings, cultural subtleties and social dynamics, which ultimately leads to a more thorough understanding of day-to-day events in the world around us (Tenny et al., 2022). In today's academic world, qualitative research is widely utilised in a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, healthcare and applied linguistics.

Applied linguistics researchers are able to generate rich and in-depth insights into the complexities of language use and human behaviour by employing flexible

qualitative research methods such as interviews, content analysis and discourse analysis. As noted by Barkhuizen et al. (2022), qualitative approaches enable researchers to examine how language constructs meaning, identities and social relationships across diverse contexts. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) too employed qualitative methods, including interviews and content analysis, to explore the nuanced terrains of language variation and its profound interplay with identity. In their work, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet reveal how linguistic practices are closely intertwined with social categories such as gender, age and ethnicity. By adopting a qualitative lens, she demonstrates how these practices shed light on the multifaceted connections between language, individuals and group or collective identities.

In the present time, qualitative research instruments in applied language studies and linguistics can include narrative frames, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and content-focused instruments like discourse analysis. These qualitative research instruments have the capacity to capture the depth, richness and contextual intricacies of language use in our daily lives (Tenny et al., 2018). As such, applied linguists are able to delve into the hidden meanings, aspirations, motivations, imagination and experience that are tied to the linguistic choices of individuals (Adnan, 2013), providing a nuanced understanding of the sociocultural underpinnings that guide human communication.

That being said, while qualitative research in applied linguistics can offer invaluable insights, it is also encumbered by certain limitations. For instance, the small sample sizes and subjective nature of the analysis might constrain the generalisability of findings (Louw, 2021). Nevertheless, the overarching contributions of qualitative methods in applied linguistics cannot be denied when it comes to building and strengthening our understanding of the interconnections between language, identity and society. The dedication of applied linguists to exploring language issues within their natural contexts and teasing out the intricate interplay of social factors with reference to language use enriches our current comprehension of how language fundamentally shapes human experiences and interactions and vice versa.

3.2 Research Design

Research design entails organising the plan for an empirical or scholarly investigation, establishing the overarching approach and providing specifics on the

processes that will be used to collect and to examine data from the field. The choices that are made about the techniques of data collecting, the time range and the general organisation of the research are included in the following segments. On the other hand, an instrument for research data collection is a tool or method that is used to gather real world data. Some examples of commonly used qualitative research instruments are interviews and observations. The selection of these instruments must be done with great care to ensure that they are in line with the aims of this study and that they gather accurate and pertinent information. Both of these aspects are essential to the accomplishment of any research endeavour and to ensure rigour and 'quality' in the qualitative data collection and analysis processes.

The present study adopted Carspecken's (1996) Critical Ethnography as its guiding research design. While traditional ethnography primarily seeks to describe and understand cultural practices within a particular community, critical ethnography extends this purpose by examining issues of power, inequality and social positioning embedded within everyday social interactions. This approach was particularly suitable for the present study as it explored language choice among young Malaysian Indian professionals operating within multilingual workplace environments where certain languages may hold greater institutional, professional, or symbolic value than others. Furthermore, Carspecken's framework provided a systematic and rigorous structure for data collection, analysis and interpretation, thereby strengthening the overall trustworthiness of the study. Critical ethnography remains highly relevant in contemporary qualitative research because it enables researchers to critically examine how power relations, social structures and institutional practices shape participants' experiences and perspectives (Madison, 2020). Guided by this research design, the data collection instruments were carefully developed to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and theoretical foundations.

The research instruments employed in this study were developed through a combination of literature review, preliminary discussions and supervisory consultation. Firstly, previous studies on language choice, multilingualism, language shift and identity were reviewed to identify themes and issues relevant to the present study. Secondly, preliminary informal discussions were conducted with several young Malaysian Indian professionals to gain preliminary insights into their language experiences, workplace communication practices and perceptions of Tamil, English and Malay. These discussions assisted the researcher in identifying issues that were

particularly relevant to the target participant group. The interview questions, written narrative frame prompts and focus group discussion protocols were subsequently refined through consultation with the research supervisor to ensure clarity, relevance and alignment with the research objectives. Instrument development in qualitative research should be grounded in both existing literature and participants' lived experiences to ensure contextual relevance and methodological rigour (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The instruments employed in this particular research are explained below.

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Personal interviews are a qualitative research method in which researchers engage in one-on-one conversations with participants to gather in-depth information about their perspectives, experiences and viewpoints (Tannen, 1989). These interviews are often semi-structured, allowing both the interviewer and participant to explore topics in a flexible and conversational manner. Personal interviews provide an opportunity for participants to share their stories, emotions and thoughts in their own words, giving researchers a deep understanding of the complexities of human behaviour and social dynamics (Tenny et al., 2022).

In applied linguistics research, personal interviews hold significant value due to their ability to delve into the intricate nuances of language use, identity and social interactions. Tannen (1989) also used personal interviews to uncover how language shapes communication patterns and reflects cultural norms, shedding light on how individuals negotiate meaning through conversation. Likewise, sociolinguists such as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) utilised personal interviews to explore language variation and its connection to social identities, revealing how individuals express themselves linguistically within specific social contexts.

The benefits of personal interviews are manifold. This research instrument allows researchers to explore participants' personal narratives, capturing the subtleties of their experiences and emotions. This aligns with narrative positioning, as discussed by Bamberg (1997) that involves how individuals position themselves in relation to broader social structures through the stories they tell. It explores the dynamic interplay between personal narratives and social contexts by delving into how individuals use language and narrative techniques to craft their identities and make sense of their

experiences within the larger societal framework. This approach recognises that storytelling is not just about recounting events but is a strategic act of communication that influences how individuals and their stories are perceived within the social and cultural landscape. As for personal interviews, this research instrument can facilitate a deeper understanding of the ways in which language is used to convey meaning, power dynamics and social relationships (Tenny et al., 2022). Additionally, by engaging in direct dialogue, researchers can clarify responses, ask follow-up questions and uncover unanticipated insights, contributing to richer data collection and making it one of the best approaches for this present study.

To ensure the quality of the interview protocol used in this study, Carspecken's Critical Ethnography framework is adopted. The framework provides a methodological roadmap for me to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews for my applied linguistics research. The interactive nature of interviews allows for a deep exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions and language practices. Carspecken's approach, deeply rooted in critical theory, encourages a reflexive stance, urging researchers to question assumptions and power imbalances inherent in the research process. This reflexivity is particularly crucial in applied linguistics, where language intersects with identity, culture and power dynamics.

The choice of Critical Ethnography as the guiding framework in designing the interview protocol signifies an intention to delve beyond surface-level observations, unravelling the intricate layers of language use in the workplace domain or context. Carspecken's emphasis on understanding the social implications of language aligns with the broader goals of applied linguistics – to not only decipher linguistic phenomena but to critically analyse their societal impact. Through the lens of Critical Ethnography, my research aims to contribute nuanced insights to the field, offering a deeper understanding of language use within diverse cultural and social settings for Malaysian young Indian professionals.

3.2.2 Written Narrative Frames

In qualitative research, a narrative frame refers to the organisational structure or framework through which participants' stories, experiences, or accounts are elicited, presented and analysed. It enables researchers to explore how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences by examining key narrative elements, such as

characters, events, settings and themes and how these contribute to the interpretation of the narrative (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). For this study, the use of a written narrative frame is particularly suitable due to its ability to capture the experiences of the participants with reference to language use, identity issues and social interactions. This study can gain insights into applied linguistic, discourse patterns and the relationship between language, social and professional identities by examining how narratives are constructed and how linguistic choices shape the storytelling process.

The benefits of using a narrative frame in applied linguistics research are manifold. It enables researchers to explore the dynamic interplay between language and social interaction, revealing how individuals position themselves within their speech communities and domains of language use. Through participants' narratives, researchers can uncover the cultural norms, values, beliefs and ideologies embedded in language practices and identity construction (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). Furthermore, by focusing on individual stories, narrative inquiry provides rich insights into participants' lived experiences and personal meaning-making, offering a depth of understanding that may not be captured through quantitative approaches (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

3.2.3 Focus Group Discussion

Group discussion, commonly referred to as focus group discussion, is a qualitative research technique in which a small group of participants participates in guided discussions led by the researcher. This approach allows researchers to explore shared perspectives, beliefs and experiences within a group setting (Nyumba et al., 2018). Group discussions are often semi-structured, enabling participants to interact with each other and respond to prompts, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas.

Within the context of applied linguistics research, group discussions hold prominence due to their capacity to illuminate the complexities of language use, identity and social dynamics. Morgan (2023) highlighted that focus group discussions enable researchers to explore how participants negotiate meanings, construct shared understandings and co-construct knowledge through interaction. Similarly, sociolinguists such as Halpern (2023) and Bucholtz (2010) employed group discussions to investigate how language variation and identity intersect, shedding light on linguistic practices within specific social groups.

The practicality of focus group discussions lies in their ability to capture collective viewpoints and interactions. Within the social sciences and humanities, where language and social interaction are central to inquiry, focus group discussions provide a valuable opportunity to observe how participants influence, negotiate and construct each other's perspectives (Morgan, 2023). Within the context of this present study, group dynamics provide insights into how linguistic choices are negotiated, challenged and reinforced within a social context.

3.3 Setting and Criteria for Participant Selection (Qualitative Sampling)

According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling involves a set of non-probability sampling methods that focus on selecting units based on specific characteristics required for the sample. In simpler terms, units are intentionally chosen in purposive sampling, specifically for their relevance to the research objectives, making this method the most suitable for this planned research. The choice of 'KD Hospital' (pseudonym) as the research site for purposive sampling is grounded in several strategic considerations. Firstly, the proximity of the workplace to the target participant pool ensures convenient and efficient access, streamlining the recruitment process. This decision aligns with the practical and feasible approach necessary for a comprehensive study of language choice among young Malaysian Indian professionals. Additionally, as an employee of KD Hospital, possessing insider knowledge provides a nuanced understanding of the organisational culture. This insider perspective may enhance rapport-building and encourage candid responses during interviews and focus group discussions. Beyond geographic convenience, this selection is driven by the overarching goal of conducting a rigorous and insightful investigation into the language dynamics within the specific professional context of KD Hospital. In considering the participant selection and setting, the incorporation of emic and etic perspectives is crucial. The emic perspective acknowledges the insider's viewpoint, recognising the unique cultural and linguistic nuances within KD Hospital. This insider understanding facilitates a more in-depth exploration of language dynamics, ensuring that the study captures the participants' authentic experiences. On the other hand, the etic perspective, informed by an external lens, contributes objectivity and allows for broader insights into language choices and identity negotiation among young Malaysian Indian professionals. The combination of emic and etic perspectives enriches the research

process, promoting a comprehensive and culturally sensitive examination of language practices in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges that focusing on a single workplace setting may limit the transferability of the findings to other professional contexts. The intention of the study was not to achieve statistical generalisation but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of language choice and identity negotiation within a specific workplace environment.

In Malaysia, the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (Amendment) 2019 (Act 668) defines youth as individuals aged between 18 and 30 years. Accordingly, this study focused on young Malaysian Indian professionals aged 20 to 30 years, as this age range broadly represents the transition from tertiary education into professional employment among Malaysian graduates, a pattern reflected in the Ministry of Higher Education's Graduate Tracer Study (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2024). The research venue was a large private healthcare facility, hereafter coded as KD Hospital, located in Kota Damansara, in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. KD Hospital employed a sizeable number of young Malaysian Indian professionals who spoke Tamil in addition to Malay and English. According to 'Mr. Franche' (pseudonym), a senior administrative officer of KD Hospital, there were reportedly forty Indian employees aged between 20 to 30 years working at the research site as of July 2023, during my initial site visit.

As previously stated in Table 1, three types of qualitative research instruments were employed in this study, namely the online narrative frame, semi-structured face-to-face interview and focus group discussion. The criteria used for the selection of participants are elucidated below:

3.3.1 Age Group of the Participants

The researcher will select six (6) respondents of Indian ethnic origin from various levels of age between 20 to 30 years, holding a professional position at KD Hospital.

3.3.2 Gender

Both young female and male professionals who met the previously stated criteria and were proficient in Tamil, English and Malay were invited to participate in this

research. In total, it was planned that three Indian males and three Indian females would be selected as research participants. The inclusion of both male and female participants was intended to enhance the diversity of perspectives represented in the study and minimise potential gender-related bias in the interpretation of language experiences and identity construction (Korsvik & Rustad, 2022).

3.3.3 Occupational Background

Occupation is a crucial factor in demonstrating how young professionals are engaging with Tamil, English and Malay languages daily. The Britannica Dictionary defines 'professional' as a position requiring specialised knowledge, expertise, or training. This usually started with undergraduates who have just finished their diploma and bachelor's studies working in a company with a particular expert position. The decision to concentrate on young professionals in the Marketing and/ or Communication field is driven by the recognition of the unique linguistic demands inherent in their work environment. Professionals in these fields often navigate intricate communication landscapes, requiring a dynamic and adaptable language repertoire to effectively engage with diverse stakeholders. The choice to target this specific professional cohort was rooted in the understanding that individuals in Marketing and/or Communication roles frequently prioritise English as their primary mode of communication due to the global nature of their work. The constant need to interact with diverse audiences, both internally and externally, underscores the significance of language choices in shaping their professional identity.

3.3.4 Educational Background

Malaysian schools are divided into two categories: public and private. Any school that is run using Malay as the language of instruction and has complete financial assistance from the government is referred to as a government school. Private schools, on the other hand, will use one language, usually English language as a medium of instruction from the three major language groups that ethnic groups represent, namely Tamil (for Indians), Mandarin (for Chinese) and Arabic (sometimes referred to as 'Madrasa school' due to the use of Arabic as a language medium. Additionally, private schools make money on their own through fees and other means. According to Chung (2020) and Lim (2020), Indian students' participation in national schools was about

2.63% and more than 90% of Malays participation. For international or private schools, 4% of students were Indians and 26.96% were Malays (Mohsen, 2020). Meaning that, in both types of schools, there were Indians who engaged with three different languages namely Tamil, English and Malay. Not just for schools, but also institutions. Zulkernain & Wan Husin (2018) claimed that 83% of Malays and 71.4% of Indians are in universities in Malaysia.

Based on the above, an Indian person's educational background will have an impact on how well they engage with the three languages. No matter what stage of their education they were in whether primary or secondary school, college, institute, or the university itself, they had the chance to engage with the languages. Starting from that point, the researcher opted to have participants with a minimum bachelor's degree qualification. This criterion does not seek to discriminate against the participants based on their educational history. Since it is commonly recognised that different educational backgrounds have distinct ways of living, the major goal is to collect their opinions.

3.3.5 Language Proficiency

The criteria for participant selection in this study emphasise language proficiency, particularly focusing on the nuanced language dynamics among young Malaysian Indian professionals. While these individuals exhibit fluency in all three languages; Malay, English and Tamil. The emphasis is on their demonstrated preference for English, often surpassing proficiency in their mother tongue, as observed in their day-to-day interactions and professional settings (Vignabalan, 2018). Based on my personal and professional experience, this preference is colloquially described by some as being a *"coconut,"* as discussed in the cultural context of young Tamils in Malaysia. The term *"coconut"* signifies a brown exterior (reflecting their Indian heritage) but a preference for English, symbolising a 'white' or Western influence. Within the outlined criteria, the study particularly seeks participants for whom English is their predominant and preferred language of communication, aiming to delve into the intricate interplay between language choices, professional identity and cultural heritage among this demographic.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, focusing on collecting rich, contextual data from participants to develop an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences, perceptions and language practices (Tracy, 2020). The study engaged

participants employed in Marketing and/or Communications roles within a private hospital situated in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. Comprehensive information is provided in **Figure 3.1** below.

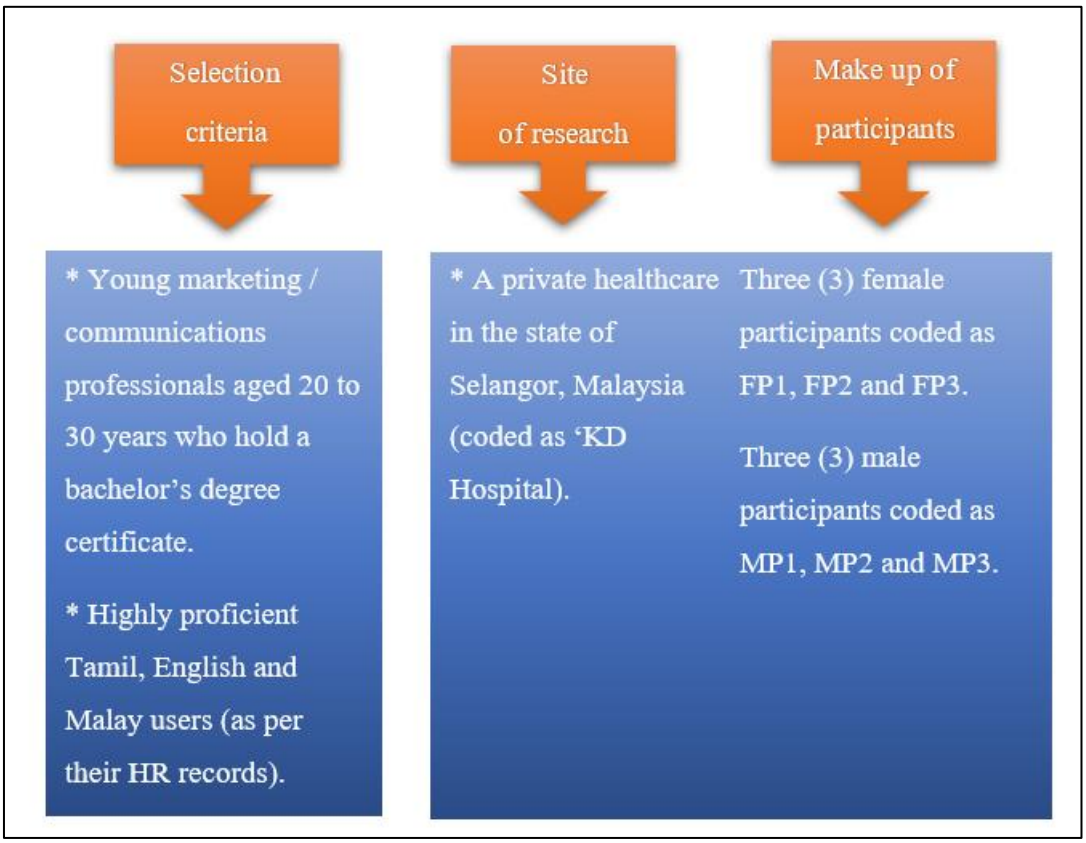


Figure 3.1 The Criteria for Selection, Research Sites and Participants' Make Up

3.4 Research Triangulation

Research triangulation, as articulated by Denzin (1978) and Patton (2002), stands as a vital methodological approach in qualitative research aimed at bolstering the credibility and validity of research findings by employing multiple methods, data sources, or theories to study a (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017). The triangulation approach involves the convergence of evidence from different perspectives, addressing the limitations inherent in any single method or source (Patton, 2002). Denzin (1978) outlines four types of triangulations: method triangulation, data source triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. In the context of this study, the focus is on three types of triangulations: method triangulation, data source triangulation and theory triangulation.

3.4.1 Method Triangulation

Method triangulation was implemented through the use of written narrative frames, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017). These methods complemented one another by capturing different dimensions of participants' experiences. Written narrative frames enabled participants to reflect privately on their language experiences and identity construction. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore these experiences in greater depth through clarification and follow-up questioning. Focus group discussions further provided opportunities for participants to collectively discuss, challenge and affirm shared experiences. The combination of these methods strengthened the credibility of the findings by enabling the phenomenon under investigation to be examined from multiple perspectives, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and depth of the analysis (Flick, 2022).

3.4.2 Data Source Triangulation

Data source triangulation involves utilising different data sources, such as online written narratives, audio recordings from individual interviews and audio recordings from focus group discussions (Yin, 2014). This comprehensive data collection strategy enriches the dataset, contributing to a more thorough analysis.

3.4.3 Theory Triangulation

Theory triangulation was achieved through the integration of Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Construct Theory, Block's (2006; 2015) Identity Framework, Norton's (2000; 2013) perspective on identity negotiation and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of Linguistic Capital. Fishman's framework served as the primary lens for examining language choice within workplace domains, while Block and Norton informed the analysis of identity construction and negotiation. Bourdieu's concept of Linguistic Capital further assisted in understanding the symbolic value attached to particular languages within professional environments. Asmah Haji Omar's (1992; 2007) discussion of Malaysia's linguistic scenery was used to provide contextual understanding of the Malaysian multilingual environment but was not treated as a formal theoretical framework.

3.5 Research Data Analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis entails the methodical evaluation and interpretation of information that is not numerical in nature, such as text, photographs, or subjective observations. The ultimate aim is to discover patterns, themes and meanings within the qualitative data set, in contrast to quantitative analysis, which is primarily concerned with numerical observations (Laubheimer, 2021). Researchers frequently employ techniques such as thematic analysis, content analysis or grounded theory, in which they immerse themselves in the data in order to establish the most important findings. For the purpose of giving a nuanced knowledge of complex social phenomena and contributing to the depth and complexity of study findings, qualitative data analysis is an essential component in a variety of domains, including in applied linguistics. The paragraphs below outline how the data collected in the field will be analysed in this empirical research effort.

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis

To categorise the answers given by the six respondents, the study implemented Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2013) framework. Thematic analysis was employed to address all three research objectives of the study. Research Objective 1, which examined factors influencing language choice in the workplace, was addressed through the identification of recurring themes related to language preference, workplace communication practices and contextual language use. Research Objective 2, which explored participants' attitudes and beliefs towards Tamil, English and Malay, was addressed through themes relating to language perceptions, values and functions. Research Objective 3, which investigated how workplace experiences contribute to social and professional identity construction, was addressed through themes associated with identity negotiation, belonging and professional self-positioning. Through this analytical process, the findings were systematically organised according to the objectives of the study. There were steps that follow after each other are illustrated in **Figure 3.2**.

Manual initial coding in Step 2 broke down the qualitative data into discrete excerpts and generated preliminary codes according to recurring concepts, themes and frequency of occurrence (Mihas, 2023). This study employed three complementary data collection procedures to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative

findings (Tracy, 2020). Two of these procedures involved collecting verbal accounts from participants through semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2024) and focus group discussions conducted at the research site (Morgan, 2023). The third procedure involved collecting written narratives through a series of narrative prompts, enabling participants to reflect on and articulate their language experiences in their own words. A comprehensive overview of the methods and their schedule is provided in **Figure 3.3**.

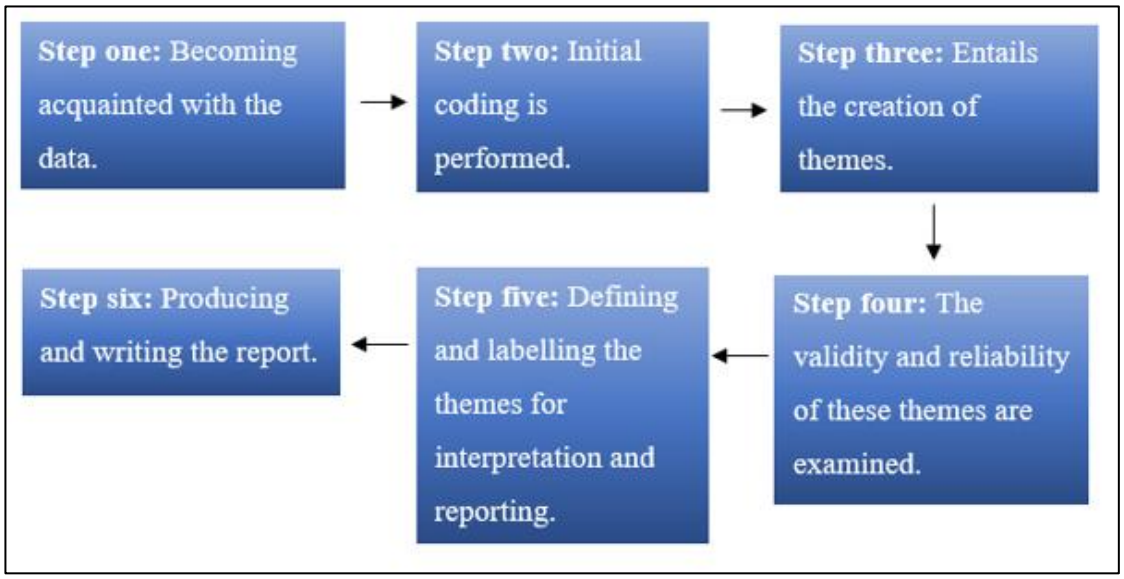


Figure 3.2 Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis Framework Employed

This study adapted the narrative frame methodology proposed by Holmes and Marra (2005b) to investigate professional identity construction among a targeted group of six young Malaysian Indian professionals. The gathering of written narratives through Google personal email (Gmail) mirrored the methods employed by Holmes and Marra (2005a, 2005b) in their original study. The decision to utilise Gmail as the online platform was based on its user-friendly interface, accessibility and convenience for participants. Moreover, the choice aligned with contemporary narrative inquiry, which emphasises the importance of participants' lived experiences and meaning making (Barkhuizen et al., 2022), as well as recent work highlighting narratives as valuable resources for examining language, identity and social interaction (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2022). Additionally, the adoption of Google Survey allowed for efficient data collection, ensuring a seamless and standardised process for the six selected individuals. This online approach was not only innovative but also served to save time and resources while accommodating the preferences and digital accessibility

of the participants within this specific professional context. Following data collection, the narrative data underwent transcription, coding and analysis using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2013) framework.



Figure 3.3 Comprehensive Overview of the Methods and Their Field Schedule

Following data collection, the narrative data underwent transcription, coding and analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis framework. Initial codes were generated manually before being transferred into NVivo for systematic organisation and analysis. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined into themes aligned with the research objectives. Throughout the process, themes were reviewed, compared across data sources and refined to ensure coherence and representativeness of participants' experiences.

Furthermore, in employing NVivo as the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for this research, it embraced a sophisticated tool for organising, managing and analysing the extensive qualitative data gathered through semi-structured individual interviews, online written narrative frames and focus group discussions. This software provided a systematic approach to coding and categorising textual and audio data, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of language practices and identity negotiation among young Malaysian Indian professionals. The utilisation of NVivo aligned with the evolving landscape of qualitative research methodologies, offering efficiency and depth in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). NVivo was also selected because it enabled the researcher to systematically manage and analyse a substantial volume of qualitative data generated through multiple instruments. The software facilitated consistent coding across data sources, visualisation of thematic patterns, comparison of emerging themes and maintenance of an audit trail throughout the analytical process. The use of NVivo therefore enhanced the transparency, rigour and efficiency of the data analysis process (Woolf & Silver, 2023). Although several themes emerged during the coding process, only the three most salient themes for each research objective were selected for detailed discussion. The selection was based not solely on frequency of occurrence but also on their relevance to the research objectives, recurrence across participants and presence across multiple data sources. Themes that were less prevalent, highly overlapping, or peripheral to the focus of the study were not included in the final presentation of findings. This approach enabled a more focused, coherent and in-depth discussion of the most significant patterns identified in the data.

Moreover, member checking, an important strategy for enhancing the credibility and accuracy of qualitative findings, was incorporated. Following the thematic analysis, participants were invited to review the transcribed data and the researchers' interpretations to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the findings, thereby adding an additional layer of methodological rigour (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This methodological combination enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, providing a robust foundation for investigating language choice and identity negotiation among young Malaysian Indian professionals.

3.5.2 Sampling and Data Collection

In alignment with established guidelines for qualitative research, the choice of a sample size comprising six participants in this study was grounded in the recommendations of Guest et al. (2006). According to their comprehensive guide for novice researchers in the social sciences, a range of six to twelve interviews is deemed sufficient for a qualitative research project. The rationale behind this recommendation lies within the qualitative research paradigm, where depth and richness of data take precedence over numerical representation.

In addition, the decision to collect fifty (50) qualitative data sets was guided by the principle of data adequacy rather than numerical guidelines alone. The study generated 50 data sets through written narrative frames, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, providing sufficient depth and breadth to address the research objectives. Recent qualitative scholarship emphasises that sample adequacy should be justified based on the richness, relevance and analytical depth of the data rather than fixed numerical thresholds (Wutich et al., 2024).

The study recognised the importance of achieving sufficient qualitative data to address the research objectives. Rather than relying solely on predetermined numerical guidelines, emphasis was placed on the richness, depth and relevance of the data collected. The six participants contributed fifty (50) qualitative data sets through written narrative frames, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, providing adequate information to support meaningful thematic analysis. This approach aligns with contemporary qualitative research, which recommends justifying sample adequacy based on the quality and richness of the data rather than the number of participants alone (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Wutich et al., 2024). In qualitative research, the emphasis is placed on obtaining rich and meaningful insights rather than achieving statistical representativeness (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Although the present study involved only six participants, each participant contributed data through multiple instruments, namely written narrative frames, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This generated a substantial and multi-layered dataset for analysis. During the latter stages of data collection, similar themes and patterns began to recur across participants and data sources, indicating that sufficient data adequacy had been achieved. Consequently, the selected sample size was considered appropriate for addressing the objectives of the

study, as the richness and depth of the data were sufficient to support meaningful qualitative analysis (Wutich et al., 2024).

3.6 Case Study: Data Collection and Analysis

In the following chapter, all data were analysed and presented as cases, following the principles of case study research in applied linguistics. The application of case study research methodology aligned with the comprehensive nature of the data collected. As Stake (2014) contended, case studies provide an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context, allowing for a holistic understanding of complex social phenomena. This approach was particularly pertinent in applied linguistics, where the examination of language use in authentic settings required a nuanced and contextually rich analysis.

The presentation of data involved an examination of various dimensions, including both horizontal and vertical perspectives. According to Yin (2014), a comprehensive case study analysis should explore both the horizontal perspective, which involves the specific details of each case and the vertical perspective, which identifies commonalities and patterns across cases. This dual approach ensured a thorough and multi-dimensional exploration of language practices and identity negotiation among young Malaysian Indian professionals.

Moreover, the cases were categorised according to participants' shared experiences and individual characteristics to facilitate both within-case and cross-case comparisons. This approach enabled a nuanced examination of language practices by considering individual perspectives alongside broader patterns emerging across participants. Consequently, the analysis provided a more holistic understanding of language use and identity negotiation among young Malaysian Indian professionals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024).

In conclusion, this chapter presented the case study analysis, drawing on the wealth of qualitative data collected through online written narrative frames, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions. The incorporation of case study methodology, guided by established scholars in the field, ensured a robust and insightful exploration of language use and identity negotiation in the context of young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace.

3.7 Research Ethics

In a study focused on language use and the construction of language identities among young Indian professionals in Malaysia, ensuring ethical considerations was of paramount importance (Bhandari, 2021). Maintaining research ethics in qualitative studies was essential for safeguarding participant well-being, ensuring the credibility of findings and upholding the overall quality and integrity of the research process. Ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent, respecting privacy and minimising harm not only protected participants but also contributed to the transparency and trustworthiness of the study. Adhering to ethical guidelines promoted honesty, integrity and accurate representation of data, fostering positive relationships between researchers and participants. In essence, research ethics in qualitative studies formed the foundation for generating authentic, meaningful insights while upholding social responsibility (Mirza et al., 2023).

The key research ethics upheld throughout the study are outlined in **Appendix D**. These principles were designed to safeguard the well-being and rights of the young Malaysian Indian professionals who participated in the study on language identity. Adhering to these principles ensured that the research process was respectful, confidential and conducted with integrity.

3.8 Managing Quality in Qualitative Research

In this qualitative research, which explored language use and language identity issues among young Indian professionals in Malaysia, several measures were implemented to ensure research rigour and quality in the management of textual (qualitative) data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The following paragraphs outline the key considerations.

The first consideration was researcher reflexivity. The researcher identified her own biases, preconceptions and possible impacts on the study. This practice, referred to as research reflexivity, guided interactions and the interpretation of data, resulting in increased transparency and dependability of the findings.

The second consideration was the criteria for participant selection. To ensure that participants were representative of the target population and that their experiences were relevant to the issues under study, precise criteria were used to guide the selection

of participants for the narrative frames, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

The third consideration was in-depth exploration. The three research instruments were selected because they facilitated open and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences related to language use and language identity. In addition, open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their rich and nuanced life narratives.

The fourth consideration was member checking. Participants were given the opportunity to examine and validate the interpretations of their responses, helping to strengthen the authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings. This vetting process ensured that participants' experiences were accurately and authentically represented.

The final consideration was ethical. By adhering to strict ethical guidelines, the research prioritised participants' confidentiality, informed consent and emotional well-being. Ethical considerations were therefore paramount to maintaining overall research quality.

By incorporating all of these measures, this qualitative empirical research on language use and language identity among young Malaysian Indian professionals upheld high standards of quality, rigour, authenticity and credibility. These considerations ensured that the findings provided valuable insights into participants' experiences and contributed meaningfully to the knowledge base in applied language studies and linguistics.

3.8.1 Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

In tandem with the established criteria for ensuring research rigour and quality in qualitative data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), this study strategically narrowed its focus to young Indian professionals in the dynamic fields of Marketing and/or Communication in Malaysia. By homing in on this specific occupational group, the research aimed to explore the intricacies of language use and language identity issues within a professional context that demands versatile communication strategies. The chosen qualitative research instruments including semi-structured interviews, written narrative frames and focus group discussions were deliberately selected for their ability to facilitate open and in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences within these fast-paced industries.

The incorporation of member checking provided participants with the opportunity to validate interpretations, thereby strengthening the authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings and aligning with the principle of confirmability. Ethical considerations, prioritising confidentiality, informed consent and emotional well-being underscored the study's commitment to maintaining research quality and, by extension, dependability. The meticulous adherence to ethical guidelines further enhanced the credibility of the research.

By addressing these considerations and upholding the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, the study not only ensured the robustness of its findings but also fostered an environment in which the insights gained could be meaningfully transferred to similar contexts within the broader field of applied language studies and linguistics.

3.9 Summary

Chapter Three navigated the chosen qualitative research tradition, emphasising its alignment with the study's objectives. The research design was meticulously outlined, integrating the principles of narrative frames, interviews and focus group discussions. The strategic use of research triangulation, employing multiple methods and data sources was discussed to ensure a robust understanding of language choices. Detailed insights into data analysis methods, along with the sample and setting, elucidated the chapter's practical application. Ethical considerations underscored the commitment to participant well-being, confidentiality and informed consent. The chapter concluded by articulating a proactive approach to managing the quality of qualitative research, ensuring the reliability and credibility of the study's findings.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on qualitative data collected through written narrative frames, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions with young Malaysian Indian professionals. The findings are organised according to the three research objectives, namely the factors influencing language choice in the workplace, participants' attitudes towards Tamil, English and Malay and the role of language choice in shaping their social and professional identities. The themes are supported by representative excerpts from participants and are accompanied by theory-informed interpretation where appropriate. A more comprehensive discussion of these findings in relation to previous studies and the theoretical framework is presented in Chapter 5.

4.1 Introduction to Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on data collected through written narrative frames, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions with six young Malaysian Indian professionals (aged 20-30) working in a private hospital in Kota Damansara, Selangor, Malaysia. All raw data were transcribed manually by the researcher to ensure accuracy and deep engagement with the data. A sample of each type of qualitive instrument's transcript is provided in **Appendix F** to illustrate the transcription style and layout. The analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2013) Thematic Analysis framework and guided by the research objectives and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 2. All data were consolidated thematically rather than by instrument type to avoid redundancy and to enable a more robust cross-case analysis. Participants are referred to using the identifiers 'I1' to 'I6' to maintain anonymity and consistency throughout the data presentation.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the data analysis stage was primarily conducted through manual thematic analysis, complemented by the brief use of NVivo, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). This software was explored during the preliminary phase to assist in organising initial codes and identifying emerging themes. However, the core analysis remained manually driven to

allow for deeper engagement with the data. To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study also incorporated member checking as a validation technique. The thematic presentation in this chapter is structured around the study's three research objectives. Firstly, it explores the factors influencing language choice in the workplace (RO1). Secondly, it examines participants' attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of Tamil, English and Malay (RO2). Lastly, it investigates how these languages choices relate to participants' expressions of social and professional identity (RO3). Each section includes detailed thematic subsections and integrates direct participant quotations to illustrate key patterns.

Most importantly, thematic coding followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework and was largely conducted manually to ensure close engagement with the data. Initial codes were developed through repeated readings of the transcripts, guided by the research objectives. These were refined through iterative rounds of analysis and grouped into broader thematic categories. NVivo was utilised during the early stage of analysis, particularly for mapping out codes and generating visual outputs such as pie charts to support initial pattern recognition. While its use was limited, the CAQDAS served as a supplementary tool to enhance organisation and provide a clearer overview of emerging themes. Ultimately, all major coding decisions and thematic interpretations were made manually under the watchful eyes of the thesis supervisors to preserve the richness and contextual depth of the qualitative data. These steps contributed to the overall rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis whilst maintaining a transparent audit trail.

This study draws conceptually from Fishman's Domain Theory (1965/1986), which posits that language use is largely dependent on specific domains or social contexts such as family, workplace, education, or religion. He argues that individuals choose language based on role relationships, settings and expected norms within these domains. Ferguson's (1959) concept of High and Low Variety complements this framework by distinguishing between formal and informal uses of language. The former is typically used in structured, institutionalised settings, whereas the latter is prevalent in casual, interpersonal contexts. Together, these theories provide a sociolinguistic foundation for understanding the multilingual practices of participants in diverse workplace scenarios.

In the Malaysian context, Che Wan Roslan (2020) found that Tamil speakers frequently engage in language switching for reasons tied to efficiency, prestige and

context. This aligns with the findings in this study, where workplace language behaviour is often shaped by socio-economic positioning and institutional expectations. The symbolic value and diminishing presence of Tamil are further reflected in participants' narratives. Scholars such as Omar (1992, 2015) have noted that Tamil language preservation in Malaysia was historically rooted in Tamil-medium education, particularly within plantation communities. However, national integration efforts and the perceived economic utility of Malay and English have contributed to a gradual shift in language preference. Ibrahim (2018) highlights that many Indian parents now prioritise national schooling for future employability. Additionally, Halimi (2008) asserts that Malay identity involves linguistic and cultural adaptation beyond ethnicity, a notion reflected in this study as participants use Malay to assimilate and reflect civic belonging within professional settings.

Building upon these theoretical and contextual foundations, it is important to understand how these linguistic patterns interact within Malaysia's sociopolitical landscape, where language serves both communicative and symbolic functions. As Fishman (1986) explains, language use cannot be divorced from the social institutions and power structures that sustain it. Within the Malaysian workplace domain, particularly in urban healthcare settings such as the one studied here, English frequently operates as the high-prestige code, which is a linguistic marker of professionalism, education and socioeconomic mobility. This reflects Ferguson's (1959) concept of 'High Variety,' where English functions as the formal, institutionally endorsed medium of communication. In contrast, Tamil often occupies a 'Low Variety' position, employed in intimate and culturally grounded contexts that foster solidarity and emotional expression among co-ethnics.

Roslan's (2020) observations on language choice among Tamil speakers reveal similar motivations for code-switching, balancing efficiency, identity and inclusivity. Her findings suggest that Malaysian Indians consciously navigate between languages to maintain professional credibility while also preserving a sense of cultural authenticity. This duality was evident among the participants in this study, many of whom associated English with competence and career advancement, while perceiving Tamil as a deeply personal language that connects them to heritage and familial identity.

Omar (1992, 2015) underscores that multilingualism in Malaysia is not merely functional but a reflection of cultural coexistence. The coexistence of English, Malay and Tamil represents an ongoing negotiation of social belonging. For many

professionals, particularly in mixed-ethnic environments, the ability to shift between these languages demonstrates not only communicative flexibility but also socio-cultural intelligence, an awareness of how language choices project empathy, inclusivity and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, Asmah (1992) argues that the Malaysian linguistic hierarchy was historically constructed through educational and colonial policies that privileged English and Malay over vernacular languages. This legacy continues to shape linguistic attitudes today, where Tamil, despite its deep cultural value, is often perceived as lacking economic utility. This study's findings echo this perspective, as participants consistently positioned Tamil as a language of emotional connection rather than professional advancement.

Ibrahim's (2018) insights into parental language choice further contextualise these findings. She found that many Indian parents opt for Malay-medium or English-medium schools due to the perceived economic advantage and national integration opportunities these languages offer. The participants in this study, as products of such educational systems, demonstrate linguistic repertoires that prioritise English and Malay for upward mobility and inclusivity, respectively. However, their narratives also reveal a conscious effort to retain Tamil in specific domains like family interactions, community events and moments of emotional intimacy, aligning closely with Fishman's (1986) concept of domain-specific language use.

Similarly, Halimi (2008) conceptualises the Malay language as a vehicle of national identity that transcends ethnicity. His argument helps explain why the participants used Malay strategically to reflect civic belonging and respect in workplace interactions. In professional settings, Malay serves not only as a medium for communication but also as a symbol of social integration and adherence to national identity norms.

The multilingual practices observed in this study also reflect wider patterns documented in contemporary Malaysian sociolinguistic research. According to Sathiah et al. (2025), Malaysian Indians tend to alternate between Tamil and English depending on situational needs, demonstrating high levels of bilingual competence shaped by domain, interlocutor and communicative purpose. Their findings emphasise that Tamil continues to play a central role within interpersonal, familia and community interactions, whereas English often dominates in educational and formal domains. This aligns closely with the present study, where all participants reported active use of Tamil

within social, emotional and culturally significant contexts, despite prioritising English and Malay for professional purposes. In this sense, the participants' linguistic patterns reflect not a loss of Tamil, but a domain-specific distribution of linguistic functions, consistent with the argument that language use is determined by social context rather than linguistic abandonment. These patterns further underscore the adaptive multilingualism of Malaysian Indian professionals, who strategically navigate different linguistic repertoires to balance cultural identity, social belonging and professional expectations.

The methodological design of this study integrating written narratives, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that allowed for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics. Each data collection method captured distinct layers of meaning: written narratives revealed internal reflections, semi-structured interviews provided insight into personal experiences and focus groups illuminated collective attitudes. This triangulation strengthened the study's trustworthiness and reflected Braun and Clarke's (2013) emphasis on rich, multi-layered thematic analysis.

Moreover, the integration of manual coding and NVivo-supported mapping reinforced the researcher's interpretive depth while ensuring methodological rigour. Braun and Clarke (2013) caution against over-reliance on software, noting that qualitative depth emerges from active researcher engagement rather than mechanical categorisation. By following this principle, the analysis in this study preserved contextual nuances, ensuring that participants' voices remained central to the interpretation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances understanding of how multilingual Malaysian professionals navigate identity through strategic language use. It bridges classical sociolinguistic theories (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1986) with contemporary Malaysian scholarship (Asmah, 2015; Che Wan Roslan, 2020; Normardhiah, 2018). This synthesis demonstrates that language choice in Malaysia's professional sector cannot be understood solely through utilitarian or structural frameworks. Instead, it must be seen as a fluid process shaped by emotion, identity and societal expectation.

Lastly, this chapter acknowledges the evolving linguistic ecology of Malaysia's professional landscape. Globalisation, cross-cultural collaboration and media exposure continue to reshape language attitudes among young professionals. English increasingly signifies professional legitimacy; Malay symbolises national unity and Tamil anchors

personal identity. The coexistence of these functions illustrates a living example of Fishman's (1986) domain theory in action where a multilingual balance is sustained by social context, cultural pride and pragmatic necessity.

The findings in this chapter are presented with both descriptive richness and analytical interpretation. Each thematic subsection includes frequency commentary, direct quotations with attribution and connections to relevant literature. Minor or contradictory cases are also considered to show real-world variation within the data. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of cross-cutting themes, including language inequality and multilingual competence, which further illuminate the social and institutional implications of participants' language choices.

4.2 Factors Influencing Language Choice in the Workplace (RO1)

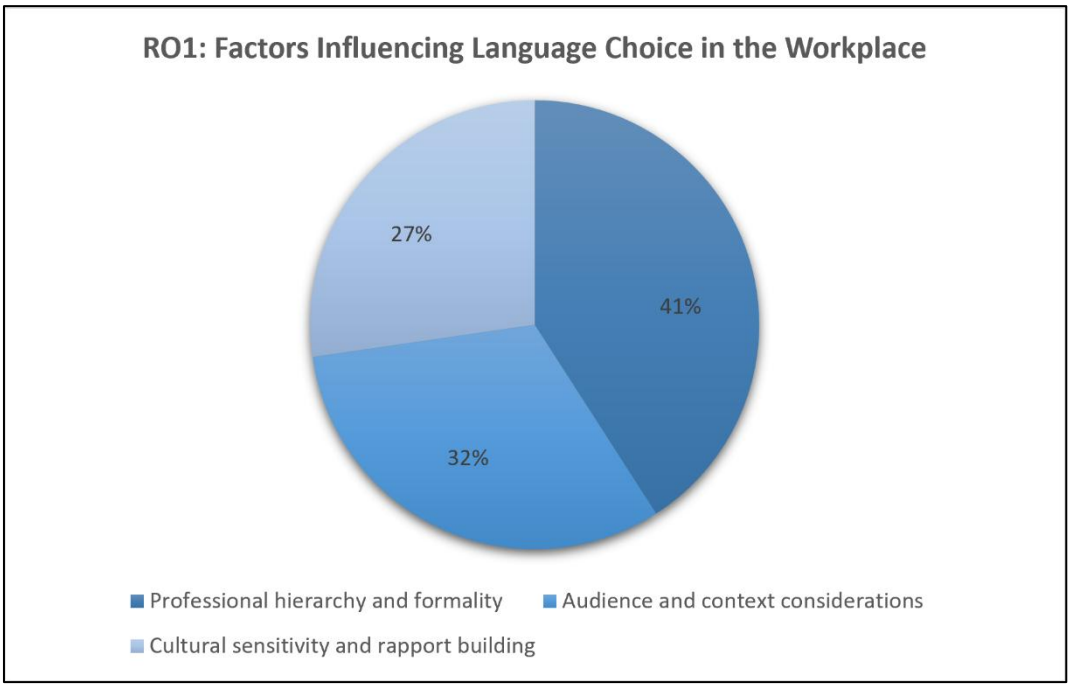


Figure 4.1 Factors Influencing Language Choice in the Workplace (RO1)

This section addresses Research Objective 1, which is to explore the factors related to language choice and language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals in Malaysia, specifically in the workplace domain.

The participants in this study consistently demonstrated deliberate linguistic behaviours shaped by a range of institutional, interpersonal and sociocultural factors. Their responses revealed that language choice at work is not a passive or habitual process, but rather a strategic act that depends on the power dynamics of the workplace,

the nature of their roles, the ethnicity or status of the listener and the expectations embedded in the professional environment. This was evident across all three data collection methods and across all six participants.

The primary languages involved in workplace interactions were English, Malay and Tamil, each carrying distinct symbolic, functional and cultural values. English frequently served as the default code in formal and professional scenarios, Malay was often used for inter-ethnic communication and administrative dealings and Tamil functioned as a means of intra-ethnic solidarity, particularly in casual or private exchanges. These language choices were shaped by domain-specific expectations, where different contexts prompted different codes depending on social roles and expectations.

Moreover, participants showed a high level of metalinguistic awareness. They were cognisant of how language use impacts perceptions of professionalism, respect, efficiency and inclusivity. Their narratives underscored the tension between maintaining cultural identity and conforming to dominant linguistic norms in professional spaces. This section further dissects these considerations under three subthemes that emerged from the extensive and exhaustive data analysis process:

(i) 4.2.1 Professional hierarchy and formality
(ii) 4.2.2 Audience and context considerations
(iii) 4.2.3 Cultural sensitivity and rapport building

4.2.1 Professional Hierarchy and Formality

The data across online written narrative frames, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions highlighted professional hierarchy and formality as a key determinant in language choice. The participants consistently indicated that when engaging with superiors, clients, or during formal work situations, English is the preferred and expected mode of communication. This linguistic pattern supports Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital, wherein the mastery and use of a prestigious language (such as English) grant symbolic power, legitimacy and increased social mobility within a professional context. Interviewee 3 (I3) clearly stated in the focus group discussion:

> *"For me, it depends on who I speak with. Like it's the superior, of course, it will be fully in English only. Mainly to show some respect. Other than that, to maintain the subordinate and pro relationship, we keep it professional all the way. Unless we're very close or good friends." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 80-84)*

This view was echoed by Interviewee 5 (I5) in the online written narrative frames:

> *"If I make a choice to achieve a professional task, then it's definitely English. I'm really more confident to speak in English compared to Tamil and Malay. English is much easier for me to speak out the ideas and share my thoughts on the point as clearly as possible. I think I can communicate better and choose the right choice of words better. I would say my choice has been good so far, since most of the people that I have to talk with at work totally understand English. This also will not leave them out from understanding my point of view and what I'm trying to say." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Online written narrative frames / Narratives lines 53-61)*

Participants reported that even when colleagues share the same ethnic or linguistic background, the choice of English persists due to its symbolic role in reflecting competence, professionalism and alignment with workplace norms. This reflects the strategic nature of language selection, particularly in hierarchically structured environments. In the semi-structured individual interview, Interviewee 1 (I1) elaborated on the situational nature of language use in professional settings:

> *"So, basically, I can give you an example. Like, for example, in a meeting with my colleagues, with my superior sales manager, all that. So, in that kind of situation, of course, we will use English to show our professionalism. But apart from that, like, in an informal setting… with my Malay friends, I will talk in*

Malay. Tamil friends, I use Tamil, sometimes mix with English. So, that's just how it is. But with our customers, it depends on who our customers are… if the person is a Tamilian and prefers to speak in Tamil, so I will speak in Tamil. That's how it is." (Interviewee 1 / I1, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 59-67)

This example offers a clear view of how English functions as a default professional code, especially during meetings and hierarchical engagements, while Tamil and Malay are used selectively to accommodate informality or establish social rapport based on cultural or linguistic affinity. Interviewee 1's narrative reinforces the theme that language use is not arbitrary, but a deliberate choice tied to the power structure and setting of the interaction. Interviewee 4 (I4) reinforced this point with a direct reflection on the implications of deviating from this expected norm:

"Yes, when you can't speak English in your workplace, it's like automatically, your manager or the upper management is thinking that you're not capable. Also, like, when you can't speak English in an interview, you automatically get rejected." (Interviewee 4 / I4, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 57-60)

This view highlights the perceived 'gatekeeping function' of English, where fluency becomes an unofficial criterion for access to jobs and leadership roles. Language proficiency, therefore, is tightly linked not only to functional communication but also to perceived credibility and eligibility in professional spheres (Ting et al., 2013). Interviewee 5 (I5) added in the next turn:

"Yes, correct. Language choices are linked with competence, you're fluent in English then people say you're intelligent and professionalism. Limited language skills then people make unfair judgments, despite you have many other more important work skills." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, line 61-65)

Interviewee 6 (I6), later added that English speakers are often "treated better" or perceived as more competent during job interviews and workplace evaluations:

> *"During interviews, the hiring managers normally they just expect you to speak in English. If you're fluent, meaning you can communicate-lah and it fits the professional setting. Rather when the managers speak in English, then you answer in another language, they won't be impressed with you already." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 68-72)*

Such sentiments suggest that English functions as a linguistic marker of professional competence and deviation from its use in formal contexts may invite negative judgements or limit access to professional opportunities (Piller, 2024). Collectively, these narratives affirm that language use among Malaysian young Indian professionals is not merely spontaneous but is shaped by structural expectations within the professional hierarchy. Language becomes a tool to signal respect, assert professional identity and align oneself with perceived standards of workplace excellence. At the same time, it reflects deeper socio-cultural ideologies wherein English is valorised while other languages, such as Tamil, are relegated to informal or intimate domains.

The findings in this subsection indicate that English functions not only as a practical workplace language but also as a marker of authority, competence and professional legitimacy. From the perspective of Fishman's Domain Theory, the workplace operates as a formal domain in which English is expected and normalised, particularly in hierarchical interactions. This also reflects Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, as English proficiency appears to provide symbolic value and professional advantage. Therefore, participants' preference for English in formal workplace situations should not be interpreted merely as individual language preference, but as a response to institutional expectations and wider linguistic hierarchies within professional settings.

4.2.2 Audience and Context Considerations

Beyond professional hierarchy, the audience and situational context emerged as critical determinants of language choice. Participants demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of who they were speaking to, their relationship with the person and the nature of the interaction. This reflects Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Theory, which posits that language behaviour is strongly influenced by situational domains such as the workplace and by the expected norms of language use within those domains. Ferguson's (1959) concept of High and Low Variety also finds relevance here, as participants code-switched based on the formality or informality of the context. Interviewee 1 (I1) exemplified this audience-driven language variation:

> *"In a meeting with my colleagues, with my superior sales manager… of course, we use English to show our professionalism. But apart from that, in relaxed settings… like with my Malay friends, I just talk in Malay. With my Tamil friends I just use Tamil, sometimes we also mix with English." (Interviewee 1 / I1, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 59-64)*

This suggests that language choice is not random but rather a deliberate communicative strategy, deployed to align with the cultural, relational and institutional expectations embedded in different settings. Such adaptability resonates with Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital, where strategic language use enables individuals to navigate power structures and gain social legitimacy. Interviewee 5 (I5) further explained that language use often aligns with the goal of building rapport and ensuring communicative clarity:

> *"In the office, I speak in English more I think because I'm more comfortable doing that because everyone can understand this language… I do speak in Tamil sometimes but only to those staff who actually talk to me in Tamil… Malay, yes, I speak with my Malay colleagues to make them feel comfortable too."*

(Interviewee 5 / I5, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 28-36)

This illustrates not just a functional concern for mutual intelligibility, but also 'relational sensitivity', which is a desire to create a linguistically inclusive environment for colleagues of different ethnicities. Here, language becomes a tool of cohesion, used to foster comfort and solidarity within Malaysia's multicultural workforce. This reflects the adaptive multilingualism highlighted by Che Wan Roslan (2020), who notes that Tamil speakers often switch languages to suit contextual demands and facilitate social integration. The emotional and identity-based dimensions of audience-aware language use are highlighted in Interviewee 2 (I2)'s online written narrative frames. She recalled:

"A colleague who's not very proficient in [Tamil]… approached the booth so I switched to Tamil and encouraged him. I feel like speaking Tamil, even in the broken manner, helped him to become like his real self that he didn't explore much in the workplace… It wasn't just the language, but it was like when you connect to your real roots and feeling some sort of like belonging." (Interviewee 2 / I2, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 53-63).

This interaction reflects how language use serves both communicative and symbolic functions. Tamil, often relegated to informal domains, is here reclaimed as a source of cultural affirmation and pride. The participant's choice to adjust her language based on her colleague's background demonstrates an empathetic approach to language, in which mutual respect and identity validation are prioritised. Interviewee 3 (I3) shared a similar audience-based strategy:

"For me, it depends on who I speak to. If it's the superior, of course it's fully in English to show sense of respect… also to maintain the subordinate and professional relationship, we need to keep it professional that way." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 80-83)

His comment reinforces the boundary-maintaining function of English in formal or hierarchical interactions, while also acknowledging flexibility when the audience is a peer or close friend. This duality reflects the notion of functional diglossia, where languages are assigned, different roles depending on formality, intimacy and power dynamics. Moreover, these practices are shaped by broader sociopolitical narratives. Omar (1992; 2015) and Ibrahim (2018) have pointed out that Tamil language maintenance in Malaysia has been in decline due to parental preference for national education systems, driven by the perceived economic capital of Malay and English. This trend is mirrored in participants' language decisions; English is deployed as a linguistic marker of competence and career alignment, while Tamil is reserved for cultural bonding or emotional expression.

Such deliberate language selection, informed by institutional pressures and interpersonal relationships, confirms that young Indian professionals are linguistic negotiators, constantly balancing their cultural identity, professional aspirations and social surroundings. Their multilingual fluency is not just a reflection of Malaysia's sociolinguistic landscape but a manifestation of lived pragmatism, where each language is chosen based on its strategic utility in a given moment.

To summarise, audience and context emerge as powerful shaping forces in language use. Whether to foster understanding, show respect, or affirm cultural identity, the participants' code-switching behaviour exemplifies the complex interplay of agency, ideology and interactional need that defines modern Malaysian multilingualism.

The findings show that participants made language choices based on audience, relationship and communicative purpose. This supports Fishman's view that language selection is shaped by domain-specific expectations, but it also demonstrates that such choices are flexible rather than fixed. Participants did not simply assign one language to one domain; rather, they shifted between English, Malay and Tamil according to the social meaning of each interaction. This suggests that young Malaysian Indian professionals exercise linguistic agency as they balance professionalism, inclusivity and cultural belonging in workplace communication.

4.2.3 Cultural Sensitivity and Rapport Building

This theme explores how participants use language not only for clarity or professionalism but to honour cultural identity, demonstrate empathy and build interpersonal rapport. Such language choices reflect the domain, where language use is governed by situational contexts and the relationships between interlocutors. Furthermore, the findings align with Adnan's (2017a, 2017b) argument that language functions both as a vessel of cultural transmission and a bridge that connects individuals across different ethnic backgrounds in Malaysia. Interviewee 4 (I4), in her semi-structured individual interview, elaborated on how she consciously tailors her language based on the ethnicity and comfort level of her colleagues. Her strategy of alternating between English, Tamil and Malay demonstrates how cultural and emotional sensitivity can be enacted through multilingual practices:

> *"In the workplace, when it comes to the workplace, I speak in English more because I think I'm more comfortable doing that as everyone can understand the language… but I do speak in Tamil at times, only to those staff who actually talk to me in Tamil or… who's quite close to me… Malay, I speak with my Malay colleagues. It is just to be more comfortable and to make them feel comfortable too." (Interviewee 4 / I4, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 28-36)*

This reflection reveals a deliberate attempt to foster an inclusive atmosphere through linguistic accommodation. It underscores how language can serve as a social lubricant in Malaysia's multiethnic professional settings, where building interpersonal rapport requires more than just a common language, it also requires awareness and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. Such cultural sensitivity also plays a crucial role in public-facing roles, especially in the healthcare setting. Interviewee 6 (I6), during Focus Group Discussion 1, highlighted a practical scenario in which language had to be adapted to serve patients of different ethnic backgrounds. His experience illustrates how multilingual practices contribute not only to relational harmony but also to effective service delivery:

> *"At KD Hospital, I got into some situations where language differences need our attention, especially in chatting with patients from different backgrounds. For example, when you must explain the complex medical terms or treatment plans, I make sure key information is translated or explained both in English and BM. I also work closely with colleagues who speak Tamil perfectly to help patients from the Indian community because we must ensure they fully understand treatment options. This team approach can cut language barriers and all our patients can receive the best care because of this clear communication style." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 150-159)*

Here, language use becomes not just a communicative strategy but a moral imperative, which is a way to ensure equity in understanding and participation, particularly for patients who may be marginalised linguistically. This aligns with Che Wan Roslan's (2020) assertion that language choice, when executed with cultural awareness, can reinforce solidarity and empathy across linguistic lines. Adding to this, Interviewee 4 (I4) offered another insight later in the interview that summarises the guiding principle behind her multilingual choices at work:

> *"It's really up to the person that I'm communicating with. If they are comfortable in Malay, then the conversation has to be in Malay." (Interviewee 4 / I4, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 75-76)*

This succinct but powerful statement reinforces the idea that language serves not just the speaker's intent, but the listener's comfort and identity as well. It demonstrates that language is more than a medium, it is also a relationship-building tool. Professionals who acknowledge and adapt to linguistic preferences affirm the worth of the individual they are interacting with, thereby enhancing team dynamics, inclusivity and cross-cultural collaboration. Collectively, these findings affirm that young Malaysian Indian professionals view language choice as a relational act, one

rooted in empathy, mutual respect and the desire to build bridges across cultural differences. Rather than adhering strictly to professional norms or personal preferences, participants adopt a fluid and adaptive approach that reflects broader ideologies of multiculturalism and cohesion in Malaysia's diverse workplaces.

The findings suggest that language choice also functions as a relational and affective practice. While English is often linked to professionalism, Tamil and Malay are used to create comfort, trust and interpersonal closeness. This demonstrates that workplace language use is not shaped by formality alone, but also by empathy, cultural awareness and the desire to build rapport. In this sense, multilingual competence becomes an important workplace resource, allowing participants to move beyond transactional communication and engage more meaningfully with colleagues and patients from different linguistic backgrounds.

4.3 Attitudes Toward Multilingual Usage (RO2)

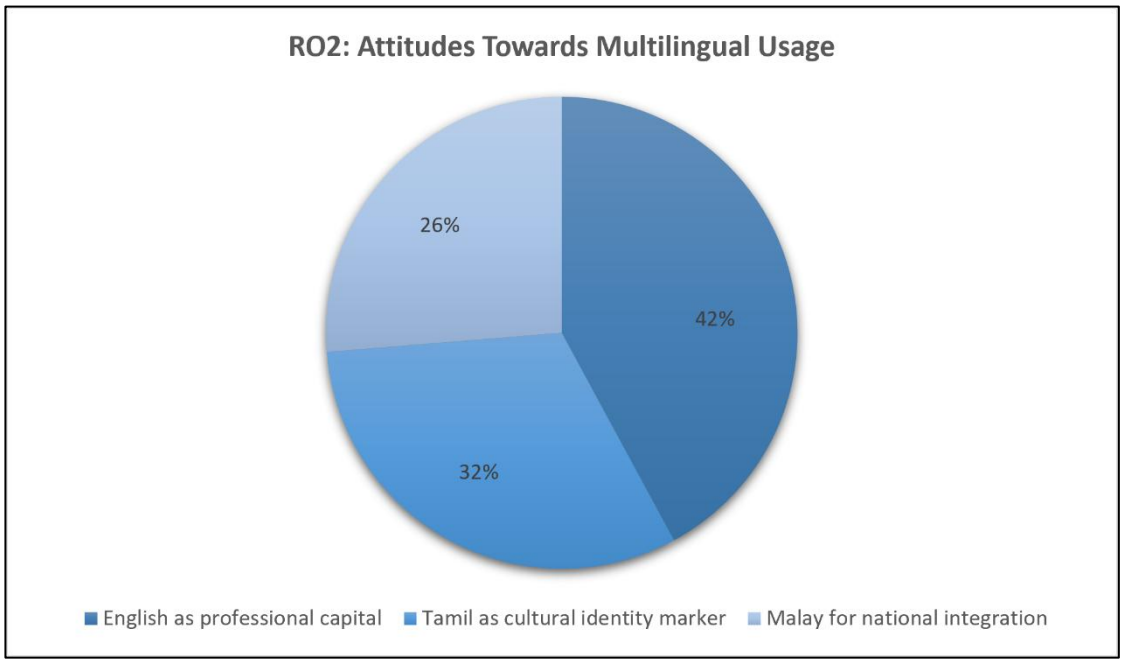


Figure 4.2 Attitudes by Participants toward Multi Language Use (RO2)

This section addresses Research Objective 2, that relates to the investigation of young Indian professionals' attitudes and beliefs mainly toward Tamil language use in Malaysia and other languages like English and Malay, with reference to their social and professional identities. The findings reveal that participants do not perceive language merely as a communicative tool but as a symbol of identity, social status and workplace

functionality. Their multilingualism is marked by a layered set of attitudes shaped by personal experiences, cultural belonging and institutional expectations. English, Tamil and Malay are imbued with distinct emotional, pragmatic and ideological associations and participants regularly navigate the tensions between linguistic preference, necessity and expectation.

English is widely associated with professionalism, upward mobility and intellectual credibility. It is seen as the language of aspiration, progress and workplace survival, a perspective that reflects Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital, where the command of high-status languages correlates with social power and access. Many participants described English as essential not only for getting the job done but also for appearing capable and employable in a competitive job market.

Tamil, by contrast, emerged as a language of emotional resonance, identity affirmation and cultural pride. Although less dominant in professional settings, participants voiced strong affective ties to Tamil, often describing it as a language that anchors them to their heritage, family and ethnic community. This suggests that the retention of a heritage language signals group membership and cultural continuity.

Malay was typically viewed as a necessary means of integration within Malaysia's multicultural workplace context. Participants acknowledged its importance for interethnic communication, particularly with Malay colleagues or within government-linked environments, but often did not attach as much emotional or identity-driven value to it. Instead, it was regarded as a practical tool for national cohesion, in line with Omar's (1992) view of Malay as a unifying national language.

These nuanced attitudes demonstrate a high degree of metapragmatic awareness; participants understand the symbolic power of languages and strategically position themselves within linguistic hierarchies to meet personal, social and professional goals. The following sub-themes delve deeper into each language and its perceived value from the participants' perspectives and personal convictions as shown in the data collected:

(i) 4.3.1 English as professional capital
(ii) 4.3.2 Tamil as cultural identity marker
(iii) 4.3.3 Malay for national integration

4.3.1 English as Professional Capital

English was unanimously positioned by participants as the primary linguistic code in formal workplace contexts, embodying professionalism, authority and strategic value. Its use was not merely functional but symbolic, signifying competence, confidence and institutional alignment. This finding aligns strongly with the Domain Theory, which posits that language use is contextually governed by the setting, participants and purpose of interaction. In professional domains, English emerged as the high-prestige code consistently selected for formal communication, reporting, client meetings and upward interaction.

The participants' strategic deployment of English in upward hierarchical interactions also reflects Ferguson's (1959) concept of diglossia, where English represents the 'High' (H) variety, used in formal and prestigious domains, while Tamil and Malay fall into the 'Low' (L) varieties for informal or personal use. This distinction was evident in how the participants consciously reserved English for external presentations, formal email correspondences and performance evaluations, aligning themselves with dominant institutional expectations. Interviewee 5, in her online written narrative frames, made a clear distinction in language use when faced with professional objectives:

> *"If I need to make a choice for a professional task, then it's definitely English. Also, I'll be more confident to speak in English compared to Tamil or Malay." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 53-55)*

This suggests that English is perceived as the most reliable medium for achieving credibility and clarity, particularly in hierarchical and evaluative settings. Interviewee 1 (I1), in his semi-structured individual interview also affirmed the strategic use of English in meetings:

> *"So, basically, I can give you an example. Like, for example, in a meeting with my colleagues, with my superior sales manager and other seniors. So, in that kind of situation, of course, we will use English to show our professionalism. But apart from that,*

like in informal setting with colleagues, we'll use what language they use. So, for Malay friends, I used to talk in Malay. Tamil friends, I can use Tamil, sometimes mix with English. It's simple really. But with customers, it depends on who our customers are. Like, if the person is a Tamilian and then he prefers to speak in Tamil, so I'll try to speak in Tamil. That's how it is where we work." (Interviewee 1 / I1, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, line 59)

Che Wan Roslan (2020) supports this notion, asserting that English proficiency in Malaysia is commonly equated with intelligence, authority and upward mobility. This perception was reinforced by Interviewee 4 (I4), who shared how the lack of English proficiency could limit opportunities:

"When you can't speak English in your workplace, it's like automatically, your manager or upper management is going to think that you are not capable enough… when you can't speak English in an interview, you can automatically get rejected." (Interviewee 4 / (I4), Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 57-60)

This sentiment is mirrored in earlier research (Halimi, 2008), where English is framed as the language of modernity, global economy and prestige, often required for career progression in both private and government-linked sectors in Malaysia. Moreover, this further highlights the institutional role of English in Malaysia as a legacy of colonial administration, where it has retained prestige in legal, medical and business settings. The participants' narratives echo this institutional legacy, where English operates as a linguistic gatekeeper, defining access to leadership roles, visibility and respect. Interviewee 3 (I3) underscored this professional code in Focus Group Discussion 2:

"For me, it depends on who I speak with. If it's the superior or super-senior, of course, it'll be fully in English only. Mainly to show a sense of respect. Other than that, to maintain the

subordinate and professional relationship, we keep it professional all the way. Unless of course we're very close or good friends." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD2, lines 80-84)

Even amongst their peers, English was described as a way to signal professional alignment, particularly in contexts where communication needed to be efficient, unambiguous and socially acceptable across ethnic lines. This supports Ibrahim's (2018) conclusion that code choice among multilingual professionals is influenced by the desire to conform to corporate identity and neutralise ethnic boundaries. Ultimately, English serves not only as a tool for communication but as a powerful marker of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Participants used English as a strategic asset to navigate professional expectations, gain respect and establish legitimacy in institutional spaces. These findings affirm that English remains entrenched as the de facto professional code in urban Malaysian settings, particularly among upwardly mobile Indian professionals.

This theme demonstrates that English carries strong symbolic and professional value in the workplace. Interpreted through Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital, English becomes a resource through which participants gain credibility, confidence and access to professional recognition. However, the findings also suggest that this value is unevenly distributed, as those with weaker English proficiency may be perceived as less capable despite possessing other professional skills. Thus, English functions both as an enabling resource and as a potential mechanism of exclusion within workplace hierarchies.

4.3.2 Tamil as Cultural Identity Marker

While English held symbolic power in professional domains, Tamil emerged in this study as a vital marker of ethnic identity, solidarity and emotional belonging. Its use, though less frequent in formal workplace interactions, carried deep personal and communal value. Participants often invoked Tamil in private conversations, culturally significant contexts and when engaging with colleagues or patients of the same ethnic background. This illustrates the ways that language use is embedded within specific domains and role relationships; Tamil being reserved primarily for intra-ethnic and

informal spaces. Interviewee 2 (I2), during her online written narrative frames, reflected on an emotionally significant interaction that highlighted how Tamil could foster reconnection and pride:

> *"This colleague of ours, originally from a Tamil-speaking background but not very proficient in the language, approached the booth and so I switched to Tamil and encouraged him… I noticed how his anxiety gradually changed to sort of pride and networking connection… it was all about reconnecting with his own roots and feeling sense of belonging." (Interviewee 2 / I2, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 55-63)*

This interaction exemplifies how language functions not merely as a communicative tool, but also as a means of cultural affirmation, particularly for younger Indian professionals navigating hybrid identities in modern Malaysia. As Omar (1992, 2015) explains, language is the vessel of culture with its preservation and usage signifying cultural continuity, especially for minority groups facing linguistic marginalisation. Interviewee 1 (I1), in his semi-structured individual interview, similarly discussed Tamil's role in fostering closeness within his circle:

> *"Tamil friends, I can use Tamil, sometimes mix with English. So, that's just how it is and how things are for us." (Interviewee 1 / I1, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, lines 64-65)*

His account underscores code-mixing as a strategy for blending cultural authenticity with practical communication needs, often seen in urban Indian communities in Malaysia. This hybrid use resonates with Ferguson's (1959) view on 'Low Variety' languages being reserved for informal, emotional, or intimate interactions.

However, the limited use of Tamil also reflects broader socio-political shifts. Participants described how Tamil is gradually becoming confined to cultural or home domains, overshadowed by English and Malay in professional spheres. This aligns with Ibrahim's (2018) findings, which noted a growing trend among Indian families to favour

English-medium education for economic mobility, often at the cost of Tamil proficiency. Interviewee 5 (I5) illustrated this pragmatic shift in her semi-structured individual interview:

> *"I do speak in Tamil at times but only to those staff who actually talk to me in Tamil … who's quite close to me. That too, I will reply in English unless we're talking about something not too serious for example, then you know I want to reply in Tamil. So yes, I talk in Tamil and I don't even think about it until you ask me here right now [laughs]." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Semi-structured individual interview / Interview, line 31-33)*

This reflects Che Wan Roslan's (2020) observation that language choice in Malaysia is often guided by social proximity and emotional relevance rather than mere ethnicity. For many professionals, Tamil retains symbolic significance even when its functional use is reduced. Furthermore, Halimi (2008) noted that national identity in Malaysia increasingly involves navigating between cultural heritage and civic belonging. The participants' selective use of Tamil illustrates this balancing act, asserting ethnic identity without disrupting institutional or national expectations. In sum, Tamil functions as more than just a language. It is a cultural emblem, a connection to ancestry and a tool for fostering belonging within the workplace. While its practical use is limited by workplace norms and institutional expectations, its symbolic weight remains potent. This dynamic illustrates how young Indian professionals actively negotiate ethnolinguistic pride within professional environments that often prioritise dominant languages.

The findings indicate that Tamil remains central to participants' emotional and cultural identity, even when its use is limited in formal workplace settings. From Fishman's domain perspective, Tamil continues to operate strongly within intimate, familial and intra-ethnic domains. However, its selective use in the workplace also shows that Tamil has not disappeared from professional life entirely; rather, it emerges in moments where cultural solidarity, trust and emotional connection are required. This suggests that participants do not abandon Tamil, but negotiate its use carefully within professional environments dominated by English and Malay.

4.3.3 Malay for National Integration

The use of the Malay language (*Bahasa Malaysia*) among young Malaysian Indian professionals reflects a pragmatic adaptation to the multilingual demands of Malaysia's national identity. Participants across both focus group discussions frequently framed Malay as essential for fostering interethnic communication, national unity and cultural inclusivity in the workplace. Although not always the primary language of professional engagement, Malay was acknowledged as a vital medium for integrating into the broader Malaysian work culture and navigating everyday interactions with colleagues and clients from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In both formal and informal contexts, Malay was often used to align with workplace expectations and to connect meaningfully with Malay-speaking colleagues. As Interviewee 6 (I6) noted:

> *"BM is usually when we must adapt to local workplace requirements, especially with government staff or local organisations. Seniors choose BM to build rapport with Malay colleagues to ensure smooth collaboration. In the private sector, we normally we strongly comply with workplace policies or official communication standards." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 48-53)*

This sentiment was echoed in Focus Group Discussion 2, where Interviewee 3 (I3) highlighted that:

> *"Malay is essentially for national communication and integration." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 57-58).*

Also, Interviewee 2 (I2) added that:

> *"Malay is very important for us, for integration into the local society." (Interviewee 2 / I2, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, line 50)*

These findings support the overall concept of diglossia, where Bahasa Malaysia functions as a 'high variety' language in official and national contexts. Simultaneously, this aligns with Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Theory, where language choice is influenced by the sociocultural domain of interaction. In professional spaces where multicultural interaction is necessary, Malay emerges as a symbolic and functional tool for unity.

Moreover, Malay was also described as a means of showing cultural respect and navigating formalities. Interviewee 5 (I5) noted that:

> *"Malay language supports our local roles, especially when we want to settle things locally, like writing formal invitation letters or speaking with the public or even the 'bigshot' ministers who attend our events or come to our hospital premise." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 246-248)*

The practice illustrates a strategic choice that demonstrates both national loyalty and practical sociolinguistic competence, as emphasized by Adnan (2013), who researched the roles of Malay as a unifying agent and shared identity in Malaysia's multicultural setting. In sum, Malay language is perceived by young Indian professionals not only as a requirement for national and workplace compliance but also as a bridge language that facilitates belonging and cooperation in a multicultural society. This reinforces its role in nation-building and professional adaptability.

The findings show that Malay is perceived as a language of national belonging, inclusion and interethnic communication. While it may not carry the same professional capital as English or the same emotional attachment as Tamil, Malay holds an important integrative function within Malaysia's multilingual workplace. This supports the view that language choice among the participants is shaped by layered identities: English supports professional identity, Tamil supports ethnic and cultural identity and Malay supports civic and national belonging. Therefore, Malay functions as a bridge language that enables participants to participate more fully in Malaysia's multicultural professional environment.

4.4 Identity Expression Through Language Choices (RO3)

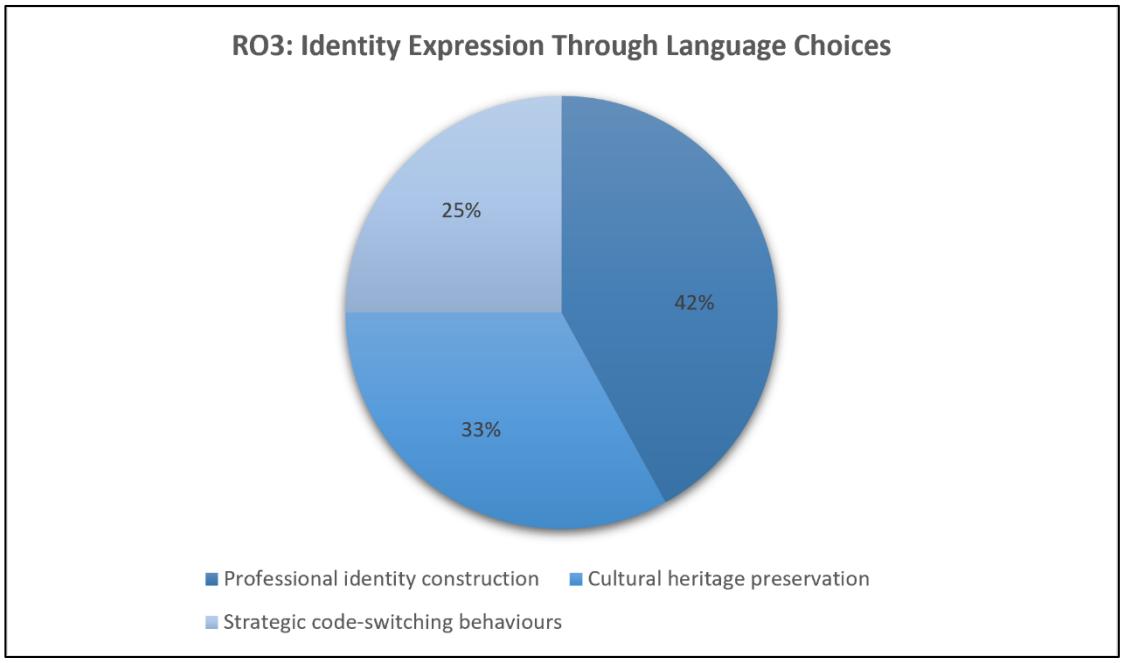


Figure 4.3 Identity Expression Through Language Choices (RO3)

In multilingual and multicultural societies such as Malaysia, language is more than a functional medium, it is a symbolic marker of identity, group belonging and social positioning. The data collected from both individual interviews and focus group discussions indicates that language choice among young Malaysian Indian professionals is deeply intertwined with the process of constructing, negotiating and performing identity within professional environments. Language becomes a vehicle through which participants navigate their dual realities: being professionals in corporate Malaysia while simultaneously upholding their ethnic and cultural roots.

Participants consistently demonstrated that their language decisions were shaped not only by situational demands, such as formality or audience, but also by the need to project professionalism, establish cultural solidarity and manage interpersonal relationships. These choices reflect both individual agency and broader societal expectations. For instance, English was often prioritised to communicate competence, intellect and leadership potential which are all the traits highly valued in professional settings. On the other hand, Tamil usage, though less prevalent in the workplace, emerged as a key mechanism for asserting cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging within intra-ethnic networks. Malay, the national language, was often used

to demonstrate inclusivity and national integration, especially in government-linked or locally rooted organisations.

The intersection of language and identity was particularly evident in how participants described their feelings of pride, struggle and adaptation when navigating between languages. These expressions were not static but dynamic and responsive to context. The data suggests that professional identity and cultural identity are not mutually exclusive, but rather coexist through fluid linguistic practices such as code-switching, accommodation and language mixing highlighting the multilingual competence of these professionals.

This section is organised into the following subthemes to reflect how language choices serve as a lens through which identity is expressed and shaped in professional life:

(i) 4.4.1 Professional identity construction
(ii) 4.4.2 Cultural heritage preservation
(iii) 4.4.3 Strategic code-switching behaviours

4.4.1 Professional Identity Construction

This subsection explores how language choice functions as a tool for constructing and asserting professional identity among young Indian professionals in Malaysia, as outlined in Research Objective 3. Language use at the workplace is not merely a communicative necessity until it becomes symbolic of one's competence, confidence and credibility within the professional sphere. Many participants indicated that English is strategically used to align with perceived professional norms and to present themselves as capable and competitive.

The perceived prestige of English, influenced by Malaysia's colonial history and its current global relevance, shapes participants' understanding of what it means to appear "professional". English is often associated with intelligence, sophistication and employability. Thus, the deliberate use of English enables participants to construct a professional identity that aligns with these values. As Interviewee 3 (I3) shared:

> *"Like them both, I also use English in formal settings or anything that's related to work. Outside of that, I'd definitely go*

> *with Malay or Tamil. This is for me to keep my professionalism at work and be close to my intimate circles after that." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 196-199)*

Similarly, Interviewee 6 (I6) emphasised the importance of English in demonstrating competence during interviews and work presentations:

> *"If your English is fluent, meaning you can communicate and so it fits with the professional communication style. Rather than when the managers speak in English, then you answer in another language, they won't be impressed with you already." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 69-72)*

These responses support Ferguson's (1959) notion of High Variety language use, where English occupies the high function domain in formal, institutional and educational contexts. The workplace becomes a space where High Variety English is necessary for maintaining status and mobility, while Malay and Tamil are often relegated to more informal interactions or personal networks.

However, this performative language choice is also deeply embedded within wider sociocultural power structures. As noted by Che Wan Roslan (2020), the use of English in professional spaces in Malaysia often perpetuates inequalities for those who are less proficient. This was evident in how some participants linked limited English fluency with fewer opportunities to lead or be selected for higher positions. For instance, Interviewee 4 (I4) shared that:

> *"I do notice some colleagues who are not so fluent in English, which tends to make them not understand something clearly and not be chosen as a group leader, for example." (Interviewee 4 / I4, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 116-119)*

Thus, professional identity construction through language is both empowering and exclusionary. English fluency becomes a gatekeeper to status and recognition, reinforcing earlier research findings that workplace communication patterns in Malaysia often reinforce hierarchical power relations through language. This professional persona, cultivated through linguistic performance, is not only about skill but also about signalling alignment with institutional values. Language choice becomes a conscious act of self-positioning, where fluency in the 'right' language marks the difference between being seen as competent or inadequate, included or marginalised.

The findings suggest that professional identity is actively constructed through language choice. English allows participants to project competence, confidence and credibility, but this construction is also shaped by institutional expectations that privilege English as the language of professionalism. Through Block's view of identity as socially constructed and negotiated, participants' use of English can be understood as part of the way they position themselves within the workplace. At the same time, the findings reveal that professional identity is not neutral, as it is closely tied to linguistic hierarchies that may advantage some speakers while marginalising others.

4.4.2 Cultural Heritage Preservation

Preserving cultural heritage through language was a significant theme across the interviews and focus group discussions. Tamil, as the mother tongue, played a central role in maintaining a sense of continuity with participants' ethnic roots. While professional spaces often demanded the use of English and Malay, Tamil remained an essential channel through which participants maintained their cultural identity and transmitted shared values, traditions and beliefs within their ethnic community. Interviewees described Tamil as a living representation of their ancestry, a connection to familial history and a bridge to intergenerational understanding. As Interviewee 5 (I5) reflected during the focus group:

> *"I use English 100% at the hospital but when I'm home, I switch to Tamil. Also, when I meet Indian aunties and uncles it's Tamil. It is just natural in order for me be seen as polite and humble." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 23-26)*

This pattern of language compartmentalisation where Tamil is reserved for familial and ethnic bonding aligns with Fishman's Domain Theory, which postulates that different languages serve distinct functions in specific social domains. A particularly powerful example of how Tamil serves as a bridge between identity and emotional connection was shared by Interviewee 3 (I3) in the written narrative frames shared online:

> *"During this team lunch, a colleague and I we were discussing this project in English when we switched to Tamil to talk about personal matters. A senior colleague overheard then joined our conversation also in Tamil. This thing is really natural. Away from the usual work language in English, we can get more personal connection. In that moment, my language choice is more personal for my inner self. Using Tamil allowed me to say things that I can't say in English. The native language you use is connected to your deep self, so I felt some sort of belonging in this professional environment. This experience also helped me to become more relaxed with I need to be in both professional and personal environments. Language is not just a tool for communication because the native language you have is your real self, real voice that can connect you to other people who also have that native language." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 25-39)*

In this scenario, Tamil was not used for its transactional utility, but rather as a tool of emotional resonance, bonding and cultural solidarity. It also echoes Ferguson's (1959) concept of diglossia, in which Tamil represents a 'low' variety language used in informal, emotionally charged settings that carry high symbolic value. Participants also acknowledged the evolving nature of Tamil usage in the workplace, especially in balancing fluency and emotional expression. Interviewee 2 (I2) from the online written narrative frames described an incident where Tamil played a powerful role in identity and emotional reconnection:

> *"Sensing he was not so comfortable I quickly changed to Tamil and I encouraged him to speak in whatever he could. As we talked, I noticed his anxiety changed to some sort of personal connection. Speaking Tamil even in a broken manner, I think allowed him to show his true self that he didn't normally do in the workplace." (Interviewee 2 / I2, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 56-61)*

This example underscores how the use of Tamil even when not fluent, carries symbolic power in affirming ethnic identity and cultural roots. It echoes Omar's (1992, 2015) perspective on language as a vessel of identity and Fishman's (1965/1986) theory, where Tamil continues to play a key role in expressing cultural solidarity in specific interactional settings.

In essence, the participants' selective use of Tamil within and beyond professional spaces reflects an intentional effort to preserve cultural identity while navigating modern workplace demands. Rather than abandoning their linguistic heritage in favour of dominant languages, these young professionals actively maintained Tamil as a meaningful part of their personal and professional identity. This conscious preservation aligns with the notion that language as a transmitter of collective memory and cultural continuity. By strategically incorporating Tamil in appropriate moments whether in private conversations, informal interactions, or community-oriented settings, participants affirmed that cultural heritage could coexist with and even enrich, their professional lives. Their narratives collectively assert that Tamil is not merely a relic of tradition but a living, evolving symbol of identity, pride and connection in Malaysia's multilingual professional landscape.

This theme shows that cultural identity continues to be maintained through Tamil, even within workplace environments where English and Malay are more dominant. Interpreted through identity theory, Tamil functions as a symbolic resource through which participants affirm belonging, heritage and emotional connection. The findings therefore suggest that professionalisation does not necessarily erase cultural identity. Instead, participants negotiate cultural preservation by reserving Tamil for moments of solidarity, intimacy and shared ethnic recognition.

4.4.3 Strategic Code-Switching Behaviours

Strategic code-switching emerged as a prominent linguistic behaviour among Malaysian young Indian professionals, reflecting a conscious adaptation to diverse communicative settings. Participants from both online written narrative frames and focus group discussions consistently described switching between English, Malay and Tamil based on context, audience and intent.

Code-switching served multiple functions: preserving professionalism, maintaining cultural ties, demonstrating politeness and fostering inclusivity. This multilingual dexterity was not random but rather a socially motivated and strategic act. Interviewee 2 (I2) described how shifting from English to Tamil during informal conversations was a way to build comfort with colleagues:

> *"If it's about work, then it's in English. If it's something else suddenly just like that, I change again. But usually if I 'auto switch', then I just switch to Tamil." (Interviewee 2 / I2, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 164-170)*

Participants employed English in formal domains such as meetings, emails and discussions with management, reinforcing its role as the language of professionalism. However, in interactions with Indian colleagues or patients, Tamil was commonly used to foster closeness and emotional resonance. Interviewee 1 (I1) noted:

> *"When there's a meeting we use English. Basically, to make work simpler in the formal settings, we use English more. But in the informal settings with our colleagues, not discussing work or whatnots, we may use Tamil because my Tamil friends or my Tamil colleagues, I try to use Tamil. Sometimes I mix of course, I mix with Malay and English a bit also. So, with my Malay friends I use Malay, that's also how it is with my Chinese friends, sometimes I use English or Malay. But when it comes to our job scope and talking about our sales, marketing things, mostly we totally just use English to communicate and work."*

(Interviewee 1 / I1, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 182-190)

Similarly, Interviewee 6 (I6) explained the purposeful use of Tamil in building rapport with patients and creating a shared sense of identity, even in workplace settings:

> *"By using Tamil in the workplace with those who can also speak it, we can help keep the language alive and even pass it on to the younger generation in a positive way." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 204-207)*

Domain Theory is once again relevant here, as code-switching reflects participants' sensitivity to the social expectations of different domains with Tamil in ethnic or cultural domains, English in professional domains and Malay in national or interethnic contexts. This aligns with the notion of diglossia, where each language holds its own functional prestige depending on the setting. Beyond functionality, code-switching was also utilised to avoid exclusion and enhance inclusivity. Interviewee 6 (I6) explained:

> *"Me, for the most part I always speak in English mostly. Unless like, some of my colleagues who are Malay that don't really or they're not very comfortable with the language. Then I go to them and speak Malay. But for the most part, I try to speak with everyone in English especially for the professional matters like asking about meetings and tasks and whatnot. But if the person asks me first in BM, then I will simply try to reply in BM." (Interviewee 6 / I6, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 178-183)*

This quote illustrates the respondent's fluidity in navigating multilingual spaces, choosing the language of the interlocutor to create a harmonious interaction. Likewise, another participant shared an instance where switching languages mid-conversation deepened a bond with a colleague:

> *"During this team lunch, a colleague and I we were discussing this project in English when we switched to Tamil to talk about personal matters. A senior colleague overheard then joined our conversation also in Tamil. This thing is really natural. Away from the usual work language in English, we can get more personal connection. In that moment, my language choice is more personal for my inner self." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 25-29)*

All of the participants repeatedly highlighted that whilst English projected competence and leadership, Tamil created personalised spaces of empathy and emotional connection. In this sense, code-switching not only enhanced communication efficiency but also affirmed the speaker's multifaceted identity. As Interviewee 5 (I5) noted:

> *"I use English 100% at the hospital but when I'm home, I switch to Tamil. Also, when I meet Indian aunties and uncles it's Tamil. It is just natural in order for me be seen as polite and humble. But mostly, I talk Malay with my Chinese and Malay colleagues and old friends outside of work settings." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 23-27)*

These reflections show that strategic code-switching is not merely a linguistic habit, but a culturally and socially embedded practice used to negotiate identity, solidarity and social expectations across Malaysia's multilingual professional landscape. This phenomenon reveals how language choices become powerful tools for navigating the complex interplay between professional credibility and cultural authenticity in Malaysian workplaces. Further, the practice demonstrates that speakers are actively and consciously managing multiple linguistic repertoires to achieve specific communicative goals, whether building rapport with colleagues, asserting expertise, or signalling belonging to particular social or professional groups.

From another viewpoint, code-switching in this context serves as a bridge between traditional cultural values and modern professional demands, allowing

individuals to maintain their ethnic and cultural identities while simultaneously participating in globalised business environments. This linguistic flexibility thus becomes an essential skill for success in Malaysia's diverse professional settings, where the ability to move fluidly between languages reflects not just bilingual competence, but also social intelligence and cultural adaptability.

The findings demonstrate that code-switching is not a random or unconscious habit, but a strategic practice shaped by context, audience and identity. Participants used English to perform professionalism, Tamil to express cultural closeness and Malay to support social inclusion. This reflects the dynamic nature of multilingual identity, where speakers move between languages to negotiate different aspects of the self. From a theory-based perspective, code-switching becomes a form of linguistic agency through which participants manage professional expectations while maintaining cultural authenticity.

4.5 Cross-cutting Themes

Whilst the previous sections focused on specific domains of language use, identity expression and attitudinal patterns, this section aims to synthesise broader insights that transcend individual research objectives. These cross-cutting themes emerging organically across both individual interviews and focus group discussions reflect deeper structural and societal patterns that influence how Malaysian young Indian professionals navigate their linguistic environments. The themes of language inequality and multilingual competence, in particular, underscore the complex interplay between language, power dynamics, cultural belonging and professional aspirations. By identifying these recurring threads, this section offers a more holistic understanding of how language not only facilitates communication, but also shapes access to opportunities, constructs identity boundaries and mediates social inclusion or exclusion in professional settings. Such findings are instrumental in understanding the broader sociolinguistic realities faced by minority groups in multicultural workplaces like Malaysia.

4.5.1 Language Inequality and Power Dynamics

One prominent theme was the unequal status assigned to different languages within professional spaces, which subsequently influenced how participants perceived

and performed their professional identities. English emerged as the dominant language of prestige, associated with intelligence, authority and employability. This reinforced power hierarchies within the workplace, often marginalising speakers who were less proficient in English. For instance, many participants noted that limited English fluency could hinder upward mobility and access to leadership roles. As Interviewee 5 (I5) noted:

> *"Language choices shape what people see as our professional skills. English fluency people usually link to intelligence and professionalism. Limited proficiency in languages lead to unfair judgments on your despite professional skills. So, language can fight stereotypes and make connections." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 61-65)*

Interviewee 1 (I1) echoed a similar concern based on personal experience navigating the complex professional work environment:

> *"You see there are some people who may have this cultural stereotype thingy. Negative stereotypes linked with certain languages which can give bad professional perception. Like for example, there are certain people if a language is seen as a lower class or linked with a certain race group, those who speak it may face challenges when they want to be professionals. For example, English is normally the more prestigious language. So, English in many ways get higher social and professional status. Automatically, those who speak it nicely will be seen as more professional and educated." (Interviewee 1 / I1, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 87-96)*

The data collected also revealed how language inequality could result in structural disadvantages. Several participants described scenarios where those who were less proficient in English were excluded from key projects, meetings, or leadership opportunities. Interviewee 3 (I3) illustrated this point clearly:

> *"For example, you don't get to be the speaker of your own project because others think you just can't speak English fluently, so you can't deliver the communications part of the project." (Interviewee 3 / I3, Focus Group Discussion 2 / FGD 2, lines 111-113)*

Moreover, Malay and Tamil, though valued for cultural and social integration, did not carry equal professional weight. While Bahasa Malaysia was important in government or local settings, Tamil was often restricted to informal, personal, or cultural domains, thereby reinforcing its marginalised status in institutional discourse. Despite the emphasis on multilingualism in Malaysia's national identity, the data revealed that professional spaces often functioned monolingually, privileging English and occasionally Malay, while Tamil remained linguistically sidelined. This imbalance created power differentials, affecting both interpersonal dynamics and career trajectories.

4.5.2 Multilingual Competence as Professional Asset

In contrast to the constraints of linguistic inequality, participants also recognised their multilingualism as a powerful resource. Rather than viewing the ability to switch between English, Malay and Tamil as a burden, many considered it a mark of versatility, cultural intelligence and adaptability, all crucial traits in Malaysia's diverse workforce. Interviewee 4 (I4) remarked:

> *"There was a time at work I chose to speak Tamil with a customer who was having trouble with English. I noticed they seemed more comfortable with Tamil, so I switched. Immediately, the customer relaxed and felt some ease talking to me. By using Tamil, I wasn't just making the conversation easier, I also show that I value our own people's culture." (Interviewee 4 / I4, Online written narrative frames / Narratives, lines 17-22)*

This perspective was reinforced in the focus groups. Interviewee 5 (I5) pointed out how her ability to speak four languages allowed her to navigate communication challenges more effectively:

> *"Teaming up with colleagues who are fluent in different languages actually make clear communication across the hospital… Like when talking to Interviewee 4, she's fluent in four languages. She sometimes helps me translate things so very easily." (Interviewee 5 / I5, Focus Group Discussion 1 / FGD 1, lines 146-149)*

The participants consistently framed multilingual competence as more than a communicative skill. It was a 'soft skill' that allowed them to embody multiple identities, build rapport and foster inclusivity. This skill also allowed them to serve a wider range of clients and patients, especially in the multiethnic Malaysian healthcare sector, where clear communication is essential.

Most importantly, the ability to code-switch across languages also gave participants control over how they presented themselves. It allowed them to retain cultural authenticity while also aligning with institutional expectations, thereby negotiating professional credibility on their own terms. Thus, while language inequality remains a challenge, multilingual competence has simultaneously become a strategic asset enabling participants to stand out, build bridges across cultures and succeed in multicultural professional settings.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study based on qualitative data gathered through written narrative frames, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions with six young Malaysian Indian professionals. The findings were organised according to the three research objectives and supported by direct excerpts from participants.

In relation to Research Objective 1, the findings revealed that language choice in the workplace was shaped by professional hierarchy, audience, context and the need to build rapport. English was commonly used in formal and hierarchical interactions,

Malay was used for interethnic communication and local integration, while Tamil was used in more personal and culturally meaningful exchanges. These findings show that workplace language choice was strategic and context-sensitive. For Research Objective 2, the findings showed that participants attached different values to Tamil, English and Malay. English was strongly associated with professionalism, competence and career mobility. Tamil was viewed as a marker of cultural identity, emotional connection and ethnic belonging. Malay was perceived as important for national integration, social inclusion and communication across ethnic groups. Finally, for Research Objective 3, the findings demonstrated that language choice played an important role in shaping social and professional identity. Participants used English to construct professional credibility, Tamil to preserve cultural heritage and code-switching to navigate different social and workplace expectations. Two cross-cutting themes also emerged from the data, namely language inequality and power dynamics and multilingual competence as a professional asset. Overall, the findings suggest that young Malaysian Indian professionals actively negotiate their multilingual repertoires to balance professional expectations, cultural identity and social belonging within Malaysia's workplace context.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter presents a critical discussion and conclusion of the research findings. It synthesises the analysis in Chapter 4 and situates the results within the wider sociolinguistic literature. The aim is to explain how the findings answer the research questions and to consider their broader implications.

5.1 Research Overview and Summary of Findings

This study investigated the factors influencing language choice, attitudes toward multilingual usage and identity expression among young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace. The three guiding research questions were:

a) What are the factors related to language choice and language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace domain?
b) What are the attitudes and beliefs of young Malaysian Indian professionals toward Tamil and other languages like English and Malay, with reference to their social and professional identities?
c) How does the experience of young Malaysian Indian professionals in the workplace domain contribute towards their social and professional identities?

For Research Question 1, the findings indicated that participants' language choices were strategic and context-dependent, influenced by professional hierarchy, audience consideration and cultural rapport. English was the dominant language in formal settings, Malay was used to build interethnic rapport and follow institutional norms and Tamil was retained for emotional and cultural resonance. These behaviours reflect Fishman's Domain Theory (1965/1986), in which language use varies across domains, as well as Ferguson's (1959) notion of diglossia and the use of high and low varieties depending on the context.

The findings for this research question also show that participants navigated multilingual environments by drawing on different linguistic resources depending on situational demands, demonstrating a level of linguistic flexibility that aligns with the

complexities of Malaysia's multicultural workplaces. Their language patterns reveal that linguistic choices were not only shaped by explicit organisational expectations but also by subtle interpersonal cues that determined how they positioned themselves within professional interactions. This indicates that workplace communication is experienced as a fluid process, where language is constantly adjusted to align with shifting roles, situational expectations and relational needs.

Furthermore, the findings highlight a consistent awareness among participants regarding how their language use contributes to the professional image they wish to project. This form of self-monitoring suggests that language operates as a form of symbolic behaviour through which individuals negotiate credibility, competence and social alignment within their working environments. The ability to alternate between English, Malay and Tamil based on context underscores the strategic dimension of language use among these professionals, reflecting not only communicative necessity but also the desire to manage impressions and maintain relational harmony.

For Research Question 2, attitudes toward multilingual usage were deeply intertwined with identity. English was viewed as a tool of professional capital and modernisation. Tamil, though functionally limited at work, was held in high affective regard, especially as a marker of cultural pride. Malay was seen as instrumental in fostering national unity. These findings align with Adnan (2017a, 2017b) and Ibrahim (2018), who emphasised how language reflects both functional utility and cultural expression in Malaysian society.

In addition to these attitudes, participants expressed a heightened awareness of the symbolic meanings associated with each language they used. Their reflections illustrate that language is not merely a tool of communication but also an important part of how they interpret their social surroundings and construct their sense of belonging. This was particularly evident in how participants described their emotional attachment to Tamil, despite its limited use in formal workplace settings. Their comments suggest that Tamil carries enduring cultural value, serving as a link between personal identity and community heritage.

Participants also articulated a nuanced understanding of how English functions as a pathway to upward mobility and wider societal acceptance. Their attitudes toward English extended beyond practical necessity, revealing aspirations tied to self-presentation, career advancement and participation in globalised professional spaces. At the same time, they recognised Malay as a unifying language that facilitated

smoother interpersonal interactions, especially in multi-ethnic teams. These layered attitudes reveal that participants assign differentiated roles to their languages based on both instrumental and identity-related factors.

For Research Question 3, participants' identity expressions were shaped through their language practices. Many constructed dual identities, blending professional presentation in English with cultural expression in Tamil. Code-switching emerged as a powerful tool for navigating personal and professional spaces. These experiences support Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1978) and underline the role of language in identity negotiation in multicultural, multilingual environments. In summary, the study highlighted the linguistic agility and identity negotiation strategies employed by young Malaysian Indian professionals as they manage expectations from professional environments while maintaining ties to their heritage.

The findings additionally illustrate that identity among young Malaysian Indian professionals is not fixed but continuously shaped through everyday linguistic decisions. Participants often shifted between different linguistic identities depending on who they were speaking to and the type of interaction taking place. This fluidity signifies that multilingualism plays a central role in how they enact, protect and express their identities in the workplace.

Participants' accounts also showed that navigating multilingual spaces enabled them to maintain a sense of cultural continuity while simultaneously meeting professional expectations. This balancing act often required careful consideration of when to foreground cultural identity through Tamil and when to adopt a more neutral or professional stance through English or Malay. These identity shifts highlight the role of language as a dynamic resource that allows individuals to construct different versions of themselves depending on social context.

Overall, the results for this research question reveal that identity formation for these young professionals is a complex and negotiated process in which language plays a central part. Their multilingual capabilities not only support communication but also provide an avenue for expressing personal beliefs, cultural loyalty and professional aspirations within Malaysia's diverse sociolinguistic landscape.

5.2 Discussion and Explanations for the Findings of the Study

The findings of this study illuminate the dynamic relationship between language choice, attitudes and identity among young Malaysian Indian professionals. The discussion below contextualises these findings within the broader framework of sociolinguistic theory and relevant literature.

5.2.1 Language Choice in the Workplace (Research Question 1)

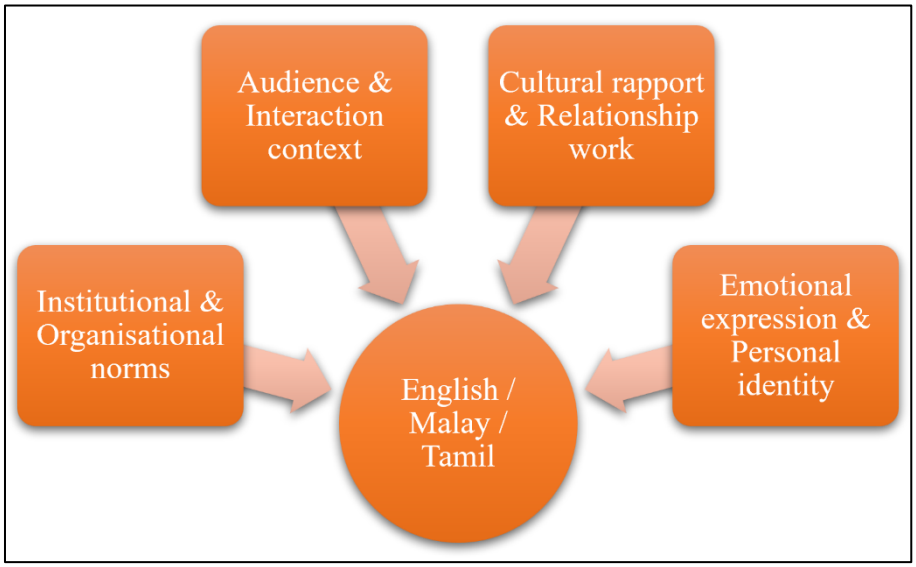


Figure 5.1 Emerging Factors Influencing Language Choice

This figure summarises the four main forces that shaped participants' language choices at work. Institutional expectations and workplace hierarchy positioned English as the default professional code, while audience familiarity and context activated shifts to Malay or Tamil. Cultural rapport-building influenced relational choices, especially in interethnic teams. Emotional expression also played a role, with Tamil enabling intimacy and English signalling professionalism. Together, these factors show that language choice is strategic and highly situational.

The dominant use of English in formal professional domains illustrates its perceived status as a high-variety language (Ferguson, 1959) and supports its role as a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2024). Participants used English to align with workplace hierarchies and to project professionalism, echoing the findings of Halimi (2008) on the symbolic power of English in formal institutions.

Audience and context considerations also shaped language choice. Participants adjusted their language based on the ethnicity or familiarity of the interlocutor, which is a clear example of domain-specific language use. Tamil and Malay were used strategically to foster inclusivity and relational harmony, as seen in both formal collaborations and informal exchanges.

Cultural sensitivity and rapport-building also emerged strongly. As highlighted by Che Wan Roslan (2020), the act of selecting a language to suit the listener reflects empathy and awareness of social dynamics. This confirms that language choice is not only professional but deeply interpersonal.

The findings also demonstrate that language choice was influenced by implicit organisational ideologies that participants had internalised through socialisation into the workplace. These ideologies, often unspoken, reinforced English as the 'appropriate' or 'default' language for high-level interactions. As Lippi-Green (2012) argues, institutions often embed linguistic norms that favour certain languages and varieties over others, contributing to the normalisation of linguistic inequality. Participants' tendency to avoid Tamil or Malay in front of superiors suggests that they were responding not only to explicit job expectations but also to broader ideological structures that position English as more legitimate or authoritative. This internalisation reflects the covert power English holds in Malaysian workplaces, even though Tamil and Malay remain vital components of participants' identities.

Moreover, the way participants shifted languages based on interactional goals highlights the role of agency in multilingual communication. Despite institutional pressures, participants exercised considerable autonomy in selecting languages that facilitated interpersonal connection or task efficiency. This reflects the concept of translanguaging as an agentive practice, where speakers draw on their full linguistic repertoires to achieve communicative goals rather than adhering strictly to rigid language boundaries. Although the settings in this study were not explicitly translanguaging environments, participants' behaviour exhibits similar fluidity, especially in interactions involving peers or clients who shared cultural or linguistic familiarity.

The participants' language choices also reveal the presence of linguistic accommodation as described by Giles and Coupland (1991). When interacting with clients or colleagues of different ethnicities, participants frequently shifted to Malay or English to reduce social distance and facilitate mutual understanding. This behaviour

demonstrates convergence; a form of linguistic alignment that enhances cooperation and reduces communicative friction. Conversely, divergence occurred when participants intentionally maintained Tamil with ethnic peers to reinforce in-group identity and cultural solidarity. Both strategies underscore how language choice functions as a means of navigating professional relationships and social boundaries.

Another key insight is the emotional dimension underlying language choice. While English was used to index professionalism, participants expressed reservations about how it sometimes created emotional distance or formality in interactions. Tamil and Malay, on the other hand, offered warmth and familiarity. This emotional contrast supports Pavlenko's (2005) observation that bilinguals often attach distinct affective meanings to each language, influencing how they communicate depending on the relational or emotional demands of the moment. The participants' decisions to switch languages during informal conversations, in moments of stress, or when offering empathy, show how language selection is tied to emotional expression.

Furthermore, language choice was often shaped by perceived expectations associated with particular workplace roles. For instance, participants who held customer-facing or managerial positions described greater pressure to maintain English use than those in administrative or technical roles. This differentiation reflects the influence of institutional language ideologies, whereby language practices vary according to organisational expectations, professional responsibilities and workplace contexts (Piller, 2024). The alignment between language use and job function indicates that organisational structures play a significant role in shaping linguistic behaviour.

When compared with previous Malaysian studies, the present findings both support and extend earlier research. Che Wan Roslan (2020) similarly found that Malaysian Tamil speakers strategically switch between languages according to context, interlocutor and communicative purpose. Likewise, Sathiah et al. (2025) reported that Malaysian Indians continue to alternate between Tamil and English depending on social domain and interactional needs. However, while these studies primarily examined multilingual practices in broader social contexts, the present study specifically demonstrates how workplace language choice is shaped by organisational hierarchy, institutional expectations and professional evaluation. English was not merely selected because it was widely understood, but because it symbolised competence, authority and legitimacy within the workplace. This suggests that language choice among young

Malaysian Indian professionals reflects not only domain-specific communication but also the unequal distribution of linguistic power within professional institutions.

Overall, the findings for Research Question 1 reveal a complex interaction between institutional norms, interpersonal goals, emotional needs and individual agency. Rather than selecting languages solely for communicative efficiency, participants strategically negotiated workplace expectations, interpersonal relationships and cultural identity through their multilingual repertoires. The findings therefore extend Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Theory by demonstrating that language choice within contemporary Malaysian workplaces is influenced not only by social domains but also by organisational power structures and professional identity construction. Consequently, this study contributes to Malaysian sociolinguistic scholarship by illustrating how multilingual professionals actively negotiate linguistic hierarchy while balancing communicative effectiveness, cultural belonging and career aspirations.

5.2.2 Attitudes Toward Tamil, English and Malay (Research Question 2)

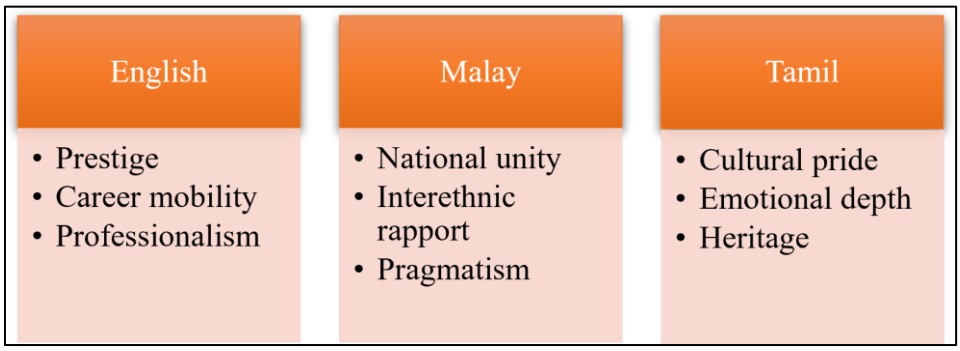


Figure 5.2 Attitudes of the Participants Toward the Three Languages

The figure illustrates how participants held different attitudes toward each language, based on function and emotional meaning. English carried prestige and was linked to professionalism and upward mobility. Malay was associated with national belonging and social harmony, especially in diverse teams. Tamil represented cultural pride, emotional depth and heritage identity. These layered attitudes demonstrate that all three languages play distinct roles in shaping participants' self-concepts.

The findings revealed that language attitudes among participants were layered. English was perceived as a symbol of economic capital and social prestige, consistent with Phillipson's (1992) critique of English linguistic imperialism. Its role in career advancement and professional image was seen as essential.

Tamil, while not used in high-function domains, was imbued with emotional value and cultural pride. Participants viewed it as part of their heritage and identity and a vessel of their unique cultural transmission. Malay, on the other hand, holds a very unique position. Though not typically linked to professional ambition, it was respected as the national language and used to facilitate harmony among ethnically diverse colleagues, as noted by Pillai (2022) and Ibrahim (2018).

A deeper analysis of participants' attitudes reveals that English functions not only as an instrumental resource but also as a symbolic marker of aspiration and modernity. Many participants associated English with global relevance, technological advancement and contemporary professional identity. This lines up with Kachru's (1990) notion of English as a 'language of wider communication,' where its value transcends local contexts and is tied to global participation. For young professionals navigating increasingly internationalised industries, English becomes a linguistic tool that signals competence and readiness to engage with broader markets. Such attitudes reflect the socio-economic pressures placed on Malaysian professionals, who perceive English mastery as essential for career competitiveness.

Despite English's dominance, participants also expressed a degree of ambivalence, acknowledging that prioritising English sometimes led to reduced emotional expressiveness or a sense of disconnection from their cultural identities. This ambivalence suggests that English can simultaneously empower and marginalise multilingual speakers, depending on how they negotiate the unequal power relations associated with dominant languages (Piller, 2024). In the context of this study, participants embraced English for professional legitimacy while remaining aware of the cultural costs associated with sidelining their heritage language in certain contexts.

Tamil, in contrast, was consistently framed as a language of emotional depth, cultural belonging and personal significance. Participants expressed pride in being Tamil speakers, emphasising its role in maintaining cultural continuity within the Malaysian Indian community. This affective orientation supports Fishman's (1991) concept of intimate retention, wherein minority languages survive through emotional and cultural reinforcement even when economic incentives favour dominant languages. Participants' attachment to Tamil, despite its limited work use, highlights how linguistic identity can persist even in environments that do not explicitly reward its use.

Malay's position in participants' attitudes reflects a pragmatic understanding of Malaysia's socio-political landscape. Participants demonstrated respect for Malay as

the national language and viewed it as essential for maintaining positive interethnic relationships. Their attitudes reflect 'linguistic citizenship' or the willingness to use national or shared languages to contribute to social cohesion (Ting & Ling, 2013). Malay was not typically associated with symbolic prestige or global mobility, yet it carried significant value as a language of national belonging and social inclusivity.

Another notable finding is the coexistence of positive attitudes toward all three languages, albeit for different reasons. This demonstrates the multilayered linguistic ideology participants hold, where each language contributes uniquely to their identity and social experiences. This shows how 'language-as-resource' is a valid orientation (Ruiz, 1984) further suggesting that participants view their multilingualism as an asset rather than a burden. Their appreciation for the distinct roles played by Tamil, English and Malay shows an integrative linguistic mindset, allowing them to draw on each language strategically depending on context and purpose.

These findings are largely consistent with previous Malaysian studies examining multilingual attitudes. Ting and Zainol Abidin (2023) similarly reported that heritage languages continue to function as important markers of ethnic identity despite the increasing dominance of English in education and professional domains. Likewise, Su (2024) found that English-dominant multilingual speakers continued to negotiate cultural identity despite their frequent use of English. However, the present study extends these findings by examining multilingual attitudes specifically within the workplace, where participants simultaneously viewed English as professional capital, Tamil as cultural identity and Malay as a language of national belonging. This demonstrates that language attitudes are shaped not only by cultural affiliation but also by institutional expectations and perceived socioeconomic value.

Overall, participants' attitudes towards English, Tamil and Malay demonstrate that multilingualism among young Malaysian Indian professionals is characterised by both pragmatic adaptation and cultural commitment. Rather than viewing these languages as competing resources, participants assigned distinct symbolic, emotional and functional roles to each language according to context. At the same time, the findings reveal an underlying identity conflict, whereby participants valued Tamil as an important marker of cultural heritage while recognising that English was essential for professional legitimacy and career progression. This contributes to existing Malaysian sociolinguistic literature by illustrating how language attitudes emerge from the

interaction between personal identity, institutional power and broader socioeconomic realities.

5.2.3 Language and Identity in the Workplace (Research Question 3)

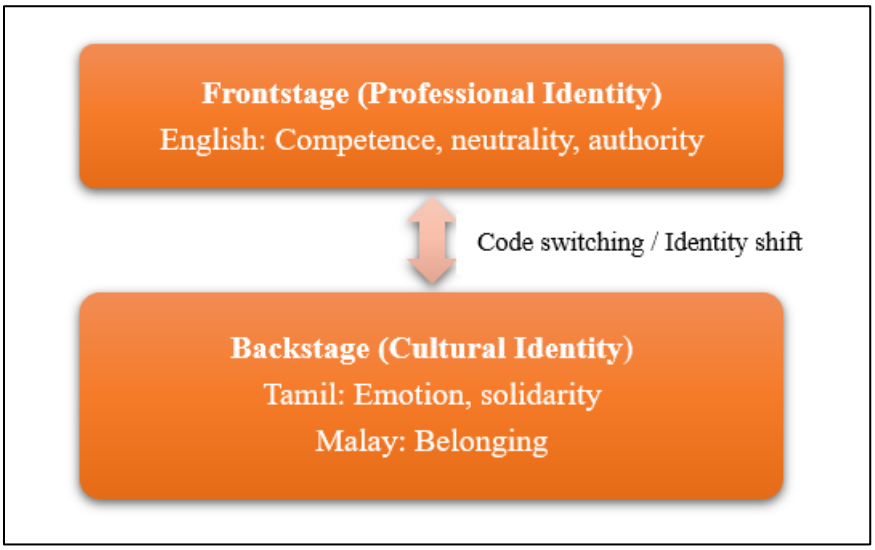


Figure 5.3 Language and Identity at the 'Frontstage' and 'Backstage'

This figure shows how identity is performed differently depending on language use. English dominated the "frontstage," where participants aimed to appear competent and professional. Tamil formed part of the "backstage," allowing emotional expression, solidarity and cultural closeness. Malay contributed to national identity and connection across ethnic groups. Code-switching acted as a bridge between these roles, helping participants negotiate shifting identity demands. Identity construction was quite evident through the participants' code-switching practices and their reflective narratives on language use. Language was not only a tool but a symbolic marker of belonging and alignment. English reflected professionalism, while Tamil allowed participants to express personal sentiments and connect with ethnic peers.

Strategic code-switching functioned as both a bridge and boundary, consistent with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model and recent findings that view code-switching as a dynamic process of identity negotiation and social positioning in multilingual interactions (Rojas, 2025). Participants fluidly moved between languages to match situational needs and relational dynamics, illustrating how in the real-world individuals switch behaviours to adapt to contextually relevant group norms.

The findings also reveal that identity was performed differently depending on the linguistic choices participants made in various contexts. When participants used English with superiors or in formal interactions, they were performing a professional identity that aligned with organisational expectations of competence, neutrality and authority. This reflects Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, in which individuals manage impressions by presenting a particular version of themselves to align with situational demands. In the workplace, English became part of the professional "front stage," allowing participants to present themselves as confident, capable and aligned with institutional norms.

In contrast, Tamil functioned as part of the "backstage" identity where participants felt freer to express their emotions, humour and cultural nuances. The shift from English to Tamil in informal exchanges indicates that participants used language to navigate the emotional boundaries between professional and personal spheres. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) argue that multilingual individuals use language to negotiate identity positions in real time. In this study, participants' code-switching demonstrated their ability to move between identities as needed, adjusting their language to match the relational and emotional requirements of each interaction.

Participants also described moments when using Tamil allowed them to demonstrate solidarity with ethnic peers or clients, thereby reinforcing a sense of collective identity. This is consistent with the in-group out out-group distinction, where speakers reinforce group membership through linguistic convergence. By using Tamil with Indian colleagues, participants strengthened communal bonds and affirmed their cultural affiliation. Conversely, using Malay or English in interethnic interactions allowed them to signal openness, inclusivity and respect for national norms

The findings also suggest that code-switching served a protective function in certain workplace situations. For example, participants described switching languages to avoid appearing confrontational, to soften criticism, or to express empathy in emotionally sensitive situations. This demonstrates that linguistic choices are tied to identity performance as well as to interpersonal sensitivity. Holmes (2000) notes that language choices in professional environments often reflects 'relational work' or ways of managing social relationships through linguistic behaviour. Participants' code-switching very much exemplified relational work, allowing them to maintain professionalism while modifying tone or emotional intensity through language selection.

Additionally, identity negotiation was evident in the way participants navigated cultural expectations alongside professional ones. Some participants expressed the tension of wanting to maintain cultural authenticity by using Tamil while also conforming to workplace norms that prioritised English. This duality finds support in Norton's (2013) argument that identity is a site of struggle for multilingual speakers who must constantly reconcile competing social expectations. Participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability by constructing hybrid identities that integrated their cultural backgrounds with their professional aspirations.

The findings also demonstrate that identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals is characterised by continuous negotiation rather than stability. This supports Block's (2006; 2015) argument that identities are socially constructed and constantly reshaped through interaction, while reinforcing Norton's (2013) view that multilingual identities develop within unequal relations of power. Participants did not experience multilingualism as problematic in itself. Rather, identity conflict emerged because different languages possessed unequal symbolic and institutional value within the workplace. English represented professional legitimacy and authority, whereas Tamil remained closely associated with cultural continuity and emotional belonging. Consequently, participants continuously balanced professional aspirations with cultural authenticity through strategic language choice and code-switching.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that language serves not only as a communicative resource but also as a mechanism through which identities are continuously constructed, negotiated and performed. Participants actively balanced competing professional and cultural expectations by drawing upon their multilingual repertoires in different workplace situations. This study therefore extends previous research by illustrating that identity negotiation among Malaysian Indian professionals is closely intertwined with linguistic hierarchy, institutional power and cultural belonging (Chandras, 2023; Dutta, 2016; Huju, 2023). Rather than existing as separate identities, professional and ethnic identities were shown to coexist dynamically through strategic multilingual practices (Block, 2015).

5.2.4 Integration with Sociolinguistic Theories

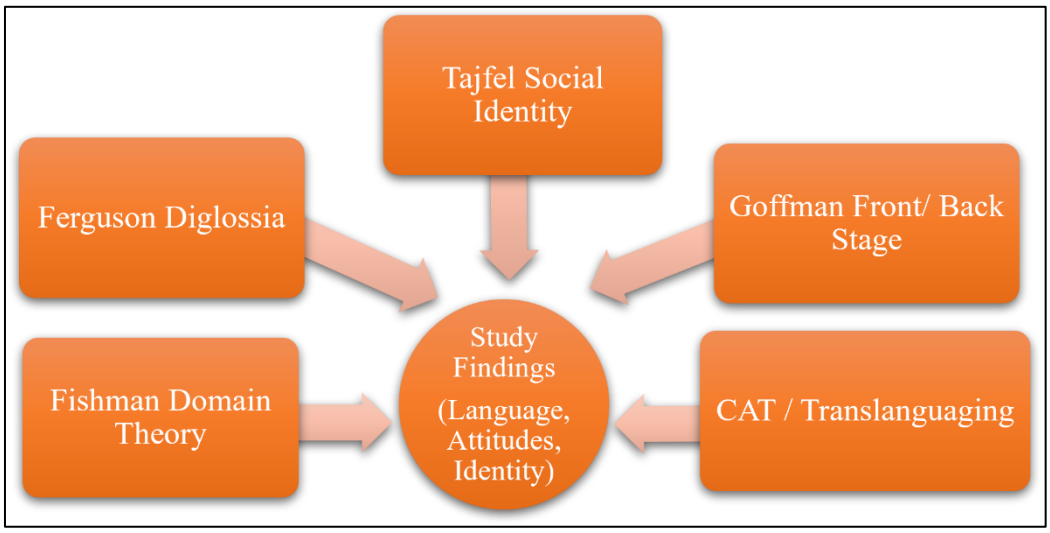


Figure 5.4 Integration of Finding with More Established Sociolinguistic Theories

This figure links the findings with major sociolinguistic theories. Fishman's Domain Theory explains domain-specific language patterns, while diglossia accounts for functional separation between English and Tamil. Social Identity Theory and Goffman's concepts show how language signals different identity performances. Accommodation Theory explains shifts toward or away from interlocutors. The figure demonstrates how this study sits at the intersection of multiple theories.

Tamil was largely reserved for informal, affective exchanges, while English and Malay dominated formal and interethnic interactions. In other words, the roles of language in both function and identity are evident in the participants' careful selection of language based on context and emotion. These findings reflect the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of language attitudes, whereby multilingual speakers assign different beliefs, emotions and behavioural tendencies to different languages according to their social experiences and communicative purposes (Li & Wei, 2022). Participants did not merely use different languages; they associated each language with distinct emotions, behaviours and social purposes.

The alignment of these findings with classical and contemporary sociolinguistic theories highlights the depth of linguistic negotiation that participants engage in daily. Domain Theory provides a strong interpretive framework for understanding why participants consistently associated English with professional tasks, Tamil with personal or emotional domains and Malay with interethnic or relational settings. The

findings reinforce Fishman's assertion that language use follows predictable patterns within stable social domains, yet this study also demonstrates that these boundaries are permeable, with participants frequently shifting between languages in hybrid or fluid contexts. This suggests that this model remains relevant but must be expanded to account for the increasingly dynamic multilingual realities of modern workplaces.

The diglossia model similarly helps explain the functional differentiation observed among the three languages. English functioned as the high variety, associated with formality, prestige and professionalism, while Tamil served as the low variety linked to intimacy, emotion and cultural belonging. Malay occupied an intermediate space, demonstrating that diglossic relationships can exist on a spectrum rather than as binary oppositions. These findings contribute to evolving discussions about 'polyglossia' in multilingual societies, where multiple languages perform distinct functional roles depending on context.

Additionally, the findings intersect with Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, particularly in how participants viewed English as a resource that enhanced their professional legitimacy. Their emphasis on using English to project competence and secure respect reflects how linguistic practices are shaped by broader power structures that privilege certain languages. Tamil, though high in symbolic and emotional capital, lacked the institutional capital that English provided, demonstrating Bourdieu's distinction between different forms of linguistic value.

Recent sociolinguistic theories on translanguaging further illuminate the fluidity observed in participants' language use. Li (2023) conceptualises translanguaging as the dynamic process through which multilingual speakers strategically draw upon their entire linguistic repertoires to construct meaning, negotiate identities and respond to diverse communicative contexts. While participants in this study used English, Malay and Tamil in contextually distinct ways, their code-switching behaviour and flexible transitions between languages reflect a translanguaging orientation. Their linguistic practices demonstrate how multilingual professionals mobilise their linguistic resources to respond to different communicative demands, often integrating features from multiple languages within a single interaction.

The findings also extend Norton's (2013) work on identity as dynamic and socially constructed. Participants' shifting identities across linguistic contexts demonstrate that language choice is part of a continual negotiation of who they are and how they wish to be perceived. The tension between presenting a professional identity

through English and maintaining cultural authenticity through Tamil illustrates the complexity of identity work among multilingual speakers. This duality supports poststructuralist views of identity as non-linear, contested and performative.

Collectively, these findings suggest that no single sociolinguistic theory is sufficient to explain the multilingual experiences of young Malaysian Indian professionals. Fishman's (1965/1986) Domain Theory explains the context-dependent distribution of languages, Ferguson's (1959) concept of diglossia accounts for functional differentiation between formal and informal language use, while Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital explains why English possesses greater institutional value than Tamil. At the same time, Block (2006; 2015) and Norton (2013) provide insight into how participants continuously negotiated professional and cultural identities within unequal linguistic environments. The present study therefore demonstrates the complementary value of integrating multiple sociolinguistic perspectives when examining multilingual identity in contemporary Malaysian workplaces.

Overall, the integration of these theoretical perspectives demonstrates that multilingual language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals cannot be understood solely as a matter of communication. Rather, language operates simultaneously as a form of symbolic capital, a marker of cultural identity and a mechanism through which institutional power is reproduced. The present study therefore contributes to Malaysian sociolinguistic research by offering a more holistic understanding of how multilingual professionals negotiate workplace expectations, linguistic hierarchy and identity construction within an increasingly globalised yet culturally diverse society.

5.2.5 Language as Yuppie Identity Performance

Before moving to the implications, it is important to revisit the concept of the yuppie, as introduced in the literature review, which was originally coined to capture a very specific social type: young, upwardly mobile, urban professionals whose identities are visibly shaped by their career ambitions, consumption patterns and cosmopolitan sensibilities (Aalst and Nortier, 2018; Zhang, 2005). Whilst the term carries the cultural imprint of the 1980s, it has retained considerable analytical traction in understanding

how young professionals in postcolonial and globalising societies negotiate public identity through the markers they adopt, project and perform.

In the Malaysian context, where ethnicity, language and professional aspiration are deeply entangled, the yuppie identity framework offers a particularly productive lens for revisiting what the data in this study revealed. The six young Indian professionals (six Indian yuppies) who participated in this research were not simply making pragmatic linguistic choices, but they were, in meaningful and demonstrable ways, performing the yuppie identity and they were doing so primarily through the languages they chose to use, when and with whom.

Zhang's (2005) study of a 'Chinese yuppie' in Beijing showed that phonological variation and the construction of a professional persona were linked. What emerged in this present study echoes that finding but extends it into the richer and more complex multilingual terrain of urban Malaysia, where the yuppie identity is not performed through a single linguistic variety but through the strategic management of three distinct languages with each carrying its own symbolic weight. The participants in this study demonstrated a consistent pattern of linguistic self-presentation ('frontstage' and 'backstage') that aligns closely with the defining features of the yuppie social identity. Language was the primary medium through which these features were expressed and crucially, recognised by others in their immediate social and especially work environments.

English, in the accounts of the participants, functioned as the central pillar of their yuppie identity performance. Its dominance in formal professional settings was not simply a response to institutional demands but a deliberate act of self-positioning. This is precisely the kind of linguistic self-fashioning that the yuppie framework anticipates. English is not merely a communicative tool and it becomes a badge, a costume and a front of stage performance in Goffman's (1959) sense of the term. Indeed, to speak English well, clearly and in the right register is to announce one's membership in the mobile, aspirational and globally oriented professional class.

For young Indian professionals in Malaysia, a group whose ethnic identity has historically been associated with manual labour and plantation communities, this performance of English-dominant professionalism carries an additional dimension of social elevation and self-reinvention that is deeply characteristic of the yuppie orientation. However, what distinguishes the yuppie identity of the participants from

more simplistic interpretations of the term is precisely the layered and nuanced way in which they managed their other languages alongside English.

A yuppie who only speaks English in an urban Malaysian hospital would in fact, be poorly adapted to the social realities of the workplace. The participants understood this implicitly. Malay was employed as a language of national belonging, of institutional compliance and of interethnic goodwill. This deployment of Malay as a 'bridge language' reflects a sophisticated awareness of how the Malaysian yuppie must navigate not only the global professional world but also the local socio-political landscape. The ability to code-switch fluently and appropriately between English and Malay signals a form of cultural and civic literacy that is itself a marker of urban professional sophistication and therefore a clear component of the yuppie identity.

Yet perhaps the most revealing dimension of the yuppie identity construction observed is the role that Tamil played. For a group of young professionals who are actively performing an upwardly mobile, cosmopolitan identity through their use of English and Malay, Tamil occupies a complicated but deeply significant position. On the surface, it might appear to be the language that the yuppie identity leaves behind as the heritage code is associated with an older, less professionally mobile generation. What this study found, however, tells a more nuanced and arguably more interesting story. The participants *did not* abandon Tamil. Rather, they incorporated it into a broader and more sophisticated identity repertoire, using it selectively, affectively and with evident intentionality.

What is significant here, from the yuppie identity perspective, is that the participants' use of Tamil was not a retreat from professional identity, it was an enrichment of it. For instance, they could move fluently from English in a meeting to Tamil over lunch and back again to demonstrate a kind of multilingual dexterity that is, in the Malaysian context, a form of social and professional sophistication. The yuppie, in this reading, is not the monolingual English speaker who has shed all ethnic markers in favour of a generic professional persona. The Malaysian Indian yuppie is the professional who knows when to speak English, when to use Malay and when a quiet switch to Tamil can create trust, warmth and a connection that no amount of English fluency can produce.

This selective and affective use of Tamil also maps onto the broader pattern of backstage identity performance that the data consistently revealed. As discussed in Section 5.2.3, participants used Tamil as part of their backstage self, the more private

and emotionally authentic space behind the frontstage English dominated professional performance. What the yuppie lens adds to this analysis is the observation that the capacity to maintain and manage this backstage identity, rather than suppressing it entirely, is itself part of the contemporary yuppie's social competence. This speaks directly to the communal dimension of the yuppie identity as it plays out among the participants. Their linguistic choices were not purely self-oriented; they were also acts of community maintenance, of keeping the Tamil-speaking professional community cohesive and culturally rooted even within the pressures of a globalised and English-dominated workplace.

Taken together, the data suggest that the yuppie identity, as lived and expressed by these six young Malaysian Indian professionals, is neither simply an adoption of Western or global professional norms nor a straightforward rejection of ethnic heritage. It is rather, a creatively negotiated and linguistically managed synthesis of the two. The participants expressed their yuppie identity by using English to signal professional competence and global alignment, Malay to signal civic belonging and interethnic adaptability and Tamil to signal cultural depth, emotional authenticity and intra-ethnic solidarity. Each language carried a distinct identity function and the ability to move between them fluidly and appropriately was the most distinctive marker of the Malaysian Indian yuppie. As Aalst and Nortier (2018) posited, yuppie identities in contemporary multicultural urban contexts are constructed through the sophisticated management of multiple social and cultural codes, of which language is among the most powerful. What this study contributes is an empirically grounded illustration of how that plays out in the lived experience of young ethnic minority professionals navigating the complex and multilayered linguistic landscape of contemporary Malaysia.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that multilingual language use among young Malaysian Indian professionals is shaped by the interaction of institutional power, workplace expectations, emotional attachment and cultural identity. English functions as the dominant language of professional legitimacy, Malay facilitates national integration and interethnic communication, while Tamil remains central to cultural continuity and emotional belonging. Rather than replacing one another, these languages perform complementary roles that enable participants to navigate multiple social worlds simultaneously. The study therefore illustrates that multilingualism is not merely a communicative competence but a strategic resource through which individuals

negotiate identity, belonging and professional success within Malaysia's multilingual workplace.

5.3 Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the interplay between language choice, attitudes and identity among young Malaysian Indian professionals. These implications extend to various stakeholders, including general audiences, students in the fields of art and literature, sociolinguistics and scholars within the broader linguistic and sociolinguistic context.

5.3.1 For General Audiences

This research sheds light on the linguistic diversity in Malaysia and the challenges faced by minority language speakers in balancing cultural preservation and professional advancement. For the general public, particularly Malaysian citizens, the findings promote greater awareness and appreciation of the cultural and linguistic dynamics within the Malaysian Indian community.

Understanding the significance of Tamil in informal and cultural contexts and the role of English and Malay language in professional and social integration can foster mutual respect and interethnic harmony. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of linguistic adaptability and cultural sensitivity, traits that can benefit society at large in a multicultural environment like Malaysia.

Beyond these insights, the findings emphasise how everyday language practices among minority communities reflect broader societal values and pressures. For general audiences, understanding these dynamics encourages a more empathetic and informed view of how multilingual Malaysians navigate their daily lives. It highlights that language is not simply a communication tool but is deeply connected to emotional well-being, professional confidence and cultural continuity. By recognising the linguistic negotiations that individuals undertake, the public may gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of multicultural living.

The study also demonstrates that minority languages such as Tamil continue to thrive in intimate and cultural domains, despite the dominance of English in professional settings. For the general public, this serves as a reminder that linguistic diversity remains a vital component of Malaysia’s heritage. Preserving this diversity

requires not only formal policies but also positive social attitudes. Increased awareness may encourage families, communities and cultural organisations to continue transmitting heritage languages across generations.

Additionally, the findings highlight the silent pressures experienced by multilingual professionals who must constantly adjust their language use to meet the expectations of various social groups. General audiences may gain insight into how linguistic shifts can impact self-esteem, identity negotiation and interpersonal relationships. Such awareness is crucial for reducing linguistic prejudice and promoting acceptance of different accents, linguistic varieties and code-switching practices. It challenges the pervasive stereotypes that equate English proficiency with intelligence or competence, encouraging Malaysians to move towards more inclusive perceptions of linguistic ability.

The study's implications also extend to the promotion of interethnic understanding. By demonstrating how Malay serves as an important bridge language for social cohesion, the findings reinforce the role of shared languages in strengthening national unity. General audiences may recognise the importance of embracing multilingual communication as a means of fostering trust, cooperation and social integration across ethnic lines. Ultimately, it encourages the public to value multilingualism as a national strength rather than a barrier. It underscores that linguistic flexibility and cultural respect are essential components of harmonious coexistence in Malaysia's plural society. By appreciating the linguistic journeys of minority communities, the general audience can play a role in nurturing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive Malaysian identity.

5.3.2 For Students in the Arts, Literature and Sociolinguistics

For students studying arts, literature, or sociolinguistics, this research provides a practical example of how language functions as a tool for expressing identity and navigating complex social contexts. The findings can inspire deeper exploration into how language use reflects broader sociocultural dynamics.

Students can draw parallels between the themes uncovered in this study such as linguistic hybridity, code-switching and cultural preservation with other works of literature or sociolinguistic theories. For instance, the findings can inform literary analyses of Malaysian-Indian authors or creative projects that depict the linguistic

realities of minority communities. Sociolinguistic students, in particular, can use this as a case study to examine real-world applications of concepts like Gumperz's theory of speech communities (1982) or Tajfel's Social Identity Theory.

For students in the arts and literature, the findings provide rich material for understanding how language can construct identities in and as creative expression. Many Malaysian Indian writers incorporate English, Malay and Tamil to reflect the lived realities of their communities. This study's insights into multilingual identity negotiation help students analyse literary works more critically, recognising how authors use multiple languages to symbolise cultural conflict, belonging, or hybridity. The exploration of Tamil as an emotional and cultural language, for example, can inform interpretations of poetry and prose where heritage language use signifies intimacy, memory, or resistance.

For sociolinguistics students, the findings provide a concrete example of how theoretical concepts manifest in actual workplace interactions. The study illustrates how Domain Theory, Speech Accommodation Theory and Social Identity Theory operate in natural settings. Students can examine how these theories overlap, interact, or diverge when applied to multilingual Malaysian professionals. This strengthens students' ability to critically evaluate theoretical frameworks rather than treating them as abstract ideas.

Students can also use this research to explore broader sociolinguistic themes such as linguistic inequality, language ideology and identity performance. The data show how English is privileged in professional settings, which mirrors global patterns of linguistic hierarchy. By analysing this relationship, students gain a clearer understanding of how language intersects with power, class and social mobility. This awareness is essential for emerging scholars seeking to contribute meaningfully to sociolinguistic discussions.

Additionally, the findings encourage students to reflect on their own linguistic experiences. Many Malaysian students navigate similar multilingual contexts and this research offers a mirror through which they can better understand their own language practices. This personal engagement strengthens their academic insight and deepens their connection to sociolinguistic issues.

5.3.3 For Scholars in the Language and Sociolinguistic Context

Scholars and researchers in the fields of language, linguistics and sociolinguistics can leverage the findings of this study to enhance their understanding of multilingualism and its impact on identity construction. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on minority languages and their role in modern professional settings, offering a Malaysian perspective that may serve as a comparative framework for similar studies globally.

Moreover, the study's exploration of attitudes toward Tamil, English and Malay language provides valuable data for policy makers and educators aiming to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity. It highlights the need to develop strategies that support heritage language maintenance while equipping individuals with the linguistic skills required to thrive in a globalised economy.

For scholars, the findings offer an opportunity to advance research on the complexities of multilingualism in postcolonial societies. Malaysia's unique linguistic landscape—shaped by colonial history, ethnic diversity and modern globalisation—makes it a fertile ground for examining how minority communities navigate language hierarchies. This study contributes empirical evidence that can refine existing sociolinguistic models by demonstrating the nuanced ways individuals blend linguistic resources to meet institutional, cultural and personal demands.

The findings also underscore the need for scholars to reconsider rigid boundaries between "heritage language," "national language," and "professional language." Participants' multilingual practices reveal that these categories are fluid rather than fixed. This challenges conventional models of diglossia and calls for theoretical updates that better reflect contemporary multilingual realities. Scholars may explore how evolving socio-economic landscapes reshape the functional roles of languages in professional environments.

Additionally, the role of Tamil in identity construction opens new research directions for scholars working on minority language vitality. While Tamil's visibility may be limited in formal domains, its emotional significance persists strongly among young Malaysian Indian professionals. This finding supports existing research on heritage language resilience but also suggests the need to examine the factors that sustain emotional attachment in multilingual urban settings. Scholars can build on this by investigating intergenerational transmission, digital usage and community initiatives

that preserve minority languages. Code-switching, as revealed in this study, serves not only communicative functions but also symbolic and relational ones.

The findings also hold implications for language policy research. Scholars interested in language planning can use the data to examine the alignment between language policy goals and actual workplace practices. For example, while English is heavily promoted in higher education and corporate settings, Tamil remains largely weaker in official communication channels despite its cultural significance.

Finally, the study's methodological approach offers a model for scholars conducting qualitative sociolinguistic research. The use of narrative frames, interviews and focus groups generated 'thick' data. Scholars may adopt similar methods to explore multilingual identity in other minority communities or to conduct comparative studies across countries. Through such work, the field can continue developing a more holistic understanding of how multilingual individuals navigate increasingly complex sociolinguistic environments.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study contribute to understanding the language choices and identity construction of young Malaysian Indian professionals in workplace settings. However, there remain areas that warrant further exploration to expand and deepen the understanding of this topic. Future researchers are encouraged to consider the following recommendations.

5.4.1 Broader Participant Demographics

This study focused on young Malaysian Indian professionals in urban settings. Future research could include participants from rural areas or different socioeconomic backgrounds to examine whether these factors influence language choices and attitudes. Additionally, exploring a wider age range could reveal generational differences in language use and identity formation.

Expanding participant demographics would also allow researchers to examine how educational background, employment sector and linguistic exposure shape language behaviour. For instance, individuals working in government sectors may encounter different linguistic expectations than those in private corporations, leading to different strategies of language negotiation. Similarly, rural participants may

demonstrate stronger attachment to Tamil or Malay due to community-based linguistic practices, potentially contrasting with the English-dominant patterns seen in urban centres. Research could also consider the experiences of older Malaysian Indian professionals who were educated during a different policy era, such as under earlier English-medium schooling systems. This may reveal generational shifts in attitudes about Tamil maintenance, Malay proficiency and English prestige.

Furthermore, including participants with diverse migration backgrounds, such as recent returnees from overseas studies or second-generation Indian Malaysians may offer insights into how global mobility shapes multilingual identities. By broadening the demographic scope, future studies can offer a more comprehensive and representative understanding of multilingual practices across the Malaysian Indian community.

5.4.2 Expanding Language Contexts

While this research primarily analysed language choices in workplace domains, future studies could explore other domains such as education, family settings, or religious practices. Examining how language choices vary across these domains can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of language in different aspects of life.

Language practices often shift dramatically depending on context and examining additional domains would deepen understanding of how multilingual individuals negotiate identity outside professional settings. For example, exploring language use within family units could reveal intergenerational dynamics shaping Tamil maintenance or shift. Research in educational contexts, such as university environments or extracurricular spaces, may reveal how young adults use English and Malay to navigate academic expectations while retaining heritage language practices among peers.

Religious and cultural domains, particularly in Hindu temples or community events, may highlight the symbolic and ritualistic significance of Tamil, shedding light on its role as a cultural anchor. Additionally, social domains such as friendships, romantic relationships, or recreational spaces offer opportunities to observe how individuals strategically shift linguistic repertoires based on emotional intimacy or identity alignment. Future research could also compare workplace behaviour with these

informal contexts to identify whether participants display consistent multilingual patterns or experience domain-specific linguistic conflicts. By examining multiple domains, researchers can build a holistic understanding of how identity and language intersect across the full spectrum of a multilingual individual's life.

5.4.3 Investigating the Role of Technology

With the increasing influence of digital communication, future studies could explore how social media, messaging apps and other digital platforms influence language choice and code-switching practices among young professionals. These platforms may also shape or reflect attitudes toward heritage and global languages.

Digital platforms provide unique spaces where multilingual practices can flourish in ways that differ from face-to-face interactions. Investigating how Tamil, English and Malay are used in WhatsApp groups, TikTok videos, Instagram captions, or professional LinkedIn posts can reveal emerging linguistic norms shaped by digital culture. Younger professionals, in particular, may use Tamil creatively online through memes, Romanised spelling, or hybrid linguistic styles, which may contribute to heritage language revitalisation in informal contexts. Conversely, English may dominate professional digital spaces, reinforcing workplace ideologies outside physical office settings.

Future research could also explore how algorithm-driven content exposure influences language use, such as whether Tamil content creators shape language attitudes or whether global English content contributes to linguistic shift. Additionally, digital communication blurs domain boundaries, creating hybrid spaces where personal and professional identities overlap.

5.4.4 Policy and Educational Implications

Further research could focus on the implications of language choices on education and policymaking. For example, studies could investigate how language policies in the workplace or educational institutions impact linguistic diversity, cultural preservation and professional identity formation.

Future research can also explore how organisational language policies unintentionally reinforce linguistic hierarchies, such as privileging English over Malay and Tamil and how this affects employees' sense of belonging and identity. Studies

could examine whether more inclusive language policies, such as allowing heritage languages in informal spaces or recognising multilingual competencies in evaluations might enhance workplace morale or cultural cohesion. In educational settings, researchers could investigate how curriculum design, teaching practices, or assessment systems either support or hinder heritage language maintenance. For example, research could examine whether Tamil language schools or mother-tongue programmes equip students with the linguistic confidence needed for professional life. Additional studies could also evaluate teacher attitudes, parental expectations and institutional support systems that influence language development across generations.

5.5 Summary

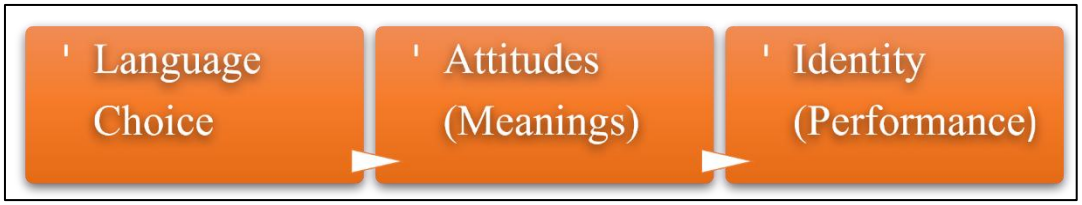


Figure 5.5 Integrated Identity Model from Choice – Attitudes – Identity

This figure provides an integrated model showing how language choice, attitudes and identity influence each other. Participants selected languages strategically, which then shaped their perceptions and emotional meanings toward each code. These attitudes informed how they performed identity at work through code-switching and linguistic positioning. The model also reflects feedback loops influenced by workplace norms, technology and social expectations. This visual summary captures the dynamic nature of multilingual identity construction.

Chapter 5 critically discussed the findings of the study by integrating the three research questions with established sociolinguistic theories and previous empirical studies. Rather than merely summarising the findings presented in Chapter 4, this chapter interpreted how language choice, multilingual attitudes and identity construction among young Malaysian Indian professionals are shaped by workplace expectations, linguistic hierarchy, institutional power and cultural belonging. Through systematic comparisons with previous Malaysian and international studies, the discussion identified areas of convergence and divergence, thereby highlighting the study's theoretical and empirical contributions to multilingual workplace research. Overall, the chapter demonstrated that multilingual language practices are not merely

communicative choices but strategic resources through which individuals negotiate professional legitimacy, cultural identity and social belonging within Malaysia's multilingual workplace.

In discussing Research Objective 1, the chapter highlighted how language choice was driven by professional hierarchy, audience expectations and rapport-building goals, with participants displaying strong metalinguistic awareness in adjusting their speech across contexts. In addressing Research Objective 2, it was shown that participants held distinct affective and functional attitudes toward English, Tamil and Malay, navigating these codes to balance cultural pride with professional ambitions. In response to Research Objective 3, the chapter explained how these language practices were used to construct and perform complex identities as competent professionals, culturally rooted individuals and socially adaptable Malaysians.

Moreover, the chapter brought to light several cross-cutting themes, including how language inequality and symbolic power shape communication norms in the workplace and how multilingual competence is increasingly seen as a valuable professional resource. These themes collectively underscored the ability of young Malaysian Indian professionals to maintain their ethnic identity while navigating a demanding, multilingual professional environment.

The implications of these findings were then explored across different audiences; the general public, students, scholars and policymakers, affirming the significance of this research in enriching national conversations about identity, multiculturalism and language diversity in Malaysia. Finally, recommendations for future research were offered, suggesting broader sampling, more varied linguistic domains and a deeper look into digital communication and institutional policy. Overall, this chapter captured the central message of the study: that language is not merely a tool for communication but a key medium through which Malaysian Indian professionals' express identity, negotiate belonging and bridge the often-divergent worlds of culture and career in a multicultural society.

In addition to summarising the findings, this chapter emphasised the broader sociocultural relevance of the study. It demonstrated that the linguistic experiences of Malaysian Indian professionals are not isolated phenomena but are deeply intertwined with Malaysia's historical, educational and political landscapes. English dominance, Malay's function as a national unifier and Tamil's role in cultural continuity all reflect larger structural forces that shape everyday communicative norms. By situating the

findings within established theories, the chapter also highlighted how this localised study contributes to global discussions surrounding multilingual identity, postcolonial linguistic politics and heritage language resilience.

Another important aspect underscored in the chapter was the tension participants navigated between linguistic assimilation and cultural preservation. While English proficiency was necessary to demonstrate professionalism, the retention of Tamil allowed participants to maintain emotional ties and cultural belonging. This duality illustrates the complexity of multilingual identity work in postcolonial societies, where languages carry unequal symbolic and economic weight. The chapter drew attention to the emotional labour participants invested in balancing these competing demands, particularly when shifting between the formal expectations of workplace English and the intimate, culturally grounded functions of Tamil.

Chapter 5 also highlighted that multilingual competence is not a passive trait but an active and agentive practice. Participants used language strategically not just to convey information but to position themselves socially, align with expectations and navigate interpersonal relationships. Their ability to code-switch or adjust their linguistic repertoire demonstrated high communicative sensitivity, adaptability and sociolinguistic awareness. These findings have broader implications for how society perceives multilingual workers, challenging the view that switching between languages indicates confusion or lack of proficiency. Instead, the chapter framed multilingualism as a sophisticated skill set that enables individuals to respond to complex social cues.

The chapter also emphasised the importance of acknowledging the diversity within the Malaysian Indian community. While the study focused on one ethnic minority group, the themes uncovered linguistic adaptability, cultural negotiation, identity tension and workplace expectations are relevant to other minority communities as well. The chapter therefore suggested that the findings contribute to cross-cultural understanding and may serve as a foundation for comparative research across ethnic groups, social classes, or linguistic backgrounds.

Finally, this chapter reiterated the broader societal significance of recognising language as a carrier of identity and cultural legacy. The chapter encouraged policymakers, educators and employers to reflect on how linguistic practices and policies influence individuals' professional experiences and cultural belonging. By reinforcing the importance of inclusive linguistic environments, the chapter positioned the study as an important step toward fostering more equitable and culturally sensitive

workplaces in Malaysia. In summarising these broader implications, Chapter 5 ultimately demonstrated how this study not only advances academic conversations but also speaks to Malaysia's ongoing journey toward embracing multiculturalism and linguistic diversity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Face to Face Semi-Structured Individual Interview Protocol Sample

** Philip Carspecken's 'Critical Ethnography' (1996) provides a methodological roadmap for me to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews for my applied linguistics research. The interactive nature of interviews allows for a deep exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions and language practices. Carspecken's approach, deeply rooted in critical theory, encourages a reflexive stance, urging researchers to question assumptions and power imbalances inherent in the research process. This reflexivity is particularly crucial in applied linguistics, where language intersects with identity, culture and power dynamics.*

My choice of Critical Ethnography as the guiding framework in designing the interview protocol signifies an intention to delve beyond surface-level observations, unravelling the intricate layers of language use in the workplace domain / context. Carspecken's emphasis on understanding the social implications of language aligns with the broader goals of applied linguistics – to not only decipher linguistic phenomena but to critically analyse their societal impact. Through the lens of Critical Ethnography, my research aims to contribute nuanced insights to the field, offering a deeper understanding of language use within diverse cultural and social settings for Malaysian young Indian professionals.

INSTRUCTION

1. Dear research participant, in answering my questions you are asked to be as candid and as honest as possible, drawing on your deepest feelings and experiences that have shaped your use of language(s).
2. As for the length of your answer, we have about 14 interview questions to discuss in about 30-45 minutes.
3. And, as for the language, it would be great if you can use English to highlight your experience and feelings.

Thank you so very much for helping me with my research --- Nur Diana Adlin 😊

**AS RELATED TO RQ #1 & #2*

(RQ1) Attitudes and beliefs toward languages

ANCHOR QUESTION:

1. How would you describe your relationship with the Tamil language in the context of your personal and social lives?

POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

2. Can you share instances where your language choices, including Tamil, English or Malay have influenced your interactions within your workplace?

3. How do you perceive the status of Tamil compared to other languages, such as English and Malay, within your social and professional circles?

4. With reference to English, how widely do you use this language at KD Hospital? Why and what for?

5. Are there situations where you find yourself code-switching or code-mixing (mixing between Tamil, English and Malay) and how does this impact your communication?

(RQ2) Language choices in professional settings

ANCHOR QUESTION:

6. What factors influence your language choices in the workplace, for example when interacting with colleagues or superiors?

POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

7. Have you ever encountered situations where language choices impacted your professional relationships or opportunities?

8. How do language preferences contribute to the professionalism shown by Malaysian young Indian professionals at KD Hospital?

9. To what extent do you think your linguistic choices are shaped by societal expectations or cultural norms?

10. Have you encountered challenges related to language proficiency in your professional journey? How did you overcome them?

--- 1ST INTERVIEW SESSION ENDS ---

APPENDIX 2

Online Written Narrative Frame Questions (6 Questions)

** This section provides a glimpse into the instructions and actual form that the 'narrative frames' would take, as one of the three qualitative data collection instruments in my research.*

INSTRUCTION

1. Dear research participant, in answering this question you are asked to be as candid as possible; the honesty of your response would shed light on the question clearly.
2. As for the length, you are free to write as much or as little as you want. My suggestion is that you write about 500 words if you can.
3. And, as for the language, it would be great if you can use English to highlight your experience and feelings.

Thank you ever so much for helping me with my research --- Nur Diana Adlin 😊

**AS RELATED TO RQ #2*

Describe what you think and how you feel when you use Tamil, English and also Malay in your workplace. For you personally, what does the language that you use say about *you* as an individual?

Describe a situation where you had to make a strategic language choice to achieve a professional objective or enhance your standing in the workplace. How did this choice influence the outcome?

INSTRUCTION

1. Dear research participant, in answering this question you are asked to be as candid as possible; the honesty of your response would shed light on the question clearly.
2. As for the length, you are free to write as much or as little as you want. My suggestion is that you write about 500 words if you can.
3. And, as for the language, it would be great if you can use English to highlight your experience and feelings.

Thank you ever so much for helping me with my research --- Nur Diana Adlin 😊

**AS RELATED TO RQ #1*

As a young professional, where and when would you use Tamil, English, or Malay in your workplace? Why do you make this choice to use *that* language and not others? Do you make this choice deliberately or consciously? Why?

Reflect on a specific incident where your choice of language in the workplace reflected your connection or sentiment towards Tamil, English, or Malay. How did it shape your identity in that instance?

INSTRUCTION

1. Dear research participant, in answering this question you are asked to be as candid as possible; the honesty of your response would shed light on the question clearly.
2. As for the length, you are free to write as much or as little as you want. My suggestion is that you write about 500 words if you can.
3. And, as for the language, it would be great if you can use English to highlight your experience and feelings.

Thank you ever so much for helping me with my research --- Nur Diana Adlin 😊

**AS RELATED TO RQ #3*

As a young professional of Indian ethnic origin, would you use a certain language in your workplace between Tamil, English, or Malay? When you use *that* language how do you think people will assess or look at you, as a normal person?

Share a narrative about a significant moment in your professional journey where language choices were instrumental in expressing your identity. How did this experience contribute to your overall linguistic identity in the workplace?

APPENDIX 3

Focus Group Discussion Questions (Actual)

** Philip Carspecken's 'Critical Ethnography' (1996) provides a methodological roadmap for me to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews for my applied linguistics research. The interactive nature of interviews allows for a deep exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions and language practices. Carspecken's approach, deeply rooted in critical theory, encourages a reflexive stance, urging researchers to question assumptions and power imbalances inherent in the research process. This reflexivity is particularly crucial in applied linguistics, where language intersects with identity, culture and power dynamics.*

My choice of Critical Ethnography as the guiding framework in designing the interview protocol signifies an intention to delve beyond surface-level observations, unravelling the intricate layers of language use in the workplace domain / context. Carspecken's emphasis on understanding the social implications of language aligns with the broader goals of applied linguistics – to not only decipher linguistic phenomena but to critically analyse their societal impact. Through the lens of Critical Ethnography, my research aims to contribute nuanced insights to the field, offering a deeper understanding of language use within diverse cultural and social settings for Malaysian young Indian professionals.

INSTRUCTION

1. Dear research participants, in answering my questions you are asked to be as candid and as honest as possible, drawing on your deepest feelings and experiences that have shaped your use of language(s).
2. As for the length of your answer, we have about 15 group interview questions to discuss together in about 60-90 minutes.
3. And, as for the language, it would be great if you can use English to highlight your experience and feelings.
4. Finally, as this is a group session, let us try to approach this session like a group of friends – which we are – and discuss together in an informal and relaxed manner.

I sincerely thank you all of you, for helping me with my research --- Nur Diana Adlin 😊

**AS RELATED TO ALL RQs*

1. How do all of you perceive the collective attitudes of Malaysian young Indian professionals toward the Tamil language generally?

2. In what ways do you think the broader societal beliefs about language influence the attitudes of Malaysian young Indian professionals toward Tamil, English and also Malay?

3. What motives do Malaysian young Indian professionals collectively express when making language choices in the workplace?

4. Can you share personal reflections on how language choices may shape or challenge societal perceptions of professional competence?

5. How do the collective language choices of Malaysian young Indian professionals impact the overall dynamics of workplace communication?

6. In your observations, does the group believe language choices contribute to or challenge the formation of professional networks?

7. Can you share instances where you had to personally address language differences to facilitate effective communication at KD Hospital?

8. How does the group see Malaysian Young Indian professionals balancing the use of Tamil, English and Malay in their workplace interactions?

9. Do you feel that the collective use of Tamil language contributes to the preservation of cultural practices and traditions among Malaysian young Indian professionals?

10. In your perspective, are there instances where language inequality exists within KD Hospital and how might this collectively affect professional relationships?

11. How should we address language-based inequalities and foster a more inclusive professional environment at KD Hospital?

12. Finally, what do you think are the impacts of language choices on the career aspirations and professional development of Malaysian young Indian professionals?

* These questions aim to elicit group reflections and discussions within the Critical Ethnographic Framework, fostering a collective understanding of the intricate relationships between language, identity and power dynamics in the workplace experiences of Malaysian young Indian professionals.

--- FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW / DISCCUSION SESSION ENDS ---

APPENDIX 4

Research Ethics

ETHIC	EXPLANATION
Informed Consent	Before participation, all potential participants will receive clear and comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures and potential risks. They will be provided with ample time to review the details and ask questions before voluntarily agreeing to take part.
Confidentiality	Participants' identities will be protected through the use of codes in reporting findings. All collected data, including transcriptions and recordings, will be securely stored and accessed exclusively by authorised researchers.
Anonymity	Efforts will be made to ensure that individual responses cannot be traced back to specific participants. This is particularly important in semi-structured interviews and narrative frames where personal stories and experiences are shared.
Voluntary Participation	Participation in the study will be entirely voluntary. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any point without facing any consequences or negative impact.
Privacy	Researcher will conduct interviews and discussions in a private and comfortable setting, respecting participants' privacy. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be treated with sensitivity.
Sensitivity to Culture	Given the potential cultural significance of language identity, the researcher will approach the topic with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that questions and discussions do not cause offense or discomfort.
Beneficence	The well-being of participants will be prioritised. Researcher will take measures to minimise any potential emotional discomfort that might arise from discussing personal experiences related to language identity.

Researcher Bias	Researcher will acknowledge their own potential biases and strive to maintain objectivity throughout data collection, analysis and interpretation.
Data Transparency	Study findings will be reported accurately and transparently, including both positive and negative outcomes. The researcher will furnish a comprehensive overview of the processes involved in data collection and analysis.
Ethics Approval	The study will be carried out in adherence to ethical guidelines and regulations. Institutional review board approval will be obtained, if required, ensuring that the study's design and procedures meet ethical standards.

APPENDIX 5

Consent Form

LANGUAGE CHOICE AMONG YOUNG INDIAN PROFESSIONALS IN MALAYSIA FOCUSING ON TAMIL AND OTHER LANGUAGES

Consent to take part in research:

□ I ……. willingly agree to participate in this research study.

□ I comprehend that I have the right to withdraw from the study or decline to answer any questions without facing any consequences.

□ I acknowledge that I can retract permission to use data from my interview within a two-week period after the interview, leading to the deletion of the material.

□ I have been provided with a written explanation of the study's purpose and nature and I've had the opportunity to seek clarifications.

□ I understand that participating involves sharing your language identity experiences through a narrative frame, personal interview and focus group discussion.

□ I am aware that my participation will not yield direct benefits.

□ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview.

□ I am aware that all information I provide will remain confidential.

□ I understand that any reports based on the research will maintain my anonymity. This will involve altering my name and concealing any identifying details in my interview that could reveal my identity or others'.

□ I understand that segments from my interview may be quoted in research presentation and published papers.

□ I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be securely kept with the researcher until [the end of the research period.

□ I understand that a transcript of my interview, with all identifiers removed, will be retained for a year.

□ I am aware that, under freedom of information legislation, I have the right to access the information I've provided during its storage as specified above.

□ I am free to contact any of the individuals involved in the research to seek additional information or clarifications.

Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

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Signature of researcher Date

Your information will be kept confidential by the investigators and will not be made public unless disclosure is required by law. By signing this consent form, you will authorise the review of records, analysis and use of the data arising from this research. If you have any question about this research or your rights, please contact *Nur Diana Adlin* at *+60 17- 530 6305.*

APPENDIX 6

Sample of Transcripts

A. Online Written Narrative Frames

SAMPLE Online Written Narrative Frames - PARTICIPANT 2

Years with the organisation: 1.5 years

Date: 19 August 2024

Researcher: As a young professional, where and when would you use Tamil, English, or Malay in your workplace? Why do you make this choice to use that language and not others? Do you make this choice deliberately or consciously? Why?

Interviewee 2: In the workplace, I primarily use English as it is the most commonly understood language and is often considered the standard for professional communications. English facilitates clear and efficient exchanges among colleagues from diverse backgrounds and helps maintain a formal and professional tone. However, when interacting on a one-to-one basis with colleagues who are more comfortable with Malay or Tamil, I switch to these languages. Using Malay or Tamil in such situations can help build stronger interpersonal relationships and create a more inclusive and comfortable environment for the individual. This approach also demonstrates cultural sensitivity and respect for their linguistic preferences. I make these language choices deliberately and consciously, as they depend on the context and the individual I am communicating with. For instance, if I sense that someone might feel more at ease or better understood in Malay or Tamil, I'll opt for that language to avoid any feelings of inadequacy or discomfort they might associate with speaking English. This choice is about fostering mutual respect and ensuring that communication is

both effective and considerate. Additionally, switching languages can help in breaking down hierarchical barriers. Speaking in a language that someone is more familiar with can make the conversation feel more personal and less formal, thereby encouraging openness and collaboration.

Researcher: Reflect on a specific incident where your choice of language in the workplace reflected your connection or sentiment towards Tamil, English, or Malay. How did it shape your identity in that instance?

Interviewee 2: Cultural Day at the workplace is an event that often brings out the best in everyone, showcasing the diversity and richness of our backgrounds. It was on such a day that I experienced a profound connection between language, identity and community; a connection that not only deepened my appreciation for the languages I speak but also reinforced how these languages shape my identity. As a young professional proficient in Tamil, English and Malay, I've always navigated the linguistic landscape with a certain fluidity. Each language holds a different significance for me. English is my go-to for professional settings, where it serves as a unifying medium of communication among colleagues from diverse backgrounds.Tamil and Malay, however, are languages that resonate on a more personal level, often used in more intimate or culturally specific contexts. On Cultural Day, the company encouraged everyone to come dressed in traditional attire and share aspects of their heritage. I decided to wear a traditional saree, a choice that immediately sparked conversations among colleagues. As the day unfolded, the event featured various activities, including language and culture booths where people could explore the different cultures represented within our team. I was invited to help manage the booth dedicated to Tamil culture. At the Tamil booth, I found myself switching to Tamil more frequently as I interacted with colleagues who were either familiar with or curious about the language. There was one particular incident that stood out.

A colleague, originally from a Tamil-speaking background but not very proficient in the language, approached the booth. He had always communicated with me in English at work and I could sense a certain hesitance when he tried to speak Tamil. Sensing his discomfort, I switched to Tamil and encouraged him to speak in whatever capacity he could. As we conversed, I noticed how his initial apprehension gradually gave way to a sense of pride and connection. Speaking Tamil, even in a broken manner, allowed him to tap into a part of his identity that he hadn't explored much in the workplace. It wasn't just about the language; it was about reconnecting with his roots and feeling a sense of belonging. This incident made me reflect on my own relationship with Tamil. In the workplace, I had often defaulted to English for its convenience and universality, but Cultural Day reminded me of the emotional and cultural significance of Tamil. It's a language that connects me to my heritage, my family and a broader community. By choosing to speak Tamil on this day, I wasn't just facilitating communication; I was reinforcing my cultural identity and making a statement about the importance of linguistic diversity. Throughout the day, I also engaged with colleagues in Malay, especially when discussing aspects of shared cultural practices between the Tamil and Malay communities. This fluidity in switching between languages made me realize how each language serves as a bridge to different aspects of my identity. English, while essential, often represents my professional self—a version of me that is efficient, formal and universally understandable. Tamil and Malay, on the other hand, are tied to my personal and cultural identity, allowing me to express sentiments that English sometimes cannot fully capture. The impact of this day went beyond just the celebration of culture—it was a powerful reminder of how language shapes identity. My choice to speak Tamil with that colleague wasn't just about making him feel comfortable; it was about acknowledging the shared heritage we had, even if it wasn't always visible in our day-to-day interactions. It was a deliberate choice to affirm that part of my identity and to invite others to do the same.

Researcher: Describe what you think and how you feel when you use Tamil, English, and also Malay in your workplace. For you personally, what does the language that you use say about you as an individual?

Interviewee 2: When I use English in the workplace, I feel it enhances clarity and professionalism, as it is widely understood and facilitates effective communication, especially in group settings. Using English reflects my adaptability and commitment to inclusivity. In one-on-one situations, speaking in Tamil or Malay can build rapport and create a sense of cultural connection, showing respect for others' backgrounds. Personally, the language I choose indicates my awareness of context and my desire to communicate effectively, demonstrating that I am considerate, adaptable and culturally sensitive. It reflects my ability to navigate diverse environments and my intention to make others feel understood and respected.

Researcher: Describe a situation where you had to make a strategic language choice to achieve a professional objective or enhance your standing in the workplace. How did this choice influence the outcome?

Interviewee 2: There was a situation where two Indian colleagues had a misunderstanding, which escalated into a major issue, causing them to avoid each other. This conflict affected the entire team's dynamics and productivity. To resolve this, I spoke to each of them individually in Tamil, which allowed for more open communication and helped me understand their emotions better. After these discussions, I brought them together and emphasized the importance of teamwork. They both understood and agreed to work through their differences. My choice to use Tamil demonstrated cultural sensitivity, which helped rebuild trust and enhance team cohesion.

Researcher: As a young professional of Indian ethnic origin, would you use a certain language in your workplace between Tamil, English, or

Malay? When you use that language how do you think people will assess or look at you, as a normal person?

Interviewee 2: English is typically my default language in the workplace. It is the most widely spoken and understood language among my colleagues, many of whom come from diverse backgrounds. In professional settings, English serves as a unifying medium that ensures clear communication, professionalism and inclusivity. Using English allows me to present myself as competent, articulate and confident. It is a language that is often associated with education, global awareness and professionalism. However, there are instances where I deliberately choose to speak Tamil or Malay, especially when interacting with colleagues who are more comfortable with these languages. For example, if I'm working with a fellow Tamil speaker or a Malay colleague in a more casual or personal setting, I might switch to their preferred language. This choice is usually made with the intention of building rapport, fostering a sense of community and making the other person feel more at ease. The way people assess my use of Tamil or Malay in the workplace can vary. Some colleagues may appreciate my effort to connect with them on a more personal level by using a language they are more comfortable with. They may view this as a sign of cultural sensitivity, humility and a willingness to bridge gaps. For instance, when I speak Tamil with a Tamil-speaking colleague, it might be seen as a way to strengthen our cultural bond, showing that I respect and value our shared heritage. Similarly, when I use Malay with Malay-speaking colleagues, it can be interpreted as an effort to honour their cultural identity and create a more inclusive environment. On the other hand, there might be those who interpret my choice to speak Tamil or Malay differently. Some may assume that I am not confident in my English proficiency and that I opt for Tamil or Malay because I find it difficult to express myself in English. This perception could lead to judgments about my educational background or professional capabilities. They might think

that I am not as fluent or comfortable in English, which could, unfortunately, affect how they view my overall competence in a professional setting. These differing perceptions underscore the complex role that language plays in the workplace. While I may intend to make others feel more comfortable by speaking their preferred language, I am also aware that such a choice could inadvertently lead to assumptions about my language abilities and, by extension, my professional aptitude.

Researcher: Share a narrative about a significant moment in your professional journey where language choices were instrumental in expressing your identity. How did this experience contribute to your overall linguistic identity in the workplace?

Interviewee 2: Early in my professional journey, there was a pivotal moment that significantly shaped my understanding of how language plays a crucia role in expressing identity within the workplace. This experience not only deepened my appreciation for the languages I speak—Tamil, English and Malay—but also helped me navigate the complex dynamics of language choice in a multicultural work environment. It was my first job after university and I had joined a diverse team in a large multinational company. The workplace was a melting pot of different cultures, ethnicities and languages. English was the lingua franca, the default language for all official communication. Naturally, I adhered to this norm, using English for emails, meetings and interactions with colleagues. However, it wasn't long before I realized that English alone couldn't capture the full spectrum of my identity or the nuances of the relationships I was forming. One day, the company organized an internal workshop on team-building and communication. The workshop was designed to be interactive, with various group activities aimed at fostering collaboration and mutual understanding among team members. During one of the exercises, we were split into smaller groups and asked to share something about our

cultural backgrounds and how it influenced our work. In my group, I found myself with colleagues from various backgrounds—Chinese, Malay, Indian and others. As we began sharing our stories, I decided to talk about my Indian heritage and how it shaped my values and approach to work. Although I started speaking in English, I soon noticed that one of my Indian colleagues, who had always been somewhat reserved, seemed particularly interested in what I was saying. I knew he was more comfortable in Tamil, so I switched to Tamil midway through my story. As I spoke in Tamil, I saw his demeanour change—he became more animated, nodding along and even chiming in with his thoughts. The shift in language transformed the interaction from a formal exchange of ideas to a more personal and meaningful connection. We talked about the shared experiences of growing up in Indian households, the values instilled in us by our families and how these values influenced our work ethics. Other team members, who spoke Malay or Chinese, listened with interest and I made sure to translate the key points into English for everyone's benefit. This moment was significant because it made me realize the power of language in expressing identity and building connections. By switching to Tamil, I wasn't just making my colleague feel more comfortable; I was also revealing a deeper part of my own identity. I was sharing a cultural and linguistic bond that transcended the professional setting and tapped into something more personal and authentic. After the workshop, I noticed a change in how my colleague and I interacted at work. Our conversations became more frequent and open and we began collaborating more closely on projects. This newfound rapport was not just the result of a shared cultural background but also a product of my deliberate language choice, which had facilitated a stronger connection. This experience had a lasting impact on my linguistic identity in the workplace. It taught me that language is more than just a means of communication—it is an expression of who we are, where we come from and what we value. In a multicultural and multilingual work environment, language choices can significantly influence how we are perceived and how we

build relationships with others. From that point on, I became more conscious of when and how I used different languages in the workplace. While I continued to use English as the primary language for professional communication, I made a deliberate effort to use Tamil and Malay when appropriate. For instance, when working closely with colleagues who were more comfortable in these languages, I would switch to Tamil or Malay to ensure that they felt included and respected. This not only helped in building stronger relationships but also in fostering a more inclusive and collaborative work environment. Moreover, this experience reinforced my understanding that being multilingual is a valuable asset in the workplace. It allows for greater flexibility in communication and enables one to connect with a wider range of people on a more personal level. It also contributes to a more diverse and dynamic workplace culture, where different languages and cultural perspectives are valued and embraced. In conclusion, this significant moment in my professional journey highlighted the instrumental role of language in expressing identity and building connections. It contributed to my overall linguistic identity by making me more aware of the impact of my language choices and encouraging me to use my multilingual abilities to enhance my professional interactions. As I continue to navigate my career, I carry this lesson with me, always mindful of the power of language in shaping not just communication, but relationships and identity in the workplace.

B. Semi-structured Individual Interviews

SAMPLE Face-to-face interview transcript – PARTICIPANT 3

Interview Date: 7 August 2024

Interview time: 10 AM - 11 AM

Years with the organisation: 11 Months

Researcher: Hey, Interviewee 3! May you please introduce yourself before we start.

Interviewee 3: Hi, I'm Interviewee 3, I'm 26 years old. Currently working in KD Hospital.

Researcher: So, my first objective is just to know your attitude and your belief toward Tamil, English and Bahasa. Okay? Alright, so the first question is, how would you describe your relationship with the Tamil language in the context of your personal and social lives?

Interviewee 3: I feel comfortable and confident, honestly. That's one thing I could say. Comfortable meaning that there's no restriction or barrier when I'm trying to convey my message or my idea.

Researcher: Why? Is it because English grammar rules are harder or…?

Interviewee 3: Not to say like that, but sometimes, you know, when you're speaking Tamil, it's just one word. But when speaking in English, it's three words, you know.

Researcher: Can you share instances where your language choices, including Tamil, English, or Malay have influenced your interactions within your workplace?

Interviewee 3: I think it's when the bosses, usually, it's English. Most of the time, it's English although they are Indians and understand Tamil because it's made it as a professional criterion over there. I also mix the languages with the other two more languages, English and Tamil, or English and Malay, depending on the preference of the patients themselves. But for sure, if I'm outside of work setting, I definitely use Tamil with my close friends and family members.

Researcher: But with bosses?

Interviewee 3: Definitely English, although they are Indians. If Indians depend, really depending on, I wouldn't say it's extremely good interaction. If I have a good relationship, I would still hesitate. Because, you know, boss, you cannot just simply, "Hello bro", just go say like that. But, if it's with my colleagues, I will mix between Tamil and Bahasa.

Researcher: Why do you choose to speak Tamil with your co-workers?

Interviewee 3: Is it more chill, informal? For informal purposes. In work areas, more like, you know, we have to divide our parts and all that. For chilling time, you know, resting period, yeah, we can speak Tamil however we want to mix it. For me, I mix it.

Researcher: Alright, got it. Next is, how do you perceive the status of Tamil compared to other languages, such as English and Malay, within your social and professional circle?

Interviewee 3: I think that, you know, the use of Tamil is frankly low, like very, very low in normal uses. English is seen to be more important compared to

Malay and Tamil even from our education. It's also easy to communicate internationally. Second is Malay because we live in Malaysia where Malay language is the national language, so whatever it is we have to know Malay. While Tamil, it's very minority spoken because we are also the minority group. There is no need to speak in Tamil other than when we are at home.

Researcher: Alright, fourth question is with reference to English, how widely do you use this language at KD Hospital? Why and what for?

Interviewee 3: I use English most of the time. Really. Like 90% of the time. I use it mostly daily for presentation purposes, because most of the presentations done, both presentations, all that to the colleagues and bosses, are done in English because of the fact that all of my, I would say, presentation materials are in English. Other than that, is during meetings and communications with colleagues, bosses and patients in general. But if the patient prefers to speak other than English, then I would change according to their preferences, but it's very rare to happen.

Researcher: Okay, what about your daily communication at work? Between your co-workers at your department, between the staff from other departments?

Interviewee 3: Mostly, to my colleagues, I speak English.

Researcher: Alright, moving on. Are there situations where you find yourself code-switching or code-mixing between Tamil, English and Malay and how does this impact your communications? It's like, sometimes, like me, if you're like this, I'm code-switching, right? Because sometimes, when we're talking, there are certain words where it's indescribable. Maybe when you speak in Tamil, it's indescribable in

Tamil. So, you choose English to just say about that part. Or maybe it's vice versa. You talk in this impact your communication?

Interviewee 3: Yes. Sometimes I do have indescribable words in English that I'd switch to Malay, mainly and vice versa, especially explaining the medical terms and explanations to patients, since the departments have more Malays and English speakers. But from this way, it helps others to understand better what I'm trying to say. Sometimes, I am at a loss for words on how to explain, which I'd get help from someone else.

Researcher: Does it happen frequently?

Interviewee 3: Not so frequently.

Researcher: So, when you code-switch, does it help you to express yourself better in what are you trying to say? Or do you think it actually confuses people more?

Interviewee 3: I think so. It does for me what I'm trying to say. But it gives a vague confusion to them, sometimes, but not always.

Researcher: So, like, when you're talking to other peers or friends that do not know a certain languages, for example, when you're talking to an Indian, Indian friend, the person only knows English, doesn't know Bahasa, doesn't know Tamil. So, when you're talking in English and then there are certain words that you cannot describe in English, you try to describe it in Tamil. But the problem is, the person doesn't know how to speak Tamil. How do you solve this issue?

Interviewee 3: You have to go through the long route explaining what it is. Because, really, when we change language, there's one word, we get to convey what we want, or a few words. But if they don't understand and they

have only one language option, then you have to go the long route where we explain the whole thing as what it is we are trying to convey. I'm going to give examples, because, whether it's for explanations, it's quite difficult.

Researcher: Alright, so we're done for Part 1. Now, we're going for Part 2. It's more toward language choices. So, why do you choose this and that at your workplace? Okay? Okay, so the first one is, what factors influence your language choice at your workplace? For example, when you're interacting with your superiors and also your colleagues, what are the factors that influence you to choose that particular language only when speaking with these groups of people?

Interviewee 3: It's who I speak to. If it's the superior, of course it will be fully in English only. Mainly due to showing a sense of respect. Other than that, to maintain the subordinate and professional relationship, we keep it professional all the way. Unless we are very close friends.

Researcher: If you are interacting with people in Bahasa, why?

Interviewee 3: Why? For explanation purposes mostly. That's one thing. The second thing, obviously, is the patient's preference. Or if my friend, friend's preference, if I can make them understand.

Researcher: Okay. Next is, have you ever encountered situations where language choices impacted your professional relationship or opportunities? For example, there are certain situations where you're not fully understand what they're saying. Do you think it has a huge impact on the quality that you will give to them?

Interviewee 3: Yes, there are times when I couldn't carry the conversation with a patient since the person preferred Malay more and I'm not very fluent in Malay as I do in English and Tamil. This made me had to ask for

helps from my another colleague. It made me lose the opportunity to serve the patient smoothly. And maybe sometimes, when the bosses speak, they accidentally only talk in Tamil for a few minutes in a meeting, making non-Tamil speakers don't get it. So, it kind of affects the teamwork and the understanding between my colleagues. Maybe there's a misunderstanding and then the teamwork is not really working because people just don't understand much.

Researcher: How do language preferences contribute to the professionalism shown by Malaysian young Indians professionals at KD Hospital?

Interviewee 3: People love to see other people educated. And speaking in English makes me look and feel educated, professional and confident. While using Tamil or Malay languages in informal settings builds rapport with my peers and make me feel closer with them because I involve myself with their preference.

Researcher: To what extent do you think your linguistic choices are shaped by societal expectations or cultural norms?

Interviewee 3: So much actually. I talk in English so that I'm at ease knowing I'm being accepted into professional groups. Since when you talk in English, you're seen to be educated and accepted among the educated and professional peers. But at home, I will switch to Tamil because I don't want my family to think that I'm forgetting my roots.

Researcher: Alright, got it. Last question, have you encountered challenges related to language proficiency in your professional journey? How did you overcome them?

Interviewee 3: Yes. Among all, my Malay is not as good as my English and Tamil. Sometimes, I have to handle patients that prefer to talk in Malay, so sometimes, I also have difficulty in explaining my points from

English to Malay. I'd just spend some time and try but if I take too much time, I'd call my colleague who is more fluent in Malay to translate.

Researcher: Thanks so much! That's all for the individual interview.

C. Focus Group Discussions

SAMPLE Focus group interview / discussion transcript

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION- GROUP 1:

Interviewee 4 (I4), Interviewee 5 (I5) & Interviewee 6 (16)

Date: 16 September 2024

Time: 1 PM - 2 PM

Researcher: Hey, everybody! Thanks for joining and helping me with my thesis. Let's start with the first question. How do all of you perceive the collective attitudes of Malaysian young Indian professionals toward the Tamil language generally?

Interviewee 4: So, speaking Tamil is like actually brings us closer to each other, like among our Indian people. Even though all of us are so professional and can talk a good English well, but when we talk in Tamil, it's like it brings us closer.

Interviewee 5: For me, short one. More like at home, I will feel comfortable and close.

Interviewee 6: I definitely feel proud when I speak in Tamil. It's like no matter how successful we get and fluent in speaking English, we can still talk in our mother tongues very fluently.

Researcher: Sweet. Next, in what ways do you think the broader societal beliefs about languages influence the attitudes of Malaysian young Indian professionals toward Tamil, English and also Malay?

Interviewee 4: Society definitely will use English naturally when it comes to formal settings, like at work or anything that's related to profession. Tamil is more like a natural language. We talk in it to have a closer relationship between each other. As for the Malay language, we all live in Malaysia and we definitely must understand our own country or national language.

Interviewee 5: I agree with I4. I use English entirely at the workplace, but when I'm home, I will switch to Tamil. Also, when I meet Indian aunties and uncles. It just very natural in order for me be seen as polite and humble. I will talk in the Malay language with my Chinese and Malay colleagues and friends outside of work settings.

Interviewee 6: English is a more common language than 90% of the population understands. It's the language of business and education, too. While Tamil is used more in informal settings, like with friends, but it doesn't serve for any formal purposes. I think that's why people prioritise learning English over Tamil.

Researcher: Alright, moving on, in your opinion, what motives do Malaysian young Indian professionals collectively express when making language choices in the workplace?

Interviewee 4: Malaysian young Indian professionals often choose English in the workplaces to align with its status as the global business language. Using English enhances their professional image, facilitates effective communication with colleagues and clients and opens opportunities for career growth, especially in corporate and multinational environments. While Tamil and Malay languages are just spoken between family and friends.

Interviewee 5: For me personally, Malay and Tamil languages are used among friends, or like when you want to get into the zone or be comfortable

with them. Other than that, I think it's in English. So, for professional things, it will be in English, definitely.

Interviewee 6: We all use English at work. Even outside of work, as long as it is closely related to work, we will automatically go with it. Bahasa Malaysia is frequently used to adapt to local workplace requirements, especially in government or local organisations. Professionals choose it to build rapport with Malay-speaking colleagues, ensure smooth collaboration, and comply with workplace policies or official communication standards. While Tamil is more toward making the relationship close.

Researcher: Can you share personal reflections on how language choices may shape or challenge societal perceptions of professional competence?

Interviewee 4: Yes, when you can't speak English in your workplace, it's like automatically, your manager or the upper management is going to think that you are not capable enough. Also, like, when you can't speak English in an interview, you automatically get rejected.

Interviewee 5: Yes, correct. Language choices shape perceptions of competence, with fluency in English often linked to intelligence and professionalism. Limited proficiency in dominant languages can lead to unfair judgments, despite actual skills. Multilingualism challenges stereotypes, highlighting adaptability and cultural connection.

Interviewee 6: So, those who speak fluent English, maybe like being seen and being treated better at the workplace. Like, people tend to have a better perception of them. Like I4 said, during the interviews, the hiring managers expect you to speak in English, if you are fluent, meaning you can communicate and it fits the professional setting. Rather than when the managers speak in English, then you answer in another language, they won't be impressed, really. They will think you don't

know English, and for you to be accepted and hired, it might be decreasing and low.

Researcher: How do the collective language choices of Malaysian young Indians professionals impact the overall dynamics of workplace communication?

Interviewee 4: When you speak in Tamil in front of people who don't understand Tamil, basically they're going to think that we are gossiping about them. I think for English and Malay there's probably no miscommunication because I think most people here understand.

Interviewee 5: The collective language choices of Malaysian young Indian professionals enhance workplace communication by fostering inclusivity and bridging cultural gaps. Proficiency in English facilitates seamless interaction in corporate and multicultural settings, while using Bahasa Malaysia strengthens collaboration with local colleagues and patients. Retaining Tamil in specific contexts supports cultural representation and adds diversity, enriching the overall communication dynamics.

Researcher: What kind of 'specific contexts' did you mean?

Interviewee 5: Like during Deepavali celebration at our workplace, when the ladies are wearing sarees and we complement each other, or when we make jokes between us, the Indians.

Researcher: What about you, Interviewee 6?

Interviewee 6: Well, for me, collective language choices actually balance professionalism and inclusivity. For example, English ensures global compatibility and Bahasa Malaysia fosters local unity because we live in Malaysia and that's our national language, right? While Tamil

preserves cultural identity, it enhances workplace communication dynamics, as I5 explained.

Researcher: In your observations, do you guys believe language choices contribute to or challenge the formation of professional networks?

Interviewee 4: For me, language choices contribute to professional networks by enabling effective communication and fostering connections across diverse cultures. However, limited proficiency in dominant languages like English or Bahasa Malaysia can challenge network-building, creating barriers to collaboration and opportunities. Multilingualism is seen as a key asset for expanding professional relationships.

Researcher: Can you give some examples?

Interviewee 4: Yea, like, our patients are mostly international, although people from China can speak Chinese, Indians from India can speak Tamil and the Indonesians can understand Bahasa, most of the time English will be chosen. The same goes for the employees here. Although we are Indians or Malaysians, we can simply talk in Bahasa or Tamil but we still choose English because it's the workplace and the professional language is English. Everywhere you go, it's English. But I do notice some who are not fluent in English, which tends to make them not understand about something clearly and not be chosen as a group leader, for example.

Researcher: Okay, got it. Interviewee 5?

Interviewee 5: For me, I think language choices play a significant role in forming professional networks, as fluency in English and Bahasa Malaysia helps establish connections with a broader range of colleagues and clients. However, using Tamil in specific contexts can strengthen ties within the Indian community, though it may limit networking in more

diverse settings. Overall, language can either facilitate or challenge the expansion of professional networks depending on the context.

Interviewee 6: In my opinion, language choices can both enhance and challenge the formation of professional networks. English and Bahasa Malaysia help professionals connect with a wider audience, while using Tamil can strengthen bonds within a specific cultural groups. However, over-reliance on any single language may limit opportunities for networking in a more diverse professional environment.

Researcher: Thanks, guys! Let's move on. Can you share instances where you had to personally address language differences to facilitate effective communication at our hospital?

Interviewee 4: Every day, every time. So, when the patient prefers to talk in Bahasa, then I will talk in Bahasa. But if bosses, I'll definitely go with English no matter what language they start to talk first, in order to maintain professionalism.

Interviewee 5: Yup, fairly easy. I frequently ensure that we cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds by offering information in both English and Bahasa Malaysia and sometimes Tamil, to ensure clarity and accessibility for all patients. This approach helps ensure effective communication, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like fertility treatments, where precise understanding is crucial. Additionally, collaborating with colleagues who are fluent in different languages further support clear communication across the hospital. Like talking to I4, she's fluent in four languages. She sometimes helps me to translate things.

Interviewee 6: At KD Hospital, I've encountered situations where language differences required attention, especially in communicating with patients from diverse backgrounds. For example, when explaining complex medical terms or treatment plans, I ensure that key

information is translated or explained in both English and Bahasa Malaysia. I also work closely with colleagues who speak Tamil to assist patients from the Indian community, ensuring they fully understand their treatment options. This collaborative approach helps bridge language barriers and ensures patients receive the best care and clear communication.

Researcher: Great! Let's continue. How do you see yourselves balancing the use of Tamil, English and Malay in your workplace interactions?

Interviewee 4: Balancing Tamil, English and Malay as a reflection of adaptability and cultural sensitivity. For me, I or even we, use English to engage in global or corporate environments, then Malay to connect with the local colleagues and adhere to workplace norms and Tamil to maintain my cultural identity and communicate within the Indian community, like Indian colleagues during lunch hour or Indian patients. This multilingual approach allows us to navigate diverse work settings, fostering inclusivity while ensuring effective communication across different cultural groups.

Interviewee 5: Yes, definitely agree, she's right. Workplace, mostly it's in English. Yeah, like colleagues who, you know, even sometimes when they come and speak in Tamil. If it's about work, then it's in English. If it's something personal, or you know, suddenly, just like that. Unknowingly, if I switch, then I switch to Tamil. And then Malay colleagues, I think most of my colleagues, they can speak good English as well.

Interviewee 6: Me, for the most part, I always speak in English. Unless like, some of my colleagues who are Malay, they don't really, or they're not very comfortable with the language. Then I go and speak Malay. But for the most part, I speak with everyone in English. So, although it's like,

professional matters like asking about meetings and whatnot. But if the person asks me first in Bahasa, I will reply in Bahasa.

Researcher: Do you feel that the collective use of Tamil language contributes to the preservation of cultural practices and traditions among you guys?

Interviewee 4: Yes, for me. It serves as a means to maintain a connection to our heritage, fostering a sense of identity and pride. Using Tamil in the workplace, especially in community-focused industries or roles, allows us to continue traditions, share cultural knowledge and pass on practices to younger generations, ensuring cultural continuity in a modern professional setting. But I think, specifically, only for the targeted areas. Like, if we want to focus on the area that has the majority of Indians.

Interviewee 5: Yes, I think because it helps us by maintaining a link to our roots. It allows us to express cultural values and share traditions within our communities, both professionally and socially. This use of Tamil in the workplace strengthens cultural identity and encourages the passing of heritage to future generations while adapting to modern professional environments. But, definitely not in front of non-Tamil speakers because they will feel ostracised.

Interviewee 6: Yes, the collective use of Tamil among us and the Malaysian young Indian professionals play a key role in preserving cultural practices and traditions. It helps maintain a connection to our heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and pride. By using Tamil in professional settings, we can continue to celebrate cultural values and pass on these traditions to younger generations, while balancing their modern career aspirations.

Researcher: In your perspective, are there instances where language inequality exists within KD Hospital and how might this collectively affect professional relationships?

Interviewee 4: Language inequality at KD Hospital could arise if certain staff or patients feel excluded due to limited proficiency in English, Bahasa Malaysia, or Tamil. For instance, if key information is only conveyed in one language, it may create misunderstandings or feelings of isolation among colleagues or patients who are less fluent. This can hinder collaboration and trust in professional relationships.

Interviewee 5: This issue would occur when certain languages dominate the workplace interactions, potentially sidelining those less proficient in them. For example, staff or patients who primarily speak Tamil might feel excluded if communication is limited to English or Bahasa Malaysia. This could strain professional relationships by creating barriers to effective collaboration and mutual respect.

Interviewee 6: I would say yes, like when English becomes a dominant language, leaving those more comfortable in Bahasa Malaysia or Tamil feeling marginalised. This can lead to misunderstandings and weaken teamwork or patient relationships.

Researcher: How should we address language-based inequalities and foster a more inclusive professional environment at KD Hospital?

Interviewee 4: Addressing this through multilingual communication and inclusivity ensures better understanding and strengthens workplace relationships.

Interviewee 5: Promoting a multilingual approach can help bridge these gaps and foster a more inclusive environment.

Interviewee 6: I think, promoting a multilingual approach can help bridge these gaps and foster a more inclusive environment.

Researcher: Finally, what do you think are the impacts of language choices on the career aspirations and the professional development of Malaysian young Indian professionals?

Interviewee 4: Language choices influence career growth for us. English boosts global opportunities to lead projects, to be promoted. Bahasa Malaysia is vital for local roles, like representing ourselves as Malaysians and Tamil preserves our cultural identity, to maintain our roots. Balancing these languages enhance adaptability, creating broader career prospects and professional versatility.

Interviewee 5: Exactly, I agree. Language choices shape career paths for Indians like us. English opens global opportunities, like how Interviewee 4 explained, the Malay language somehow supports local roles, especially when we want to settle things locally, like writing formal invitation letters, speaking with ministers who attend our events and the Tamil language helps to preserve our cultural identity. Balancing these languages enhances adaptability and career growth.

Interviewee 6: I agree with the girls. It impacts career growth for us. English ensures global access, Bahasa Malaysia supports local roles and Tamil maintains cultural identity, fostering adaptability and broader opportunities.

Researcher: And, we are done! Thanks so much guys!

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION- GROUP 2

Interviewees: Interviewee 1 (Interviewee 1), Interviewee 2 (I2) & Interviewee 3 (I3)

Date: 17 September 2024

Time: 10 AM - 11 AM

Researcher: Hey, guys! Thanks for joining me. Let's start. How do all of you perceive the collective attitudes of Malaysian young Indian professionals toward the Tamil language generally?

Interviewee 1: I think the collective attitudes toward the Tamil language are actually complex and multifaceted. And so, as you see, many individuals maintain a strong sense of pride and connection to Tamil culture. However, there are also factors that may influence their attitude and language use. For example, some of them may think that English is often perceived as the language of prestige and opportunity in Malaysia. So, this can influence some of young Indian professionals to prioritise English over Tamil in certain contexts, such as in professional settings. And talking about Tamil, it's often seen as a symbol of cultural identity and heritage for many Malaysian Indians. And this can lead to a strong attachment to the language and a desire to preserve it. I always feel very proud when I speak in Tamil.

Interviewee 2: So, I think generally the attitude of the young Malaysian Indian professionals towards Tamil, varies. So, different people may have different opinions about Tamil. So, some people really think that Tamil is an important part of their culture and their identity. But some will think it's very less practical because in professional settings in Malaysia, they use English and Malay mainly. So basically, Tamil is for cultural purposes and for bonding purposes. I'm very proud of my

culture and I can still speak Tamil fluently. Otherwise, English is used for professional basis, like work basis and all.

Interviewee 3: For me, mostly, even if we get to know the language itself, like Tamil, right? The thing is, at work and in workplaces, it's rarely even used. I mean, mostly, you know, Malay, English, Mandarin. And these are the three main requirements. But Tamil is only accessible to people who are Tamil. And if you consider the population of Indians in Malaysia, it's not really a practical thing to be followed. But, of course, I feel proud when I can still talk fluently in this language.

Researcher: I got it. Moving on, in what ways do you think the broader societal beliefs about language influences the attitudes of young Malaysian Indian professionals toward Tamil, English and Malay?

Interviewee 1: Society values English more for success, which makes them prioritise it over Tamil because especially in Malaysia, where they may think of English as the language of opportunity. So, the societal perception often places English as the language of prestige and upward. And other than that, Tamil may be seen as the language of cultural heritage and identity. And some people may perceive it as less advantageous for a professional advancement in a predominantly English-speaking society. They emphasise on Malay as the national language, which can influence the attitudes of young Indian professionals towards it. So, some may feel a sense of obligation to learn Malay to contribute to the national unity. While others may view it as a necessity for certain career paths.

Interviewee 2: Same. I agree with I1. Definitely people value English for success because in this country, Malaysia, English and Malay are like dominant languages, especially in education-wise, business-wise and government-wise. And Malay for like integration into local society.

And Tamil may be seen as secondary due to these kinds of pressures, although it holds cultural significance.

Interviewee 3: For me, society's emphasis on English as the language of business and education leads many young Indian professionals to prioritise it. Well, definitely not just the Indians, but also Malays and the Chinese, I believe. Tamil may be seen as less important in the professional context and space, while Malay is essential for national communications and integration.

Researcher: You three give almost the same exact answers. "English is the professional language", in what way, if I may know that you guys can conclude it this way?

Interviewee 2: Well, in university, whether it government or non-government universities, syllabi, textbooks and presentations are in English. Even when you communicate with your lecturers and your peers. Not just that, to enter a university also they will also judge based on your English grade in SPM to be a minimum of credit, usually. Like work, you are being interviewed using English language, forms, meetings, literally everything is in English. That's how I conclude it.

Researcher: Okay. Next, what motives do Malaysian young Indians professionals collectively express when making language choices in the workplace?

Interviewee 1: Generally, in a professional setting, of course, wherever you work, English is often the language of choice in professional settings. So, proficiency in English can open doors to more lucrative and prestigious positions as well.

Interviewee 2: Generally, we should use English because, first of all, we are in a multicultural environment. So, Malay, Chinese, Indians or even international colleagues or superiors, I think they will understand

English somewhat, so we can always use either English or maybe Malay a little bit.

Interviewee 3: For me, it depends on who I speak to. If it's the superior, of course, it will be fully in English only. Mainly to show a sense of respect. Other than that, to maintain the subordinate and professional relationship, we keep it professional all the way. Unless we're very close or good friends.

Researcher: Can you share personal reflections on how language choices may shape or challenge societal perceptions of professional competence?

Interviewee 1: See, there are some people who may have this cultural stereotype thing. Negative stereotypes associated with certain languages which can hinder our professional perception. Like, for example, there are certain people, if a language is perceived as a lower class, or associated with a particular ethnic group, individuals who speak it may face challenges in being seen as a competent professional. English is perceived as more prestigious. So, such as like, English in many contexts often carries high social and professional status. So, individuals who speak these languages fluently may be seen as more competent and educated.

Interviewee 2: If you speak English, people will think you are much more educated and you're much more professional. So, if you're fluent in English, for example, it is seen as a form of education and professionalism. But if you can't speak English well, then they might think that you're not so educated.

Interviewee 3: Language plays a big role in shaping perceptions. Speaking fluent English often gives the impression of competence and education, while someone primarily speaking Tamil might be seen as more

		traditional. These perceptions can sometimes create challenges in professional environments.
Researcher:		What do you mean by “can sometimes create challenges in professional environments”?
Interviewee 3:		You know, the superiors might see you as someone who’s not capable in your English communication. So, you might get lesser chances in your professional. For example, you don’t get to be the speaker of your own project because they think you just can’t speak English fluently, so you can’t deliver the communications part of the project.
Researcher:		Understand. Next, how do collective language choices of Malaysian young Indian professionals impact the overall dynamics of workplace communication?
Interviewee 1:		I think the use of all these three languages can create more diverse and inclusive workplace environment, which can foster a sense of belonging and encourage open communication among employees from different backgrounds. This flexibility can enhance communication efficiency and, I think, can facilitate cross-cultural understanding as well.
Interviewee 2:		If we use Tamil and Malay where not everyone can understand so, this can create some barrier, basically, in the workplace. So, I think, we should always use language where everyone can understand and also create some bonds between individuals in the workplace.
Interviewee 3:		When different languages are used, it can sometimes lead to confusion or feelings of exclusion. For example, if some employees speak Tamil and others don’t, there might be miscommunications or a sense of division. Balancing between English and Malay helps maintain clarity and inclusivity.

Researcher: In your observations, do you guys believe language choices contribute to or challenge the formation of professional networks?

Interviewee 1: I think it's a yes. I can say, language choices can significantly contribute to or challenge the formation of professional networks among Malaysian young Indian professionals. Say, individuals who share a common language, such as Tamil or English, they find it easier to connect and build relationships. This can lead to the formation of an informal network based on linguistic affinity.

Interviewee 2: I think language choices can help and like prevent the formation of professional networks. But, speaking English can facilitate broad networking while using Tamil may create more like a very close circle among the Tamil-speaking colleagues, which can also be inclusive and exclusive, basically.

Interviewee 3: Language can either foster or hinder relationships. Sharing a common language, like Tamil, often helps in forming closer bonds among Indians professionals, but overusing it might isolate the non-Tamil speaker, which can challenge the formation of a more diverse professional network.

Researcher: Got it. Can you share instances where you had to personally address language differences to facilitate effective communication at KD Hospital?

Interviewee 1: I think when interacting, sometimes we do interact with patients and doctors. So, when patients and doctors do not share a common language or when they meet us, it can lead to misunderstanding. There are certain cases, it happens that way, like a misunderstanding. So, we somehow managed to rectify that. That's why the common language is important, the understanding, the communication level is so important, I believe. And to do some documentation, not only talking

about the language, I can say even some terms, some, as we are working at the KD hospital, right? So, sometimes we need to know certain medical terminology as well, so as to avoid some misunderstanding.

Interviewee 2: I would mix languages, depending on that individual, if let's say that particular person is really good in English, I would just explain in English, but if let's say the person is, like, average or lesser than average in English, I'll just speak in Tamil, so they'll understand it better and I don't need to, like, repeat it again and again, right? So, just for, like, convenience manner, I would just use different languages rather than using English.

Interviewee 3: In my experience, there's one patient I was trying to speak to, he looks like a Malay person, but then he speaks no Tamil, so it's like, you know, as a person who speaks English, it's just easy for me to speak to them when they're speaking in my own mother tongue, right? So, like, there are some patients, they do understand their native language because of their own backgrounds, but then if you want to normally speak to any patient, it's better to go more, like, simple terms and mixing the languages, which is more, like, which makes it easier for them.

Researcher: How do you balance the use of Tamil, English and Malay in your workplace interactions?

Interviewee 1: When there is a meeting, we use English. Basically, to make it simple, in the formal settings, we use English more and in informal settings, like with our colleagues, not discussing work or what, we may use Tamil, my Tamil friends or my Tamil colleagues, I use Tamil. Sometimes I mix, of course, I mix with Malay and English a bit, so with Malay friends, I use Malay, so that's how it is with my Chinese friends, sometimes I use English or Malay, but when it comes to our

job and talking about our sales, marketing things, mostly we use English to communicate.

Interviewee 2: Formal settings like, meetings, interviews, when we're discussing about job, basically, I would use English, but with my friends, like, my colleagues who are Malay or Tamil and they are all Indians, so I'll use Malay and Tamil. English is for professional settings. Outside of work, it is obviously other languages, besides English.

Interviewee 3: Like I1 and I2, I also use English in formal settings or anything that's related to work. Outside of that, I'd definitely go with Malay or Tamil. This is for me to keep my professionalism at work and be close to my circles after that.

Researcher: Do you feel that the collective use of the Tamil language contributes to the preservation of cultural practices and traditions among you guys and the rest of other Malaysian young Indian professionals?

Interviewee 1: I can say yes, because first of all, I like to say that Tamil is a language rich in cultural history and traditions, so by using Tamil in the workplace interactions, I think we can transmit this cultural knowledge to our colleagues and contribute to the preservation of Tamil culture as well. And also, I feel that using Tamil, uh, can foster a sense of community among our Indian professionals in my workplace.

Interviewee 2: Collective use of Tamil among Malaysian young Indian professionals, it contributes to the preservation of cultural practices and traditions by keeping the language alive in informal settings. And it also, like, helps maintain the connections with the older generation like, the senior nurses here in the hospital and also with our cultural roots. Also, it can, like, create bonding in the workplace as well.

Interviewee 3: Yes, the use of Tamil does contribute to cultural preservation. Even if Tamil isn't spoken regularly in the workplace, using it in casual situations conversations allow professionals to maintain a connection to their cultural roots, which are important for identity and tradition.

Researcher: I can understand your points clearly. Next, from your perspective, are there instances where language inequality exists within KD Hospital and how might this collectively affect professional relationships?

Interviewee 1: There are sometimes when language inequality exists. Like in some cases, some of whom are not proficient in the dominant language may face, like, you can see that there can be some kind of discrimination or be denied opportunities for advancement. So, this can create a hostile environment in the professional relationship.

Interviewee 2: Language inequality does exist to some extent. For instance, English speakers might have more access to the leadership role, while those more comfortable in Malay or Tamil may feel sidelined. This can affect teamwork and create peelings of exclusion among certain groups.

Interviewee 3: Sometimes it does. I noticed that some people who are so fluent in English tend to lead big projects with the reason they are good at communicating. However, if this continues and no chance is given to other less-fluent English speakers, it will create unfairness in performing professionally.

Researcher: In your opinion, how should we address language-based inequalities and foster a more inclusive professional environment at KD Hospital?

Interviewee 1: I think we can promote understanding, like the Human Resource Department can conduct cultural sensitivity training to help the staff understand the importance of language diversity and respect different

cultural norms. Also, maybe, we do a mandated language training, require language training programmes for all staff, especially those inpatient-facing roles, all that.

Interviewee 2: So, to foster a more inclusive environment, our hospitals could implement language sensitivity training, encourage the use of common language, like English and ensure the important communications that are available in multiple languages. They can also provide language learning opportunities for staff to fill in the gaps among the workers.

Interviewee 3: I would say offering language training sessions, promoting bilingual meetings and encouraging open communication in multiple languages can help reduce language barriers. It's also important to foster an environment where all languages are respected and valued equally.

Researcher: Cool! Last question, what do you think are the impacts of language choices on the career aspirations and professional development of Malaysian young Indian professionals?

Interviewee 1: Language choices significantly impact career growth. Those fluent in English speakers often have more access to global opportunities and leadership roles. On the other hand, those primarily speaking Tamil may find it harder to advance unless they develop proficiency in English or Malay, which are crucial for higher-level positions.

Interviewee 2: Language choices significantly impact the career aspirations and professional development of young Indian professionals in Malaysia by shaping their ability to adapt to diverse work environments. Proficiency in English enhances opportunities in the global and corporate sectors, while fluency in Bahasa Malaysia is essential for local job Interviewee 6ets and government roles. Retaining Tamil fosters cultural pride and can create niche opportunities, but balancing

multiple languages ensures a broader networking potential and professional growth in Malaysia's multicultural workplace.

Interviewee 3: Language choices impact skill development and leadership by enabling young Indian professionals to navigate Malaysia's multicultural workplace. Proficiency in English and Bahasa Malaysia broadens career opportunities, while Tamil fosters cultural pride and a niche relevance. Multilingualism enhances versatility, networking and leadership potential, but limited proficiency in dominant languages may hinder confidence and career progression.

Researcher: Thanks so much, guys! What a wonderful discussion we had.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE



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