

The intricacies of Tamil maintenance and shift in Singapore

[Draft]

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Abstract

The Tamils of Singapore have been the subject of language shift discussions for years where much of the narrative has been focused on tale of Tamil abandonment in favour of English. However, when considering minority languages in Singapore, a closer examination of census data reveals that the decline in Tamil usage has occurred at a relatively slower rate compared to Malay, whose speakers have been repeatedly hailed by scholars as custodians of their language. This may be an indication of Tamils exerting some effort to continue maintaining their language despite the prevailing shift – this maintenance is something that the existing literature has largely ignored. The current study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the language situation of young Tamilians in Singapore. Data on language use, attitudes and core values were collected through a questionnaire from 71 Tamil Singaporeans aged 18 to 27 and semi-structured interviews were conducted with five young Tamilians to gain additional insight. The findings of the present study challenges previous scholarly works that predicted an impending death for Tamil as a spoken language in Singapore; it was found that certain segments of the community, such as those belonging to the lower income bracket have been maintaining the language at a high level for a long time and still continue to do so. This, coupled with the generally positive attitudes towards Tamil, suggests that the future of Tamil may not be quite as bleak.

1 Introduction

An examination of Singapore's language ecology in its formative years and how it currently stands yields remarkable insight into how the nation's linguistic situation has drastically transformed since independence in 1965. The Singaporean government's highly interventionist and top-down approach to language planning, which includes the implementation of the bilingual policy in education and the relegation of non-Mandarin Chinese languages to dialects, has greatly influenced the current language situation of Singapore. Amidst this changing landscape, over the years, a consequential phenomenon known as language shift has taken effect on the population. Besides the aforementioned language planning efforts, a contact situation such as Singapore's, where there has been prolonged interaction between the various languages of its Chinese, Malay and Indian residents, is fertile grounds for language shift to take shape. While it is true that Singapore has collectively experienced language shift, the way in which it has manifested in each of the three main ethnic groups has varied considerably.

Just five years into independence, Tamil was reported to be the only official language that was losing ground to English (Kuo, 1980). This placed Tamils and the wider Indian community at the forefront of conversations surrounding the shift to English. Today, close to 58 years since independence, Tamil is still being spoken in Singapore but its future in the country as a spoken language remains uncertain considering the continued reports of declining use. The current study will be focused on investigating the language situation of young Tamil Singaporeans set against the backdrop of this ongoing shift to English.

1.1 Language Maintenance and Language Shift (LMLS)

Fishman's (1964) seminal article on language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) establishes a starting point which can be used to understand what the field is concerned with. He notes that it is the study of the relationship between how language use patterns change (or remain the same) in situations where linguistically distinct populations come into contact and how this interacts with continuing psychological, social and cultural processes. The resultant effect is that certain languages within the language ecology are sometimes replaced by another (Fishman, 1964, p.35); this is what is referred to as language shift (LS). LS is a process that occurs gradually (Pauwels, 2016, p.13) at the societal level where the shift generally takes at least a generation before we see the language being completely abandoned. Given how

ubiquitous language contact is, it has been emphasised that LS is a societal norm (Fishman, 1964).

Contact situations are born out of mobility, with migration and colonisation being some of the basic causes highlighted in the LMLS context. Colonisation, especially, has been noted to be the most intrusive due to the disruption that the colonisers' language causes to a given community's language ecology where pre-existing linguistic hierarchies have already been established (Pauwels, 2016, p.17). Singapore then lends itself to the study of LMLS considering migration and colonisation have played defining roles in its history, making it a country where diverse linguistic groups have been in contact for extended periods.

1.2 Theoretical frameworks and approaches in LMLS research

The *sociology of language approach*, *core value theory*, and *social psychological approach* are three frameworks that are commonly employed in LMLS studies. The current study utilises a combination of these approaches.

The *sociology of language approach* that is associated with Fishman (1964) focuses on the habitual language use patterns of a community across various domains. The approach aims to understand “who speaks what language to whom and when” (Fishman, 1965) to provide an overview of a given ethnolinguistic group’s language situation. This primarily quantitative approach has been noted to be beneficial in spotting macro trends.

Core value theory, pioneered by Smolicz (1981), posits that groups have a set of values they subscribe to and these are values that "are regarded as forming the most fundamental components or heartland of a group's culture" (Smolicz, 1999, p.105); they also act as “identifying values which are symbolic of the group and its membership" (Smolicz & Secombe, 1985, p.11). Different groups hold different values such as religion, family, and language, with some groups placing more importance on language as a core value than others (Smolicz & Lean, 1979, p.235). For instance, language-centred groups like Greeks and Poles have been found to exhibit higher rates of language maintenance, whereas cultures like Italians and the Dutch, who place less significance on language, tend to be more prone to language shift (Smolicz and Secombe, 1985). Additionally when two core values interact, such as religion

and language for the Arabic community (Turjoman, 2017), higher rates of maintenance is observed (Gogonas, 2012).

The *social psychological approach* (Giles & Johnson, 1987) is concerned with investigating the language attitudes of groups and how it influences their language practices and language use (Pauwels, 2016). It has been noted that language attitudes is a crucial factor in LMLS considerations (Bradley, 2013). Various studies have identified a correlation between positive attitudes and increased use of a given language (Morita, 2003; Sevinç, 2016) while also acknowledging that attitudes can vary between different segments of the same community (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). As such, it can be seen why understanding language attitudes of a given community can be valuable in LMLS investigations.

1.3 Situating the Tamils as a part of Singapore's multicultural makeup

The city state of Singapore poses a multi-ethnic fabric (Figure 1) that is officially composed of three main ethnic groups: Chinese (74.3%), Malay (13.5%) and Indian (9%). The final 3.2% of the population comprises an ethnically diverse group that do not fall into any of the three main ethnicities and are thus parked under the umbrella of 'Others' (Department of Statistics, 2021). This official representation of Singapore's ethnic composition has been termed the Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others (CMIO) race model.

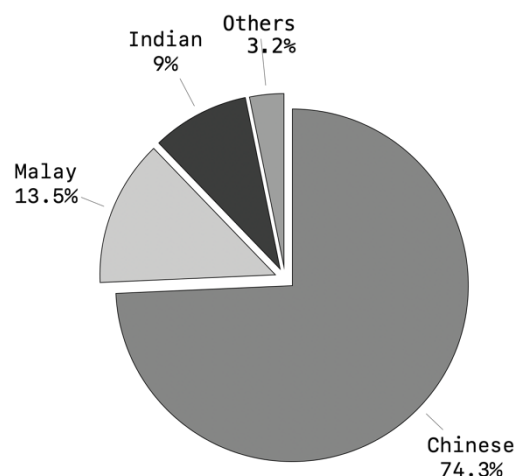


Figure 1. Singapore's ethnic composition (Department of Statistics, 2021)

The CMIO model, for all intents and purposes, exists as a tool for the governance and management of policies that are concerned with race (Ong, 2022; Solomon, 2012), while not making any distinctions between the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity'. The three main ethnic groups that are officially recognised in Singapore are in reality a lot more heterogeneous than it is made out to be by the model.

The Indians in Singapore are an especially heterogeneous group, with multiple ethnolinguistic communities falling under a single umbrella. The Department of Statistics (2021) defines "Indian" as anyone of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origin, essentially rendering "Indian" a catch-all term for people of South Asian descent. Of interest to this paper is the intra-ethnic majority among the Indians, the ethnic Tamils who make up 54.3% of the Indian community (Lakshmi, 2016) which translates to slightly less than 5% of Singapore's total population.

1.4 A socio-historical background of Tamils and Tamil in Singapore

The Tamils in Singapore form a part of the larger Tamil diaspora that has its roots set in the Tamil homeland of Tamil Nadu, India. The earliest Tamil settlers arrived in Singapore during British rule, many of whom were characterised as subservient low wage labourers and convicts; being an easily manageable group, they were put to work in construction, working on the infrastructure of the developing settlement in Singapore (Mani et al., 2018).

Despite the subsequent arrival of Tamils from other walks of life, including Tamil Muslim traders, Chettiar financiers as well as Sri Lankan administrative assistants, the stigma of Tamils being racially inferior coolies persisted (Solomon, 2012, p.262) and was extended to the Tamil language (Schiffman, 2003). To distance themselves from the stigma of being lower class coolies, the educated Tamils, rejected Tamil and adopted English to ensure they were not socially and economically limited.

After World War II, the leadership in the Singapore Indian community assumed a pan-Indian identity (Solomon, 2012) by downplaying their regional differences (Purushotam, 2000, p.45). There was however a growing disconnect (Solomon, 2012) between the elite class leaders and the working class masses. Influenced by nationalism in India, there was a desire by the leaders

to promote Hindi as the lingua franca of the Indian community in Singapore but this did not resonate with the working class Tamils. Labour then became increasingly politicised, playing a central role in the rise of Tamil leadership within the Indian community (Rai, 2008) by gaining the support of Tamil labourers. This saw the start of Tamil Separatism (Solomon, 2012) in Singapore, paving the way for the ascension of Tamil in the country. Tamil was further propelled to the fore by the influence of the Dravidian movement (Purushotnam, 2000, p.45) that took root in Tamil Nadu during that period; the Tamil teachers in Singapore were heavily taken with the movement (Rai, 2004, p.259), which placed an emphasis on the Tamil language and glorified the Tamil culture.

Thus, Tamil's status in Singapore can be largely attributed to bottom-up movements from the Tamil community, propelling their language to the forefront of Indian languages in the country. These bottom-up efforts were what eventually influenced the top-down language policies of the Singapore government; acknowledging the numerical and political power that the Tamils amassed within the Indian community, Tamil was accorded the status of official language alongside Mandarin, Malay and English, as legislated by the Republic of Singapore's Independence Act of 1965.

1.5 Tamil use post-independence

Table 1 shows a clear, steady increase in the use of English at home and the corresponding decrease in the use of heritage language for all three main ethnicities. The exception is Mandarin which increased in use for the first 30 years before declining over the past decade.

Table 1. A comparison of English and Mother Tongue use in Singapore, as preferred home language, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020 (%)*

Ethnicity	Language	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Chinese	English	10.2	21.4	23.9	32.6	47.6
	Mandarin	13.1	30.0	45.1	47.7	40.2
	Chinese Vernaculars	76.2	48.2	30.7	19.2	11.8
Malay	English	2.3	5.7	7.9	17.0	39.0
	Malay	96.7	94.1	91.6	82.6	60.7
Indian	English	24.3	34.3	35.6	41.6	59.2

	Tamil	52.2	43.5	42.9	36.6	27.4
	Malay	8.6	14.1	11.6	7.9	6.0
	Other Indian Languages	14.9	8.1	9.2	13.6	7.3

*Not all figures add up to 100 percent. The remaining speakers speak a variety of smaller languages.

* Pre-1980 census did not account for preferred home language

Source: Department of Statistics, 2020; Cavallaro & Ng, 2014

The shift in the Indian community (seen in the high use of English at home) has been apparent since independence and has been acknowledged by various studies (Gupta & Yeok, 1995; Schiffman, 2002). Specifically, when looking at the Tamil community, Kuo (1980), based on his analysis of the 1970 census, Tamil was the only one of the four official languages that was facing declining use.

The 1980 census, the first to report data on preferred home language, shows that 52.2% of the Indian community reported Tamil as their main home language. Over the next four decades, the preference for Tamil continued to decline (Figure 2), with English overtaking it as the sometime in the 2000s. The 2010 census was the first to report English (41.6%) preference over Tamil (36.6%). The gap between the two languages continued to widen; as of the 2020 census, the preferred home language of Singaporean Indians is English (59.2%) while Tamil preference (27.4%) is at the lowest it has been. It should however be noted that the data for English in Figure 2 is accounting for all Indian Singaporeans and not just ethnic Tamils as the census does not provide data on the use of English for Tamils only.

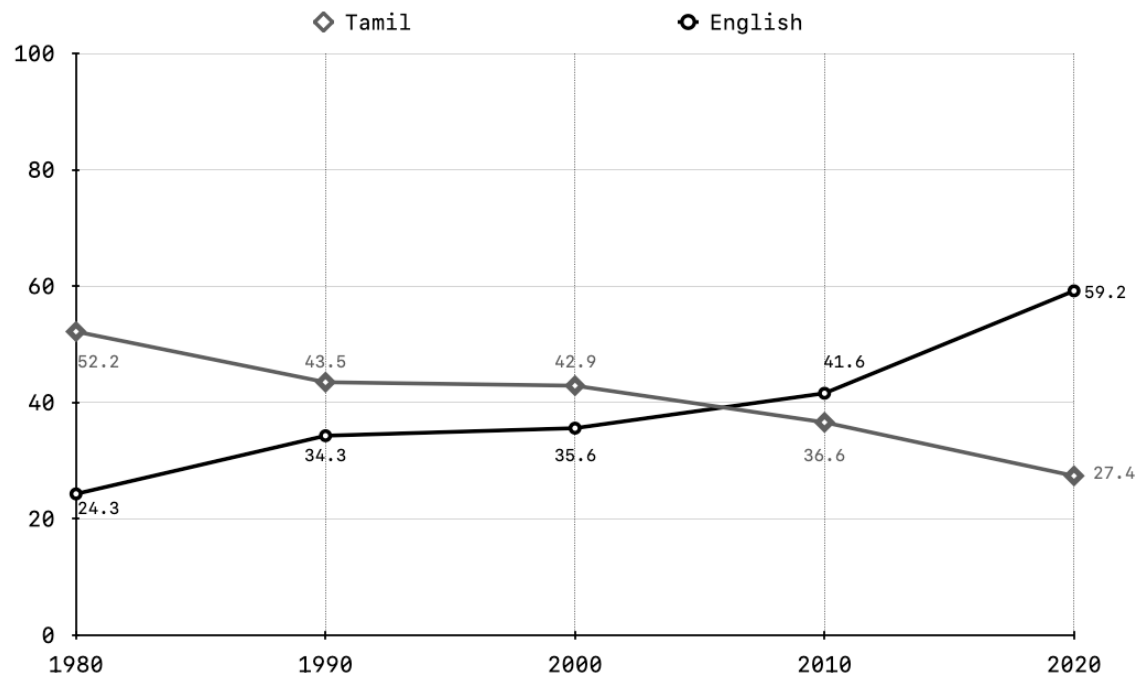


Figure 2. Decline of Tamil against the increase of English as the preferred home language of the Indians, 1980-2020 (Department of Statistics, 2021)

1.6 Language Shift Studies in Singapore

1.6.1 Non-Tamil LMLS studies

The earlier LMLS studies on the Chinese community were focused on the various subgroups of the community and the shift away from their respective vernaculars such as Cantonese (Gupta & Siew, 1995), Teochew (Li, Saravanan & Ng, 1997), and Hokkien (Chua, 2002) towards Mandarin and English. Recently, studies have turned their focus to a more recent development, the shift away from Mandarin towards English. This has been studied from a 'family language policy' (FLP) perspective (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Lea, 2011; Xie, Ng and Cavallaro, 2022) where language ideologies of parents/grandparents have been investigated in relation to how they impact the children/grandchildren under their care. A more traditional sociolinguistic approach was undertaken by Cavallaro & Ng (2020) by providing a linguistic account of different ethnic groups in Singapore, including the Chinese community, in the context of LMLS.

The Malay community did not receive as much scholarly attention until the 2010s, possibly due to their supposedly remarkable levels of maintenance. However, research using domain

analysis found that English started to seep into previously Malay domains such as the home (Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010). From the FLP perspective, Mirvahedi & Cavallaro (2020) found that bilingual Malay-English children prefer English over Malay during playtime, and introduce more English into the family's language dynamics when they start schooling. Additionally, investigations of Malay-Chinese families showed a higher rate of language shift, with English being the dominant language used in all domains (Ng et al., 2022). Malay was also reported to be perceived as less important than Mandarin for their children's future (Ng et al., 2022), which puts Malay in a precarious position for these mixed families.

1.6.2 Tamil LMLS studies

Some of the earliest work done on LMLS in the Tamil community post-independence is that of Gopinathan & Mani's (1983) evaluation of census data and several small-scale studies. In analysing language use with the family, they found that Tamil was in "declining continuum across generations" (p.111), where English dominated in communication with siblings while Tamil was used with older interlocutors. The study reported that Tamils in Singapore were experiencing "subtractive bilingualism" (p.111), in which socioeconomic forces were pushing them to replace Tamil with English. Subtractive bilingualism occurs when there is a decline in use and proficiency of the first language due to the acquisition of a second language that is perceived as having more power and prestige (Baker, 2011). This evaluation of various studies and census data led Gopinathan & Mani (1983) to conclude that the "Tamil language in Singapore is in a state of uncertainty" (p.115).

Ramiah (1991), investigated the language use habits of primary school Tamil students in Singapore across eight domains through the use of a questionnaire. Similar to Gopinathan & Mani's (1983) study, the primary finding highlighted was the shift to English when communicating with siblings and friends while Tamil was used in communication with older interlocutors such as their parents and grandparents.

While the scholarly works discussed thus far have made observations of general trends and language use patterns within segments of the Tamil community, Saravanan (1993) highlighted the factors that have led and contributed to the shift away from Tamil. The main reason identified for the declining use of Tamil was its perceived status as a language of low social

status; it was observed that Tamils of high socio-economic status were not maintaining Tamil as much as the low socio-economic group.

The existing literature has also identified the highly diglossic relationship between the two varieties of Tamil, Literary Tamil (LT) and Spoken Tamil (ST), as another factor that further exacerbates the challenge of its maintenance (Saravanan, 1993; Schiffman, 1998, 2003). The language used in the Tamil media scene in Singapore was criticised by Saravanan (1993) for its large use of LT as compared to the media industry in India which makes use of ST to appeal to the masses; many Singaporean Tamils were reported to have a feeling of inadequacy in LT, thus avoiding to participate in radio or tv interviews and activities (Saravanan, 1993). As such, another domain for potential Tamil use was lost. Considering it has been cited in various studies (Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Othman, 2006) that media can play a part in maintenance by promoting the heritage languages at home, not making use of ST in the media was an opportunity missed to encourage maintenance of Tamil. It is, however, acknowledged that measures were starting to relax at the time of the study's publication, where ST was reported to be acceptable in some instances to encourage participation and attract larger audiences. Currently, the Tamil media scene has adopted the use of ST for a wider range of programmes while maintaining LT exclusively for news segments.

Even with such relaxations, Saravanan, Lakshmi & Caeon's (2007) investigations on language attitudes towards LT and ST among Tamil language teachers in Singapore revealed that Tamil teachers still advocate for the use of LT in the media. The participants' attitudes towards ST and LT did not, however, present any discernible differences when it came to its *suitability for Tamil teaching*. Despite this, the pedagogical challenges surrounding Tamil diglossia is still prevalent; designing an appropriate syllabus for Tamil in Singapore has been constantly plagued with issues of relevance to daily life and the functionality of the different varieties. Tamil language education in Singapore schools have always placed an emphasis on the high variety LT, which has little relevance to everyday life. The issue of maintenance lies in the disconnect between the variety learnt in school and the variety spoken at home. With little emphasis placed on ST, students have little opportunity to improve spoken proficiency in the variety that is more relevant to their daily lives. It has been found that the disconnect has caused younger Tamils to avoid using the language, further diminishing their identity with their heritage tongue (David et al., 2009). The government grew cognisant of the issues surrounding Tamil diglossia and pedagogy through a number of commissioned studies leading them to

introduce Standard Spoken Tamil (SST), the emerging standard of the L variety (Schiffman, 1998), to the Tamil classroom in 2008 (Lakshmi, 2012). As such, the students are now expected to be proficient in both ST for the oral component of examinations and LT for the written components (Lakshmi, 2012).

There has been limited Tamil-specific LMLS research since the 2010s. Rajan (2014) explored the issues of the pedagogical challenges in teaching and maintaining Tamil. Her findings note that there has been an increase in maintenance efforts including revisions to pedagogical approaches such as localising the content of textbooks to increase its relevance and the introduction of Tamil degree and diploma programmes. Kadakara (2015) conducted a qualitative investigation on the language situation of Tamils in the home domain, highlighting that the “English-only Tamil[s]”, whom he refers to as “elites” (p.53), are not maintaining their language. It was also found that there is a lack of intergenerational transmission of Tamil in English-Tamil and English-only families.

The literature discussed thus far paints a grim picture for Tamil in Singapore. Vaish (2007), however, provides a sliver of optimism by reporting some level of maintenance in Singaporean Tamil children based on the findings of The Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore 2006. In her analysis of language use across five domains, she reported that both English and Tamil are used in all domains to different extents, which is typical of a community that exhibits bilingualism without diglossia. Fishman (1967) identifies bilingualism without diglossia as one where bilingualism is observed but with no clearly defined or separate function for the two languages/varieties, thus resulting in the absence of diglossia. Without diglossia, Fishman posits that maintenance of both languages is unlikely, resulting in the language that is "associated with the predominant shift of social forces" (Fishman, 1967, p. 36) to replace the other language. Despite the assertion of bilingualism without diglossia, Vaish (2007) reports that Tamil Singaporeans are an exception to groups that typify this since the findings are indicative of both maintenance and shift. Tamil maintenance was observed in communication with the older generation and also in certain contexts such as religion. Moreover, it was also found that certain speech events, especially those of an affective nature saw more Tamil use as opposed to English.

1.7 Research Aims

The existing literature mostly tells a tale of unremitting Tamil abandonment. A closer look at the census, however, reveals that Tamil as the preferred home language has declined by 24.2% since 1980 compared to the 64.4% decline in the Chinese vernaculars and the 36% decline in Malay in the same period. In terms of minority language maintenance, it can be observed Malay has been declining at a more rapid rate every decade since the 1990s as compared to Tamil. In fact, Tamil was the only language that experienced a period of stability as observed in the 1990s. This relatively low rate of decline may be indicative of some level of Tamil maintenance despite a shift. As such the current study is focused on providing a more comprehensive picture on the nuances of the language situation of young Tamilians in Singapore that the census is unable to capture.

To do so, the current study will be utilising the sociology of language approach to analyse the language use patterns, the social-psychological approach to explore language attitudes as well as core value theory to gain an understanding of the core values that young Tamilians subscribe to. Additionally, the current study aims to assess the effects of education and income level on Tamil maintenance since it has been a central point of concern with the studies discussed in the literature.

Therefore the research questions of this study are:

1. What are the language use patterns and language attitudes of young Tamil Singaporeans?
2. How does monthly household income and education level affect the language use and attitudes of young Tamil Singaporeans?
3. Are Tamil Singaporeans “language-centred” by the conventions of core value theory?

2 Methodology

The current study utilises a mixed-methods approach (Creswell et al., 2011; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Mixed-methods research combines at least one quantitative and qualitative element, to achieve greater breadth, depth, and validation of the findings (Greene et al., 1989; Johnson et al., 2007; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The quantitative component of this study was an online questionnaire and the qualitative component took on the form of semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires can be utilized in small-scale research, but in such cases it is common to combine them with other qualitative methods. Interviews, the qualitative method of choice for this small-scale study, can be used to provide a more detailed account of linguistic practices including language use and attitudes (Pauwels, 2016). The data gathered through these methods were triangulated using the convergence model (Creswell, 1999) where the qualitative and quantitative data were collected separately and converged for interpretation when discussing the findings.

2.1 Participants

The online questionnaire had a total of 71 participants (Table 2) who were recruited through snowball sampling (Buchstaller & Khattab, 2013) by disseminating the link via social media, email and personal contacts.

All participants were 18 to 27 ($M=21.78$) year old ethnic Tamil Singaporeans. This target age group was chosen because they would have completed their mandatory bilingual education. Importantly this age group represents the future of Tamil in Singapore, and they consist of individuals who will be starting families in the near future making questions on the future of Tamil most relevant to this group.

Table 2. Breakdown of participants

Gender		Income			Education Level	
Male	Female	Low	Middle	High	University	Non-university
36	35	23	24	24	31	40

With considerations for the median monthly household income of Singaporeans which is \$9520 (Department of Statistics, 2021), the participants were banded into three different income groups: Low (below \$6000), middle (\$6000 to \$9999) and high (above \$10000).

The participants varied in terms of education level and academic qualifications. As such, participants who reported their highest or current education level as anything below the university level were grouped together as the “Non-university” group while university students and graduates were grouped together and labelled as the “University” group.

Self-reported spoken proficiency (Table 3) was not used as a factor of analysis but it is worth noting that the sample of participants in this study were generally more proficient in English ($M = 4.90$) than Tamil ($M = 4.28$).

Table 3. Self-reported spoken proficiency

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Tamil	0	2	12	21	36
English	0	0	0	7	64

There were a total of 5 participants (Table 4) for the semi-structured interviews. These participants were recruited from the online survey where they indicated their interest in an optional follow-up interview. It is typical in cases such as this study for interviewees to be chosen from those who participated in the questionnaire (Pauwels, 2016).

Table 4. Interview participants breakdown

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Income group	Education group
Jay	Male	26	Middle	University
Abi	Female	18	Middle	Non-university
Rai	Female	24	High	University
Sid	Male	26	High	University
Vee	Female	22	High	University

2.2 Questionnaire

The online questionnaire was designed and hosted on Qualtrics. The questionnaire consisted of 37 questions and had six main parts (Table 5). The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

Table 5. Breakdown of questionnaire parts with sample questions.

Part	Description	Sample Questions
1	Basic demographic criteria. Confirmation that participants meet the demographic criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your ethnicity? • What is your age?
2	Self-rated spoken proficiency. Tasked to rate their language proficiencies from ‘level 1’ to ‘level 5’. A guide with descriptions of each level was provided so that the data is more standardised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your proficiency in English? • What is your proficiency in Tamil?
3	Language use. Tasked to indicate their proportion of each language used on a slider for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Language use with different interlocutors across different contexts (b) Language use for emotional expression and cognitive activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) You’re discussing a Tamil movie you just watched. What language do you use with your parents? (b) What language do you use when making mental calculations?
4	Core values. Tasked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale what they considered to be culturally important to Tamil Singaporeans. They were presented with 14 different items to rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tamil cultural history • Speaking and understanding Tamil • Tamil literature
5	Language attitude questions. Participants were tasked to rate different statements relating to language attitudes on a 7-point Likert scale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tamil is an important part of my identity • There are economic benefits to knowing Tamil

6	Background information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly household income • Education level • Housing type • Religious affiliation
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Participants provided informed consent by checking a box to start survey and completed the online survey using their preferred device at their own time. Some surveys were conducted in-person, with the researcher reading and recording responses on a laptop.

2.3 Semi-structured interviews

The 5 interviews conducted lasted between 20 to 40 minutes. They were conducted through various means ranging from phone calls to in-person interviews to accommodate to the participants' preferences. Pseudonyms were given to each of the interviewees to maintain their anonymity. All interviews were conducted in English.

The interview aimed to seek responses on two main areas that would aid in understanding the current language situation of young Tamil Singaporeans (Table 6). As reported in Table 4, each interviewee was asked for their basic demographic information such as age, monthly household income and education level at the start of the interview.

Table 6. Sample questions from semi-structured interviews.

Topic	Sample Questions
Personal language practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any instances where you prefer using Tamil over English? • Has your level of Tamil use changed with age?
Views on Tamil and its future in Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does Tamil play an important role in your life? • Does the Tamil syllabus in school help to promote Tamil use outside the classroom? • Do you think speaking Tamil is an important marker of being a Tamil Singaporean?

3 Results

The following section presents the results of the questionnaire with supplements from the semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Language use

The overall language use reported (Figure 3) reveals that the preferred language of communication differs depending on the interlocutor. When speaking to grandparents and parents, the older generation in the context of this study, Tamil is the preferred language. However, in communication with siblings and Tamil friends who are of similar age, the overall language use pattern indicates that English is the preferred language. It is worth noting, however, despite being in the same generation, the gap between English and Tamil use is closer in communication with friends as compared to siblings.

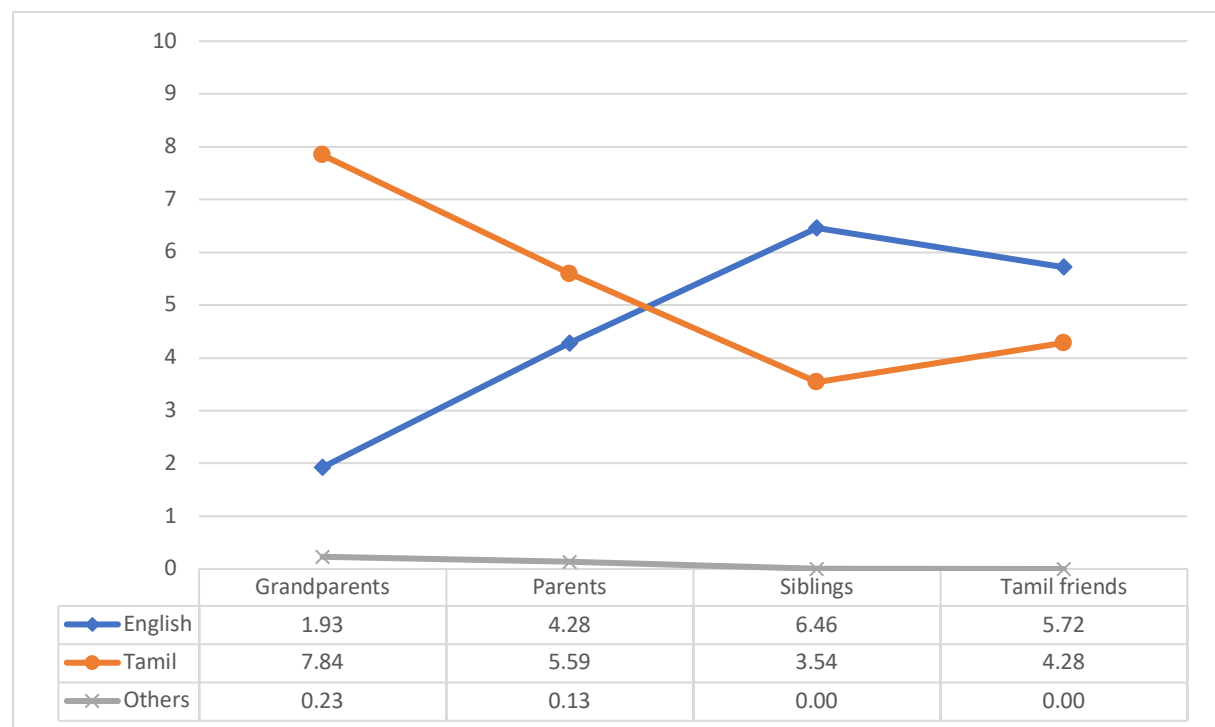


Figure 3. Overall language use with interlocutors

3.1.1 Effects of context on language use

Considerations for the different contexts reveal that different topics trigger varying language use patterns (Figure 4). Of the three contexts presented, English is most used when discussing English media, while Tamil is preferred for discussions on Tamil media and religious festivals.

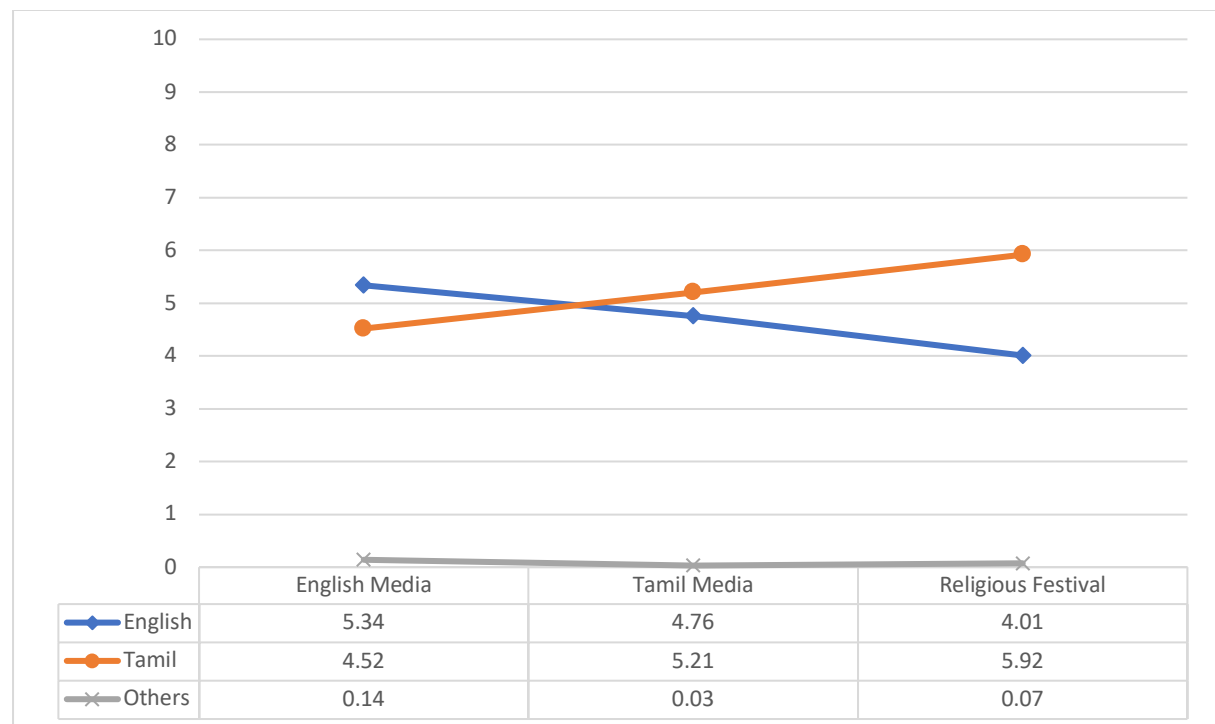


Figure 4. Overall language use by topic

However, this pattern does not persist when further broken down to investigate language use by topic when speaking with the different interlocutors (Figure 5).

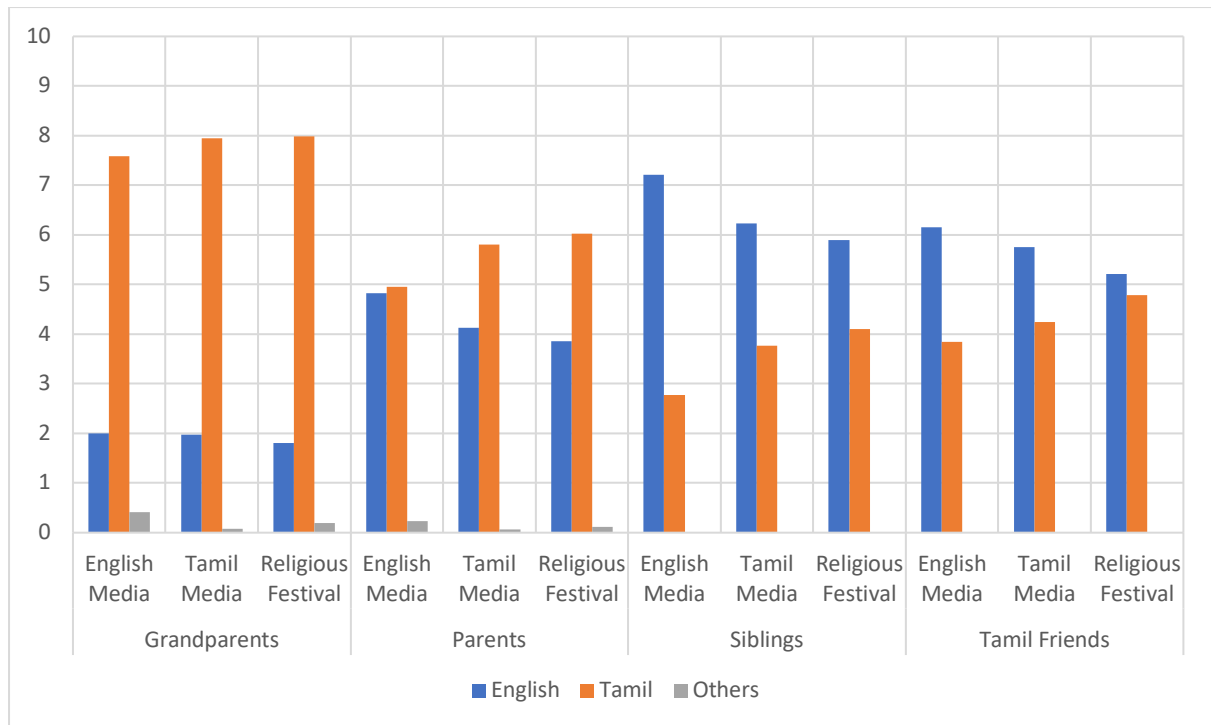


Figure 5. Language use with interlocutors across topics

Tamil is most used across all three contexts in communication with grandparents (Figure 6). The same can be observed in communication with parents except in discussion of English media where there are very similar levels of English ($M = 4.82$) and Tamil ($M = 4.96$) use reported. In general, the discussions on Tamil media and religious festivals triggers more Tamil use in conversation with both grandparents and parents.

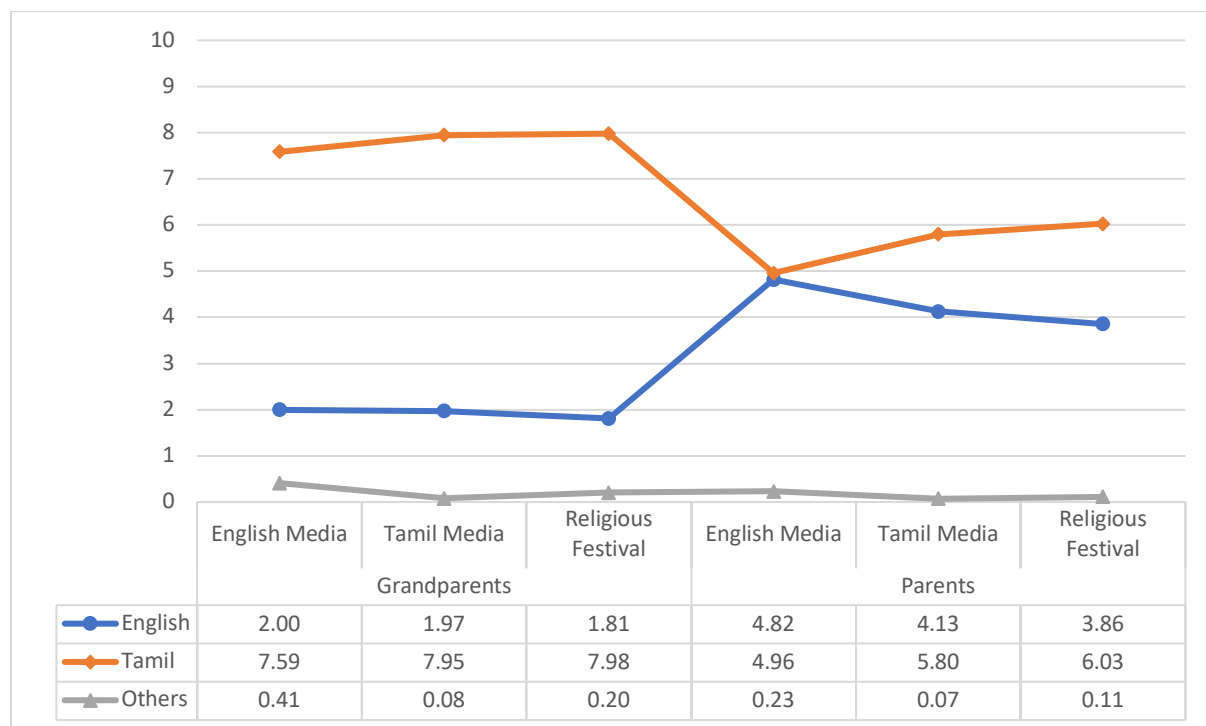


Figure 6. Language use with grandparents and parents across topics

On the other hand, English is the most preferred language when communicating with siblings and Tamil friends (Figure 7), regardless of the context. A discussion in the Tamil and religious context does however see an increase in the use of Tamil although English is still preferred. Additionally, it is worth noting that the religious context triggers the use of considerably more Tamil especially with friends, where similar levels of Tamil ($M = 4.79$) and English ($M = 5.21$) are reported.

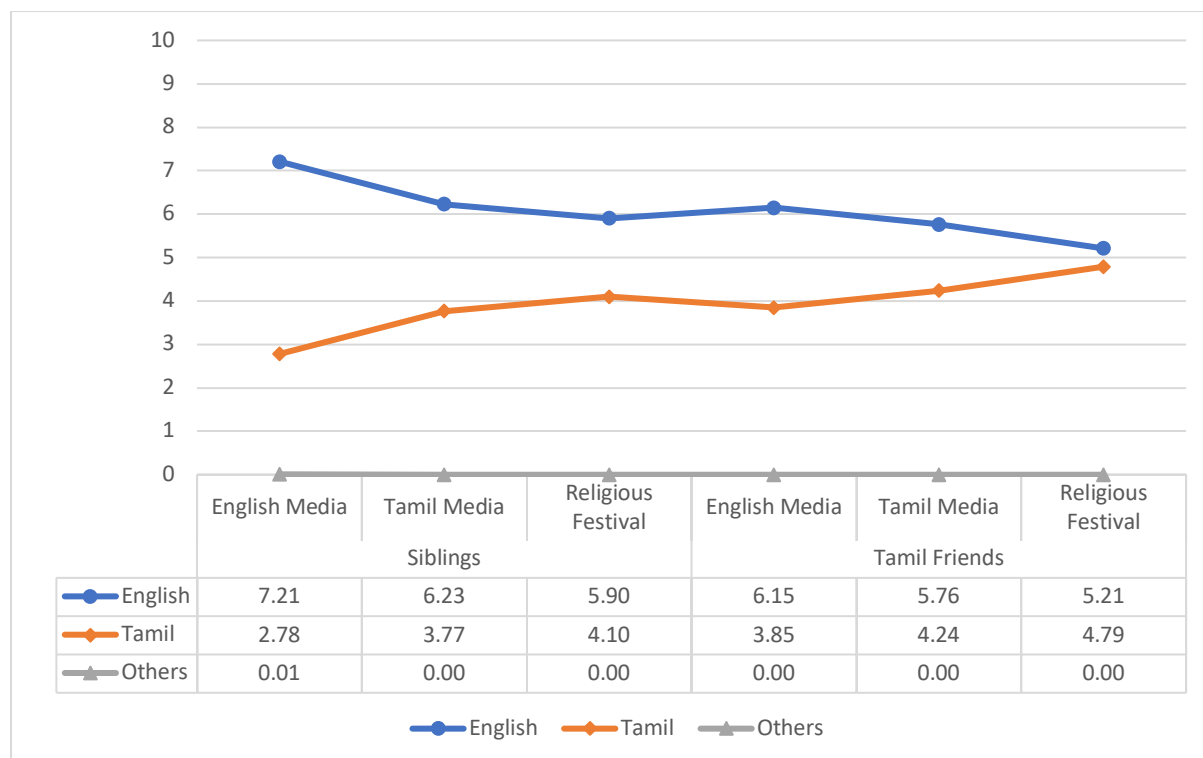


Figure 7. Language use with siblings and Tamil friends across topics

3.1.2 Effects of income on Tamil use

In general, it can be observed from the data that the low-income group reports higher levels of Tamil use than the middle-income and high-income groups. The middle and high-income groups report similar levels of Tamil use with all interlocutors except when speaking to siblings where the low-income reported considerably lower amount of Tamil use as compared to their high-income counterparts.

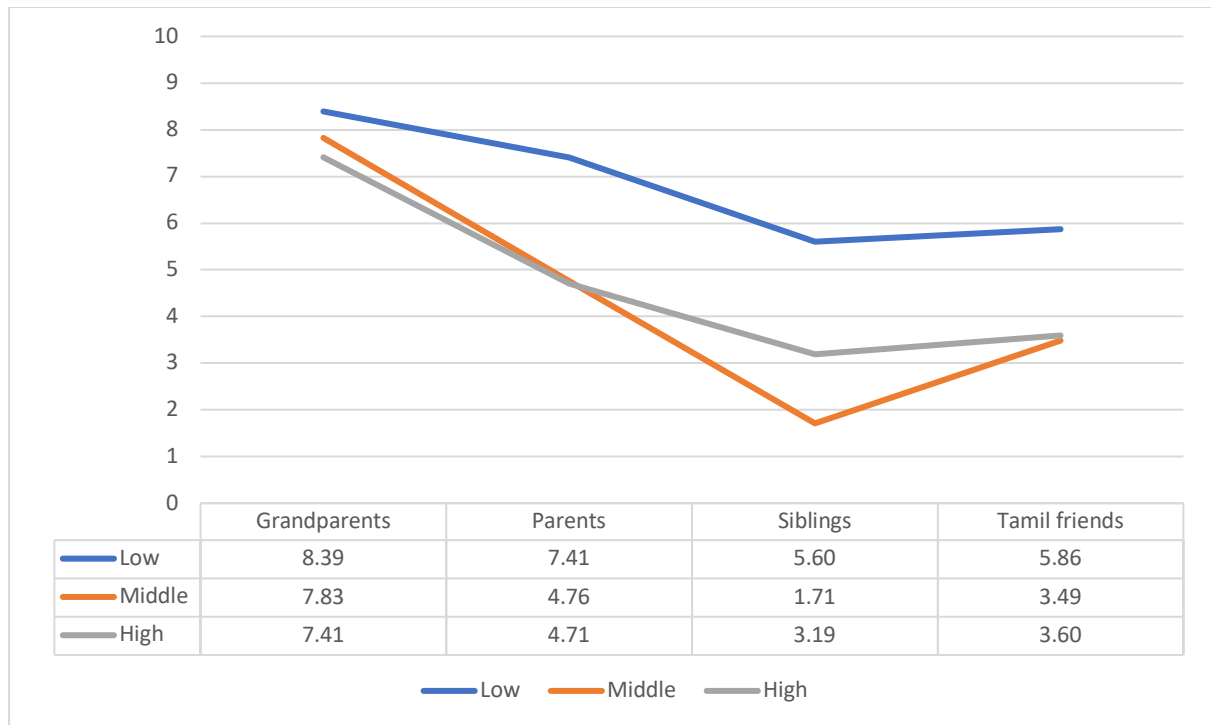


Figure 8. Tamil use with different interlocutors by income

A one way-analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the difference in Tamil use between the income groups in conversation with grandparents ($F(2, 174) = 1.181, p = 0.31$) was not statistically significant.

A one way-analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc Tukey HSD test revealed the low-income group's higher use of Tamil with parents ($F(2, 205) = 11.044, **p < 0.01$) was statistically significant in comparison to both the middle and high-income groups. Comparing the differences in Tamil use by the middle and high-income group with parents ($F(2, 205) = 11.044, p = 0.90$) was not statistically significant.

Additionally, the low-income group's higher use of Tamil with Tamil friends ($F(2, 205) = 12.836, **p < 0.01$) was statistically significant in comparison to both the middle and high-income groups. A comparison of the difference between the middle and high-income groups' Tamil use with Tamil friends ($F(2, 205) = 12.836, p = 0.9$) was not statistically significant.

Finally the difference in means was statistically significant between the low-income group's interaction with siblings ($F(2, 255) = 24.031, **p < 0.01$) when compared to both the middle and high-income groups. There was also a statistically significant difference between the

middle-income group and high-income group's Tamil use with siblings ($F(2, 255) = 24.031$, $**p < 0.05$).

With considerations for what is reported above, an additional point of interest emerges when looking at the overall language use by income, where the low-income group reports a preference for Tamil regardless of interlocutor (Figure 9).

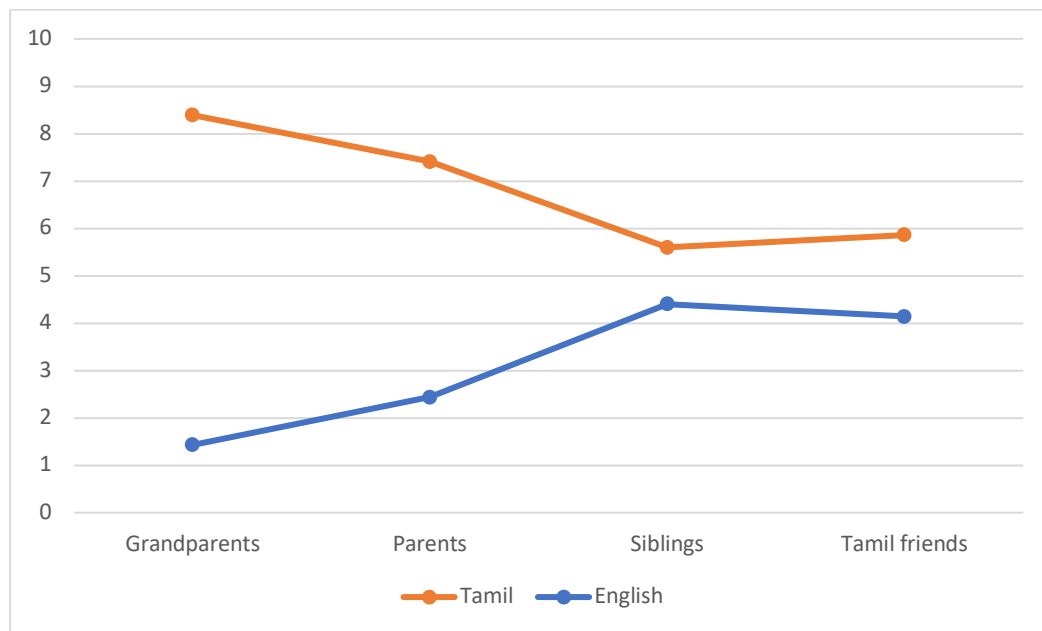


Figure 9. Low-income group's overall language use with different interlocutors

3.1.3 Effects of education level on Tamil use

As seen in Figure 10, when analysed by education level, the Non-university group in general reports the use of more Tamil with all interlocutors except with siblings where similar levels of Tamil use is reported by both the University and Non-university groups.

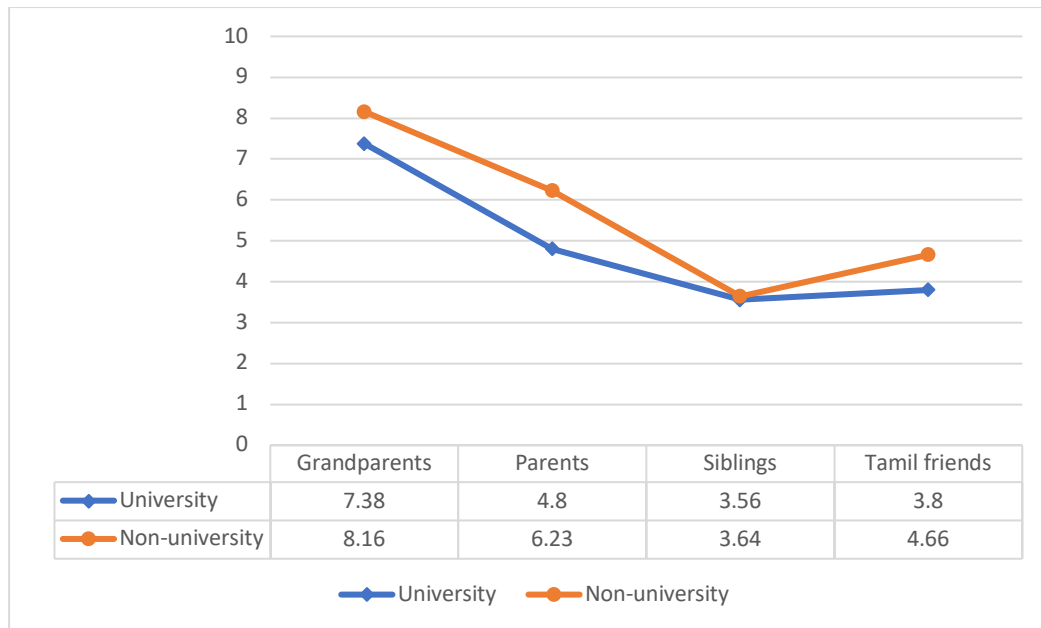


Figure 10. Tamil use with different interlocutors by education level

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was no statistical significance between the university and non-university group in Tamil use with grandparents ($F(1,175) = 3.561, p = 0.13$), with siblings ($F(1, 271) = 0.265, p = 0.61$), and with Tamil friends, ($F(1, 206) = 3.561, p = 0.06$). There was however, a statistical significant difference between the university and non-university group in Tamil use with parents ($F(1,206) = 6.788, **p < 0.01$).

While only Tamil use with parents presents statistically significant differences between the two groups, it is worth noting that the difference in Tamil use with friends ($p = 0.06$) is close to yielding a statistically significant result.

3.1.4 Language use for cognitive activities and emotional expression

Language choice during cognitive processes such as mental calculation, inner speech and emotional expressions have been found to be indicative of language dominance and competence (Dewaele, 2004; Pavlenko, 2014). It has also been noted that a language shift away from the heritage language is linked to a similar shift away from its use for the aforementioned activities.

When looking into the language use of participants for swearing, mental calculation and inner speech English dominates as the language of choice (Figure 11). Tamil, however, is not absent

in these situations, especially in more affective situations such as when swearing or engaging in inner speech. The use of other languages for swearing were mainly Hokkien and Malay, which is unsurprising in the Singapore context.

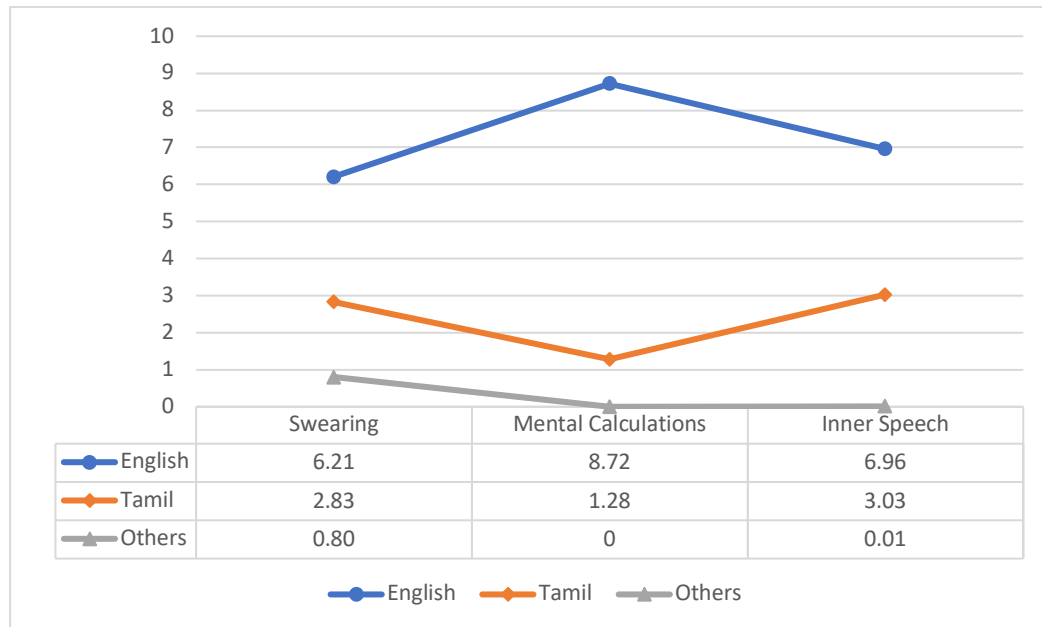


Figure 11. Language use for cognitive activities and emotional expression

3.1.5 Effects of income on Tamil use – cognitive activities and emotional expression

Figure 12 shows that the low-income group uses higher levels of Tamil across all three activities. In general the middle-income group uses more Tamil for these activities, except when engaging in inner speech where the high-income group ($M = 2.64$) reports slightly higher Tamil use as compared to the middle-income group ($M = 2.46$).

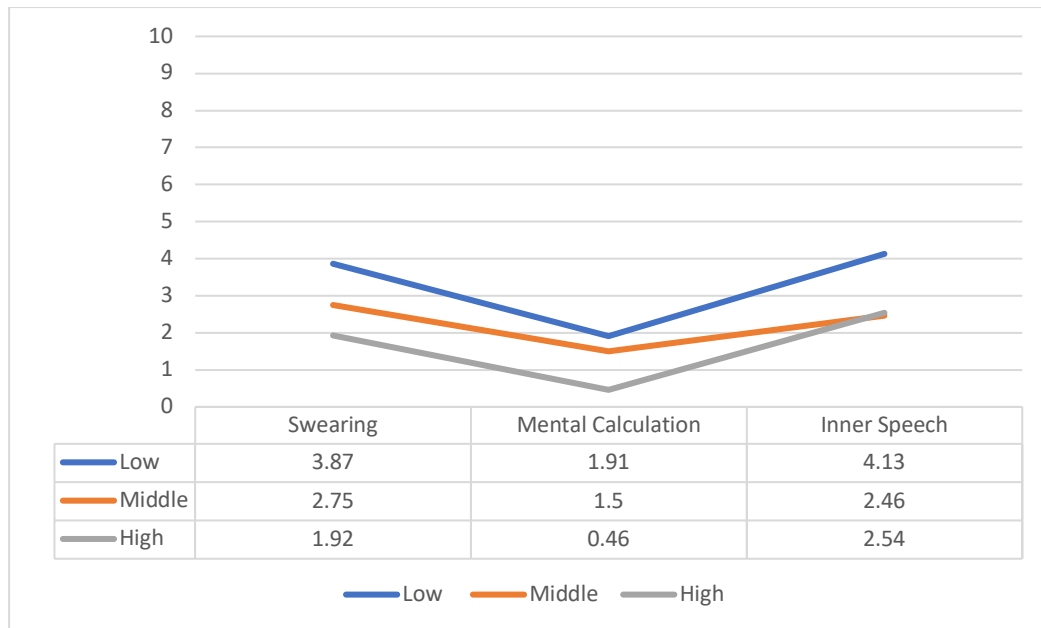


Figure 12. Language use for cognitive activities and emotional expression by income level

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that the low-income group uses significantly more Tamil when swearing ($F(2, 68) = 3.726, *p < 0.05$) when compared to the high-income group. There were no other statistically significant intergroup differences found when analysing for the effects of income level on swearing, mental calculation and inner speech.

3.1.6 Effects of education on additional language use contexts – cognitive and affective

As seen in Figure 13, the Non-university group reported a higher level of Tamil use across all three contexts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were no statistically significant inter group differences in Tamil use between the University and Non-university groups for swearing ($F(1, 69) = 3.191, p = 0.08$), mental calculations ($F(1, 69) = 1.138, p = 0.29$) and inner speech ($F(1, 69) = 0.305, p = 0.60$).

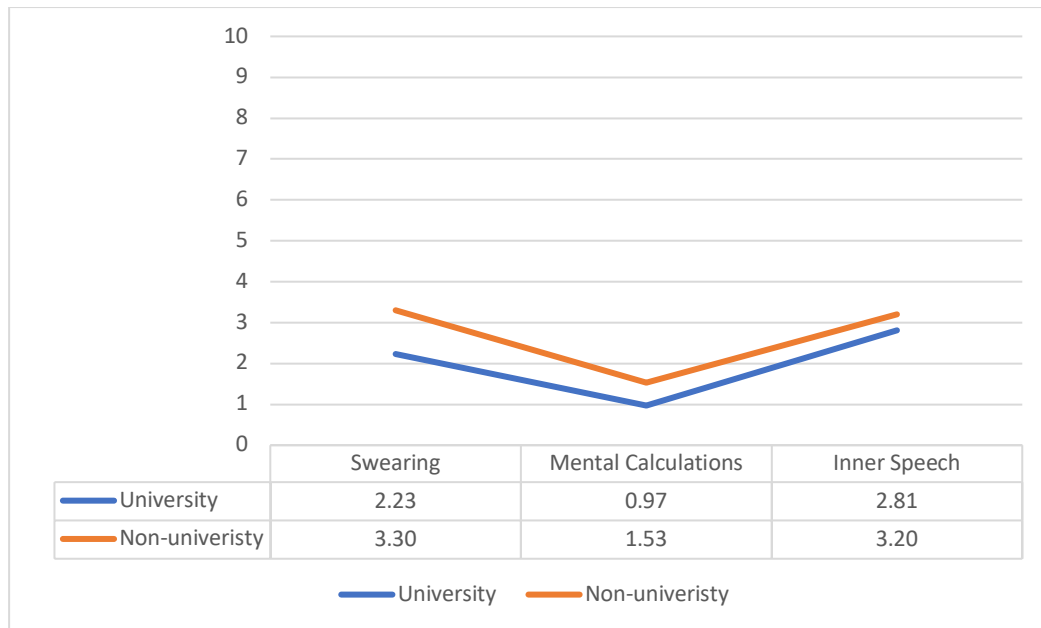


Figure 13. Language use for cognitive activities and emotional expression by education level

From this section it can be observed that English dominates, regardless of the activity. The dominant use of English persists even when broken down to investigate the effects of income and education levels. As discussed above, this serves as an indication of a English dominance and a shift away from Tamil.

3.1.7 Interview data for language use

While the quantitative findings provide an indication of general trends, the interview data managed to provide additional insight behind the motivations of the reported trends.

When communicating with grandparents, interviewees reported using Tamil exclusively, mirroring the high level of Tamil use reported in the quantitative data:

They don't understand English, so for me no choice I guess. It's okay though because we usually talk about simple things like daily routine and stuff...so although my Tamil is not as good, I am still able to talk to them. (Abi)

We always speak in Tamil. It's the language they are more comfortable in although they understand a little bit of English. (Jay)

Evidently, the motivations behind Tamil use with grandparents is primarily accommodative. Abi's interaction with her grandparents is a prime example of accommodation where she feels her Tamil proficiency is not very high, but she still takes into consideration the limited linguistic repertoire of her grandparents and caters to them.

Tamil use with friends reported by the interviewees indicates that it is highly context dependent. The common sentiment was that they use Tamil when they intend to convey their emotions. This is in line with the quantitative findings that suggest relatively more Tamil use is triggered for affective purposes.

With my friends, I feel that I use Tamil to convey my emotions because I feel that Tamil is very expressive. (Rai)

However, the use of English inevitably enters the interactions when conversing about academics and work. One interviewee who predominantly speaks English to his friends feels that it is impossible to use Tamil when speaking about certain topics that are more academic; the need to use domain-specific and technical jargon limits the use of Tamil:

I usually speak English with my friends given the subject matter of what we usually discuss is highly technical or scientific...[which is] more easily expressed and elaborated in English (Sid)

School and academics as topics of conversation also stood out when interviewees elaborated on their language use with siblings.

Honestly we talk quite a lot about school. The only time we use Tamil when talking about school work is when discussing Tamil homework last time. Actually even then we mix with English. Other subjects of course we use English. (Abi)

It was also noted by one interviewee that after his younger sister entered university, the use of Tamil with her declined.

She's a philosophy major and I did engineering [so] we definitely cannot use Tamil when sharing about university work. (Jay).

3.2 Core Values

Figure 16 (visualisation of the data in Table 7) offers a comprehensive overview of the rankings of core values perceived by young Tamil Singaporeans that they believe is crucial to the Tamil community in Singapore.

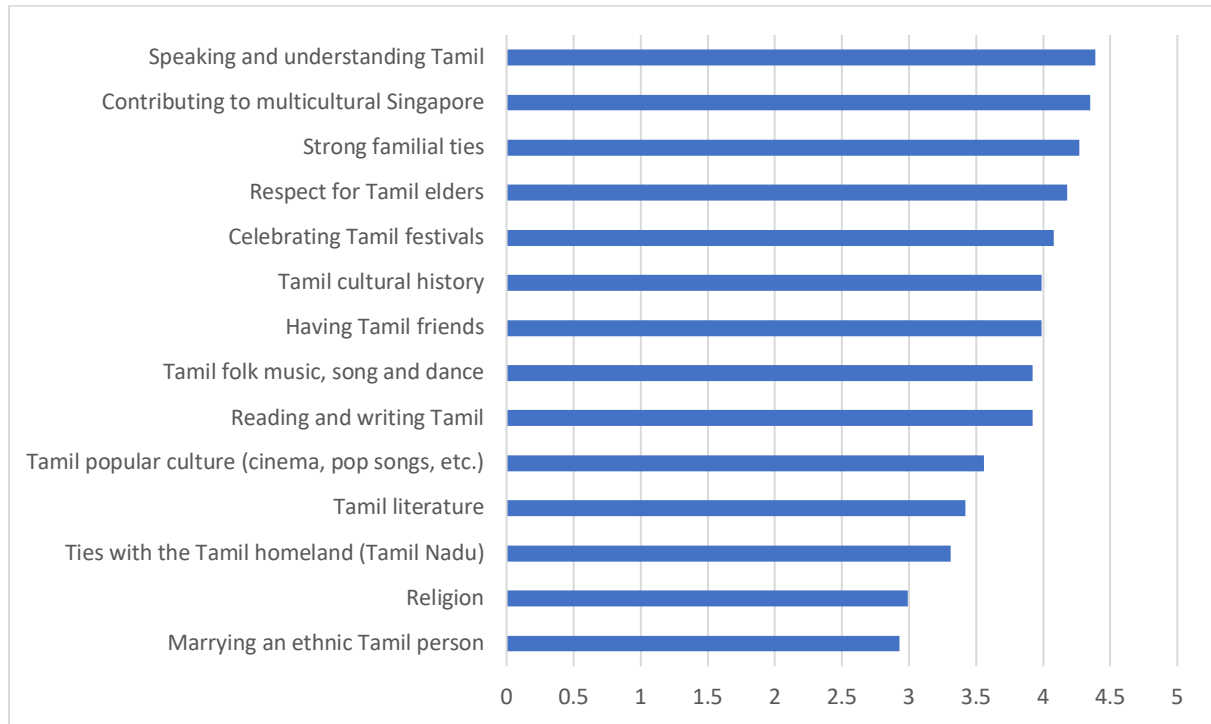


Figure 16. Mean ratings of core values

Table 7. Ranking of core values based on mean ratings.

Core Value	Mean	Ranking
Speaking and understanding Tamil	4.39	1
Contributing to multicultural Singapore	4.35	2
Strong familial ties	4.27	3
Respect for Tamil elders	4.18	4
Celebrating Tamil festivals	4.08	5
Having Tamil friends	3.99	=6
Tamil cultural history	3.99	=6
Reading and writing Tamil	3.92	=8
Tamil folk music, song and dance	3.92	=8
Tamil popular culture (cinema, pop songs, etc.)	3.56	10
Tamil literature	3.42	11

Ties with the Tamil homeland (Tamil Nadu)	3.31	12
Religion	2.99	13
Marrying an ethnic Tamil person	2.93	14

'Speaking and understanding Tamil' was ranked as the most important core value along with *'Contributing to multicultural Singapore'* and *'Strong familial ties'* closing out the top three. Among the bottom half values the bottom four, *'Tamil literature'*, *'Ties with the Tamil homeland (Tamil Nadu)'*, *'Religion'* and *'Marrying an ethnic Tamil person'* were values that less than 50% of the participants rated as either vitally important or important to Tamil Singaporeans.

Even from the interview data gathered, the interviewees expressed not only that Tamil was an important part of their identity but being able to speak and understand it ensures that they are able to contribute to Singapore's multicultural fabric as a distinct ethnolinguistic group.

Speaking [Tamil] and understanding it is part of my identity and part of my Singaporean multicultural identity. (Sid)

It was also mentioned that being able to speak Tamil is important because it helps them stay connected with the elderly members of the community. In this case we see the core values of *family* and *language* interacting:

Speaking Tamil makes it easier for us to speak to our grandparents who are unlikely to know English. (Sid)

Meanwhile, *Reading and writing Tamil* was rated to be not as important, ranking in the bottom half of the items investigated. While the majority agree that it is not important to the Singapore Tamil culture, Rai, who is an aspiring Tamil educator felt that LT education is still needed. She mentions that LT forms the foundations for gaining proficiency in ST where it aids in the understanding of how grammatical elements of the language such as tenses work.

Sid, however, based on his Tamil education, felt that not enough emphasis was placed on improving ST to the extent that many students force LT into speech, which sounds awkward

especially considering that Singapore Tamil has unique inflections that are influenced by Singlish and Malay.

Clearly there are contrasting views on the state of Tamil diglossia in Singapore. Educators still value the importance of Literary Tamil (LT), while non-educators who underwent Tamil Mother Tongue lessons advocate for improving Spoken Tamil (ST) instead during Mother Tongue lessons. Regardless, the majority do not consider LT as a significant aspect of Singaporean Tamil culture, as it lacks relevance in their daily lives as Tamils.

3.3 Language Attitudes

Figure 17 illustrates the general attitudes that participants possess with regards to Tamil across five categories. Participants reported generally positive attitudes towards the maintenance of Tamil ($M=5.59$), its future in Singapore ($M=5.51$), its function as a language of solidarity ($M=5.34$) as well as a language that is important to their identity ($M=5.01$). On the other hand they expressed neutrality in their attitudes towards the pragmatic value of Tamil ($M=4.15$).

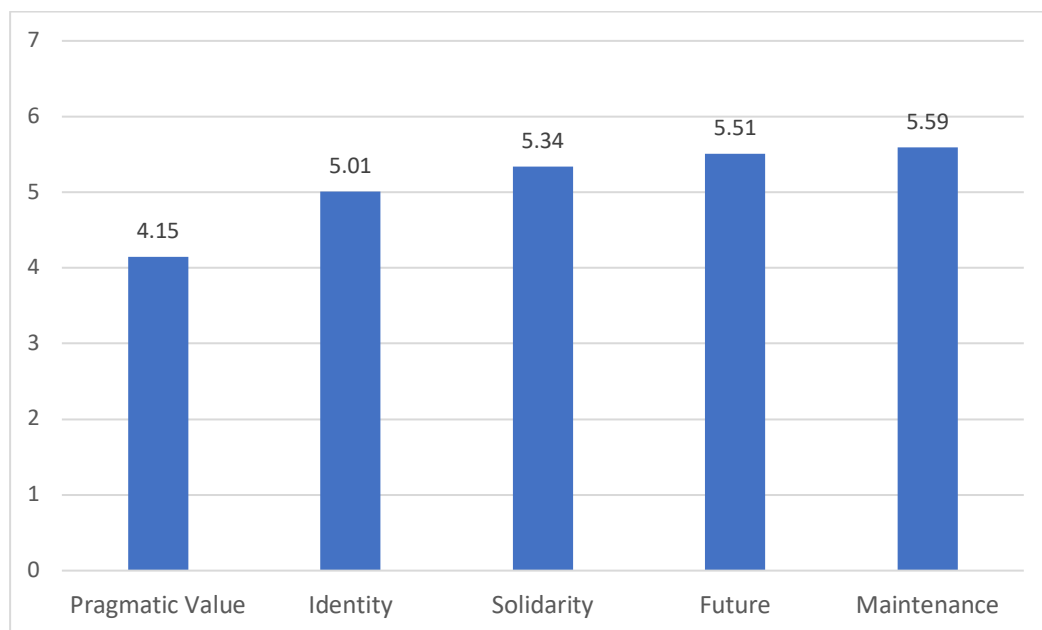


Figure 17. Overall language attitudes ratings

The participants demonstrate a belief that Tamil lacks utilitarian value (Figure 18), as reflected in their lower attitudes rating in the ‘pragmatic value’ category ($M = 4.15$) relative to how they rated other categories. Specifically, their ratings suggest that they view Tamil as a language that holds little economic power within the Singaporean context. Even the highest rated statement in the category ‘*Tamil is needed to ensure Singapore does well economically*’ ($M = 4.48$) received a neutral rating. As a whole the attitudes rating of the “Pragmatic value” category clearly indicates that Young Singaporean Tamilians do not feel like Tamil holds much power in helping them advance up the socio-economic ladder at the individual level, nor is it powerful enough to contribute positively to Singapore’s economic success at the societal level.

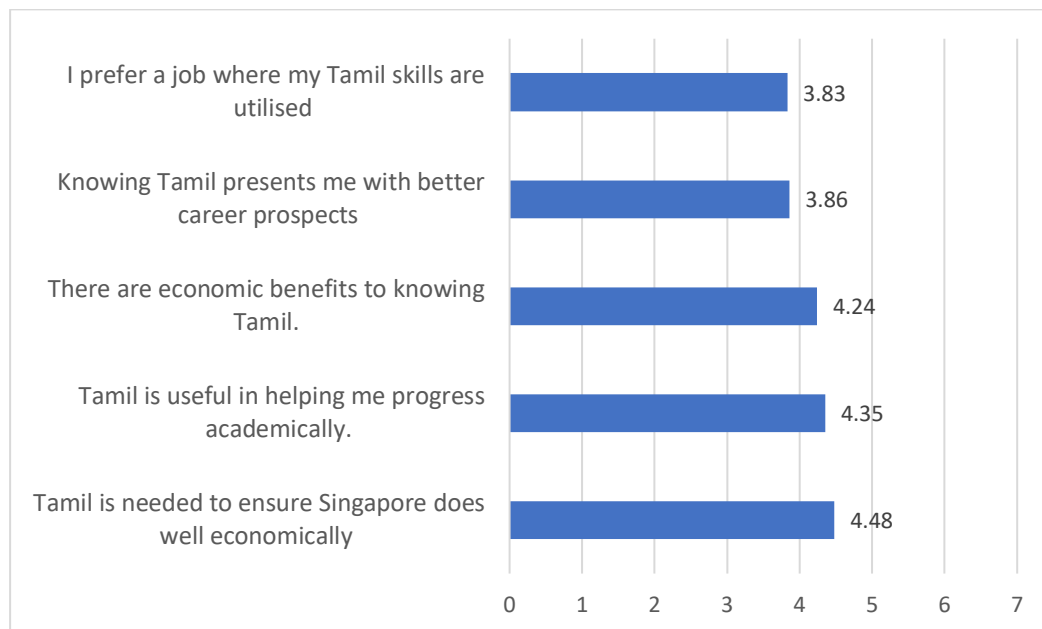


Figure 18. Attitudes ratings for the “Pragmatic” category

Despite this sentiment, participants reported the most positive attitudes towards the “Maintenance” category ($M = 5.59$), where they rated statements that investigated how willing they were to maintain Tamil as well as their views on existing measures relating to maintenance such as the Tamil presence in national media (Figure 19).

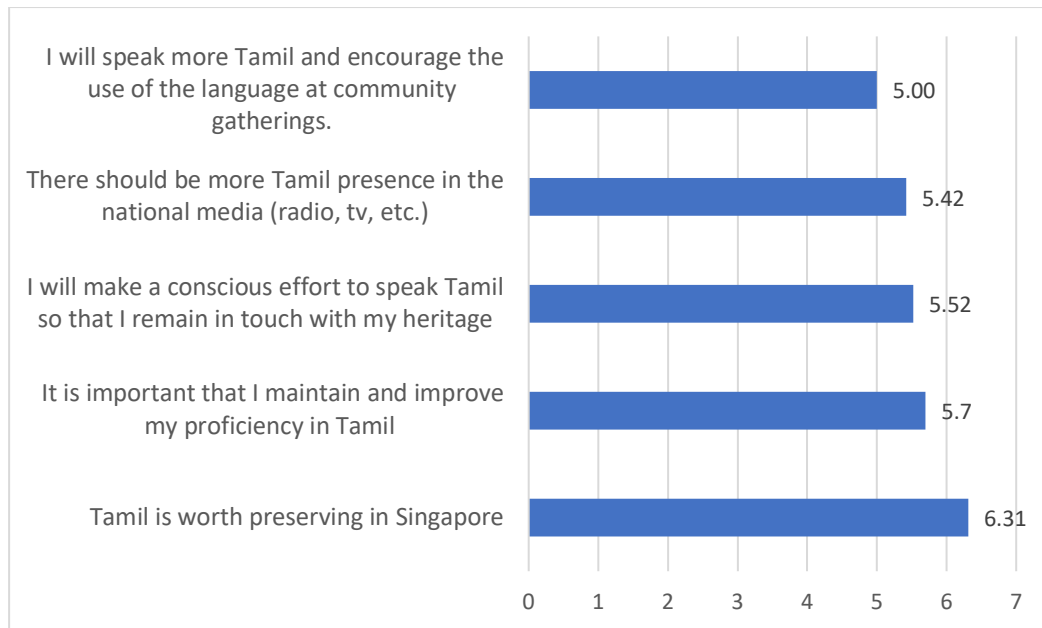


Figure 19. Attitudes ratings for the “Maintenance” category

In line with their attitudes towards the maintenance of Tamil, they also expressed similarly positive attitudes in the “Future” category ($M = 5.51$), as seen in Figure 20. Importantly, participants expressed a desire for the intergenerational transmission of Tamil as seen from their positive ratings for the statement *‘I want my children to be able to speak and understand Tamil’* ($M = 5.67$).

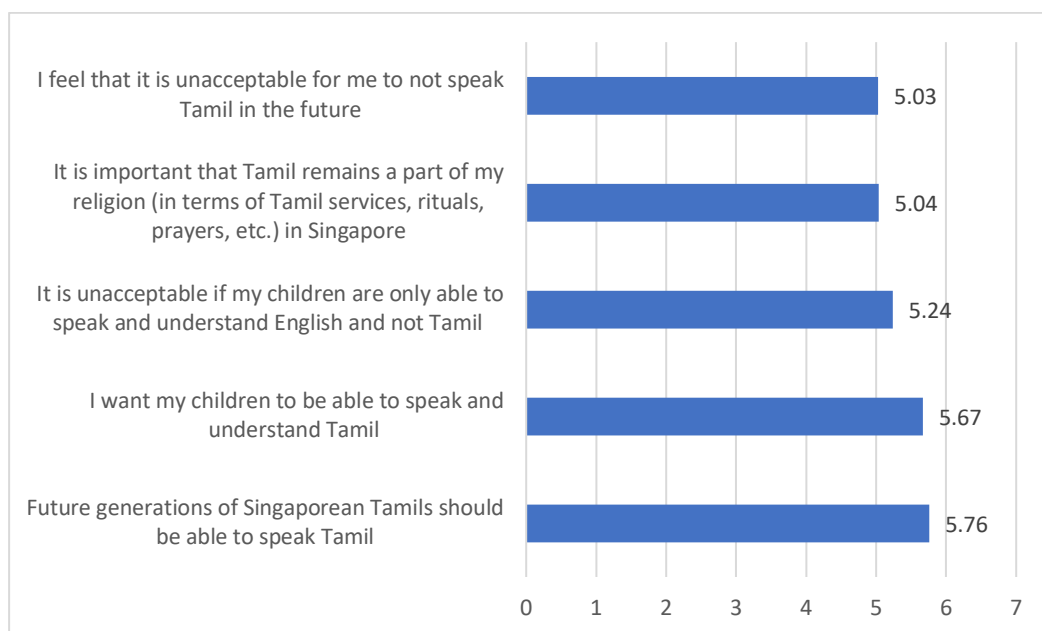


Figure 20. Attitudes ratings for the “Future” category

When collectively looking at the ratings of the “Future” and “Maintenance” categories, it is evident that the young Singaporean Tamilians are keen on ensuring that Tamil continues to have a place in Singapore’s language ecology at the societal level; they show agreement towards the statements that ‘*Future generation of Singaporean Tamils should be able to speak Tamil*’ ($M = 5.76$) and ‘*Tamil is worth preserving in Singapore*’ ($M = 6.31$). Even at the individual level, they reflect the sentiment that it is unacceptable for them to not speak Tamil in the future as they grow older ($M = 5.03$), while also expressing that they would make a conscious effort to maintain/improve their Tamil proficiency ($M = 5.52$).

While the attitudes of the participants reflect that they do not value Tamil as a language that holds pragmatic value, they have expressed the desire for the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore and wanting it to have a future in the country. This discrepancy between attitudes towards Tamil’s lack of utilitarian value and the strong desire to maintain it can be explained when looking at the attitudes rating for the ‘Solidarity’ category (Figure 21).

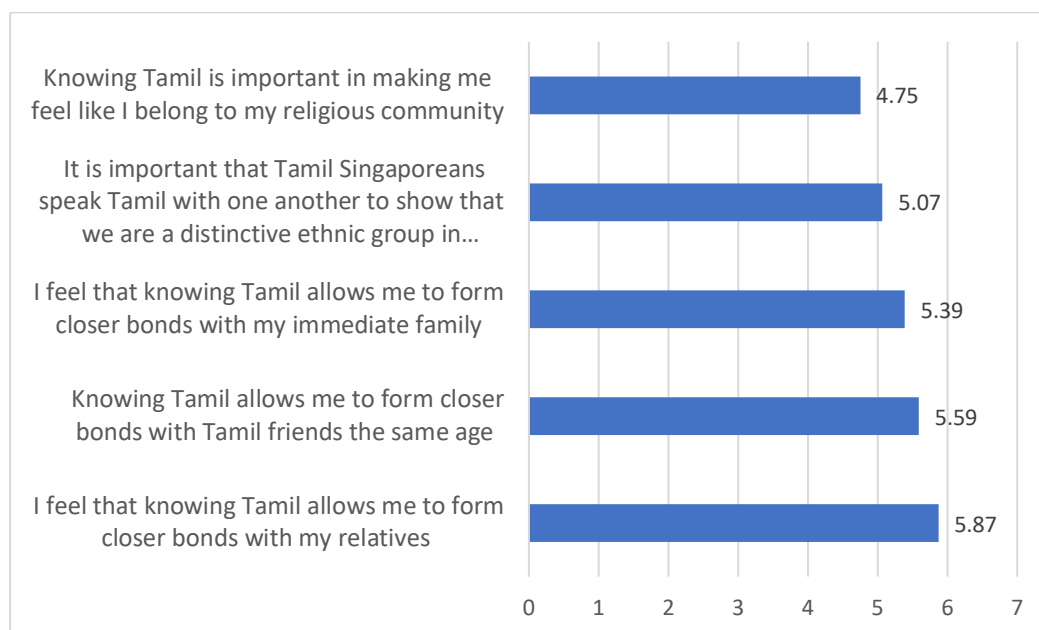


Figure 21. Attitudes ratings for the “Solidarity” category

Participants mostly agree that Tamil is a language of solidarity that allows them to bond with their family and friends. The two highest rated statements were ‘*Knowing Tamil allows me to form closer bonds with my relatives*’ ($M = 5.87$) and ‘*Knowing Tamil allows me to form closer bonds with Tamil friends the same age*’ ($M = 5.59$). However, ‘*Knowing Tamil is important in*

making me feel like I belong to my religious community' ($M= 4.75$), is rated the lowest in the category.

In terms of identity ratings, it can be observed that the ethnic identities of young Tamilians is largely tied to the Tamil language. This is especially clear when considering the lowest rated item in the “Identity” category, *'I can be Tamil Singaporean without being able to speak and understand Tamil'* ($M = 4.01$). It is clear that the respondents view being able to speak and understand the language as a prerequisite to being considered a Tamil Singaporean; this is consistent with what was reported in Section 3.2 where the participants felt that *Speaking and understanding Tamil* is the most important cultural core value. In line with this, respondents also indicate that Tamil is important to their identity at the individual level where the statement *'I feel that knowing Tamil is important to who I am as a person'* ($M=5.59$) was rated the second highest in the category. Tamil identity at the societal level was rated the highest where they felt that Tamil is an important part of Singapore's identity ($M = 5.72$). This, again, is consistent with what was observed in Section 3.2 where respondents rated *'Contributing to multicultural Singapore'* as the second most important value to the Tamil culture in Singapore.

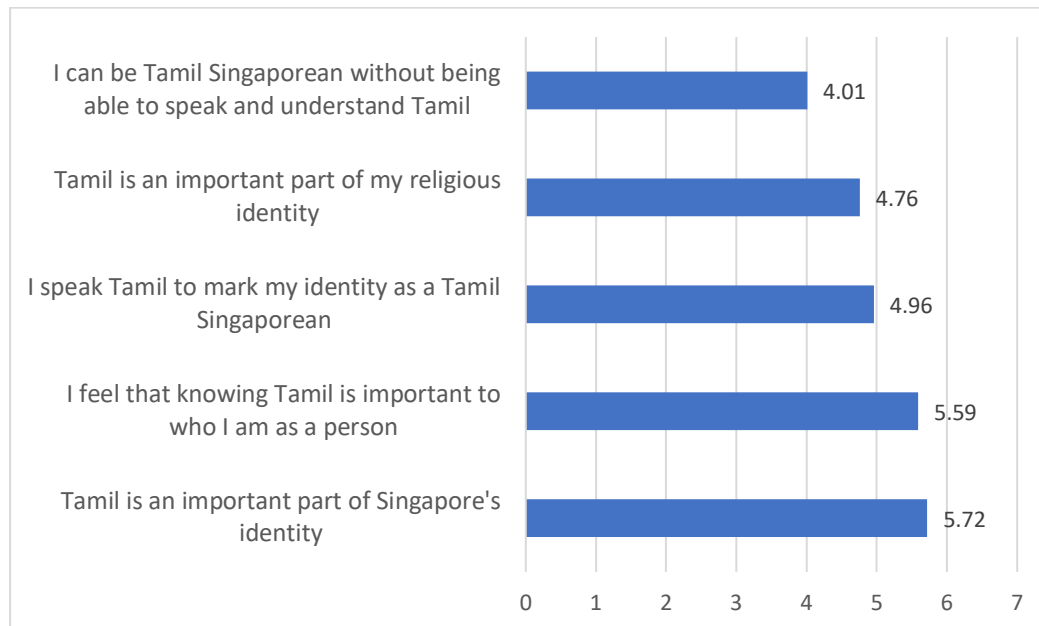


Figure 22. Attitudes ratings for the “Identity” category

3.3.1 Effects of income level on language attitudes

As seen in Figure 23, there is no clear trend when it comes to the attitudes ratings of different income groups across the five categories. Though, it can be noted that the high-income group had the lowest ratings for four of the five categories, “Future” being the exception.

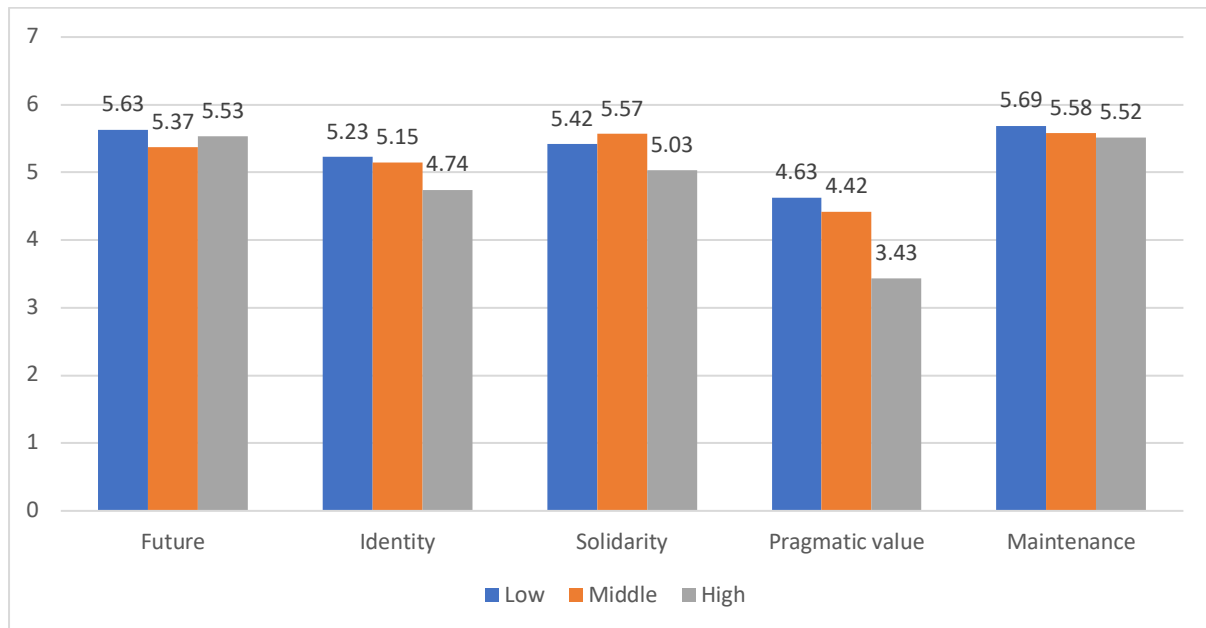


Figure 23. Overall attitudes ratings by income level

A one-way variance of analysis (ANOVA) revealed that there was no statistically significant differences in the three income groups' ratings for the categories of “Future” ($F(2,352) = 0.800$, $p = 0.45$), “Identity” ($F(2, 352) = 1.800$, $p = 0.17$), Solidarity ($F(2, 352) = 2.951$, $p = 0.05$) and “Maintenance” ($F(2, 352) = 0.344$, $p = 0.71$). There was however a statistically significant difference in the high-income group's lower rating of Tamil's “Pragmatic value” ($F(2, 352) = 13.686$, $**p < 0.001$) when compared to the low and middle-income groups' ratings of the same category.

3.3.2 Effects of education level on language attitudes

As seen in Figure 24, the Non-university group reported higher ratings across all categories. The most pronounced difference can be observed in the rating for the “Pragmatic value”

category where even though both groups were leaning towards neutrality, the University group ($M = 3.73$) reported a lower rating than the Non-university group ($M = 4.48$).

A one-way variance of analysis (ANOVA) revealed that the differences in attitudes ratings between the University and Non-University group was statistically significant for the categories of “Identity” ($F(1,353) = 8.228, p^{**} < 0.01$), “Solidarity” ($F(1,353) = 13.533, p^{**} < 0.05$) and “Pragmatic value” ($F(1, 353) = 13.533, p^{**} < 0.01$). The differences in ratings between the University and Non-university groups were not statistically significant for the remaining two categories “Future” ($F(1,353) = 0.346, p = 0.56$) and “Maintenance” ($F(1,353) = 2.997, p = 0.08$).

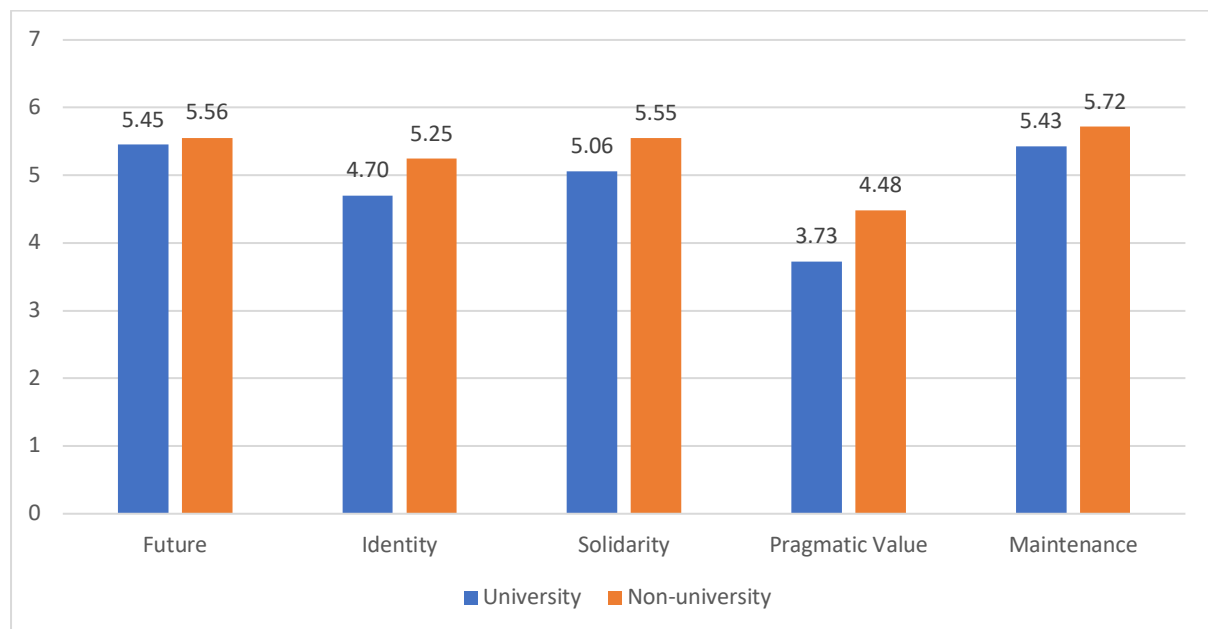


Figure 24. Overall attitudes ratings by education level

3.3.3 Interview data on language attitudes

From the interview data that was discussed in relation to language use in Section 3.1.8, interviewees mentioned not using Tamil for academic or work discussion clearly reflecting the sentiments that was reported in the ‘pragmatic value’ category. When asked about the usefulness of Tamil when looking to get employed one interviewee put it very bluntly:

Oh, completely useless. [Have] you ever seen a job ad asking for Tamil speakers? (Jay)

Tamil as a language of solidarity is reflected in the interview data where it is mentioned that the use of Tamil makes the interviewees feel closer to the Tamil community.

Maybe Tamil is useless in terms of my studies or career in Singapore but I still love the language because it makes me feel closer to [Tamil] speakers, especially when joking around with friends ...my Tamilness shows a lot more when I hang out with them. (Abi)

In section 3.2.2 in relation to core values, Sid mentions that Tamil is an important part of his personal identity and that contributes to multicultural Singapore. The quantitative findings coupled with interview data suggests that most young Tamilians consider Tamil to be a vital part of their identity and believe that their language plays a significant role in defining multicultural Singapore.

An English-dominant interviewee, Vee, shared how using Tamil only with grandparents impacted her sense of identity and solidarity with the wider Tamil community. She mentioned that a lack of Tamil friends and seeing other Tamils her age gathering and enjoying shared experiences, such as a recent concert by Tamil singer Anirudh, made her feel like she is missing out.

Recently there was the Anirudh concert at indoor stadium...it doesn't particularly interest me, but not going to lie, when I saw so many young Tamils posting their concert experiences together I felt like I was missing out. (Vee)

She emphasised that she did not feel like she was missing out on the concert specifically but rather the sense of community which she felt was on strong display with young Tamilians celebrating Tamil popular culture, singing popular Tamil songs together and socialising in Tamil. Additionally it was noted that when given the opportunity, young Tamilians do not shy away from using Tamil with friends, especially in Tamil contexts.

If we are talking about Tamil movies or maybe gossiping about someone, Tamil naturally makes its way into the conversation even if we are using mostly English. (Jay)

4 Discussion

4.1 General discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate that young Tamilians possess an awareness and acceptance of the existing circumstances of living in Singapore, where they feel that the Tamil language lacks economic power and plays little significance for academic advancement. This was previously observed in (Saravanan, 1998a) where an attitudinal survey of Tamil secondary school students revealed that in evaluation of its prestige and usefulness only 24 % of respondents considered Tamil a prestigious language in Singapore. Nonetheless, the participants of this current study expressed a desire to maintain the language at both the societal and individual level. This is unsurprising when looking at the core values they subscribe to, where '*speaking and understanding Tamil*' was rated as the most important core value of Tamil Singaporeans.

However, applying Core Value Theory wholesale to Tamil Singaporeans is problematic. Although *speaking and understanding Tamil* is rated as the most important core value, *reading and writing Tamil* is not rated as highly, ranking 8th out of the 14 items investigated. This is indicative of an issue which stems from the fact that the language is highly diglossic. It is likely that the respondents were treating the H variety and L variety as two separate languages by rating Spoken Tamil (ST) as a core value while Literary Tamil (LT), the written language, was not rated to be as important. *Tamil literature*, which primarily exists in LT, was also rated lowly, where it ranked 11th of 14 items. Classifying Tamils in Singapore as *language centred* according to the conventions of Core Value Theory then becomes problematic since the findings indicate that they subscribe to a particular variety and certain aspects of Tamil as a core value and not others.

Moreover, although young Tamilians exhibit a higher level of Tamil maintenance in the religious domain, *religion* is not a core value they subscribe to; *religion* was the second lowest rated value ranking 13th out of the 14 values investigated. According to Smolicz' theory, an interaction between core values results in higher maintenance of the language as seen in the Arabic culture (Turjoman, 2017). However, Tamil is still being maintained in the religious context to a very high degree even though young Tamil Singaporeans do not subscribe to *religion* as a core value. Attitudes towards Tamil in relation to religion was also constantly rated

as one of the lower items in the attitudes categories of “identity”, “future”, and “solidarity”. Additionally, this runs contrary to what was found by Smolicz (1991) where he found that Tamil Hindus in Australia reported high levels of maintenance in the religious domain since they subscribe to both *language* and *religion* as core values. The majority of respondents of this current study were Hindus, but religion was reflected to not play a central role in their lives as Tamil Singaporeans. Evidently, the theory cannot be applied as is to pluricentric cultures that span across a wide diaspora. There is a discrepancy between the reported high Tamil use and the perceived non-importance of religion as a core value which Core Value Theory cannot explain. On the other hand, while *language* and *family* are both core values to Singaporean Tamils, Tamil is not being maintained at high levels with all family members. Overall, trying to quantify complex interaction of factors through core value theory may be clear cut with some cultures but not others. Investigating core values aids in understanding what young Singaporean Tamils feel is vitally important to the Tamil culture but the theory fails in its application to explain the actual language use patterns reported in relation to LMLS.

However, a more cohesive understanding of the language situation of young Tamilians in Singapore can be achieved by examining their language attitudes in relation to their reported language use.

The current study presents a case that Tamil use among young Tamilians goes beyond just accommodation to older interlocutors. The participants expressed that they view Tamil as a language of solidarity where it allows them to not only bond with family but also friends who belong to the same generation as them. This can be seen in their language use patterns where even with English dominating, they still employ a good mix of Tamil in their interactions; as seen in Section 3.1 they reported that in their interaction with friends, they used around 57.2% of English and 42.8% of Tamil overall. Even when discussing a topic that is in the English context, the languages used still sees a considerable amount of Tamil (38.5%) being spoken. The increase in Tamil use for the Tamil context as well as the religious context is another indication that Tamil does not just serve accommodative purposes for young Singaporean Tamilians. As such the overall finding of young Tamilians’ attitudes towards Tamil is not supportive of Schiffman's (1995) assessment of Tamils in Singapore. Schiffman concluded that most Tamils shunned their language entirely since it was not economically valuable in a “consumer-oriented Singapore”. The language attitudes of the young Tamilians in this study indicate that they do not place an emphasis on the lack of Tamil’s economic status when

reflecting on the overall value of the language since they have expressed that they value Tamil for other reasons. Tamil being a language that marks solidarity and identity in the Tamil community has been reported in previous studies such as Saravanan (1998b) where it was highlighted that the Tamil language is viewed as a symbol of group loyalty.

However, one observation, which is perhaps the biggest threat to Tamil maintenance reported in the findings of this study is the low levels of Tamil use with siblings. This low degree of Tamil use with siblings has been reported years prior (Gopinathan & Mani, 1983; Ramiah, 1991). The low use of heritage language with siblings is not a Tamil specific phenomenon as Singaporean Malays have been noted to exhibit the same trend (Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010; Mirvahedi & Cavallaro, 2020). While there has been no consensus as to why interaction with siblings sees limited heritage language use, the interview data from the current study indicates that the nature of interactions between siblings encourages the use of more English. Specifically, a common theme that emerged was the constant discussions on schoolwork that results in higher English use with siblings at home; it pointed out by the interviewees that English was clearly the more appropriate language of choice when discussing school related topics other than when talking about Tamil (Mother Tongue) homework. It was also pointed out that when siblings move on to the tertiary level, such as university education, the level of Tamil use decreases due to the nature of more complex and academic discussions.

4.2 Discussion – effects of income and education level

The current study attests to the assertion that Tamils who belong to the lower stratum of the education and income hierarchy display higher rates of Tamil maintenance.

The low-income group reported significantly more Tamil use as compared to the middle and high-income groups, echoing the findings of Saravanan (1993). This becomes more evident when considering their preference for Tamil regardless of interlocutor. Tamil use with siblings presented statistically significant differences between all three groups with the middle-income group interestingly reporting the lowest level of Tamil use. In terms of attitudes, there was no clear trend established with the exception of the ratings for the ‘pragmatic value’, where the high-income group’s lower ratings were statistically significant as compared to the ratings of the low and middle-income groups. While this may be an indicator of how the high-income group has developed a better understanding of Tamil’s limited power in facilitating socio-

economic advancement in Singapore, it does not mean much given the other two income groups rated Tamil's pragmatic value the lowest in relation to other categories as well. Nonetheless, the high-income group still values Tamil for other, non-utilitarian motives.

In general, the Non-university group reported higher use of Tamil with all interlocutors, except with siblings, where similarly low levels were reported. Although only the higher use of Tamil with parents by the Non-university groups was statistically significant, it is worth noting that difference in Tamil use with friends between both groups was very close to being statistically significant. Where language attitudes are concerned it was observed that the Non-university students reported higher attitudes ratings for all five categories three of which, produced statistically significant differences as compared to the University group. Both groups however, expressed similar levels of positive attitudes towards the "future" and "maintenance" category indicating a desire to push for Tamil's survival in Singapore.

Overall, even though this study yields results that align with Vaish (2007) where she observed Tamil was present in all domains investigated and more dominant in some, labelling young Tamilians as a group that exhibits bilingualism without diglossia is contestable. While both languages are present in all domains, participants do assign separate functions for the two languages. From the interview data and ratings of Tamil's utilitarian value, it is evident that English is clearly defined to function as the language of work and academics. Meanwhile, Tamil takes a more affective function where even if the interaction is not exclusively in Tamil, participants tend to turn to the language for emotional expression and bonding with certain interlocutors.

5 Conclusion

The current study does not refute the notion of a shift in the Singaporean Tamil community to English. Instead, the intention of this study was to investigate the nuances of the language situation of young Singaporean Tamilians who will be at the crux of LMLS conversations since they form the next generation of Tamil parents in Singapore. The findings of this study, as discussed in section 4, are similar to those of Vaish's (2007) study which reported some levels of maintenance in the Singaporean Tamil community. At the point of publication, her study stood out as the sole source of hope with regards to the maintenance of Tamil in Singapore.

The lack of research on LMLS in the Tamil community in the 2010s made it difficult to ascertain if Vaish's sliver of optimism amounted to anything. Although census data from the 2010s presents a bleak outlook for Tamil, the panic it has created may be overstated. Kadakara's (2015) conclusion to his study where he states that a lack of continued Tamil use in the home "will lead to language loss and ultimately, sound the death knell for the Tamil language in Singapore" (p.58) is also a rather drastic claim. The findings of this study suggest that certain segments of the community, specifically, those that belong to the lower stratum in terms of income and academic qualifications are still maintaining Tamil. Considering this trend that has been reported decades prior in Tamil LMLS studies still persists in the 2020s, it is likely that this segment of the Tamil community will continue to practice some level of maintenance.

The rise of Tamil in Singapore as discussed in Section 1 was largely due to grassroots movements and not top down governance. It was the solidarity of the Tamil community that put Tamil at the forefront of all Indian languages in Singapore. The current study reveals that the level of solidarity rooted in Tamil is still intact with young Tamilians. While the government continues to tackle pedagogical issues relating to Tamil education, the onus is on the Tamil community to continue speaking their language to keep it alive, even if English continues to dominate. One thing that can be certain though, is that even if Tamil continues to decline in use, it will remain a cultural symbol to the community as one of in-group loyalty.

6 Limitations

While able to pick up on statistically significant findings, the study's sample size is insufficient for generalisation, as only 71 of the initial 128 responses were viable for analysis after data clean-up. As with all questionnaire data, results represent reported language use, not actual use. As such, future studies should apply ethnographic methods such as participant observation to supplement the findings of a large scale survey to periodically monitor the language situation of Singaporean Tamils.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire

Tamil in Singapore

Start of Block: Block 1

The Tamil language and Tamil community in Singapore.

Thank you for taking the time to do this survey.

Purpose:

The following study is being conducted for the purposes of a **Linguistics and Multilingual Studies final year project**. The study intends to **investigate the Tamil community in Singapore in relation to their language**. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. The survey should take only 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Privacy and anonymity:

This survey is **COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS**. You will **NOT** be asked to write your name, any identification number (student, I/C, telephone) or address on this survey. We are committed to respecting your privacy and keeping your personal information confidential. In order for proper research to be conducted, some demographic information may be required prior to attempting the questionnaire. However, all information will be kept strictly confidential and any physical documentation will be kept in a secure location with restricted access. No data that may potentially identify you will be recorded.

I understand the following:

I am about to participate in a study which is being conducted by an undergraduate student in Linguistics & Multilingual Studies at Nanyang Technological University; my participation in this study will entail completing this questionnaire; my participation in this study is voluntary, and that no penalty or disadvantage will accrue to me for non-participation, nor any benefit for participation; I may withdraw from the study at any time, and may refuse to answer any question I am asked, without stating any reasons; I may participate anonymously or under a pseudonym, and will not be asked for my name during the study. No record will be kept of my name if I wish to remain anonymous; even if anonymity is not important to me and I give my name to the investigator, my name will never be revealed in written or oral presentations of the study.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns relating to this project or to my participation in it I may contact:

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☐ Yes, I confirm that I agree to participate in the online survey. I understand what it involves and I agree to the use of findings as described above.

☐ No, I do not agree to participate in the online survey of the study.

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q2 Ethnicity

☐ I am Singaporean Tamil

☐ I am not a Singaporean Tamil

Q3 What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Others _____

Q4 How old are you?

Q5 Tamil Proficiency

Please select one option which best corresponds to your level of proficiency in **Tamil**. (Level 1 "low proficiency" to Level 5 "high proficiency"; description of each level is provided as a guide.)

- ☐ **Level 1** I **cannot speak and cannot understand** Tamil at all (including swearwords)
- ☐ **Level 2** I am able to speak/understand approximately **less than 30** Tamil words or phrases (*including swearwords*) I am **not fluent** in speaking full phrases/sentences in Tamil I am **not able** to converse with / understand a monolingual Tamil speaker I am **not able** to converse with / understand a bilingual Tamil speaker speaking Tamil even with the use of words/phrases from other languages.
- ☐ **Level 3** I am able to speak/understand **more than 30** Tamil words or phrases I am **slightly fluent** in speaking short phrases/sentences in Tamil I am **able to converse** with/understand a monolingual Tamil speaker **sometimes** I **might be able to understand** a bilingual Tamil speaker speaking in Tamil with the use of words/phrases from other languages
- ☐ **Level 4** I am **rather fluent** in speaking short and long sentences in Tamil I am **able to converse** with/understand a monolingual Tamil speaker most of the time I am **able to converse fluently** with a monolingual Tamil speaker about a limited number of topics (daily conversation)
- ☐ **Level 5** I am **very fluent** in speaking Tamil I am **able to speak and understand** a monolingual Tamil speaker all the time I am **able to converse fully** with a monolingual Tamil speaker about any topic
-

Q6 English Proficiency

Please select one option which best corresponds to your level of proficiency in **English**. (Level 1 "low proficiency" to Level 5 "high proficiency"; description of each level is provided as a guide.)

- ☐ **Level 1** I **cannot speak and cannot understand** English at all (including swearwords)
- ☐ **Level 2** I am able to speak/understand approximately **less than 30** English words or phrases (*including swearwords*) I am **not fluent** in speaking full

phrases/sentences in English I am **not able to converse** with / understand a monolingual English speaker I am **not able to converse** with / understand a bilingual English speaker speaking English even with the use of words/phrases from other languages.

☐ **Level 3** I am *able to speak/understand* **more than 30** English words or phrases I am **slightly fluent** in speaking short phrases/sentences in English I am **able to converse with/understand** a monolingual English speaker sometimes I **might be able to understand** a bilingual English speaker speaking in English with the use of words/phrases from other languages

☐ **Level 4** I am **rather fluent** in speaking short and long sentences in English I am **able to converse with/understand** a monolingual English speaker most of the time I am **able to converse fluently** with a monolingual English speaker about a limited number of topics (daily conversation)

☐ **Level 5** I am **very fluent** in speaking English I am **able to speak and understand** a monolingual English speaker all the time I am **able to converse fully** with a monolingual English speaker about any topic

End of Block: Block 3 - Proficiency

Start of Block: Block 4 - Language Use

Instructions

For each question, please indicate the proportion of languages used with the persons stated below using the sliders; the sum for all languages should add up to 10. (e.g you speak an equal amount of English and Tamil with your grandparents; move the slider to 5 for English, 5 for Tamil and keep it at 0 for the rest of the options)

*Please note that the **slider will not move beyond a total of 10**. If you are unable to adjust the slider, do reduce the percentage for the other bars first.*

If the family member has passed away or you do not have, for example, a sibling, please move the slider for the 'Not Applicable' option to 10.



Q7 You are talking about something you have just seen or read on an **English-language media source** (newspaper, TV, online source), what language(s) do you use with your grandparents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q8 You are talking about something you have just seen or read on an **English-language media source (newspaper, TV, online source)**, what language(s) do you use with your parents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q9 You are talking about something you have just seen or read on an **English-language media source (newspaper, TV, online source)**, what language(s) do you use with your older sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q10 You are talking about something you have just seen or read on an **English-language media source (newspaper, TV, online source)**, what language(s) do you use with your younger sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q11 You are are talking about something you have just seen or read on an **English-language media source (newspaper, TV, online source)**, what language(s) do you use with Tamil friends (around the same age):

_____ English

_____ Tamil

_____ Other language(s)

_____ Not Applicable

Page Break



Q12 You are discussing a **Tamil movie** that you've just watched. What language(s) do you use with your grandparents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q13 You are discussing a **Tamil movie** that you've just watched. What language(s) do you use with your parents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q14 You are discussing a **Tamil movie** that you've just watched. What language(s) do you use with your older sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q15 You are discussing a **Tamil movie** that you've just watched. What language(s) do you use with your younger sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q16 You are discussing a **Tamil movie** that you've just watched. What language(s) do you use with Tamil friends (around the same age):

_____ English

_____ Tamil

_____ Other language(s)

_____ Not Applicable

Page Break _____



Q17 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.) discussing an upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with your grandparents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q18 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.) discussing an upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with your parents:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q19 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.) discussing an upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with your older sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q20 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.) discussing an upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with your younger sibling:

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q21 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.)** discussing an **upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with Tamil friends (around the same age):

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q22 You are **at your place of worship (temple, church, mosque, etc.)** discussing an **upcoming religious festival/celebration**, what language(s) do you use with your religious leader (Priest, Imam, etc):

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Other language(s)
 - ☐ Not Applicable
-



Q23 What language(s) do you use when **swearing**

_____ English

_____ Tamil

_____ Other language(s)



Q24 What language(s) do you use when **making mental calculations**

_____ English

_____ Tamil

_____ Other language(s)



Q25 What language(s) do you use when **engaging in inner speech (talking to yourself in your mind)**

_____ English

_____ Tamil

_____ Other language(s)

Page Break

Q26 Which of the following is **culturally important** to you **as a Tamil Singaporean**.
Rate the statements according to their level of importance on a 5-point scale from "**not important at all**" to "**vitally important**".

	Not important at all	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
Speaking and understanding Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading and writing Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having Tamil friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having a strong relationship with your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil cultural history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil folk music, song and dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Celebrating Tamil festivals (Ponggal, Tamil New Year etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ties with the Tamil homeland (Tamil Nadu, India)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respect for elders in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contributing to multicultural Singapore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil literature	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marrying an ethnic Tamil person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Tamil Popular Culture
(Cinema, popular songs, entertainment industry)



End of Block: Block 5 - Core Values

Start of Block: Block 6



Q27 On a 7-point scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I want my children to be able to speak and understand Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can be Tamil Singaporean without being able to speak and understand Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that knowing Tamil allows me to form closer bonds with my immediate family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil is needed to ensure Singapore does well economically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil is worth preserving in Singapore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q28 On a 7-point scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Future generations of Singaporean Tamils should be able to speak Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that knowing Tamil is an important to who I am as a person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that knowing Tamil allows me to form closer bonds with my relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowing Tamil presents me with better career prospects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important that I maintain and improve my proficiency in Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<hr/>							

Q29 On a 7-point scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that it is acceptable for me to not speak Tamil in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil is an important part of Singapore's identity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowing Tamil is important in making me feel like I belong to my religious community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are economic benefits to knowing Tamil.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will make a conscious effort to speak Tamil so that I remain in touch with my heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q30 On a 7-point scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is acceptable if my children are only able to speak and understand English and not Tamil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I speak Tamil to mark my identity as a Tamil Singaporean	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowing Tamil allows me to form closer bonds with Tamil friends the same age	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tamil is useful in helping me progress academically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There should be more Tamil presence in the national media (radio, tv, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q31 On a scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements below.

[illegible]

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Block 7 - Additional demographic questions

Instructions You are nearing the end of the survey. Please answer these last five demographic questions by selecting the most appropriate option.

Q32 What is your religion?

- ☐ Hinduism
 - ☐ Islam
 - ☐ Christianity (inclusive of all denominations and Catholicism)
 - ☐ Not applicable
 - ☐ Others (please specify in the text box below)
-

Q33 What is your combined average monthly household income?

- ☐ Below \$1999
 - ☐ \$2000 - \$3999
 - ☐ \$4000 - \$5999
 - ☐ \$6000 - \$7999
 - ☐ \$8000 - \$9999
 - ☐ \$10000 - \$11999
 - ☐ Above \$12000
-

Q34 Please indicate the type of housing that you currently live in:

- ☐ HDB Flat (1/2/3 Room)
 - ☐ HDB Flat (4/5 Room. Executive)
 - ☐ Condominium
 - ☐ Private Housing (e.g. Semi-detached, Terrace, Bungalow)
-

Q35 What is your current education level? (if you have completed your education, please indicate the highest education level you have achieved)

- ☐ 'N' Level certificate
 - ☐ 'O' Level certificate
 - ☐ Diploma (Polytechnic)
 - ☐ 'A' Level certificate (Junior College, Millenia Institute)
 - ☐ Nitec/Higher Nitec
 - ☐ University Degree
 - ☐ Others: _____
-

Q36 What is the **MAIN** language that you use at home?

- ☐ English
 - ☐ Tamil
 - ☐ Malay
 - ☐ Singlish
 - ☐ Other languages (please fill in the language in the text box)

-

Q37 Would you be available for a follow-up interview? The interview will be done at your convenience (online, in-person, etc). If you are interested in participating in the interview please provide your preferred way to be contacted (email, telegram, etc) in the text box provided.

- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in the interview
- ☐ Yes, I would like to participate in the interview
-

End of Block: Block 7 - Additional demographic questions
