



ips
exchange
series

number 15 • june 2020

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, IDENTITY & MANAGEMENT: RESULTS FROM THE IPS SURVEY ON RACE, RELIGION & LANGUAGE

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IPS Exchange, Number 15, June 2020

Language Proficiency, Identity & Management: Results from the IPS Survey on Race, Religion & Language

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ISSN 2382-6002 (e-periodical)

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Preface

PREFACE

Singapore's reputation as a successful city-state has been built on its ability to thrive amidst differences. With a multi-ethnic resident population comprising 74 per cent Chinese, 13 per cent Malays, 9 per cent Indians, and many other ethnicities, our embrace of multiculturalism inevitably extends to language, given the close intertwining of the latter and ethnicity.

Diversity in languages is a cornerstone of Singaporean identity; it plays an integral role in shaping our uniquely multicultural identity. We are proud of our rich linguistic heritage, and the peaceful coexistence of a multitude of languages. Many Singaporeans also use Singlish, a novel language with its own unique syntax and an amalgamation of English and vernaculars in Singapore — a testament to our multiculturalism.

Resources have to be channelled into managing linguistic diversity. This allows for the peaceful coexistence of languages. It also ensures that Singaporeans are well able to communicate with the rest of the world.

Over the years, language policies and campaigns have been implemented. Language policies in Singapore operate based on English as the country's *lingua franca*, along with the active preservation of ethnic languages. The bilingual policy requires students to learn both English and a Mother Tongue language; it signals the prioritisation of interethnic interaction and global competitiveness. These language policies shape our identity, cultivate our affinity to languages, and impact our language proficiencies. They invariably influence how we relate to others around us.

Language trends are not only shaped by domestic social policy but also by external factors. Increased globalisation, rapid advances in technology and popular culture constantly redefine our relationship with languages. They shift the positions languages occupy on a ladder of importance. For example, the increasing prominence of globalisation and popular culture in today's context lends importance to languages that have a larger global presence. The substantial consumption of English-medium popular culture through television programming, music and movies potentially increases individuals' English language affinity and proficiency.

Our relationship with language is also a product of our demographic background. Race, age, and socio-economic status affect our choice of language use. For instance, younger generations such as millennials are beneficiaries of the Bilingual Education Policy, and have more opportunities than older peers to consume a wider range of broadcast and online media originating from Anglophone countries such as the US and the UK. Hence, they may be more comfortable expressing themselves in English as compared to a significant group of elders who were educated in Mother Tongue-medium schools.

Considering the complex interaction of a diverse range of factors in shaping and reshaping the linguistic landscape of Singapore, this study attempts to document the linguistic landscape and provide empirical data on on-going changes in the scene. This was done by analysing and comparing data from the Institute of Policy Studies' Survey on Language, Race and Religion across two different waves of data. The first survey generated 4,131 responses in

2013, while the second generated 4,015 responses in 2018. This allowed for the tracking of linguistic trends and changes across a span of five years.

This publication begins by investigating the language proficiency of Singaporeans across a range of relevant languages: English, the official Mother Tongue languages (Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil), Singlish, as well as heritage languages¹. The study shows a rise in reported English proficiency especially among respondents in older age groups. This, inevitably, was accompanied by a decline in reported Mother Tongue and heritage language proficiency — a signal of increased globalisation and a growing cosmopolitan identity. Interestingly, Singaporeans reported strong proficiencies in Singlish, signalling some embrace of local identity even with an increasing ability in English.

Language affinity trends mirror proficiency trends. Despite a decline in overall identification with Mother Tongue languages, close to two-thirds of Singaporeans still considered ethnic languages important to their sense of identity. This indicates that cosmopolitan identities and localised, ethnic identities are not mutually exclusive. This trend also signals that a decline in proficiency is not synonymous with a decline in affinity to the language.

In spite of the support shown to Singlish, this does not obstruct the value accorded to English. Singaporeans are able to identify contexts in which Singlish use is appropriate. For example, Singlish is perceived as appropriate in some contexts (when talking to friends and family, when ordering food from hawkers, etc.) and inappropriate in other contexts (in government speeches, during lessons in school, etc.). The capital attached to Singlish then varies across different contexts.

This study also examines the frequency of language use socially as well as at workplaces. The majority of Singaporeans use English most frequently at work, which aligns with the language's *lingua franca* status. Despite this, close to a quarter of Singaporeans report using Mandarin at work. While, understandably, Chinese Singaporeans were the most likely to use Mandarin at work, one in 10 ethnic minorities also report using Mandarin at work.

Linguistic diversity in Singapore operates under the ethos of multiculturalism: an according of equal status and recognition to all languages. There are perceived differences in linguistic capital across various languages with English viewed as providing most capital. Respondents to the survey perceived English speakers as having to work less hard to achieve a prosperous life, relative to non-English speakers. Mother Tongue languages, especially Malay and Tamil, were perceived as having less linguistic capital, especially by ethnic minorities themselves. Chinese Singaporeans felt that Mandarin would help them in work or business settings, while ethnic minorities did not reciprocate these sentiments in the case of their own Mother Tongue languages.

The perception of language hierarchies can transform into the perception of linguistic discrimination if not managed properly. While most Singaporeans do not perceive linguistic discrimination in public spaces, a significant minority of non-English speaking Chinese Singaporeans felt otherwise. In addition, Singaporeans today were more likely to perceive that

¹ Heritage languages refer to any other language spoken by a person as a result of their heritage, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Javanese, Boyanese, Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu and many others.

there is some level of language prejudice compared to Singaporeans in 2013. This signals the need to constantly re-evaluate how languages are used and perceived in society.

How do Singaporeans perceive the role of language policy in managing linguistic diversity? More than half of them felt that there should be less government intervention in shaping language use — a potential reaction to the unintentional effects of bilingual policies phasing out many heritage languages or earlier stances on Singlish. The same proportion also felt that they should be free to speak in languages of their choice as long as communication is not obstructed. Nonetheless a substantial portion of respondents to the survey also felt that the government should do more to curb the use of Singlish. Singaporeans thus struggle with determining ownership of language management. While there is some hesitation to take cues from language policies given their seemingly intrusive nature, there is still some reliance on state apparatus to manage Singapore's diverse linguistic landscape.

One of the most salient trends visible in this study is that despite the predominant use of English and Singlish, many still consider Mother Tongue languages important to their identities. This is an important feature of Singaporean identity that is intricately related to having a sense of ethnic identity. But as this study shows, there is at least some decline in self-reported proficiency in Mother Tongue languages. It is important then, that we continue to find ways to make Mother Tongue language learning conducive to the large number of students from English-speaking family backgrounds, by expanding the capabilities of our education system, parents and families, and the broader community.

This publication ends with a succinct discussion on the potential policy implications arising from the above trends.



Chapter 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Language is an integral aspect of social life. It shapes our identities and relationships, and is an indicator of class, education, ethnicity, and many other social characteristics. The significance and impact of language on everyday life hence necessitates its careful management, especially through social policy addressing the use of languages across various domains such as governance, industry, and schools. This is especially the case in multicultural societies with a diversity of languages. In Singapore, the use of language and its management has a rich, varied history. Language policies that seek to alter individual attitudes towards and perceptions of language are often understood and discussed in Singapore within a broader state-driven narrative prioritising social harmony, integration, and development.

1.1 LANGUAGE USE AND PROFICIENCY IN SINGAPORE

1.1.1 Colonial Language Legacy

Prior to Singapore's independence and its implementation of language management policies, the local populace spoke a variety of languages across domestic and professional settings. The Chinese community communicated in a variety of dialects, with 80 per cent of them conversing in Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese (Chua, 1964). The local Indians likewise spoke a diverse range of languages; namely, Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali and Malayalam (Jain & Wee, 2015; Pakir, 1994; Rubdy, 2001; Wee, 2003). Most of the Malays in Singapore communicated in Malay, although there was a sizeable population of Malays who spoke Javanese and Boyanese (Kwan-Terry, 2000).

Vernacular schools back then played an outsized role in shaping language identities and proficiencies. Students were more likely to attend schools associated with languages of their ethnic group; Chinese students mostly attended Chinese-medium schools, and so forth. There were English-medium schools established by the British colonial government that aimed to train people to serve in the local administration. However, only children with privileged, upper-class backgrounds from the Chinese and the Indian communities attended these English-medium schools (Tremewan, 1994), with an over-representation of children from the Indian community (Kwan-Terry, 2000). The language legacy of the colonial administration hence resulted in a plural society marked by racial and linguistic differences (Purushotam, 1998).

1.1.2 English and Mother Tongue

When Singapore gained self-governance from the British in 1959, it embraced a multicultural and multilingual societal landscape with the designation of four official languages, namely, English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil (Rubdy, 2001). The government promoted English as a common language in Singapore for three main pragmatic reasons. First, policymakers believed that English, as a neutral language to the major ethnic groups in Singapore, would level the playing field as the *lingua franca* for inter-ethnic communications (Wee, 2018). Second, English as the *lingua franca* was also aligned with the broader ideology of

meritocracy; everyone, regardless of race, would have equal opportunity to learn and communicate in English, given its “foreign” status to all racial groups (Chua, 2017). Third, the city-state would also reap the myriad social and economic advantages conversing in English offered; especially in industry and commerce with more affluent, Anglophone countries such as the US and the UK (Rubdy, 2001).

Policymakers were however concerned by the potential cultural implications of extensive exposure to English; namely, a fear of Singapore becoming more “Westernised” or “decadent” (Wee, 2018, p. 22). In light of how language plays a key role in the construction of national identity and ethnic identity, and in the sustenance of culture (Lee, 2013), the state implemented a policy requiring Singaporeans to acquire a Mother Tongue language. This “cultural ballast” as it was termed, would ostensibly encourage individuals to stay rooted to their Asian identity and diminish the cultural influences associated with learning English (Chua, 2017, 135). In addition, speaking one’s heritage language has been posited to support ethnic identity formation, develop ethnic pride, cement close relationships between family and community, and boost self-esteem (Arredondo, Rosado & Satterfield, 2016).

The government consequently designated Chinese, Malay, and Tamil — the main languages of the three main ethnic groups — to be Mother Tongue languages (Wee, 2002). The functions of these “Mother Tongues” were to demarcate and embody culture, as well as anchor Singaporeans to their cultural heritage (Dixon, 2009; Rubdy, 2001; Wee, 2003). As Singapore was culturally and linguistically diverse, the government underscored the equal status of every ethnic group and their associated languages, with no one language accorded more privilege or preference over another (Wee, 2018). This was in line with the state’s ideological stance on meritocracy, multiracialism, and equality (Benjamin, 1976; Wee, 2003).

To encourage and expedite adoption of the official languages, the government instituted the Bilingual Education Policy in 1966 (Dixon, 2009; Kuo & Chan 2016), which required all schools to teach Mathematics and Science subjects in English. This policy was expanded in 1987 to encompass all subjects except for the Mother Tongue languages (Dixon, 2005). By this time, the popularity of vernacular schools had declined significantly; apart from English-medium schools, there were only a handful of Chinese-medium schools left with the last of Malay-medium schools and Tamil-medium schools already shuttered (Purushotam, 1998). Presently, all pupils in Singapore are taught English as a first language, with their official ethnic Mother Tongue taught as the second language (Rubdy, 2001). Bilingualism in Singapore is therefore defined in relation to English and Mother Tongue proficiency (Pakir, 1994).

Language campaigns also played a role in garnering public support for the official language policy. The Promote Mandarin Council led the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979 to promote the use of Mandarin, in place of the varying dialects (such as Hokkien, Teochew or Cantonese) used by a substantial proportion of the Chinese population (Kuo & Chan, 2016). Chinese-dialect programmes on air were also phased out and replaced by programmes that were dubbed in Mandarin (Dixon, 2005). In the same vein, the Malay Language Council, Singapore and Tamil Language Council were set up in 1992 and 2000, respectively. These institutions engaged promoters and activists, and organised literary awards to encourage local Malays and Tamils to use their respective official Mother Tongue languages (National Heritage Board, 2014).

1.1.3 Singlish as National Identity Marker

With the implementation of the official language policy, Singaporeans started using both English and their Mother Tongue languages in everyday life. This gave rise to a language contact situation, whereby speakers of two or more languages interact and influence each other in social settings. The mix of English and Mother Tongue languages in informal interactions resulted in the birth of an indigenous, vernacular English, known as Singlish. Many Singaporeans believe that Singlish captures the essence of being a Singaporean and it is a by-product of the multilingual and multicultural society we live in (Goh, 2016).

As Singlish comprises lexicons from several Chinese dialects, Malay, and Tamil in addition to English, it is perceived as an important unifying force amidst ethnic diversity, and a cultural symbol of being Singaporean (Rubdy, 2001). Moreover, Singlish semantically embodies the everyday lived experiences of a “true” Singaporean, as a differentiating marker that is integral to the construction of a Singaporean identity that excludes those perceived to be outsiders or foreigners (Goh, 2016). As Goh explained, Singlish is an important part of public discourse because “it is a creole whose authentic performance functions as a shibboleth of ‘localness’, and because its predominantly somatic frames of reference make it a very suitable expression of visceral responses, everyday bodily experiences and the shared values of a communal body” (p. 754).

In response to Singlish’s amplifying prevalence and popularity, the government implemented measures to promote the use of Standard English. One example is the Speak Good English Movement in 2000. At its launch, then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong noted that “the ability to speak good English is a distinct advantage in terms of doing business and communicating with the world”, and that this was “especially important for a hub city and open economy like [Singapore]” (Goh, 2000). Notwithstanding the difficulties in defining what exactly Standard English is, Singapore’s English language policy essentially prioritises “exo-normative standards” based on traditional British or American native speaker norms (Wee, 2018, 33). While Singlish is perceived by the government as a “contaminant” that might compromise effective communication with English speakers in international business and social settings, it nonetheless recognises it as a cultural marker for most Singaporeans (Wee, 2018).

1.2 CRITIQUES AND CONCERNS

The management of language in Singapore is not without criticism. As the language policy resulted in a shift in language patterns of younger generations, it has compromised on intergenerational communications (Gupta & Siew, 1995). There is a perceived loss in linguistic diversity and cultural heritage due to the loss of heritage language proficiency amongst younger generations (Gupta & Siew, 1995; Pakir, 1993). Tremewan highlights the effect of the bilingual policy on the Singaporean Chinese community, which declared Mandarin their official language and consequently disenfranchising the dialect-speaking Chinese and subjugating them to “an atomised working class” (Pakir, 1994, p. 90).

Another critique directed at the state's official language policy is its tendency to augment class divisions. Studies show that Singaporeans from English-speaking households tend to have better educational and occupational attainment (Kwan-Terry, 1991; Pakir, 1993; Rubdy, 2001). The higher functional value attached to English, given its status as the working language and *lingua franca* of Singapore, ascribes its users a higher socio-economic status — with greater access to resources and networks to build social capital at the expense of the working class (Tremewan, 1994).

There have also been concerns over perceived unequal treatment of the four official languages in education and their use in public spaces. The public outcry over English and Chinese-only announcements (and the dearth of Malay and Tamil announcements) in trains by local transport operators is one example (Yahoo! News, 2012). Many Singaporeans also registered their displeasure over a proposal to reduce the weighting of Mother Tongue languages in the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE), which would favour predominantly English-speaking households (Oon, 2010). Immigration-related concerns have also intersected with grievances over the use of language; with complaints that new citizens and immigrants were unable to use English in the service industry (Ong, 2018), and the use of non-Tamil Indian languages and Tagalog in public signage and content as opposed to the state's official languages (Stolarchuk, 2019; Wong, 2013).

1.3 OUTLINE OF STUDY

Against this backdrop, the following chapters seek to shed light on Language Proficiency, Identity, and Management (LPIM) in Singapore, along with attitudes towards state policies on language. Following a brief discussion of the survey methodology employed and respondents' demographic profiles across the 2013 and 2018 waves of the IPS Race, Religion and Language (RRL) survey in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 begins the LPIM study with an analysis of official language proficiency, heritage language proficiency and Singlish proficiency, with an emphasis on bilingualism (proficiency in English and the official Mother Tongue). Chapter 4 focuses on language patterns in different contexts, such as languages spoken with family members, language used in social contexts with friends, and at work. Chapter 5 examines language identity, with a specific emphasis on Singlish and its usage. Chapter 6 analyses issues pertaining to language value, hierarchies, and linguistic discrimination, especially in a linguistically diverse society like Singapore. Attitudes towards the official language policies are examined across social groups — ethnicity, age cohort, and socio-economic status — in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 concludes this study with a summary and key policy implications.



Chapter 2

Methodology, Demographics & Representation

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY, DEMOGRAPHICS & REPRESENTATION

Data for this LPIM study is derived from the 2013 and 2018 instalments of the IPS Race, Religion and Language (RRL) survey. Data collection for the 2013 instalment took place from January 2013 to April 2013 and was conducted by a market research company. In total, 4,131 Singaporean residents participated in the 2013 RRL survey. The 2018 wave of the survey commenced in August 2018 and was completed in January 2019, with a total of 4,015 Singaporean residents responding to the survey. The fieldwork for the 2018 IPS RRL run was conducted by the IPS Social Lab.

At the outset for both instalments, a sampling frame comprising a list of 5,000 randomly generated household addresses and associated contact details was obtained from the Singapore Department of Statistics (DoS). About 3,000 respondents completed the survey for each run based on this initial list. Thereafter, a booster sample was procured, comprising the selection of an additional 1,000 ethnic Malay and Indian respondents based on a pre-defined strategy; they lived in close proximity to survey respondents in the initial DoS sampling frame. There was a good response rate for the RRL survey for both runs, with approximately 70 per cent of those eligible to complete the study doing so.

A drop-off, pick-up method was employed for both iterations of the IPS RRL survey. Surveyors from the market research company or IPS Social Lab approached the pre-determined prospective households, identified the eligible respondent using a set of criteria, briefed the respondent about the RRL study, and invited the respondent to participate in the survey. If they agreed, they received a survey booklet that they had to complete on their own. This booklet was collected at a stipulated time. This self-administered questionnaire method limits the potential for 1) interviewer bias, which could arise when responses were recorded by an interviewer; and 2) social desirability bias, whereby respondents might temper or alter their responses in a one-on-one interview to be regarded as “politically correct”, or to ostensibly avert potential discomfort, or the interviewer’s adverse judgement.

The survey booklets were made available in Singapore’s four official languages. For respondents who were not able to read and write in any of the four languages, they were given the option of having the interviewer guide them through the survey instrument. However, it should be noted that there were limited interviewers who were able to administer the survey in Tamil. This meant that intermittently, should potential respondents request the survey to be administered in Tamil, the interview would have to be deferred for a Tamil-speaking interviewer to subsequently administer the survey. A number of potential respondents who may have only been able to speak in Tamil may have chosen to not proceed with the survey as the interview would have to be done at a future date. This may have resulted in some loss of data from respondents who were only comfortable in speaking Tamil. We do not expect this number to be high considering that 97.3 per cent of the Singapore’s population in 2018 were literate, based on Department of Statistics (DoS) figures.

Deviations in the responses of minorities in the main DoS sample and additional booster sample to the questions-of-interest in both runs were statistically insignificant; and hence data obtained from both sampling frames were combined to form one overall dataset. The dataset

was subsequently weighted to mirror the race and age demographics of Singapore’s resident population for the year of the iteration. The weights applied to the dataset were based on the latest available publicly accessible DoS population data (DoS, 2019a). After weighting, race and age profiles in our sample used for analysis closely mirror that of local population (see Figures 1 through 4). One exception is the representation of the under-20 age cohort, as the RRL survey includes only respondents aged 18 and above. As a result, the proportion of those below 20 years of age is much lower relative to that of the national resident population.

Figure 1: Racial demographics of RRL survey respondents vs. national resident population (2013)

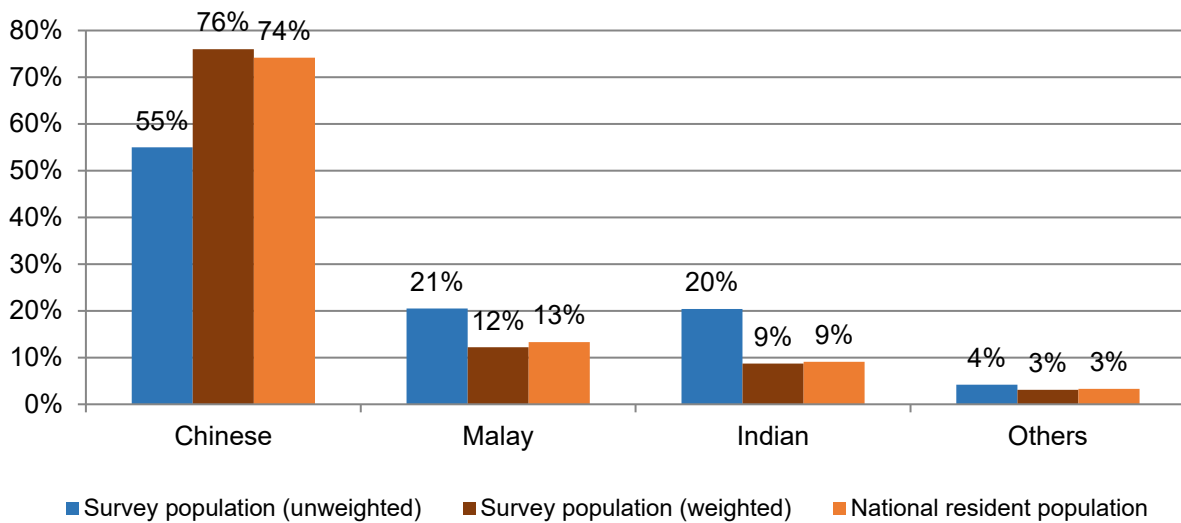


Figure 2: Racial demographics of RRL survey respondents vs. national resident population (2018)

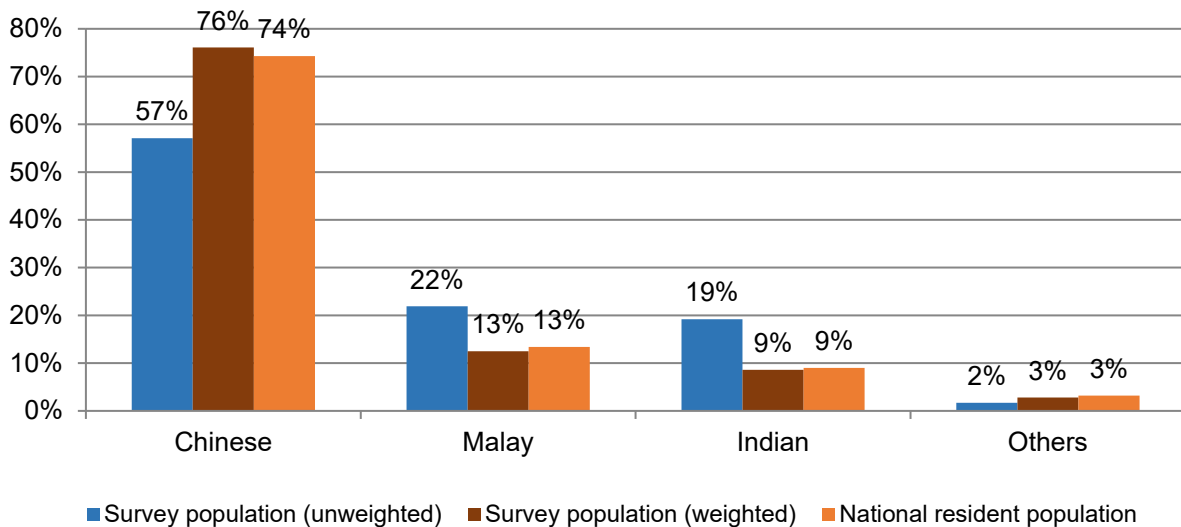


Figure 3: Age composition of RRL survey respondents vs. national resident population (2013)

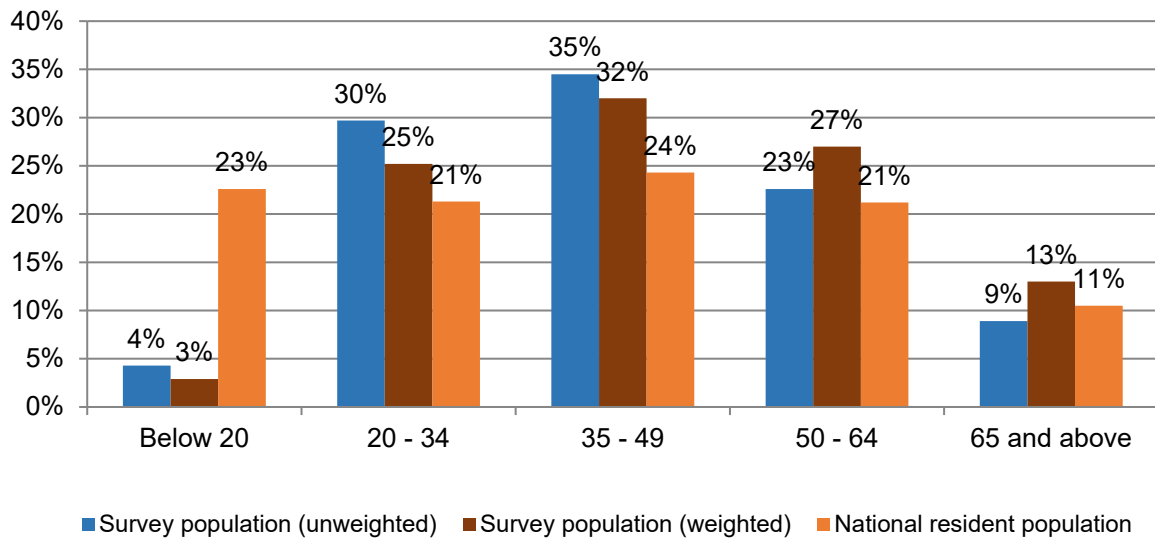
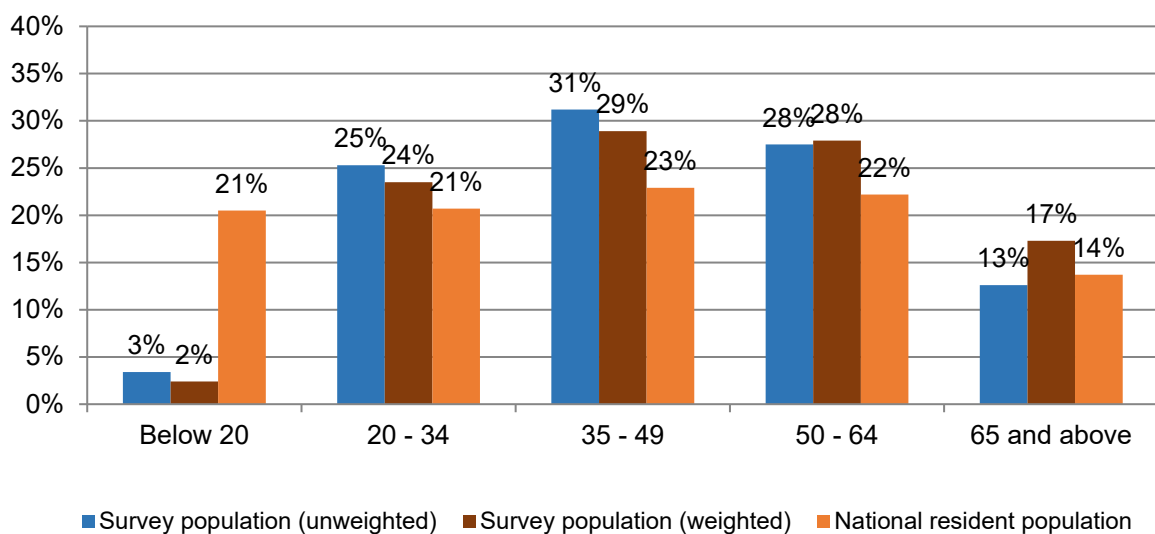


Figure 4: Age composition of RRL survey respondents vs. national resident population (2018)



After applying weights, the sample was appraised by gender, housing type, and education levels. In general, the 2013 and 2018 RRL weighted dataset is largely representative of the actual population in terms of these attributes. Notwithstanding under-sampling of the population with below secondary educational qualifications, as well as more affluent groups residing in HDB 5-room or larger flats and private housing, the survey responses provide a robust sense of the overall resident population’s views based on the sizeable respondent numbers surveyed for both instalments (see Figures 5 through 10).

This sample is however not without limitation. As expected, the total number of Indians in the sample is just over 800 respondents. Since not all Indians are Tamil by ethnic identity, responses to issues related to the Tamil language comprise an even smaller group. Due to the smaller Tamil segment, any comparison between 2013 and the 2018 waves for this group must be taken with substantial caution as small differences or outliers in survey responses will be magnified.

Figure 5: Gender ratio of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2013)

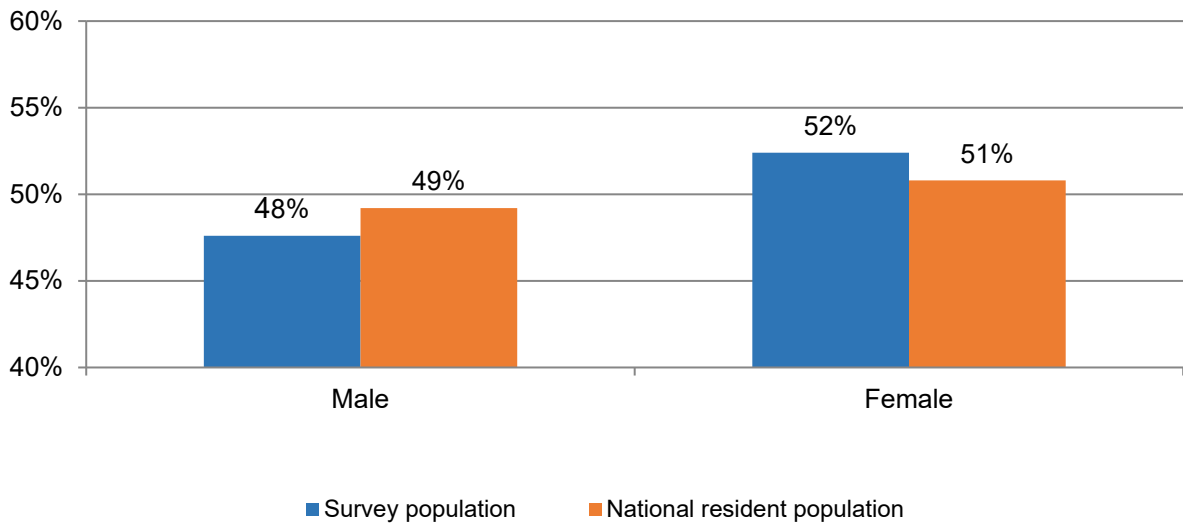


Figure 6: Gender ratio of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2018)

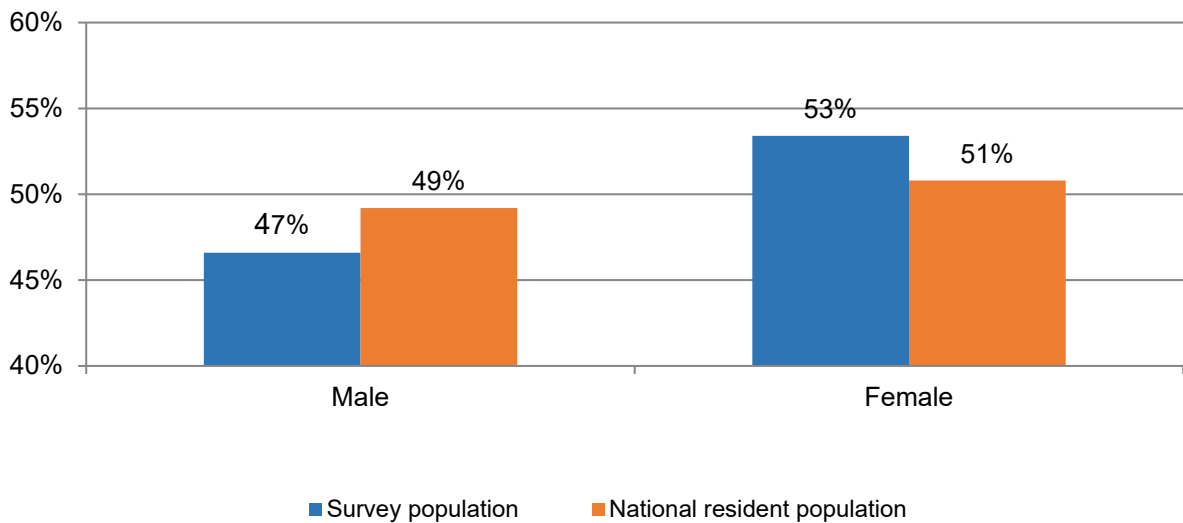


Figure 7: Housing type of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2013)

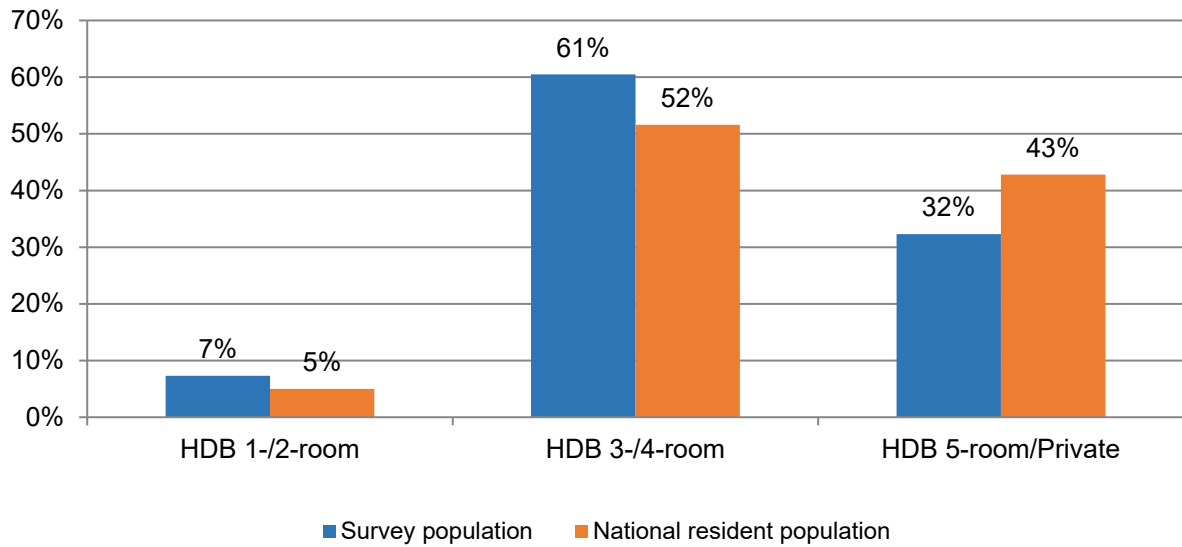


Figure 8: Housing type of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2018)

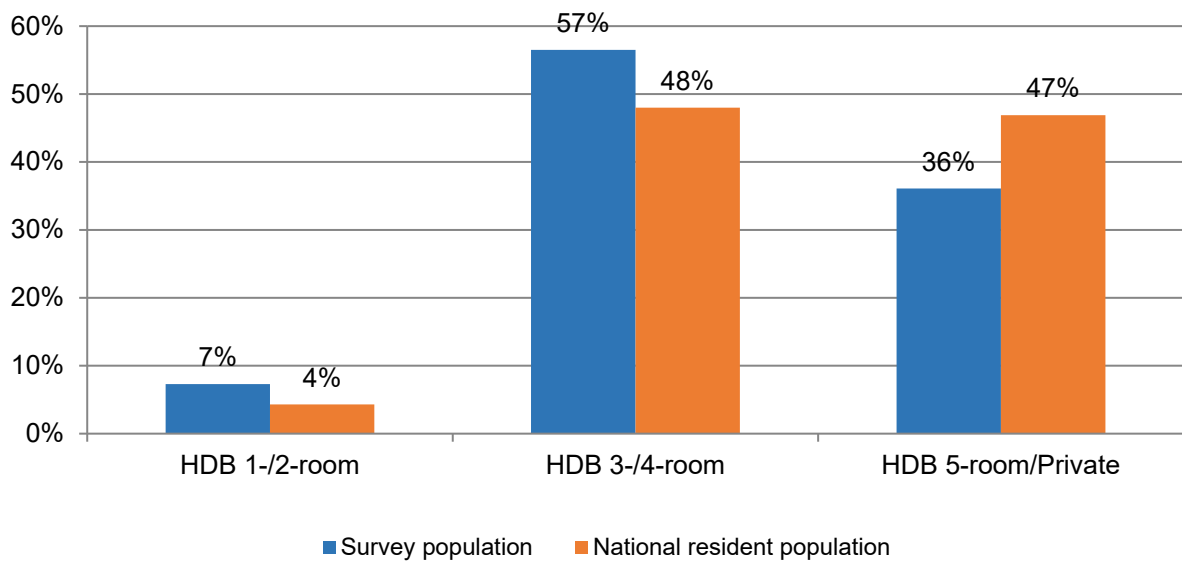


Figure 9: Highest education qualifications of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2013)

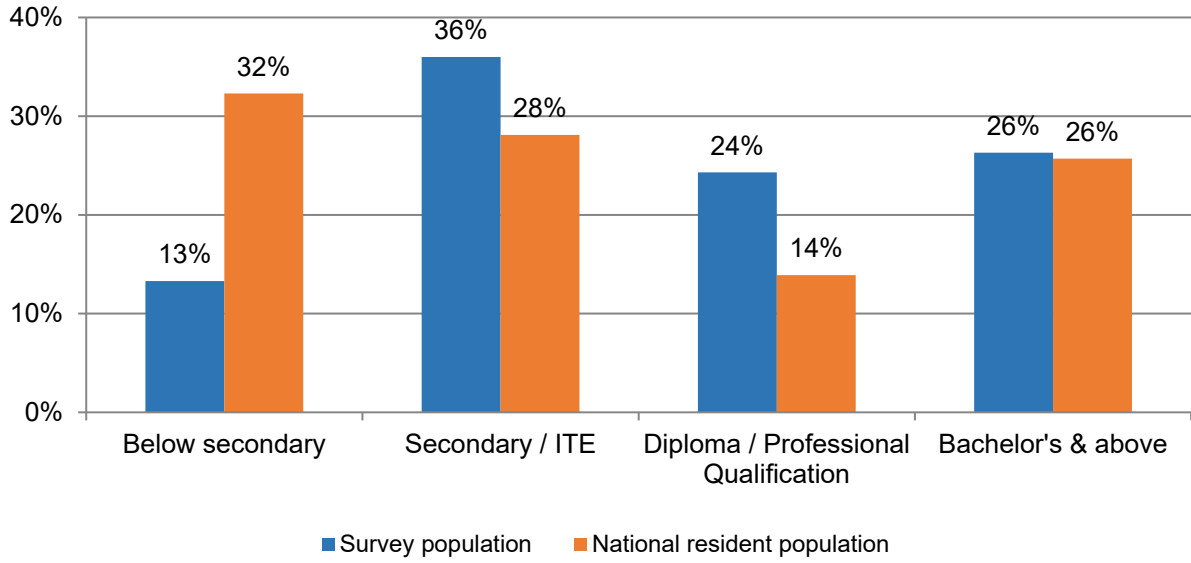
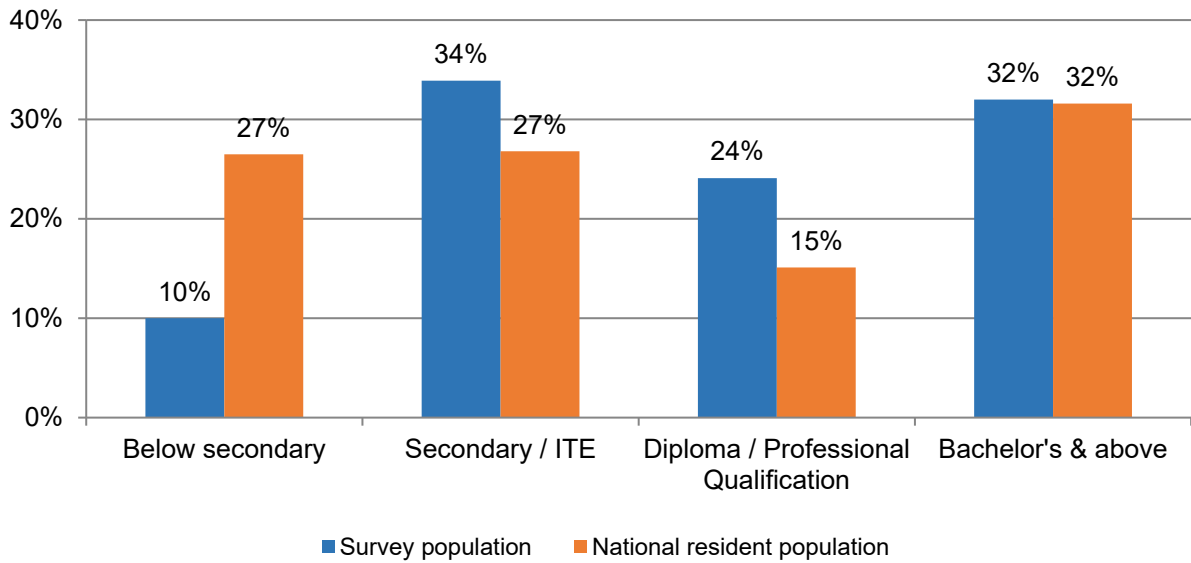


Figure 10: Highest education qualifications of RRL respondents vs. national resident population (2018)





Chapter 3

Language Proficiency

CHAPTER 3: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The multi-ethnic setting of Singapore is an environment where many languages coexist and interact. Against the policy backdrop of a mandatory bilingual education in local schools, many Singaporeans acquire proficiency in two languages to varying degrees. In this chapter, we discuss language acquisition and proficiency level across the three primary ethnic groups in Singapore. Trends in English proficiency, the official Mother Tongue language proficiency, heritage language proficiency and the local English variety known as Singlish are also examined, based on differences in responses across the two RRL iterations. To assess respondents' levels of language proficiency, the RRL survey asked each respondent to score their perceived language proficiency levels (see Table 1).

Table 1: Language proficiency level criteria

“How well can you speak the following languages to perform the different tasks?” (Tick most appropriate response)	
1	Can't speak (cannot perform tasks in this language)
2	Somewhat well (can exchange greetings)
3	Fairly well (can make purchases in a shop or food centre)
4	Well (can talk about family, friends, etc.)
5	Very well (can discuss ideas like religion, politics, technology, etc.)

Due to the exigencies in structuring a reasonably concise set of questions for the overall IPS RRL survey, only data on self-reported oral proficiency skills, alongside perceptions of general spoken and written language proficiencies in Singapore are collected. The languages surveyed are English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, Singlish, and respondents' parents' heritage languages. It is important to note too that while self-reported language proficiency is useful in providing a broad-brush overview of Singapore's linguistic landscape, it is limited by individual differences in assessing proficiency levels. Some for instance may hold differing views on what constitutes being able to speak a language “very well”; such as being able to engage fluently in multifaceted or academic discussions versus being able to engage in “coffeeshop banter”. As such, the results from this section denote what respondents believe is their language proficiency, rather than an objective standard of language competence.

3.1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

English is the working language of Singapore. By 1987, all schools used English as the primary language of instruction for all subjects except for Mother Tongue language classes (National Library Board, 2016). In this regard, we would expect to witness higher self-reported proficiency in English over time and especially for younger age cohorts. The highly globalised and open nature of Singapore's economy would also necessitate exposure of our workforce to communicating in formal English across a variety of professional settings, which is posited to gradually augment proficiency for older age cohorts too.

3.1.1 Perceived overall spoken English proficiency has risen from 2013 to 2018

Based on the 2013 and 2018 responses, there is a rise in overall perceived English proficiency over the past few years. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents in 2018 reported the ability to speak English at least “well”, as compared to 71 per cent of respondents in 2013 (see Figures 11 and 12). In addition, over half of respondents (51 per cent) in 2018 reported the ability to speak English “very well”, compared to 44 per cent who reported similar proficiencies in 2013. These results illustrate the increasing levels of perceived English proficiency for the overall resident cohort, and exemplifies 1) the relative success of prioritising English as the main language of instruction in Singapore’s education system, impacting younger cohorts; and 2) the outsized exposure of individuals to English as the main mode of communication in professional settings within Singapore’s globalised open economy, impacting the workforce.

Figure 11: Official language proficiency (2013)

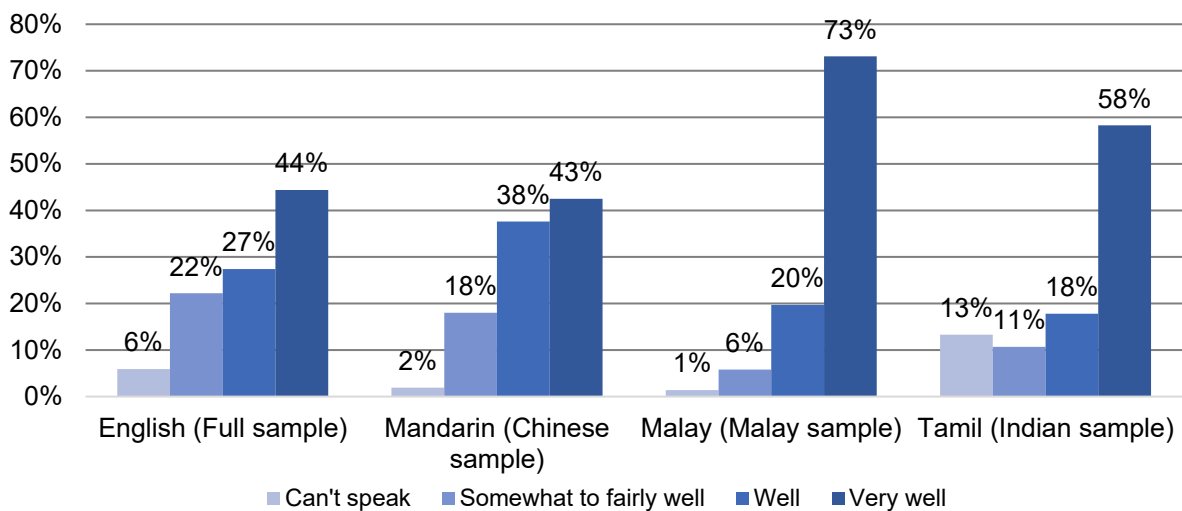
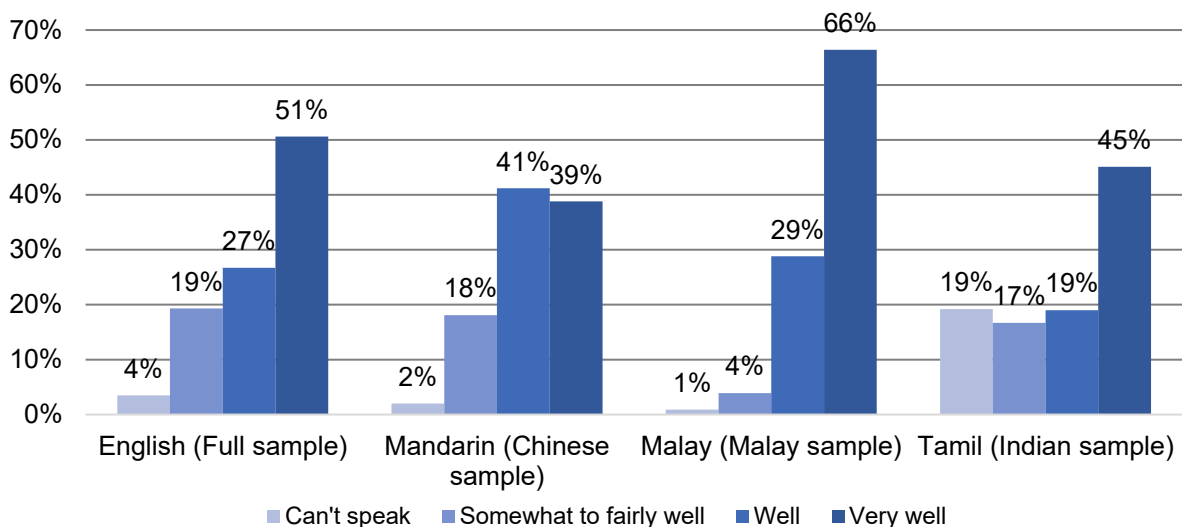


Figure 12: Official language proficiency (2018)



3.1.2 As expected, younger cohorts reported stronger proficiencies in speaking English relative to older cohorts; nonetheless older cohorts indicated significantly stronger proficiencies relative to five years ago

The rise in spoken English proficiency is evident across all age groups from 2013 to 2018. For instance, 44 per cent of Chinese respondents over 65 years old reported speaking English “well” or “very well” in 2018; compared to 36 per cent of their counterparts in 2013 (see Figures 13 and 14). However, younger age cohorts were more likely to report speaking English “well” or “very well” regardless of ethnicity, with significant differentials between the youngest and oldest cohorts. Ninety-five per cent or more of respondents aged 18–25 reported speaking English “well” or “very well” across racial groups; compared to just 44 per cent, 59 per cent, and 86 per cent of Chinese, Malays, and Indians aged 65 and above, respectively in 2018. These findings are in line with shifts in Singapore’s education policies towards English as the default language of instruction in the 1970s to 1980s.

The results were also analysed according to respondents’ ethnicities. Indian respondents were the most likely to report the ability to speak English at least “well” across all age groups in both RRL waves, with over 93 per cent of Indian respondents under 51 years of age reporting similar proficiency levels in both waves (see Figures 13 and 14).

There was a marked increase in reported proficiencies in English across all ethnicities for respondents aged 51 and above. For example, the proportion of Malay respondents aged above 65 indicating they could speak English at least “well” increased from 44 per cent in 2013 to 59 per cent in 2018. Proportions of Chinese respondents aged 65 and above indicating similar proficiencies in spoken English also increased from 36 per cent in 2013 to 44 per cent in 2018. The increase was most pronounced for Indians; 86 per cent of Indians above 65 years old reported speaking English “well” or “very well” in 2018, compared to just 52 per cent in 2013 — a 34 percentage point difference.

One likely reason for this increase in reported proficiency for older cohorts is the demise of Chinese-, Malay- and Tamil-medium schools in Singapore during the 1970s to the 1980s in favour of English as the language of instruction across all schools. This would have coincided with the age cohorts attending English-medium schools and hence gaining greater proficiencies in speaking English (Chua, 2011).

Figure 13: Proportion of respondents who can speak English "well" or "very well", by race and age (2013)

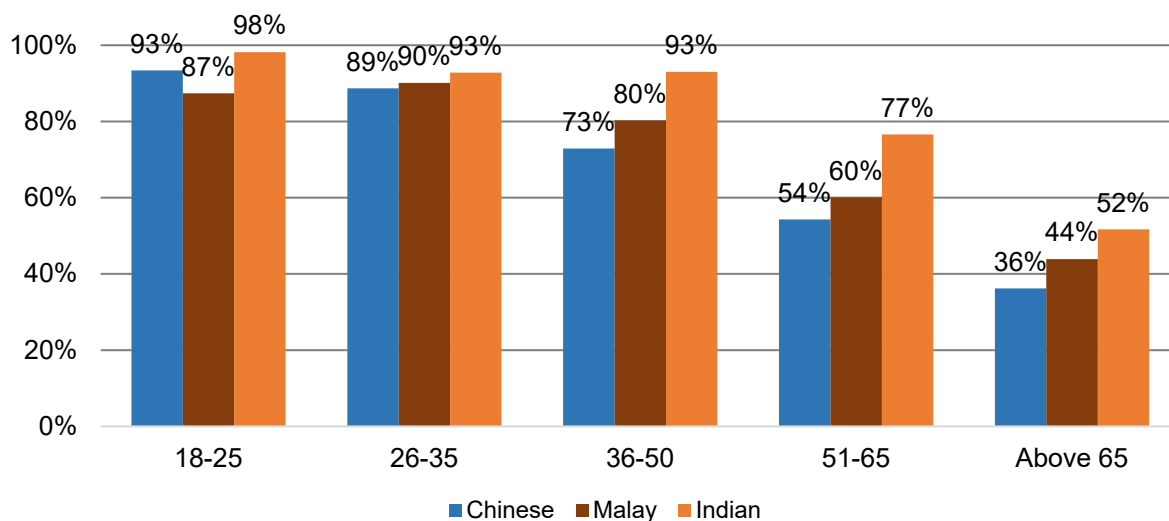
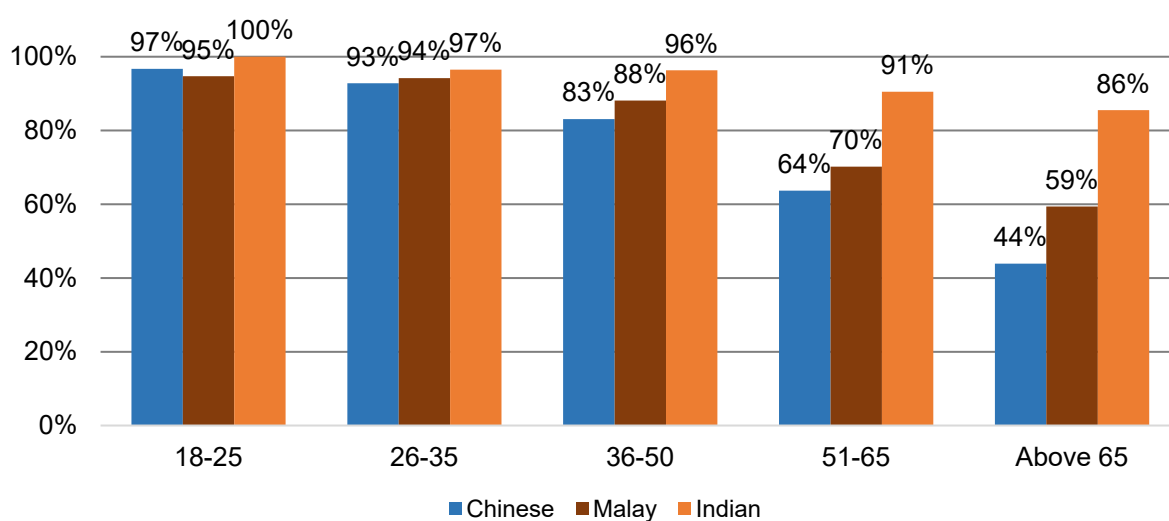


Figure 14: Proportion of respondents who can speak English "well" or "very well", by race and age (2018)



3.2 OFFICIAL MOTHER TONGUE PROFICIENCY

Mandarin, Malay (Bahasa Melayu) and Tamil are the designated official Mother Tongue languages for Chinese, Malays and Indians in Singapore, respectively. These are taught as Mother Tongue languages in schools to students as part of the Bilingual Education Policy instituted since the 1980s. In this regard, we would expect to witness higher self-reported proficiency in their Mother Tongue languages over time and for younger age cohorts.

3.2.1 Chinese youth aged 18–25 relative to their peers aged 26–35 reported marginally lower proficiencies in speaking their Mother Tongue language

The relative proficiency of respondents aged 50 and below in speaking Mandarin is high, with more than 83 per cent indicating they speak Mandarin “well” or “very well” (see Figures 15 and 16). A smaller proportion of older Chinese respondents aged 51 and above reported good proficiency levels in speaking Mandarin, with only 59 per cent of those above 65 years reporting this. This is not unexpected given that during the 1950s, it was observed that less than one per cent of the Chinese population spoke Mandarin (Kuo, 1985).

When analysing results by age cohort, we note a marginal difference (4 percentage points) in the proportion of Chinese respondents aged 18 to 25 who reported the ability to speak Mandarin at least “well” compared to their counterparts aged 26 to 35 in 2013 (see Figure 15). This difference is more apparent in 2018, where 83 per cent of Chinese respondents aged 18–25 reported similar proficiencies relative to 92 per cent of their counterparts aged 26–35, a 9 percentage point difference (see Figure 16). This suggests that students continue to speak Mandarin after graduation potentially due to workplace requirements. In the same vein, this provides some support for individuals embracing lifelong learning prerogatives via the continued use of the language post-graduation.

Given how both these age cohorts experienced similar bilingual education policies in school, with English taught as a first language and Chinese as a second language (Li, 1989), this result seems to suggest our youngest cohorts are potentially more exposed to English-speaking households, environments, and media in line with our globalised economy; and have lowered exposure to Mandarin contexts. Yet, as these cohorts transit from educational institutions to workplaces, their propensity to use Mandarin may rise as a result of requirements in industry or skills upgrading needs. Similar results indicate this line of reasoning is likely applicable to Malays and Indians too vis-à-vis their respective Mother Tongue languages.

Figure 15: Proportion of Chinese who can speak Mandarin “well” or “very well”, by age group (2013)

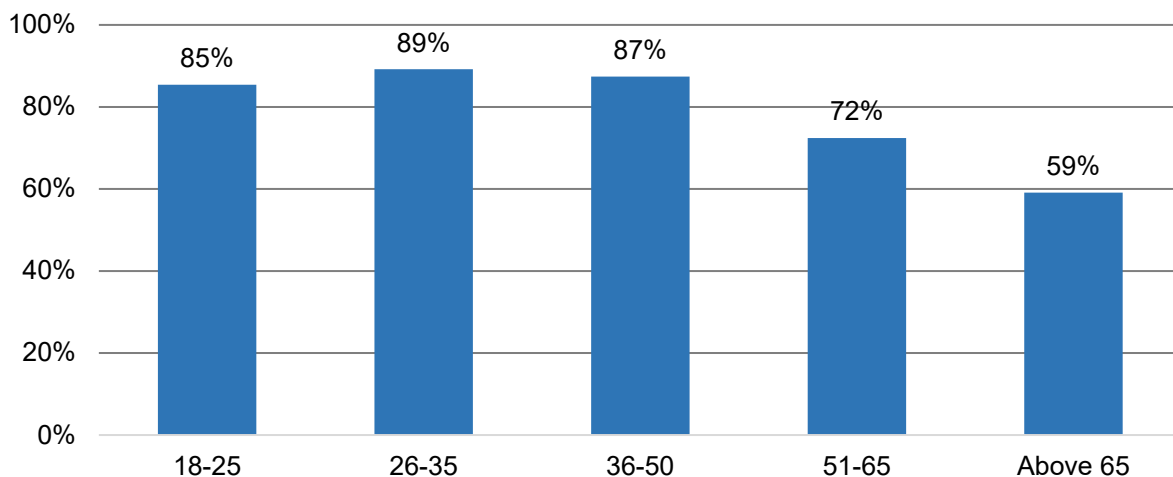
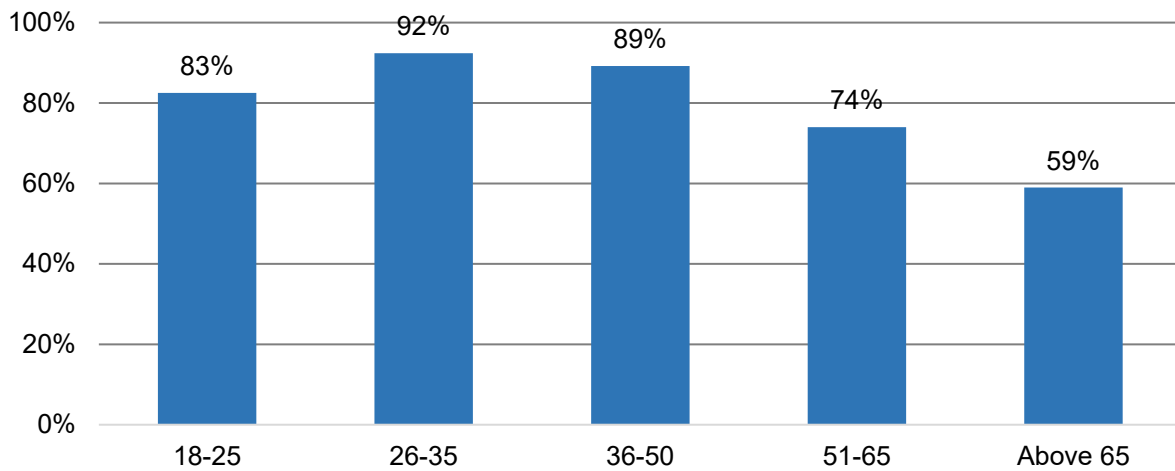


Figure 16: Proportion of Chinese who can speak Mandarin "well" or "very well", by age group (2018)



3.2.2 Malays are most likely to indicate strong proficiencies in speaking their Mother Tongue, amidst a decline in reported levels of spoken Mother Tongue proficiency across all ethnicities

Amongst the three official Mother Tongues, Malay-speaking respondents were most likely to report stronger language proficiencies. Seventy-three per cent of Malay respondents in 2013 reported the ability to speak their Mother Tongue language "very well", as compared to only 43 per cent of Chinese respondents and 58 per cent of Indian respondents (see Figure 11). This trend is mirrored, though slightly muted in 2018, where 66 per cent of Malay respondents reported the ability to speak Malay very well, while only 39 per cent of Chinese respondents and 45 per cent of Indian respondents reported this about their respective official Mother Tongue languages (see Figure 12).

The Malay respondents present a different language acquisition pattern as compared to the Chinese respondents in both waves (see Figures 17 and 18). Malay respondents demonstrate similar proficiency levels in Malay across all age groups. It is interesting to note a decrease in proficiency in Malay amongst younger respondents, with 88 per cent of the respondents aged between 18 and 25 reporting the ability to speak Malay at least well in 2018 and 93 per cent of those aged between 26 and 35 years reporting likewise (see Figure 18). Similar to Chinese-speaking respondents, this difference was less stark in 2013, where 94 per cent of respondents aged between 18 and 25 years reported the ability to speak Malay at least well, likewise for 96 per cent of those aged between 26 and 35 (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Proportion of Malays who can speak Malay "well" or "very well", by age group (2013)

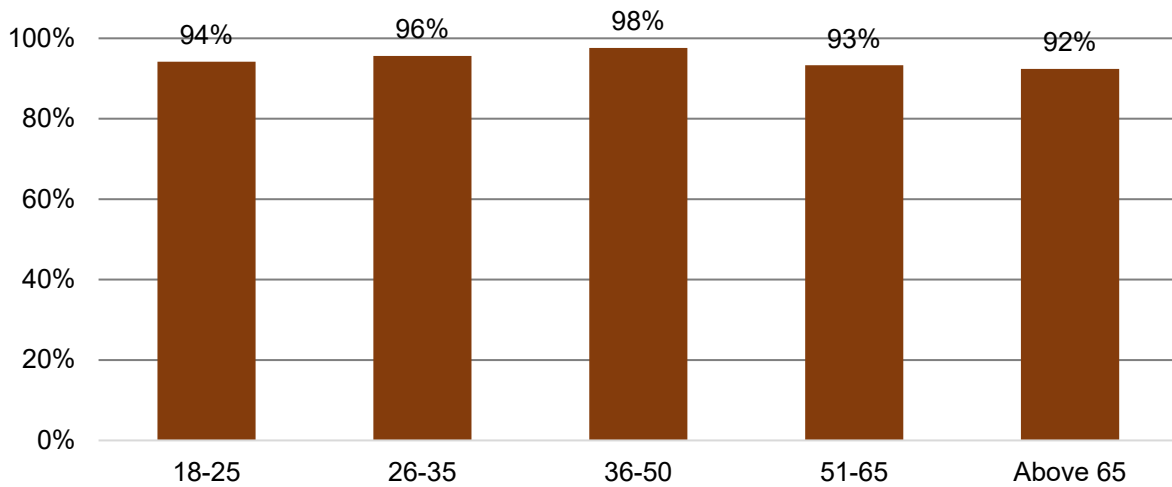
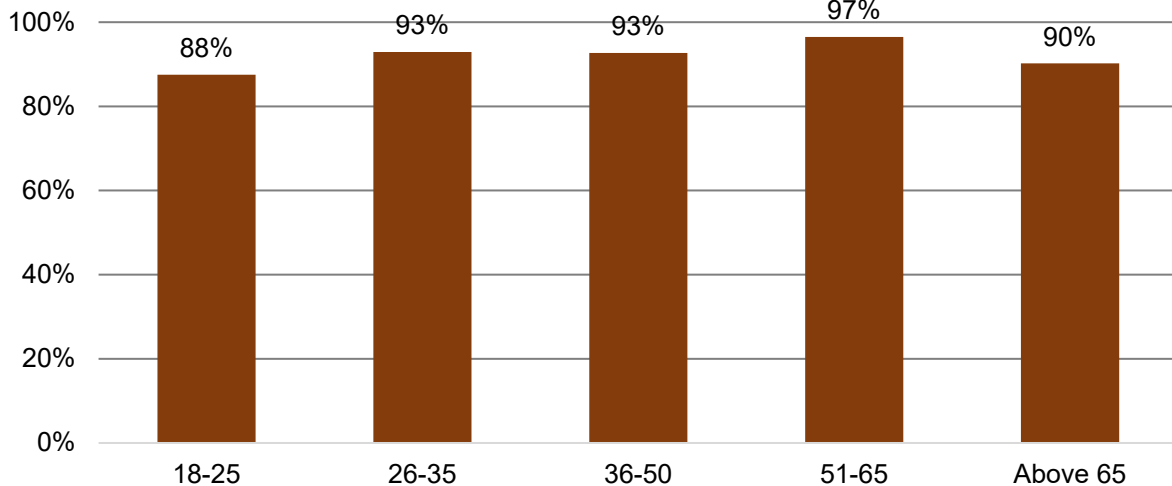


Figure 18: Proportion of Malays who can speak Malay "well" or "very well", by age group (2018)



3.2.3 Majority of ethnic Tamils reported strong proficiency in spoken Tamil, even amidst an overall decline

For the Indian community, the usage of several other heritage languages alongside the official Mother Tongue renders the analysis slightly more intricate. While Indians were most likely to indicate strong proficiency in speaking English relative to other races (see Figures 13 and 14 in 3.1.2), they were least likely to indicate strong official Mother Tongue language proficiency (76 per cent in 2013 and 64 per cent in 2018; see Figures 11 and 12). However, these findings have to be taken in context with the limitations of the small sample size of Tamil speakers. In addition, levels of reported proficiency in spoken Tamil remain high among ethnic Tamils, with

three-quarters of this sub-group indicating they could speak the language “well” or “very well” in 2018, as compared to 82 per cent in 2013.

Similar to their Chinese counterparts, we note a marked 10 percentage point difference between the proportions of Indians aged 18–25 indicating they spoke Tamil “well” or “very well”, compared to their counterparts aged 26–35 in the 2018 iteration (see Figure 20). This difference is marginal in the 2013 wave of this study (see Figure 19). There is also significant decline in proportions for all other age groups for respondents indicating strong proficiency in spoken Tamil for the 2018 survey run compared to five years ago.

Aside from how English has seemingly displaced Mother Tongue languages over the past decades, some may argue that for the Indian community, the recognition of five other Indian languages apart from Tamil in the local school curriculum since 1990, may have resulted in fewer Indians choosing to do Tamil in school. Currently, students from non-Tamil speaking Indian communities can choose to offer Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu in lieu of an official Mother Tongue language from primary to post-secondary levels (Ministry of Education, 2007). This policy change inevitably impacts the acquisition of and proficiency in Tamil among the younger generations. Prior to the introduction of these non-Tamil Indian languages in schools in the 1990s, more non-Tamil Indians might have taken Tamil as a language option in school. However in the absence of data, this conclusion is problematic. Anecdotally, many non-Tamil Indians took Malay as their Mother Tongue language prior to the introduction of non-Tamil Indian languages in schools.

Once again, care must be taken in interpreting results for Tamil; in this case, the unexpected sharp drop in those above 65 years who do not speak Tamil well may be due to the small sample size over the two waves. There were less than 70 respondents in that category (which also included non-Tamil Indians) and as such the figures must be taken with great caution. Moreover because of small sample sizes for this age group, any changes between waves would be magnified.

Figure 19: Proportion of Indians who can speak Tamil “well” or “very well”, by age group (2013)

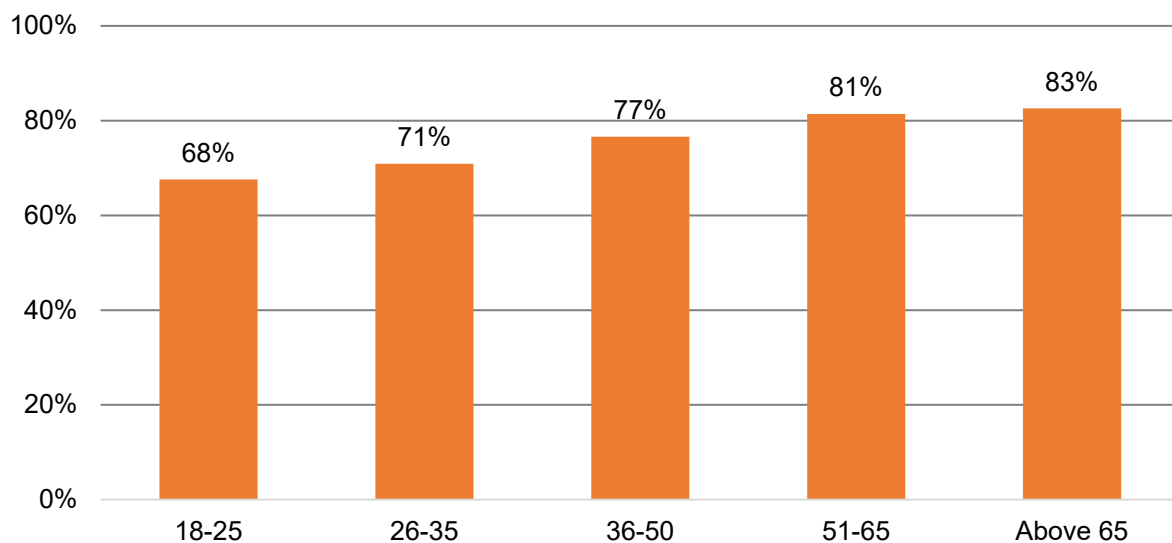
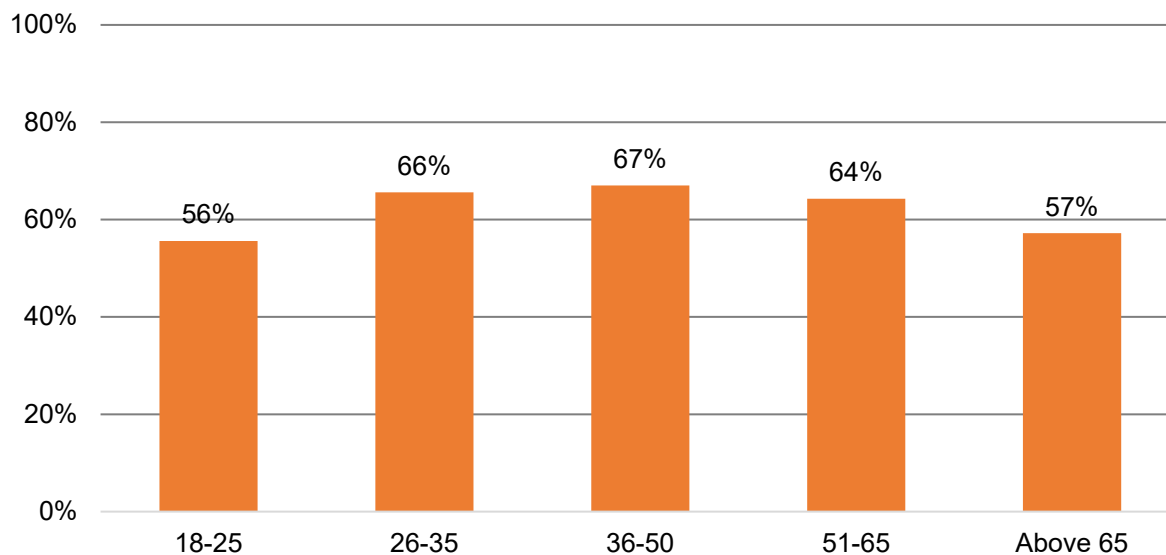


Figure 20: Proportion of Indians who can speak Tamil "well" or "very well", by age group (2018)



3.3 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PATTERNS ACROSS ETHNICITIES

In this section, we compare reported spoken language proficiencies in English, Mother Tongue languages, as well as the heritage languages of respondents' parents by ethnic groups. The LPIM study expects reported proficiencies in speaking English and Mother Tongue to be higher for younger cohorts in general, in line with the Bilingual Education Policy. However, this will likely occur at the expense of spoken proficiencies in heritage languages across time.

3.3.1 Across all ethnic groups, reported heritage language proficiencies have significantly declined over the past five years, even as English proficiency has risen

In the case of the Chinese community in Singapore, there has been a decline in proficiency in parents' heritage languages, in tandem with an increase in English proficiency. In 2013, 71 per cent of Chinese respondents reported the ability to speak their parents' heritage language "well" or "very well" (see Figure 21); this figure dropped to 57 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 22). The corresponding proficiency figure for English was 69 per cent in 2013, and 74 per cent in 2018. Chinese respondents were just as likely to be proficient in their Mother Tongue language (Mandarin) across both 2013 and 2018 iterations of the RRL survey (80 per cent for both iterations).

Malay respondents were most likely to perceive high levels of spoken Mother Tongue language proficiency in both waves. Ninety-three per cent of Malay respondents in 2013 and 95 per cent of Malay respondents in 2018 reported the ability to speak Malay at least "well" (see Figures 21 and 22). Malays also reported high and growing levels of spoken English

proficiency as well, with 75 per cent in 2013 and 83 per cent in 2018 reporting the ability to speak English at least “well”.

While a drastic drop for heritage language proficiency is observed (63 per cent versus eight per cent indicating an ability to speak “well” or “very well” in 2013 and 2018, respectively), this could in part be due to differences in how Malay respondents interpreted the notion of “heritage languages”. Many in the 2013 run of the survey listed “Malay” as their heritage language rather than other languages such as Javanese and Boyanese — which only a few indicated. This is expected since Malay has been the dominant language among the Malays in Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia for centuries (Andaya, 2001). In the 2018 wave, perhaps more respondents had not considered Malay as a heritage language but rather, their official Mother Tongue language.

Similar results were also observed for the Indian community, with spoken English proficiency (“well” or “very well”) growing from 87 per cent to 94 per cent from 2013 to 2018. This however occurred at the expense of both official Mother Tongue and heritage languages — for the reasons of linguistic heterogeneity within the Indian community and education policy stated in 3.2.3.

Figure 21: Language one speaks “well” or “very well”, by race (2013)

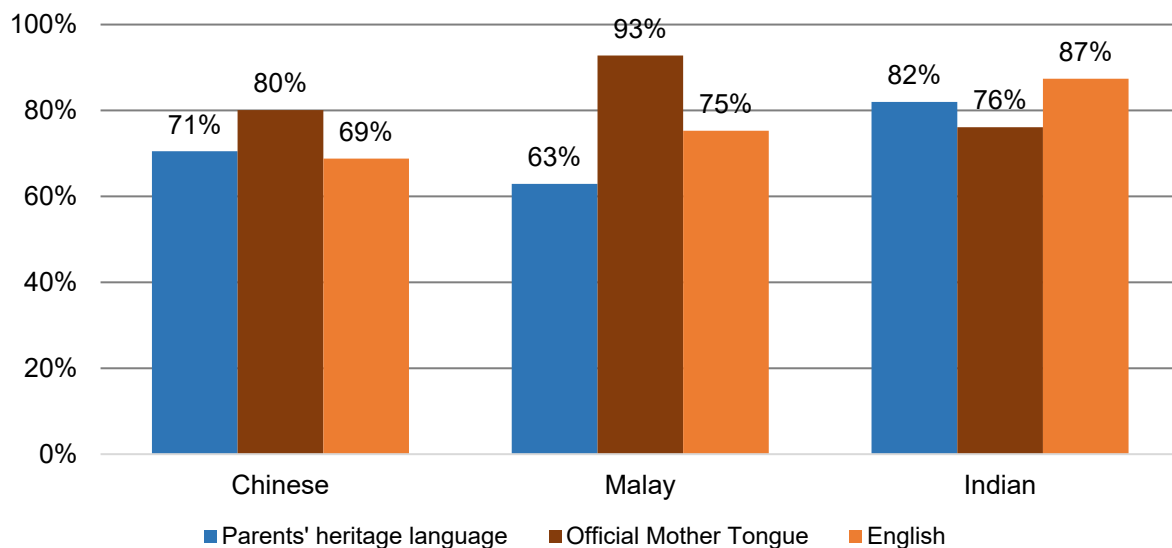
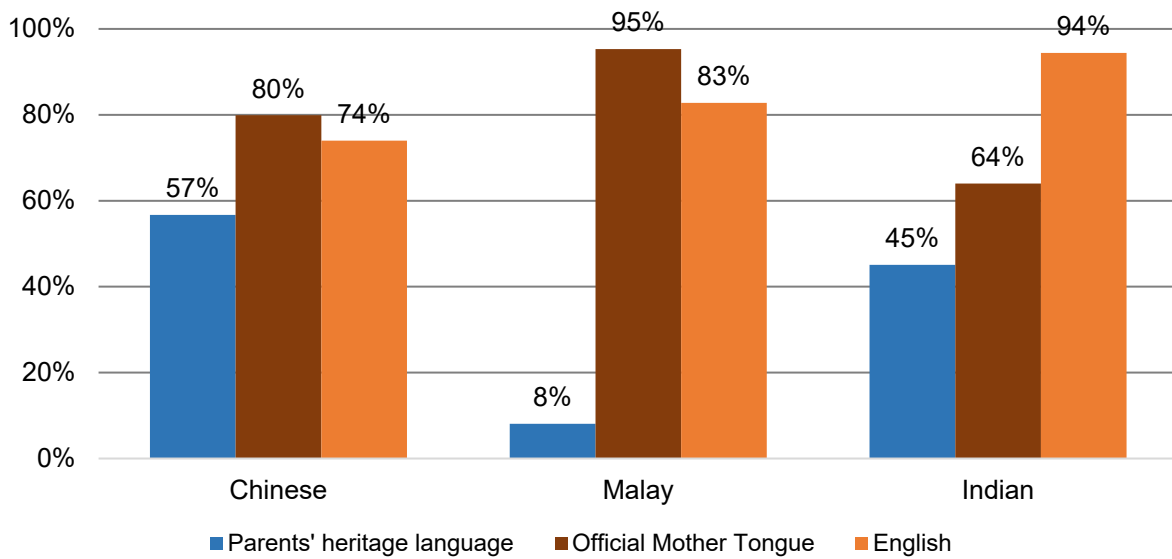


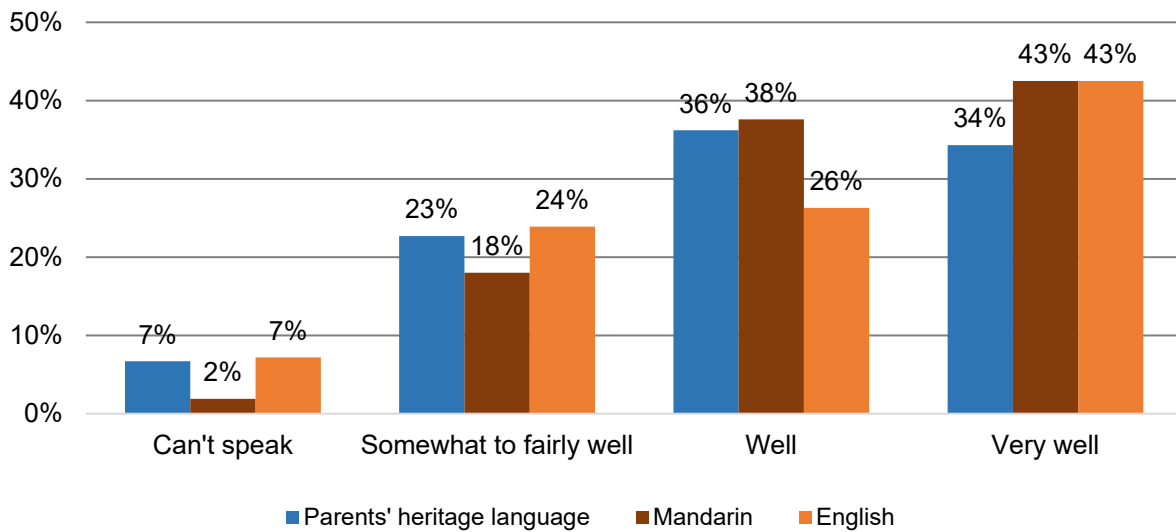
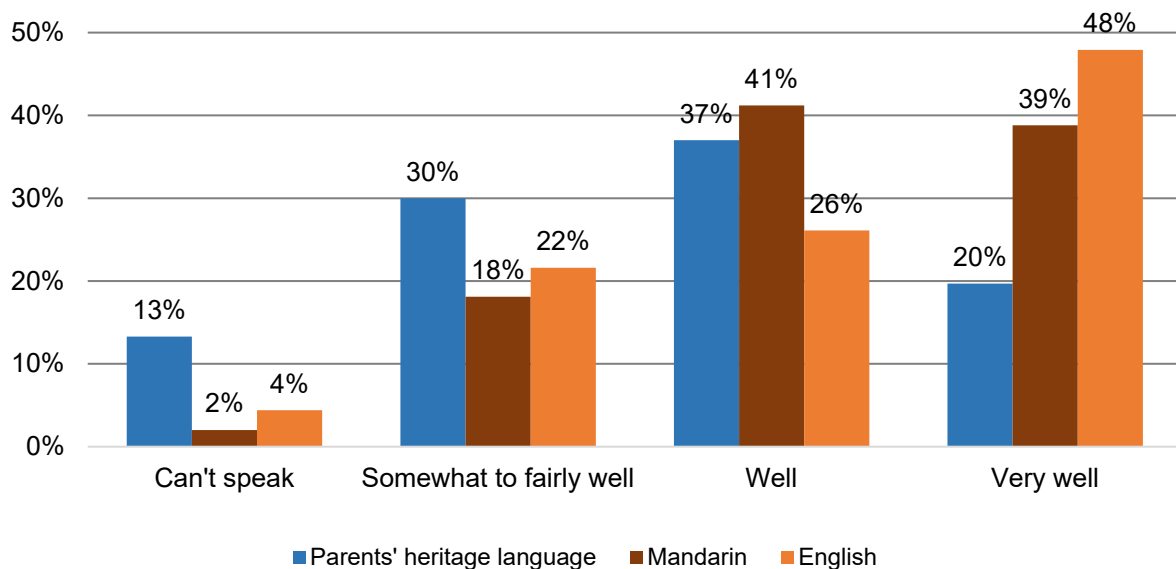
Figure 22: Language one speaks "well" or "very well", by race (2018)



3.3.2 More Chinese reported being able to speak Mandarin “well” and “very well” compared to English, though proficiency in the latter has risen

This sub-section features a more detailed analysis of trends within the Chinese community. The majority of Chinese respondents reported the ability to speak the official working language (English), their official Mother Tongue (Mandarin) and their parents’ heritage language(s) at least “well”. The highest proportions of high-proficiency language speakers (“well” and “very well”) belong to the Mandarin category (see Figures 23 and 24), although numbers of Chinese respondents indicating high proficiency in English have risen.

The results also illustrate the durable role of Mandarin as the common language of communication in the Chinese community, where only two per cent of respondents reported that they could not speak the language at all in both waves. However, the emphasis on “standard” Mandarin by the state — relative to Chinese languages (or dialects) such as Hokkien and Teochew — has exerted a clear impact on the spoken heritage language proficiency of the Chinese population. While 7 per cent of respondents reported that they could not speak their parents’ heritage language in 2013; this figure increased to 13 per cent in 2018 (see Figures 23 and 24). This trend will be elaborated on in the later sections of this paper.

Figure 23: Language proficiencies of Chinese respondents (2013)**Figure 24: Language proficiencies of Chinese respondents (2018)**

3.3.3 Similarly, more Malays reported greater proficiency in their Mother Tongue compared to English

The Malay community is similar to the Chinese in terms of the respondents' high proficiency levels (at least "well") in both English and their official Mother Tongue language. In 2013, 93 per cent of respondents reported the ability to speak Malay at least "well"; only 2 per cent reported being unable to speak the language at all (see Figure 25). In 2018, a larger proportion (95 per cent) of Malay respondents reported the ability to speak Malay at least "well"; only 1 per cent reported that they could not speak the language at all (see Figure 26). However, there was a drop in proportion of respondents indicating they could speak Malay "very well", reflecting shifts towards English proficiency.

With regard to the heritage languages of parents, 20 per cent of Malay respondents reported being unable to speak their heritage language in 2013. However, this number rose to 76 per cent in 2018. As explained earlier in 3.3.1, this might be due to a different understanding of what heritage language means to Malay respondents, rather than representative of any significant shifts in heritage language proficiency; given a large proportion of the Malay community already spoke the Malay language pre-independence.

Figure 25: Language proficiencies of Malay respondents (2013)

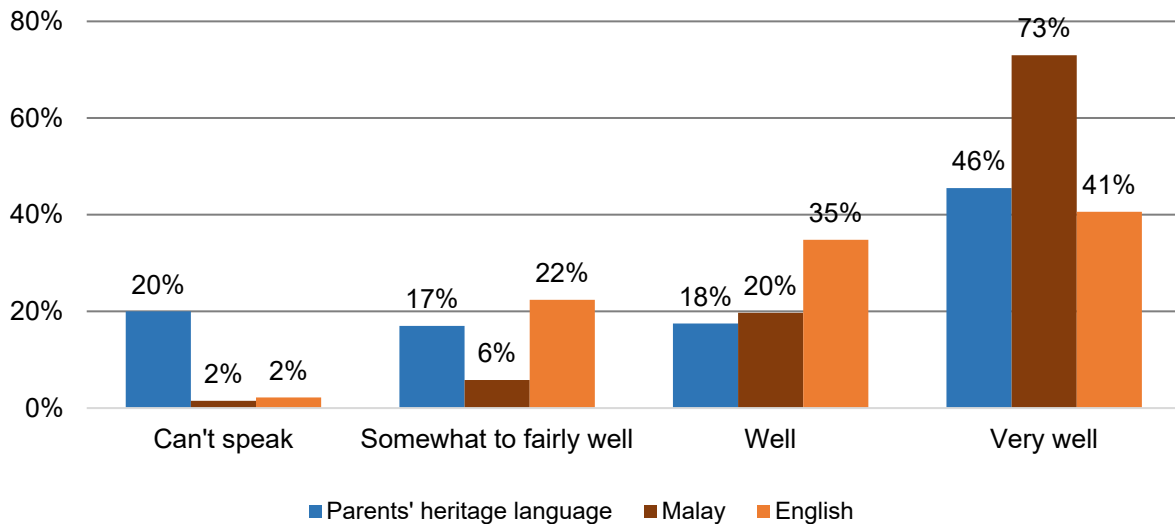
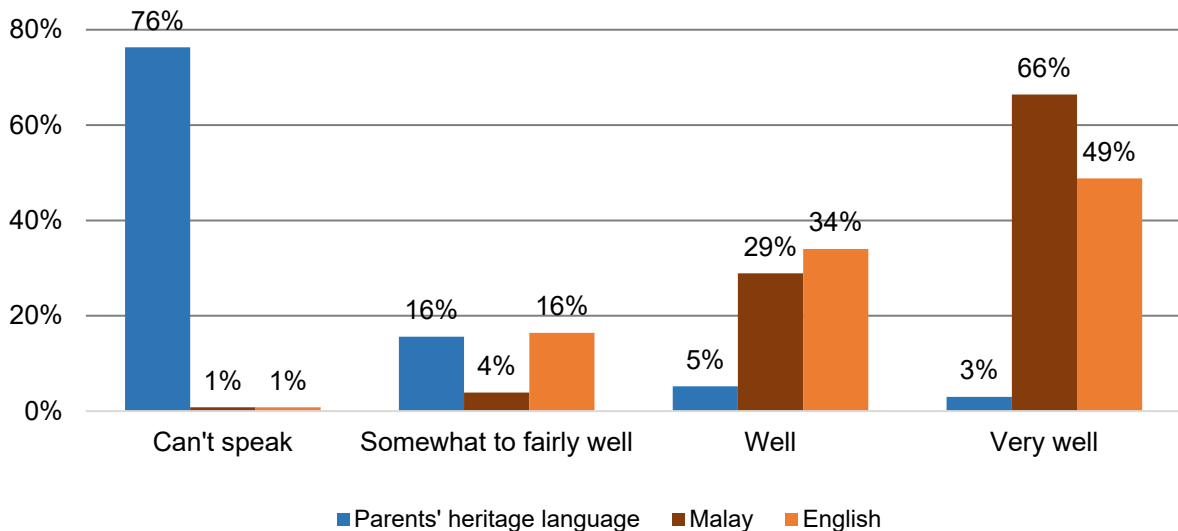


Figure 26: Language proficiencies of Malay respondents (2018)



3.3.4 Indians are most likely to indicate high proficiencies in speaking English and their heritage languages relative to other ethnic groups

In 2013, 76 per cent of Indian RRL respondents reported the ability to speak Tamil at least “well”. However, this number dropped to 64 per cent in 2018, indicating a decrease in proficiency in Tamil amongst Indian respondents over time. Similarly, 13 per cent of respondents reported the inability to speak Tamil at all in 2013 (see Figure 27), with this figure increasing to 19 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 28). In contrast to Chinese and Malay respondents, significantly higher proportions of Indians report being able to speak their parents’ heritage language “well” or “very well”. This is due to the linguistic heterogeneity of the community, alongside expanded Mother Tongue policies of the state allowing non-Tamil speaking students to designate another language as their second language (e.g., Hindi and Bengali amongst others).

Figure 27: Language proficiencies of Indian respondents (2013)

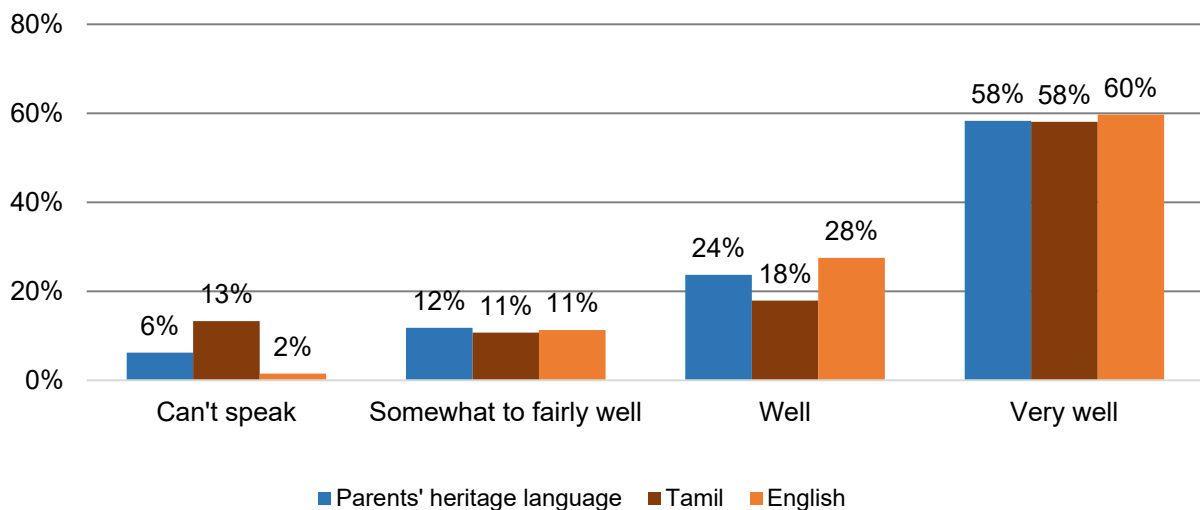
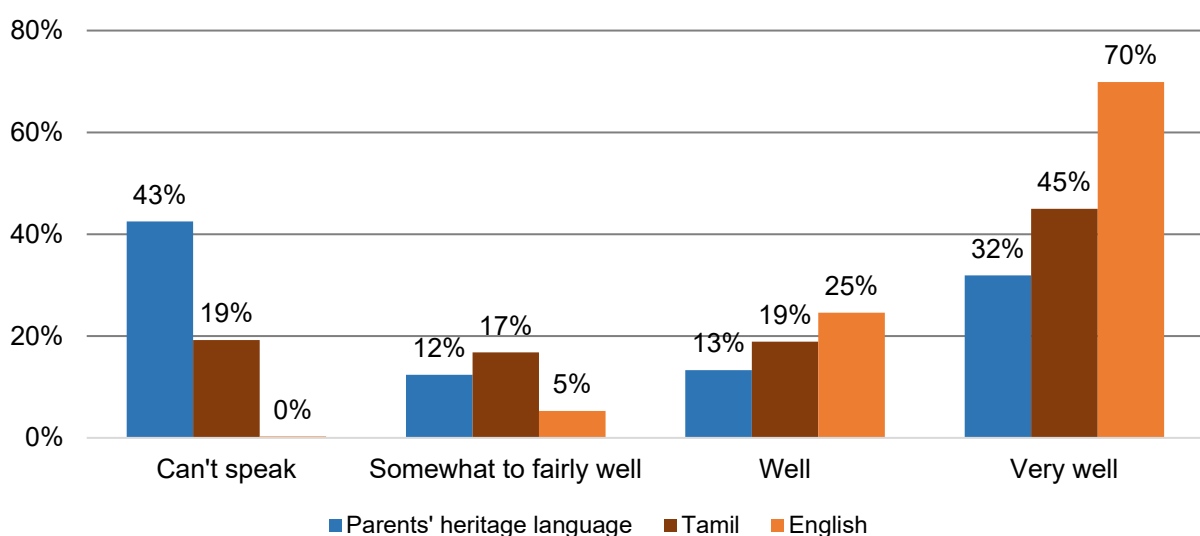




Figure 28: Language proficiencies of Indian respondents (2018)



3.4 BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY

Bilingual education is a cornerstone of Singapore’s education policy and the state’s emphasis on economic competitiveness. Drawing on data from the survey, we examine the bilingual proficiencies of the respondents by ethnicity to glean a sense of the outcomes stemming from our Bilingual Education Policy. Scholars have described Singapore’s bilingual education system as “English-preferred-bilingualism”, where English is studied as a first language, and the Mother Tongue as a second language, except for selected SAP schools where both languages are taught as first languages (Chiang & Low, 2016). In this regard, the LPIM study assumes that an “ideal” outcome would be students being able to speak English “very well” and speak their Mother Tongue “well”.

We look at the bilingual proficiencies of English and the respective official Mother Tongues. The figures presented in this section juxtapose two bilingual proficiency measures:

-  The left columns in dark blue present a general measure of bilingualism, with percentages of respondent groups *indicating they can speak both English and their Mother Tongue “well” or “very well”*. This is an indication of the proportion of respondents whose reported abilities to converse in both languages fall within a wider functional proficiency range.
-  The right columns in orange present a more stringent measure of “English-preferred-bilingualism”, with percentages of respondent groups *indicating they can speak English “very well”, and their Mother Tongue “well” or “very well”*. This is a subset of respondents who fulfil the above criteria, but who are able to converse in English at the highest levels of proficiency.

3.4.1 In general, bilingualism has blossomed across the board, with younger respondents likelier to report higher levels of bilingual proficiency

Overall bilingual proficiency has increased across all age groups from 2013 to 2018. For instance, 70 per cent of respondents aged 35–49 reported being able to speak both English and Mother Tongue “well” or “very well” in 2013; this proportion increased to 77 per cent in 2018 (see Figures 29 and 30). Even with the more stringent “English-preferred-bilingualism” measure, 41 per cent of respondents aged 35–49 reported they could speak English “very well” and their Mother Tongue at least “well” in 2013; this proportion increased to 50 per cent in 2018. The significant differences in proportions across the general and stringent measures of bilingualism suggest that there is still some way to go in elevating the spoken language proficiency of the community.

In general, the increase in reported bilingual proficiency over time is greater for younger age cohorts, which suggests 1) the efficacy of the Bilingual Education Policy, as well as 2) increased exposure to English-medium content and work scope in the context of a globalised economy. Younger respondents are also more bilingually proficient than older respondents in absolute terms. In 2013, over half of respondents 35 years or younger reported the ability to speak English “very well” and their Mother Tongue at least “well” compared to about a fifth of

respondents 50 years or older (see Figure 29). This difference persisted in the 2018 RRL iteration, albeit higher baselines for both age segments (see Figure 30).

Figure 29: Bilingual proficiency of English and Mother Tongues (MT), by age group (2013)

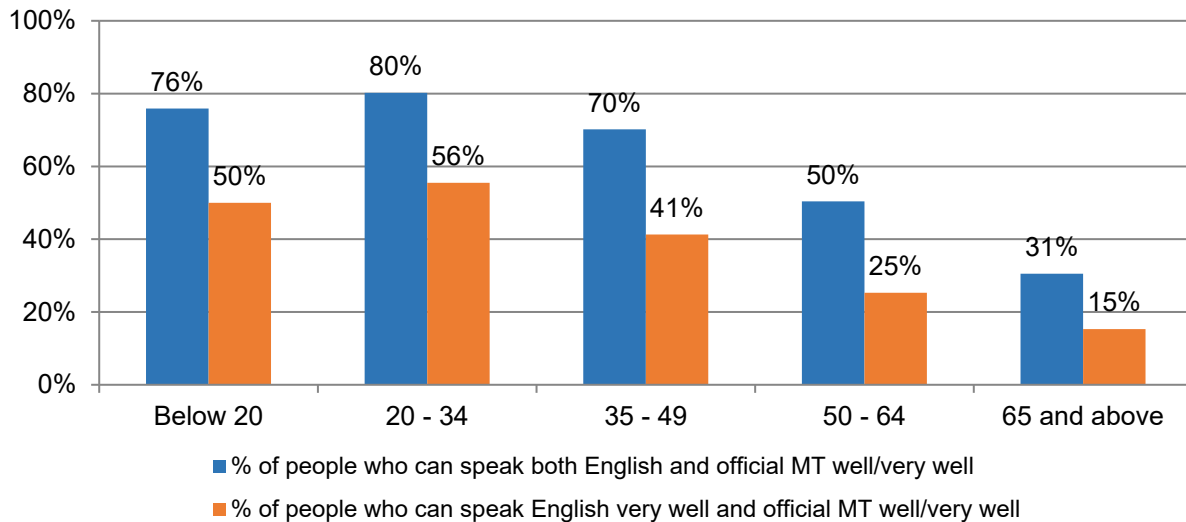
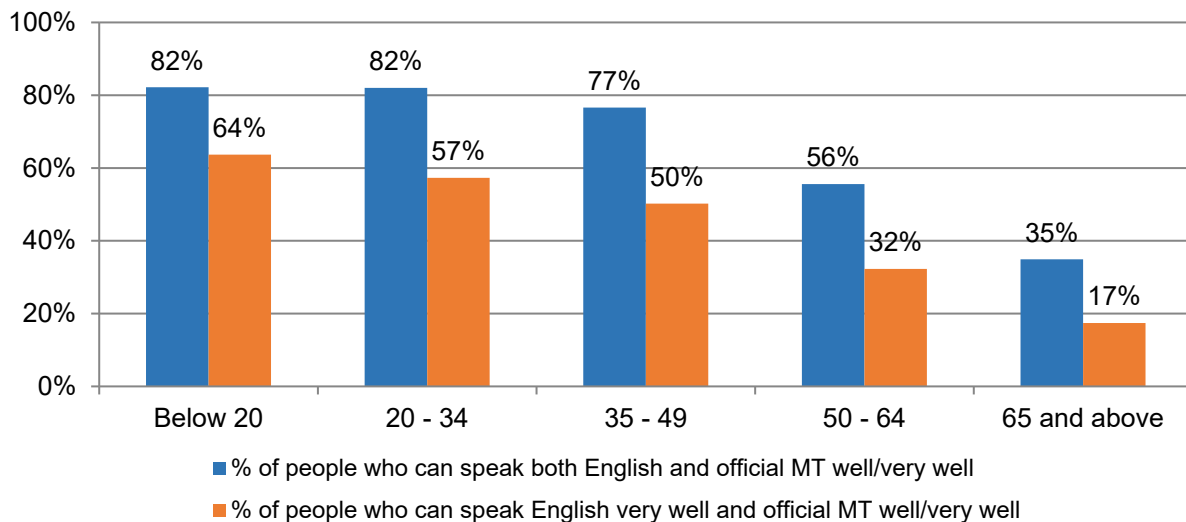


Figure 30: Bilingual proficiency of English and Mother Tongues (MT), by age group (2018)



3.4.2 Proportions of bilingual older Chinese respondents have increased over the past five years

In the next few sections, we focus on the reported bilingual proficiencies of specific ethnic groups and key findings gleaned from dissecting the data. At the outset, we note that the proportion of older Chinese respondents indicating relative bilingual proficiency has increased.

Fifty-eight per cent of Chinese respondents over 50 years old indicated they were able to speak English and Mandarin either “fairly well”, “well”, or “very well” in 2013 (see Figure 31). This proportion increased in 2018 to 66 per cent (see Figure 32). Similar trends were noted for respondents over 65 years old, the age cohort least likely to demonstrate bilingual proficiency due to socio-environmental factors.

In the same vein, the proportion of older Chinese respondents unable to speak English has also decreased. In 2013, 15 per cent of Chinese respondents aged above 50 were unable to speak English; this proportion dropped to 8 per cent in 2018. These findings attest to the impact of the policy shifts to prioritise English as the *de facto* working language and first language since 1959 and through independence (Mauzy & Milne, 2002).

Figure 31: Language proficiencies of Chinese respondents above 50 years old (2013)

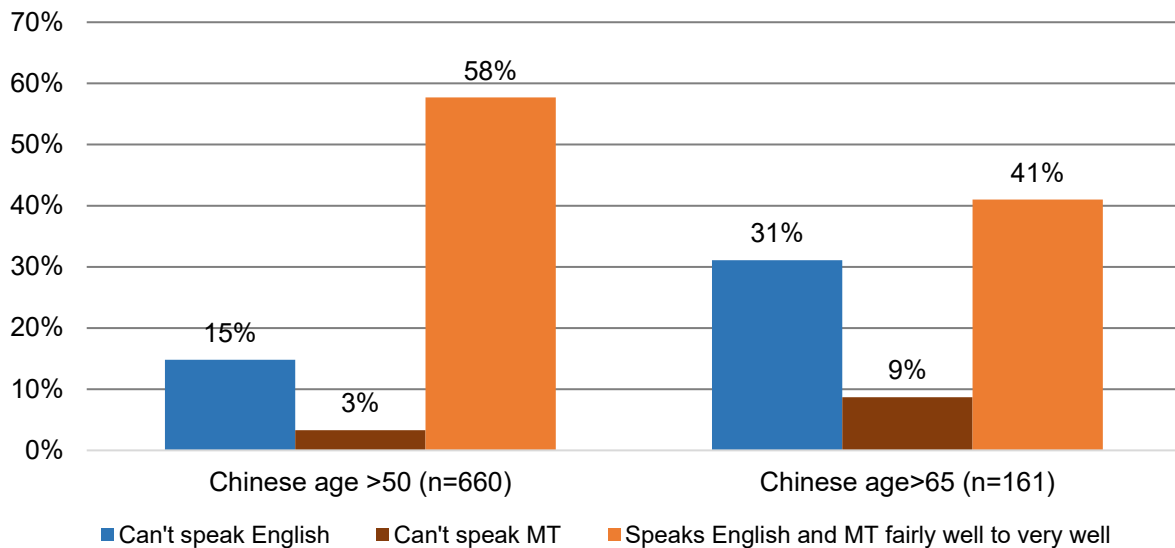
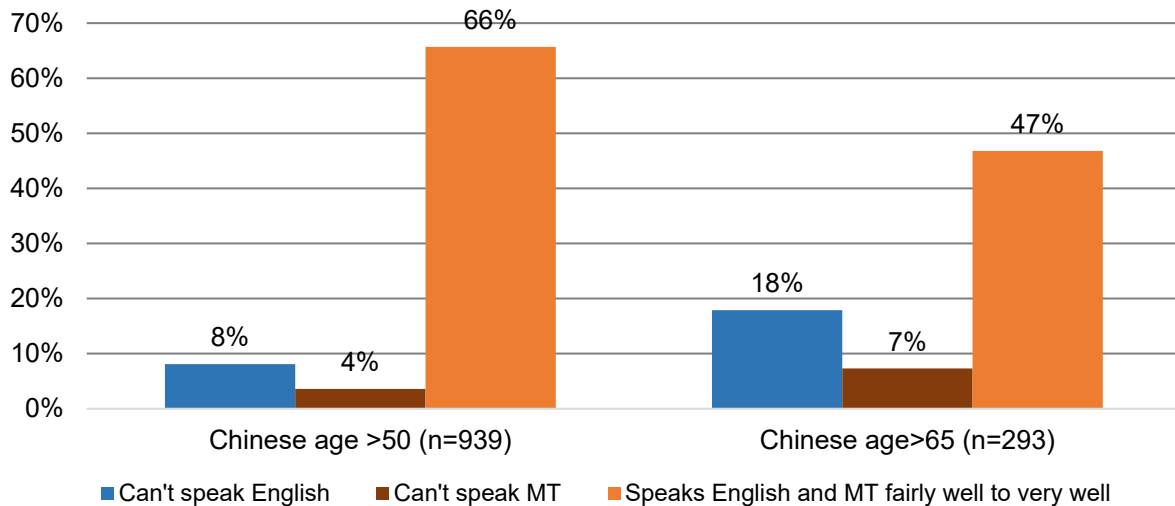


Figure 32: Language proficiencies of Chinese respondents above 50 years old (2018)



3.4.3 Younger Chinese reporting high proficiencies in spoken English are less likely to report similar proficiencies in spoken Mandarin compared to before; however, those reporting higher proficiencies in spoken Mandarin are still just as likely to report speaking English “very well”

We next look at the Mandarin proficiency of Chinese respondents under 35 years old who can speak English “very well” (see Figures 33 and 34), and the English proficiency of the same age group who can speak Mandarin “very well” (see Figures 35 and 36). Across both 2013 and 2018 RRL iterations, the majority of younger Chinese respondents reported the ability to speak English and Mandarin “well” or “very well”. However, there are differences in “English-centric” bilinguals and “Mandarin-centric” bilinguals.

Amongst young Chinese respondents who reported the ability to speak English “very well”, 61 per cent in 2013 and 50 per cent in 2018 reported the ability to also speak Mandarin at similar proficiency levels (see Figures 33 and 34). This suggests a marked decrease in Mandarin proficiency for those most conversant in English over the past few years. In comparison, for those who reported the ability to speak Mandarin “very well” — 77 per cent in 2013 and 74 per cent in 2018 — also reported the ability to also speak English “very well” (see Figures 35 and 36). These statistics show that Chinese respondents who are predominantly proficient in Mandarin were also equally proficient in English; but the reverse is less often true.

Additionally, in both waves of the study, less than 1 per cent of Chinese youth reporting the ability to speak English “very well”, simultaneously reported not being able to speak Mandarin at all, while 12 per cent reported the ability to use Mandarin only “somewhat well” (see Figures 33 and 34). For younger respondents who reported the ability to speak Mandarin “very well”, none reported not being able to speak English at all, while only 6 per cent reported to have a somewhat fair English proficiency in both waves. This demonstrates extremely strong bilingual proficiency amongst a substantial number of Chinese youth under 35 years of age.

Figure 33: Mandarin proficiency of Chinese respondents under 35 years old who can speak English “very well” (2013)

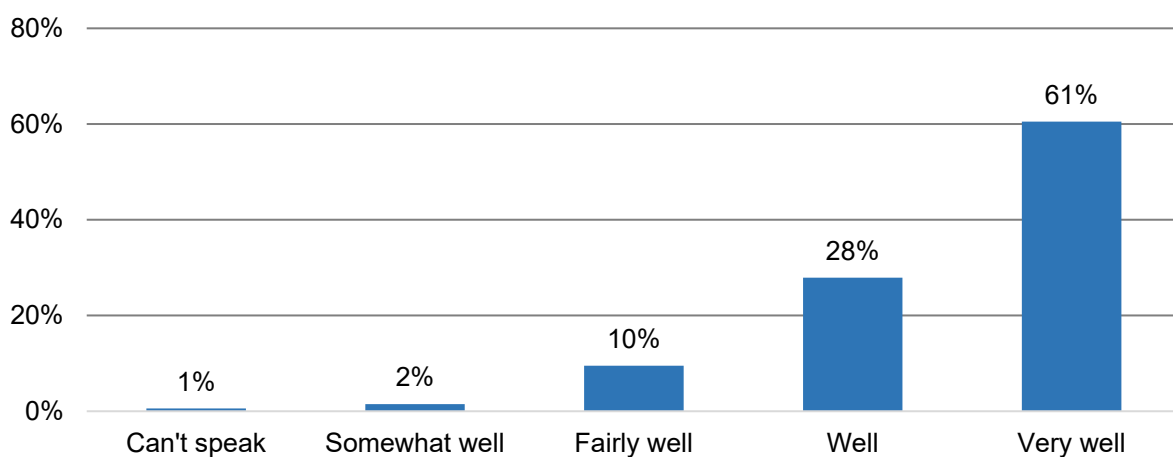


Figure 34: Mandarin proficiency of Chinese respondents under 35 years old who can speak English "very well" (2018)

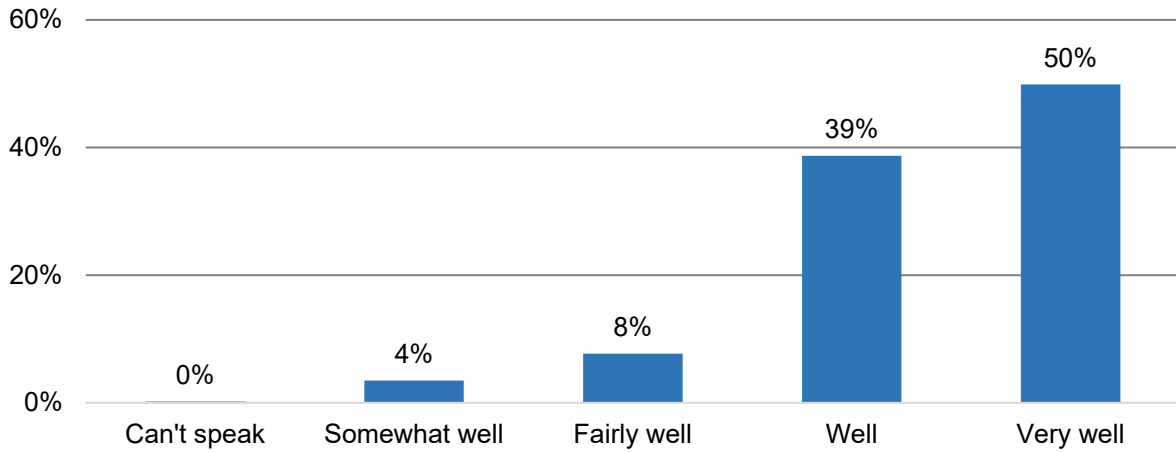


Figure 35: English proficiency of Chinese respondents under 35 years old who can speak Mandarin "very well" (2013)

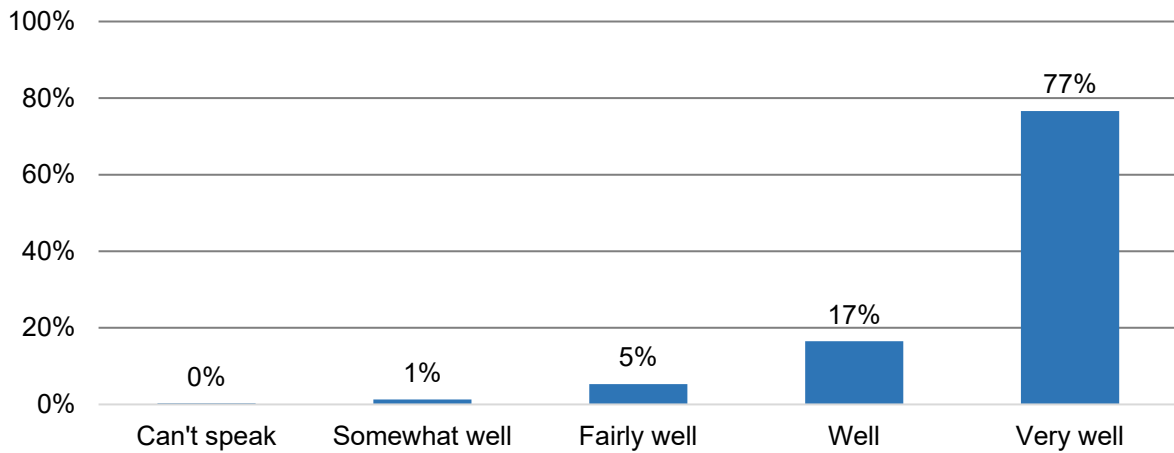
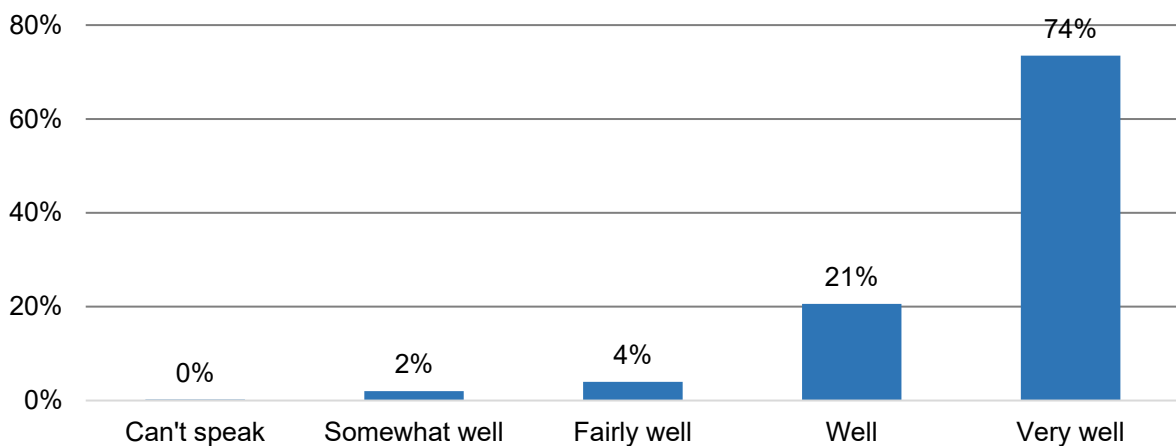


Figure 36: English proficiency of Chinese respondents under 35 years old who can speak Mandarin "very well" (2018)



The bilingual proficiencies of Chinese respondents are then analysed by age (see Figures 37 and 38). There is a negative relationship between age and bilingual proficiency amongst Chinese respondents, with older respondents less likely to be bilingually proficient. This may be due to the older Chinese being more proficient in Chinese dialects, and these heritage languages are not recognised by the state as official Mother Tongue languages. However, it is notable that at least one-fifth of respondents aged 18 to 25 (23 per cent) and 26 to 35 (23 per cent) reported weak proficiency levels in both English and Mandarin in 2013. These figures have decreased slightly in 2018.

From the survey results, we note too that the proportions of younger Chinese respondents indicating they speak both English and Mandarin “very well” has decreased marginally since 2013. About 40 per cent of Chinese youth 35 years or younger indicated so in 2013, as opposed to approximately 35 per cent in 2018. This is the reverse for older Chinese respondents above 35 years of age. This is potentially a cause for concern, given the need for younger generations to develop high levels of language proficiencies in both English and Mandarin to thrive in industry amidst an increasingly globalised socio-economic landscape, and the rise of China.

Figure 37: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Chinese RRL respondents by age (2013)

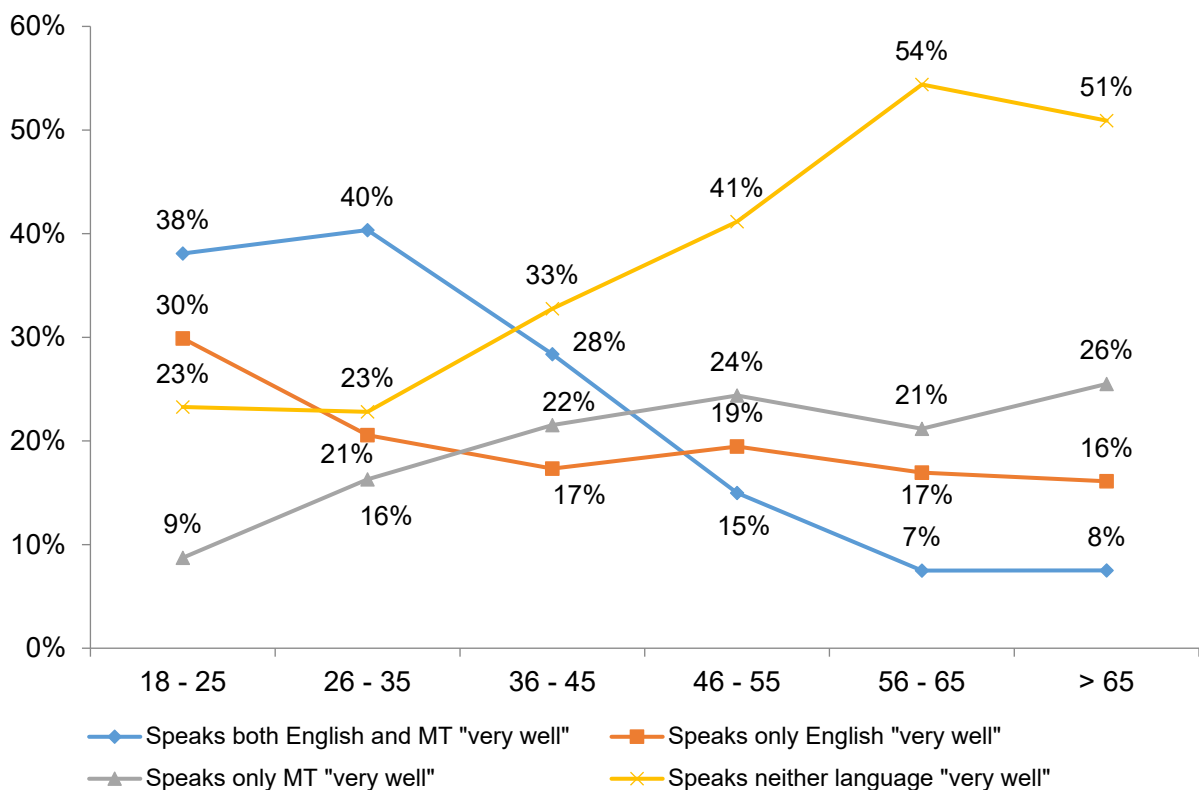
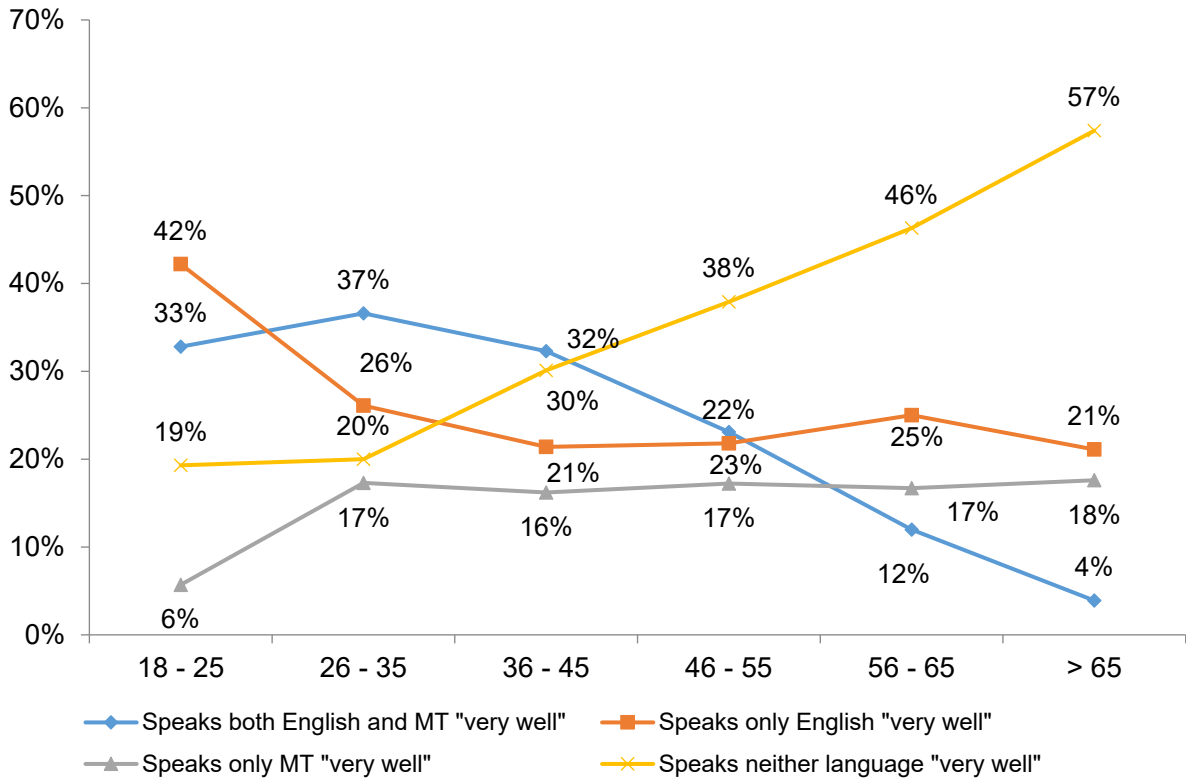


Figure 38: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Chinese RRL respondents by age (2018)



As expected, there is also a positive correlation between education level and Chinese respondents' bilingual proficiency (see Figures 39 and 40). Approximately 40 per cent of university-educated respondents reported proficiency in both English and Mandarin in both 2013 and 2018 waves; however, this proportion dipped from 48 per cent to 37 per cent from 2013 to 2018.

It is also interesting to note the proportions of Chinese respondents with university degrees reporting the ability to speak only English "very well" grew significantly from 28 per cent in 2013 to 41 per cent in 2018. This proportion is also significantly higher than that of lower-educated Chinese respondents. These findings reflect a bilingual proficiency with a bias towards English; potentially the result of a linguistic environment that privileges English over the three official Mother Tongues. These findings also testify to the benefits of promoting Mother Tongue languages to encourage the growth of bilingualism. It also serves as evidence that learning two languages simultaneously does not necessarily affect the mastery of either one of them for the majority of language speakers.

Figure 39: Linguistic proficiency of Chinese aged below 35, by education level (2013)

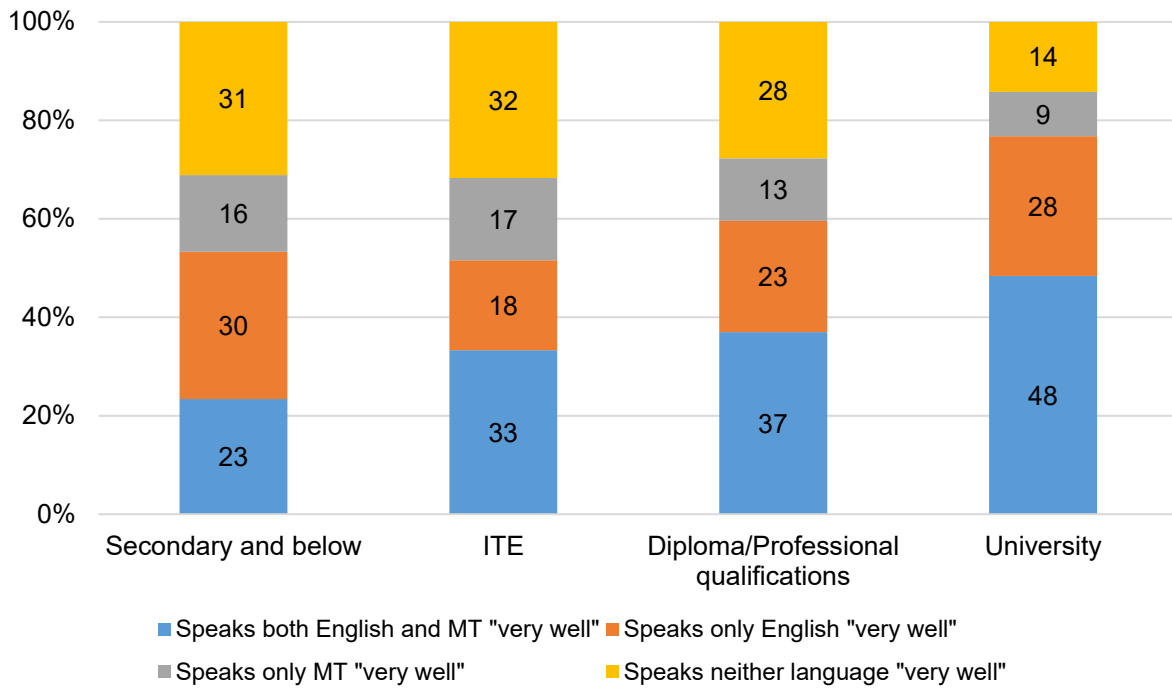
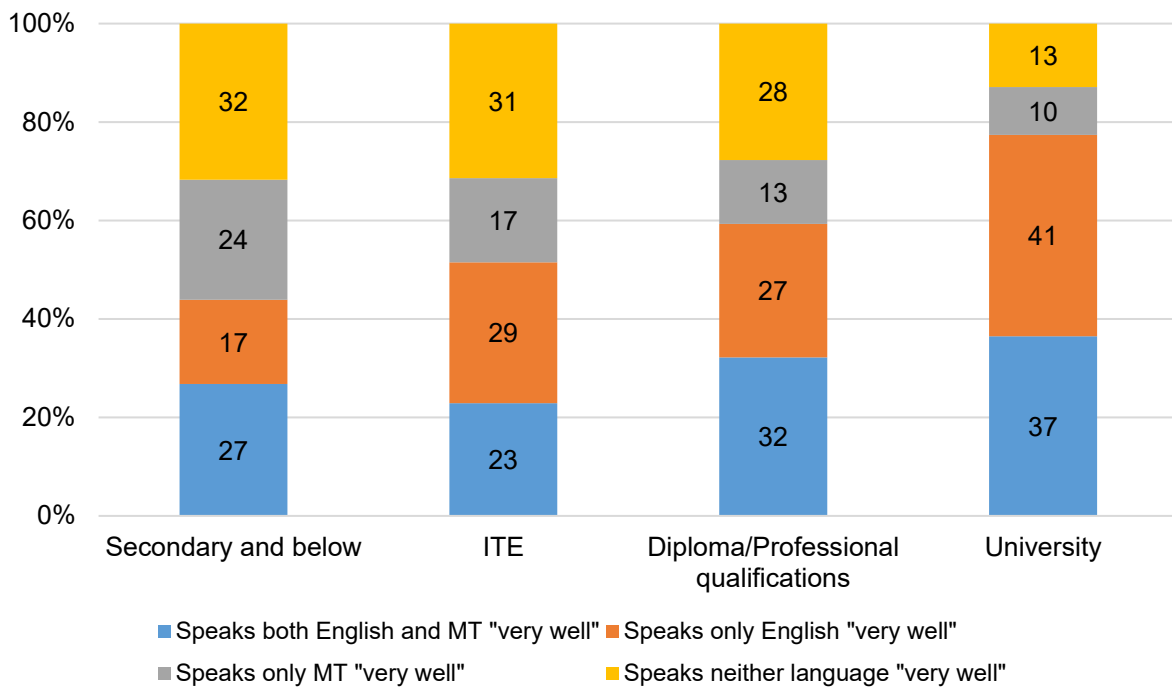


Figure 40: Linguistic proficiency of Chinese aged below 35, by education level (2018)



3.4.4 Similar to ethnic Chinese, there has been an uptick in bilingualism amongst Malays across all age cohorts

Similar to the Chinese community, overall bilingual proficiency for Malays has increased across all age groups from 2013 to 2018. For instance, 76 per cent of respondents aged 35–49 reported being able to speak both English and Mother Tongue “well” or “very well” in 2013; this proportion increased to 86 per cent in 2018 (see Figures 41 and 42). Even with the more stringent “English-preferred-bilingualism” measure (see page 35), 39 per cent of respondents aged 35–49 reported they could speak English “very well” and their Mother Tongue at least “well” in 2013; this proportion increased to 52 per cent in 2018. The significant differences in proportions across the general and stringent measures of bilingualism suggest that there is still some way to go in elevating the spoken language proficiency of the community.

Figure 41: Bilingual proficiencies of English and Malay among Malay respondents, by age group (2013)

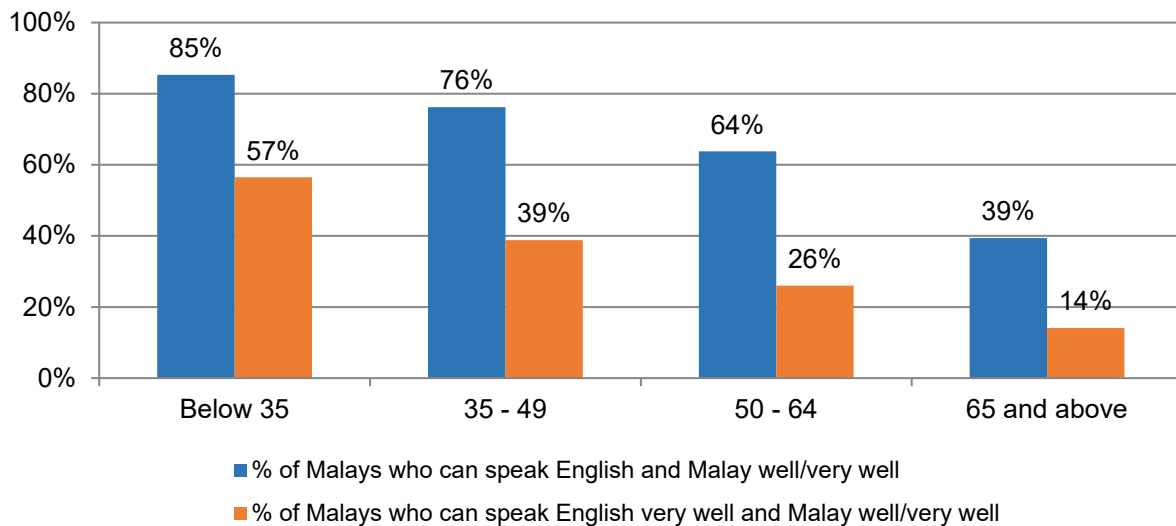
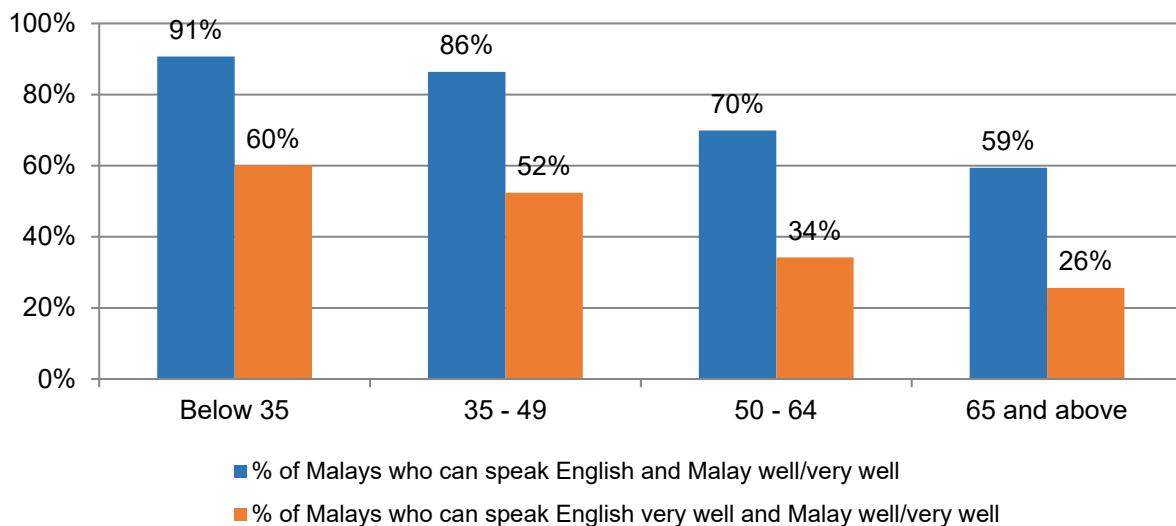


Figure 42: Bilingual proficiencies of English and Malay among Malay respondents, by age group (2018)



The bilingualism of Malay respondents is then analysed according to age (see Figures 43 and 44). Malay respondents aged below 35 were significantly more likely to report being highly proficient in both English and their Mother Tongue language. For example, 50 per cent of them reported this in 2013, and 45–49 per cent reported speaking both languages “very well” in 2018, as compared to under a fifth of respondents aged above 65 for both iterations (14 per cent in 2013 and 18 per cent in 2018).

Older Malay respondents aged above 55 were also much more likely to report being able to speak only Malay “very well” (63 per cent to 66 per cent in 2013 and 39 per cent to 45 per cent in 2018). This suggests that younger Malays are more bilingual — a by-product of the Bilingual Education Policy. At the same time, from 2013 to 2018 there was a rise in the proportion of Malay respondents aged above 55 who reported the inability to speak both languages “very well” (from 16 per cent to 19 per cent in 2013, to 29 per cent to 33 per cent in 2018).

Figure 43: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Malay RRL respondents by age (2013)

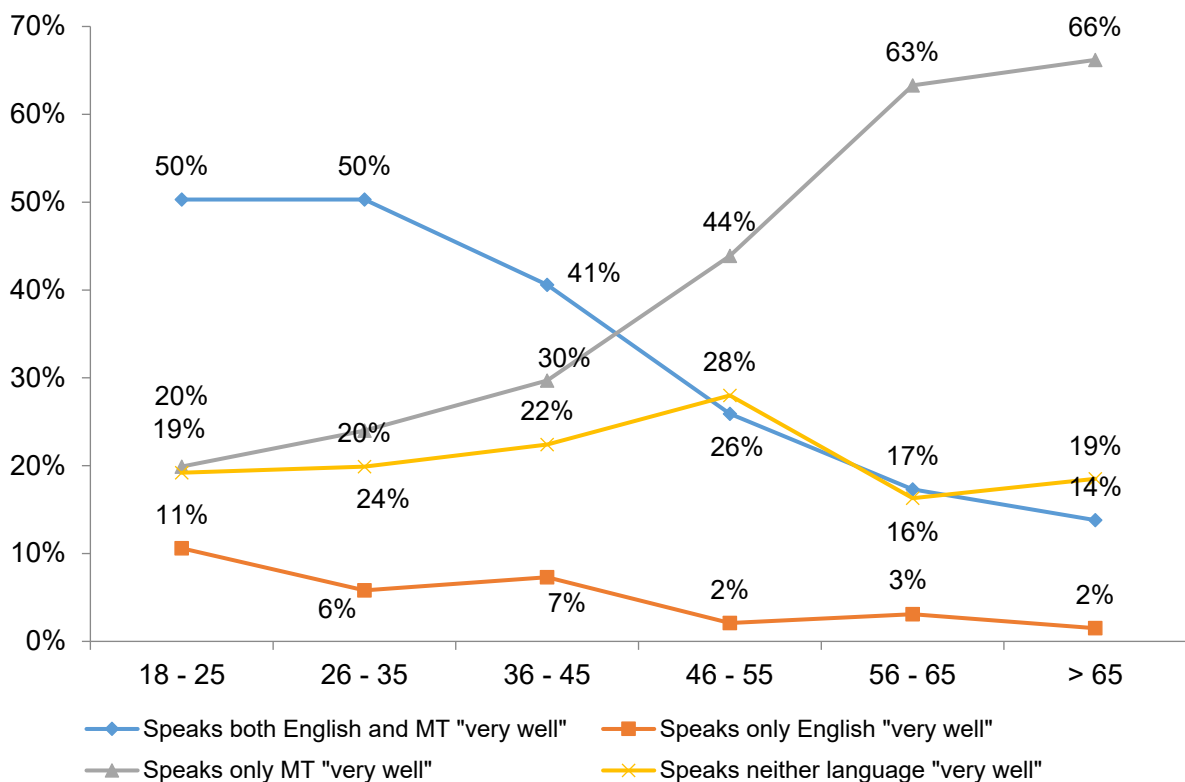
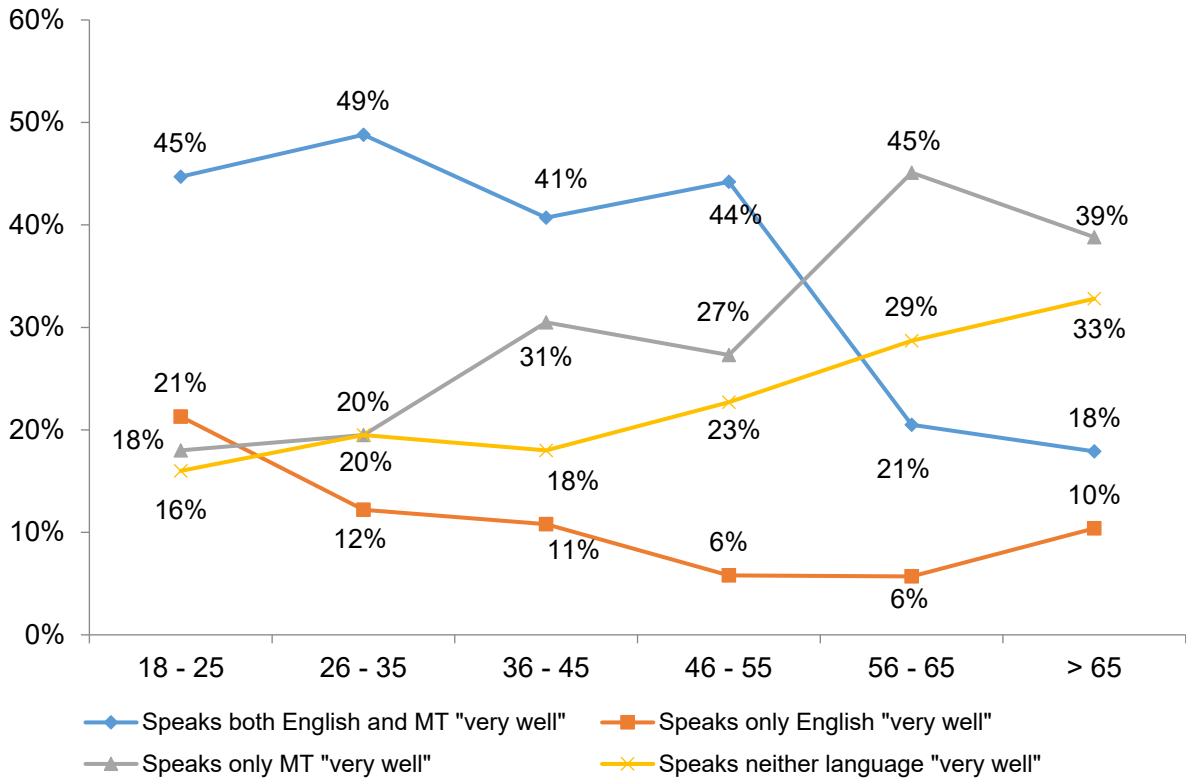


Figure 44: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Malay RRL respondents by age (2018)



The LPIM study then analysed bilingualism amongst Malay respondents by education levels. The results show a strong correlation between bilingual proficiency and education level. However, it is interesting to note that degree-holding Malay respondents were significantly more likely to report a high level of proficiency solely in English (21 per cent in 2013 and 24 per cent in 2018), as compared to respondents of other education levels (see Figures 45 and 46).

Such a trend is also prevalent for other ethnicities, in line with the emphasis on English proficiency over and above Mother Tongue languages in higher education. It is however not clear whether respondents with university qualifications were more exacting in their self-reporting, i.e., they held themselves to much higher levels of proficiency relative to their lower-educated peers.

Figure 45: Linguistic proficiency of Malays aged below 35, by education level (2013)

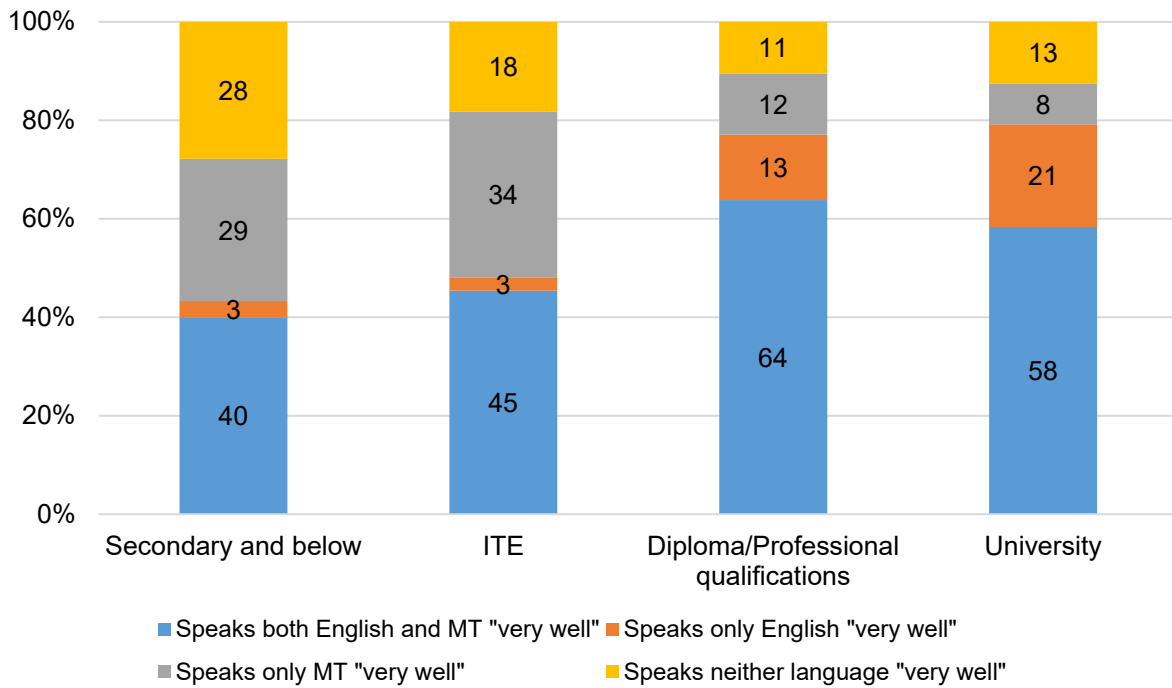
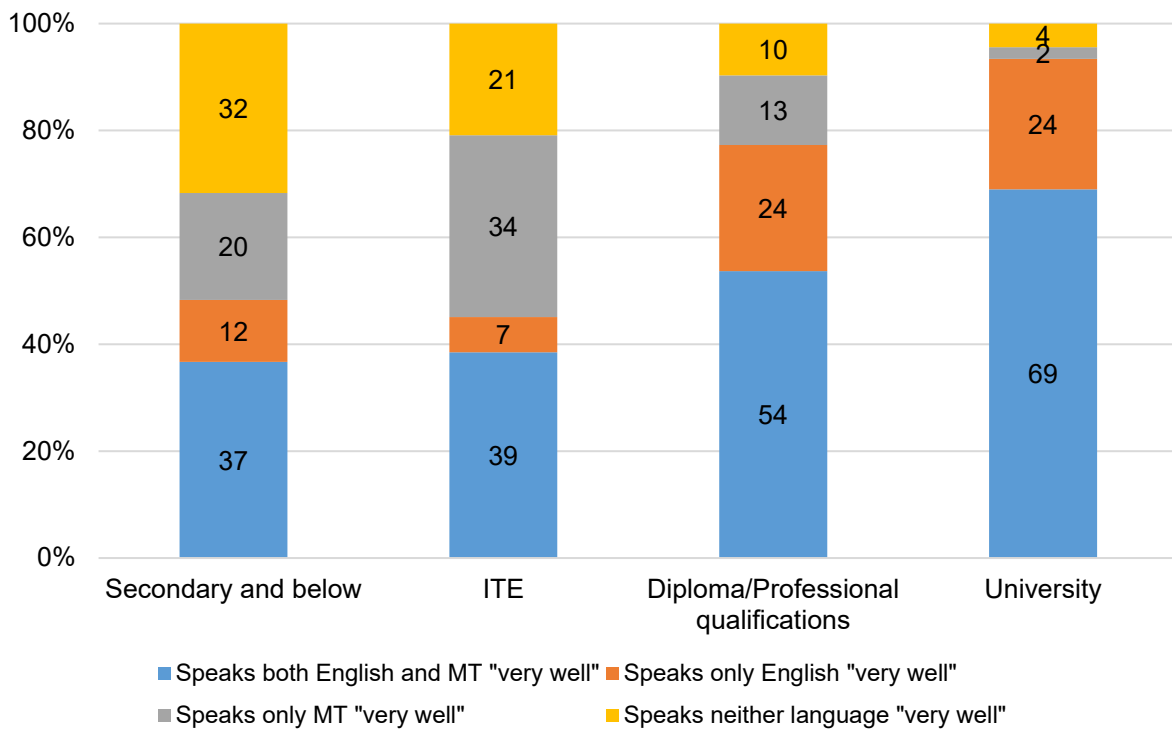


Figure 46: Linguistic proficiency of Malays aged below 35, by education level (2018)



3.4.5 Unlike Chinese and Malays, middle-aged Indian respondents were most likely to report being effectively bilingual; Indian youth marginally less so

In contrast to Chinese and Malay ethnicities, the trend of the younger generation being more bilingually proficient is not evident amongst Indian respondents (see Figures 47 and 48). For both 2013 and 2018, the 35–49 age cohort presented the largest proportions of respondents indicating they could speak English and Mother Tongue “well” or “very well”, as opposed to respondents under 35 years old. On average, about 69 per cent of speakers under 50 years of age reported the ability to speak in both English and Tamil at least “well” in 2013; this proportion decreased to 63 per cent in 2018 (see Figures 47 and 48). As per the findings presented in this LPIM study above, these observations are likely due to the linguistic heterogeneity prevalent within the Indian community.

Figure 47: Bilingual proficiencies of English and Tamil among Indian respondents, by age group (2013)

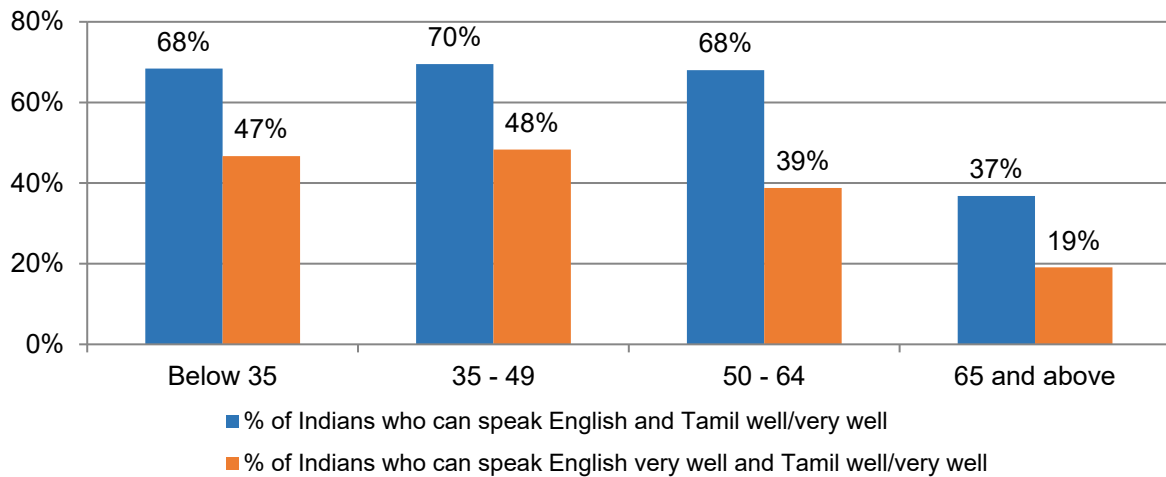
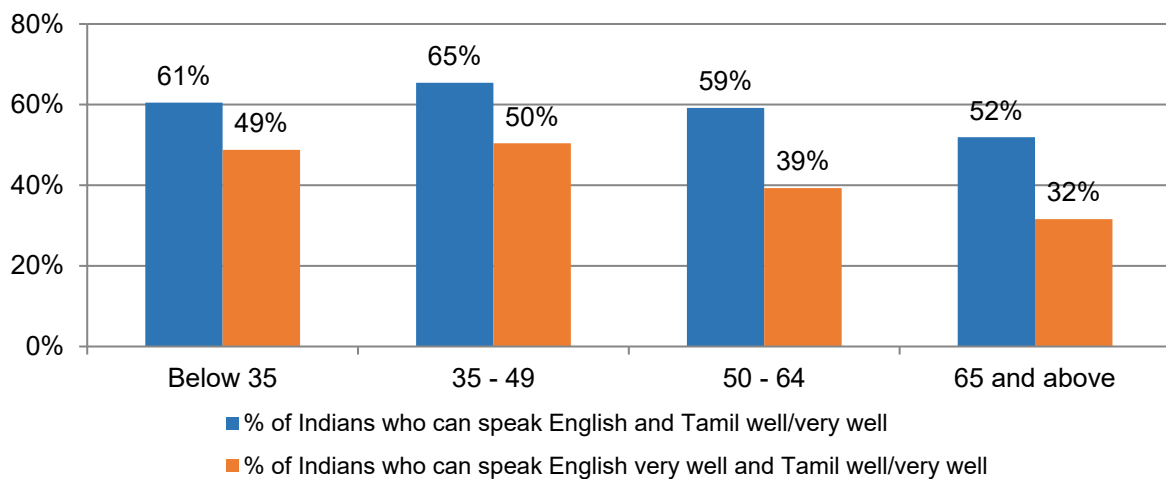


Figure 48: Bilingual proficiencies of English and Tamil among Indian respondents, by age group (2018)



The bilingualism of Indian respondents is then analysed according to age (see Figures 49 and 50). Younger Indian respondents were more likely to speak only English “very well”, while older respondents were more likely to speak only their Mother Tongue “very well”. In 2013, 32 per cent of respondents aged between 18 and 25 reported the ability to speak only English “very well”, as compared to 16 per cent of respondents above 65 years old (see Figure 49). Similarly, in 2018, 44 per cent of Indian respondents between 18 and 25 reported the ability to speak only English “very well”, as compared to 36 per cent of those above 65 years old (see Figure 50).

On the other hand, over half of Indian respondents above 65 years old reported only speaking Tamil “very well”, as compared to 13 per cent of respondents between 18 and 25 years of age in 2013. While this contrast is more muted in 2018, this trend illustrates how younger Indians are in general more proficient in English and less proficient in Tamil, as compared to older Indian respondents. Overall, middle-aged Indians between 36 and 45 years of age were more bilingually proficient than their younger and older counterparts.

Figure 49: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Indian RRL respondents by age (2013)

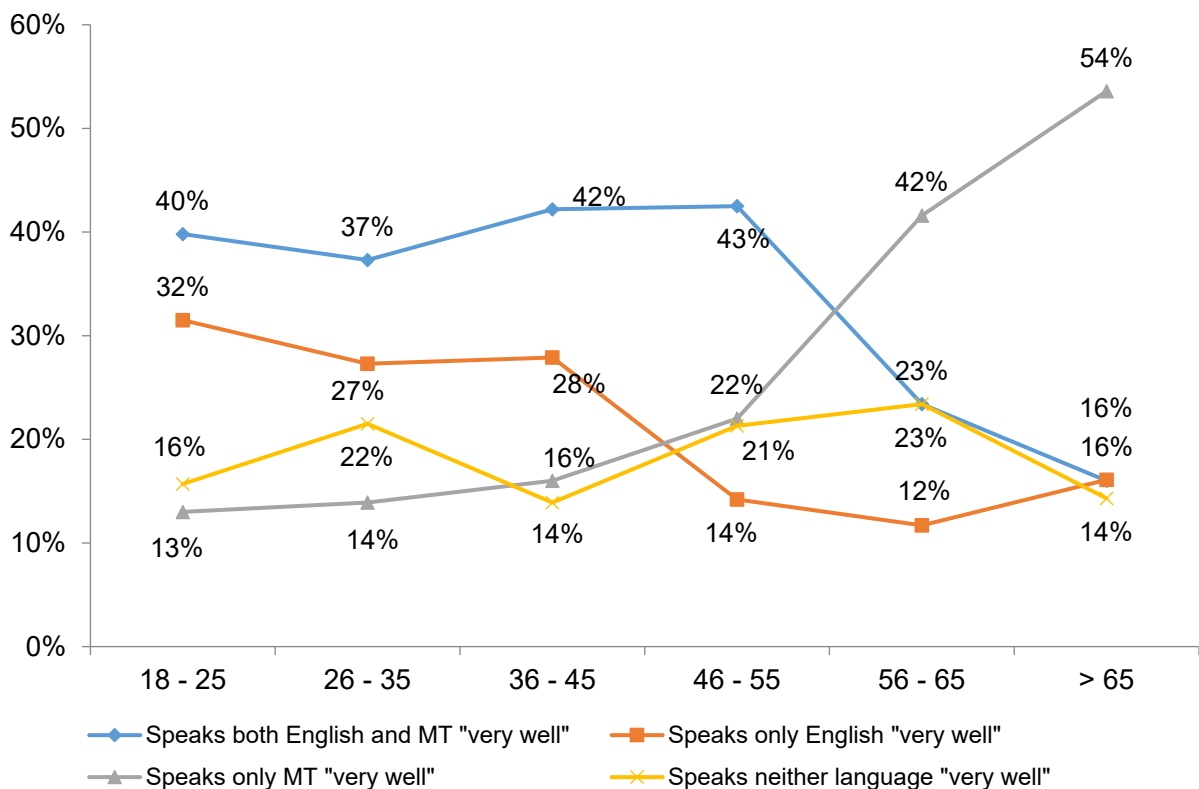
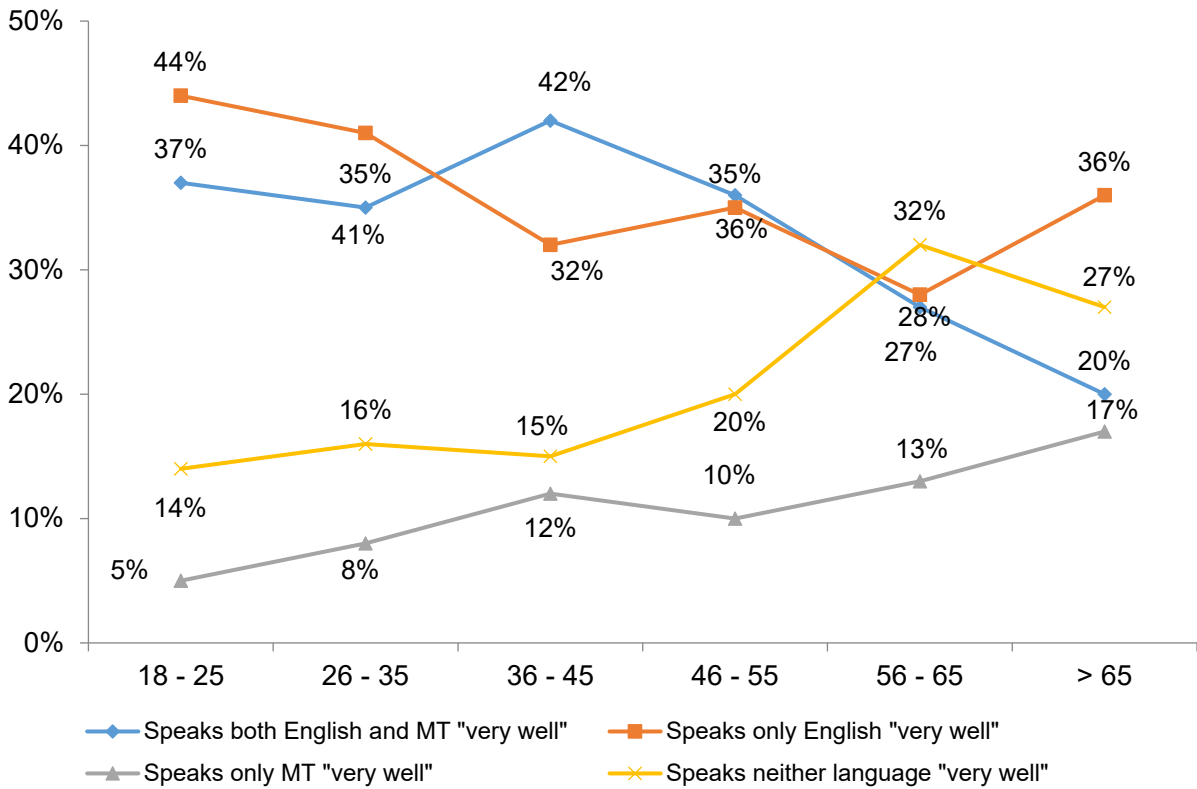


Figure 50: Linguistic proficiency in English and Mother Tongue (MT) for Indian RRL respondents by age (2018)



When analysing bilingualism amongst young Indian respondents by education level, some interesting trends are observed. At the outset, while we find that university graduates generally report higher levels of bilingualism across the races, Tamil-speaking university graduates do not necessarily have a monopoly on effective bilingualism in English and Tamil (see Figures 51 and 52). In 2013, ITE graduates rated themselves the most bilingually proficient within the Tamil-speaking community (42 per cent compared to 39 per cent for degree holders). In 2018, Tamil-speaking university graduates were actually the least likely to speak both English and Tamil “very well” compared to their lower-educated counterparts. This might be due to the predominant use of English in higher education, coupled with the increased prevalence of non-Tamil speaking, higher-educated Indians in the community.

Figure 51: Linguistic proficiency of Indians aged below 35, by education level (2013)

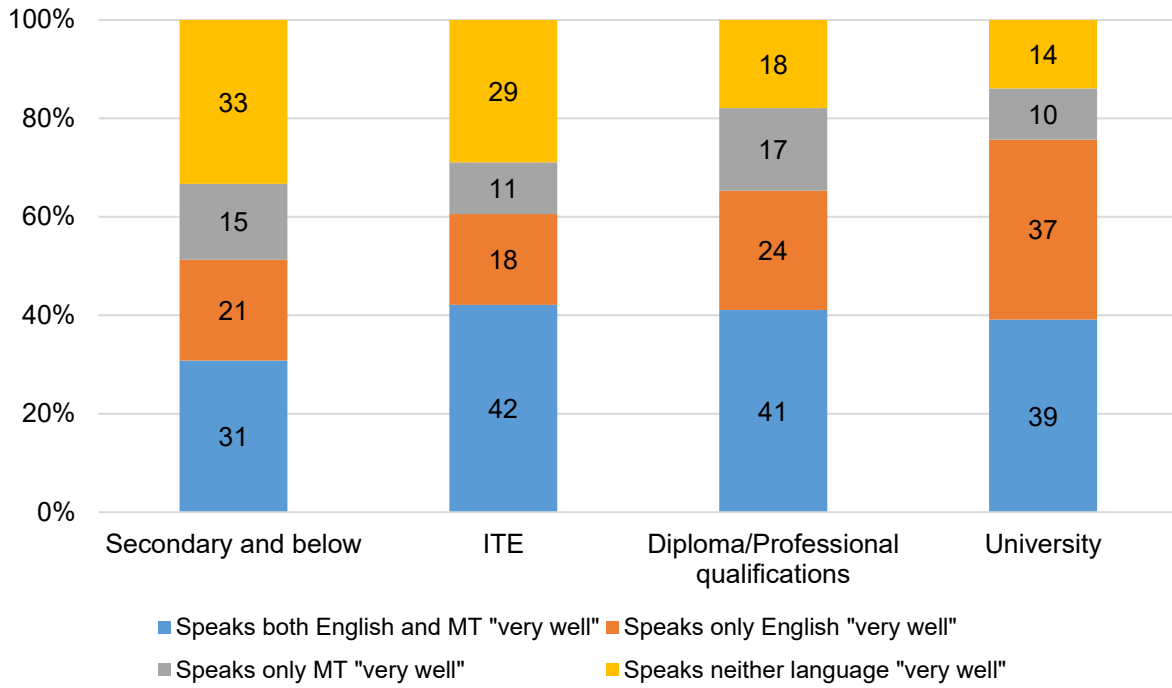
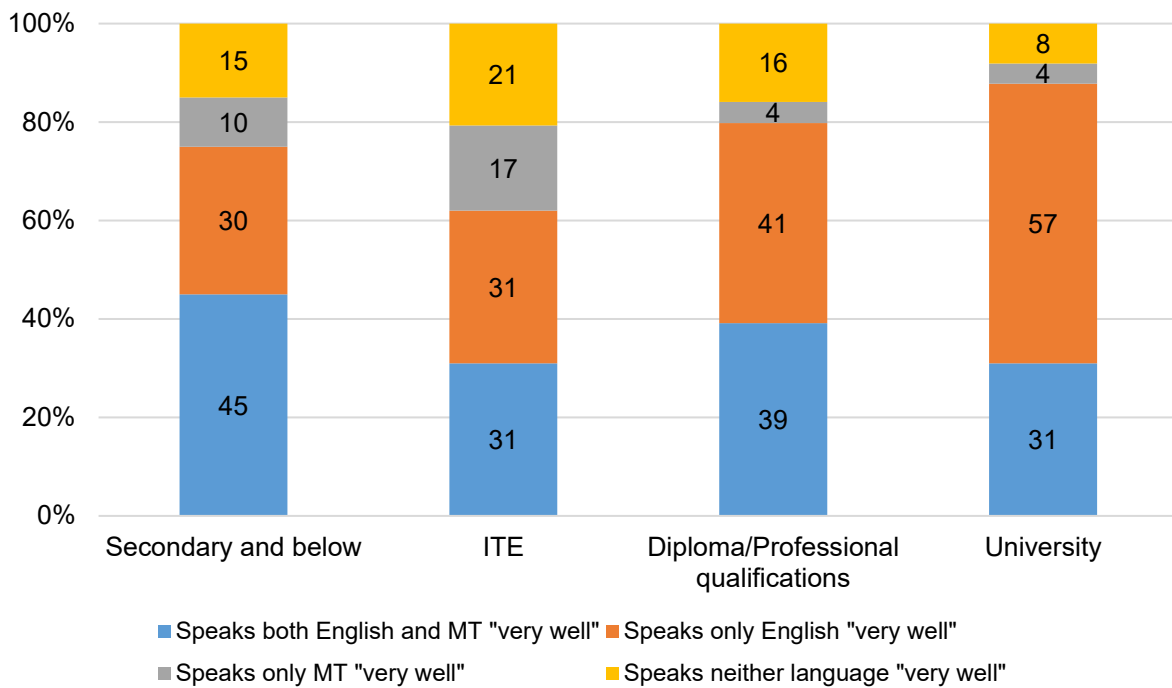


Figure 52: Linguistic proficiency of Indians aged below 35, by education level (2018)



3.4.6 In general, education and age were the strongest predictors of bilingualism; young, more-educated Singaporeans were likeliest to report high levels of proficiency in both English and their Mother Tongue

Alongside analysing the survey responses of respondents' bilingual proficiencies, we employ binary logistic regressions in this section to determine the most salient variables impacting bilingualism, i.e., the characteristics of individuals who are bilingual. The regressions examine how variables like education, age, housing type, citizenship and ethnicity affect bilingualism (see Tables 2 and 3 for the 2013 and 2018 RRL iterations, respectively). The dependent variable, bilingualism, is a dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent is bilingual (versus not bilingual). We have defined the criteria of bilingualism as the ability to speak both English and one's respective official Mother Tongue language "very well". For example, a Chinese respondent is bilingual if he speaks both English and Mandarin "very well".

For both 2013 and 2018 RRL iterations, we find that one's bilingual proficiency increases with education level, regardless of one's ethnicity. This is evident from how respondents with a university degree are in general more likely to be bilingual than those with secondary and below education for all races (across all models). This is unsurprising, given that fluency in spoken English is required in formal settings as English is Singapore's *de facto* working language. Fluency in one's Mother Tongue may also be regarded as beneficial to one's accumulation of social capital in informal contexts. One possible explanation could be that affluent individuals with greater access to educational resources, in terms of tuition and extra-curricular lessons to boost their proficiencies in both English and Mother Tongue languages, are better-placed to augment their academic achievements for both examinable subjects in national examinations and future academic pathways.

Age appears to have a negative effect on bilingualism for the Chinese and Malay respondents (see Models 2 and 3 in Tables 2 and 3). In line with the findings in previous sections, this could be due to older generations speaking their respective heritage languages or the official Mother Tongue assigned to their race rather than English. Despite fluency in their Mother Tongue language, their heritage language or any other permutation (e.g., Hokkien and Malay), they would not be considered bilingual under the working definition of bilingualism in Singapore if they were not fluent in English.

It is also notable that Malays and Indians were more likely to report speaking both English and their respective Mother Tongues "very well" compared to the Chinese. This trend is consistent across both waves, and also holds for "weaker" definitions of bilingualism whereby participants report speaking one language "well", and the other "very well". This might be because Malays and Indians, as ethnic minorities, are more obliged to use English to communicate with individuals of other ethnicities in their daily lives. This stands in contrast with the Chinese majority who are less likely to encounter individuals of other ethnicities and may hence have marginally lesser need to develop bilingual proficiencies at the highest levels. In addition, Singapore citizens were also more likely than Permanent Residents to indicate bilingualism in English and their official Mother Tongue.

Table 2: Predictors of bilingualism (binary logistic regression, 2013)

Predictors	Model 1 (Full sample)	Model 2 (Chinese sample)	Model 3 (Malay sample)	Model 4 (Indian sample)
<i>Degree and Above</i>	1.534***	1.619***	1.378**	.952**
<i>ITE or Diploma</i>	.782***	.825***	.808**	.578
<i>Private or Condo</i>	-.101	-.247	1.497	.231
<i>HDB 3–5 Room</i>	.342	.284	.586	.145
<i>Age</i>	-.033***	-.038***	-.034***	-.005
<i>SG Citizen</i>	.585***	.736***	.69	-.208
<i>Malay</i>	.931***			
<i>Indian</i>	1.187***			
<i>Other Races</i>	-2.402***			
<i>Intercept</i>	-1.444***	-1.375**	-.793	-.436
<i>n</i>	4056	2234	825	830
<i>Nagelkerke R-square</i>	.234	.220	.194	.076
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	9	6	6	6
<i>Chi-square</i>	671.377	461.065	72.065	20.094

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Omitted categories: Secondary and below education, HDB 1–2 Room, Singapore Permanent Resident, Chinese.

Table 3: Predictors of bilingualism (binary logistic regression, 2018)

Predictors	Model 1 (Full sample)	Model 2 (Chinese sample)	Model 3 (Malay sample)	Model 4 (Indian sample)
<i>Degree and Above</i>	1.469***	1.726***	1.385***	.671*
<i>ITE or Diploma</i>	.997***	1.340***	.660**	.255
<i>Private or Condo</i>	-.033	.067	.109	-.117
<i>HDB 3–5 Room</i>	.023	.107	-.069	.186
<i>Age</i>	-.023***	-.025***	-.019**	-.01
<i>SG Citizen</i>	.272*	.507**	.667	-.622*
<i>Malay</i>	.966***			
<i>Indian</i>	1.008***			
<i>Other Races</i>	-2.944***			
<i>Intercept</i>	-1.395***	-1.850***	-.707	.191
<i>n</i>	3865	2219	839	743
<i>Nagelkerke R-square</i>	.198	.185	.123	.087
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	9	6	6	6
<i>Chi-square</i>	562.017	385.494	45.073	22.107

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Omitted categories: Secondary and below education, HDB 1–2 Room, Singapore Permanent Resident, Chinese.

3.5 HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

A considerable portion of Singapore’s resident population did not speak the official Mother Tongue languages prior to the enactment of official language policies post-self-governance. Only a very small number of Chinese respondents spoke Mandarin at home, and only 60 per cent of Indians spoke Tamil at home (Dixon, 2009). Against this backdrop, it is imperative to understand if this still is the case today. In our survey, we asked respondents if they spoke any of their parents’ heritage languages.

3.5.1 In general, reported proficiencies in heritage languages have dropped precipitously over the years as a result of the Bilingual Education Policy

The survey results show that a majority of the respondents reported the ability to speak their parents’ heritage language at least well, with 71 per cent of the respondents reporting the ability to speak a heritage language “well” or “very well” in 2013. However, this proportion dropped significantly to 54 per cent in 2018.

One reason for this high proficiency might be the high conflation rate between their parents’ heritage language and the official state-mandated Mother Tongue language for many of the respondents. In the 2013 wave, we also asked respondents to list their father’s heritage language, and if they can maintain a 15-minute conversation in that language with ease. The top five heritage languages for the four racial groups are listed in Table 4. Across the main ethnic groups, we note that the official Mother Tongue languages still feature considerably; the bulk of Malays and Indians identified Malay and Tamil, respectively (their official Mother Tongue) as their heritage language too.

Table 4: Top five father’s heritage languages (2013)

Rank	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others
1	Hokkien 39.1%	Malay/Melayu 84.6%	Tamil 64.9%	Tagalog/ Filipino 19.5%
2	Teochew 15.8%	Javanese 5.9%	Hindi 9.5%	English 17.2%
3	Cantonese 15.6%	Boyanese 3.9%	Malayalam 6.6%	Myanmar 6.9%
4	Mandarin 12.8%	English 0.6%	Malay/ Melayu 3.8%	
5	Hakka/ Khek 5.3%	Indonesian 0.6%	Telugu 3.5%	

Meanwhile for the Chinese, Mandarin was identified as the heritage language of 13 per cent of the respondents. This is a significant increase from 1972, when there were only 0.8 per cent of Mandarin speakers (Kuo, 1985). This can be attributed to the success of 1) the Bilingual Education Policy instituted in 1966 across all schools where Chinese students acquire English and Mandarin proficiencies; 2) the Speak Mandarin Campaign, which was launched in 1979; and 3) the aggressive shift in focus away from Chinese dialects via their removal from public media.

In addition, the lack of teachers, adequate syllabi and learning materials such as textbooks for Chinese dialects posed significant obstacles to learning; potentially influencing many to focus on learning Mandarin instead, which was well supported within the local education system. Another possible contributing factor could be the influx of new citizens originating from Mainland China in recent decades, where *Putonghua* (Mandarin) is predominantly spoken. These trends notwithstanding, Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese still remain the top three Chinese heritage languages.

For the Malay community, the majority of Malay respondents chose the Malay language as their father's heritage language (85 per cent). Given Malay's status as the indigenous, national language of Singapore (Chew, 2010), it is unsurprising that most of the older ethnic Malays residing in Singapore speak Malay. This finding also explains why only about a fifth of Malay respondents indicate spoken proficiency for heritage languages other than Malay, or Melayu.

The linguistic diversity of the Indian community is apparent from the languages identified in Table 4, with respondents likely to be proficient in their heritage languages rather than their designated official Mother Tongue due to socio-cultural reasons. Nonetheless, as of 2013, Tamil speakers were still the majority at 65 per cent.

3.5.2 Reported heritage language proficiency amongst young Chinese respondents has declined most significantly relative to their elders and their peers of different ethnicities

After more than half a century of promoting the use of the four official languages in Singapore, one prevailing perception is that younger generations are no longer proficient in heritage languages. We examine this hypothesis in the context of Chinese respondents, given that the Chinese as the majority race experience widespread, state-led efforts to replace their dialects with "standard" Mandarin. In this regard, we would expect to observe a decline in heritage language proficiency amongst the younger Chinese who grew up studying Mandarin in schools. The Malay and Indian communities, on the other hand, did not witness the active phasing out of their heritage languages. As a result, we would not expect to see much of a divergence in heritage language proficiencies between younger and older cohorts for minority ethnic groups.

We analyse the heritage language proficiency by ethnicity and age (see Figures 53 and 54). There is a general declining trend in heritage language proficiency with age; 84 per cent of Chinese respondents aged above 65 in 2013 indicated an ability to speaking their heritage language "well" or "very well" compared to 71 per cent in 2018. For younger respondents aged 18 to 25 years old, the corresponding figures are 45 per cent and 22 per cent in 2013 and 2018, respectively; a more substantial decrease.

Figure 53: Heritage language proficiency of Chinese ("well" or "very well" by age cohort (2013)

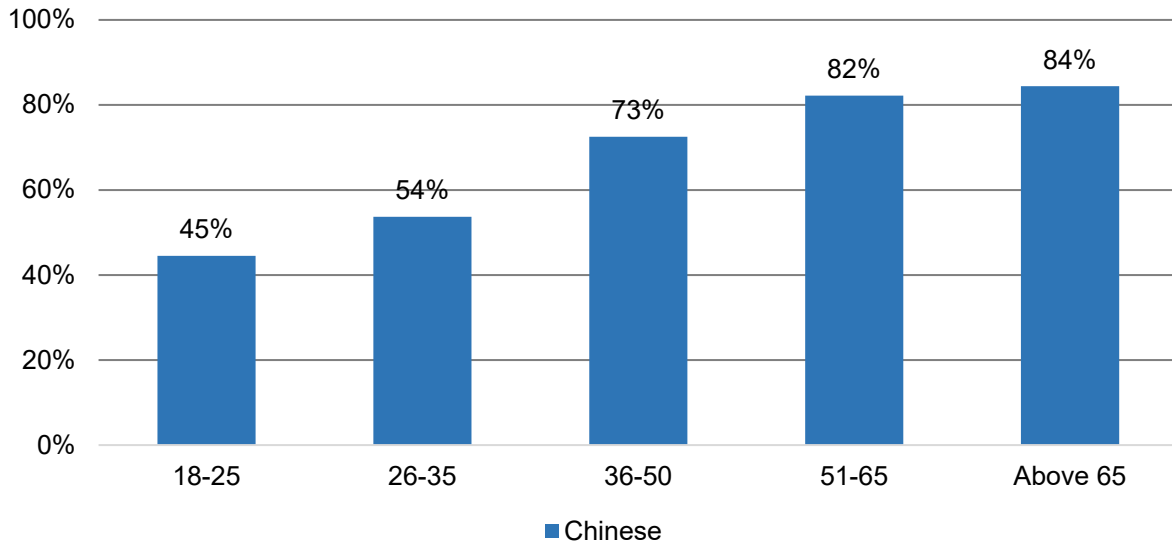
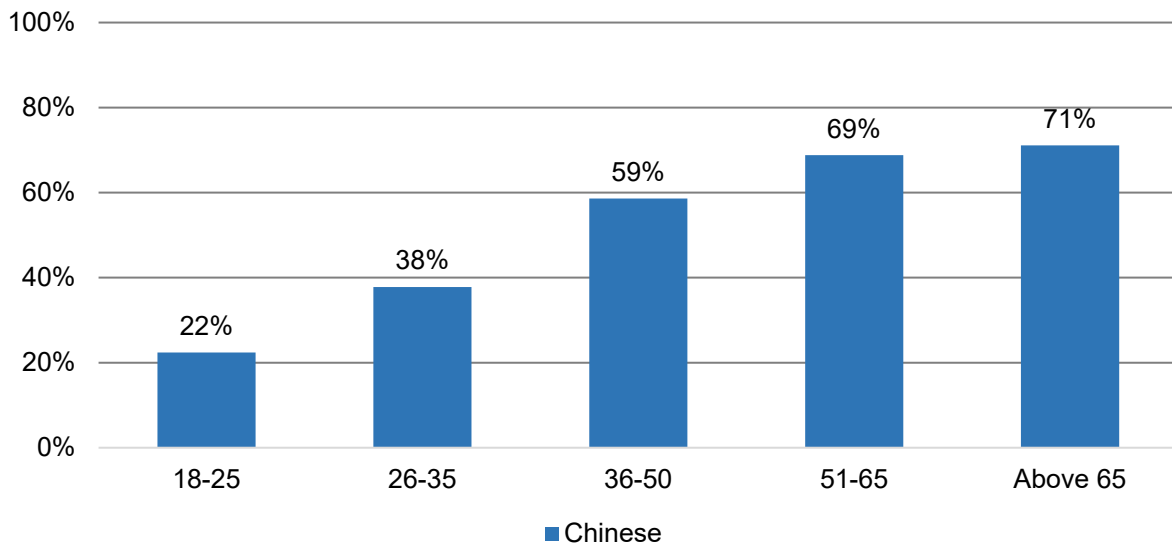


Figure 54: Heritage language proficiency of Chinese ("well" or "very well" by age cohort (2018)



3.6 SINGLISH PROFICIENCY

Singlish is often deemed undesirable in formal situations. However, many speakers attribute a strong national attachment to this localised English variety. In this LPIM study, we query the proficiency of RRL respondents in Singlish in order to effect comparison with proficiencies in English, Mother Tongue languages, and heritage languages.

3.6.1 Younger age cohorts were more likely to indicate proficiency in speaking Singlish relative to older cohorts

Our survey results from both waves showed that about half of the respondents reported being able to speak Singlish “well” or “very well” across both 2013 and 2018 survey iterations. When analysing Singlish proficiency by respondents’ ethnicity and age, we note that in general, the younger the respondents, the greater their proficiency in Singlish; notwithstanding differing perceptions of what constitutes proficiency in Singlish across age cohorts. In 2013, approximately two-thirds of respondents aged 18–25 years old reported speaking Singlish “well” or “very well”. This contrasts with under a fifth of respondents aged 65 years and above indicating likewise (Figure 55).

In 2018, over three-quarters of respondents aged 26–35 years old reported the ability to speak Singlish “well” or “very well”, regardless of ethnicity (see Figure 56). This is a sizeable increase compared to 2013 — which potentially points to increasing versatility in the ability to “code-switch” between languages alongside the growing recognition and popularity of Singlish. About a quarter of respondents aged 65 years and above indicated likewise too; an increase from 2013 but still significantly lower relative to younger cohorts. As Singlish incorporates elements of vernacular languages, utilising the language in informal settings perhaps serves as a channel for cross-cultural interaction.

Figure 55: Proportion of respondents who can speak Singlish “well” or “very well”, by race and age (2013)

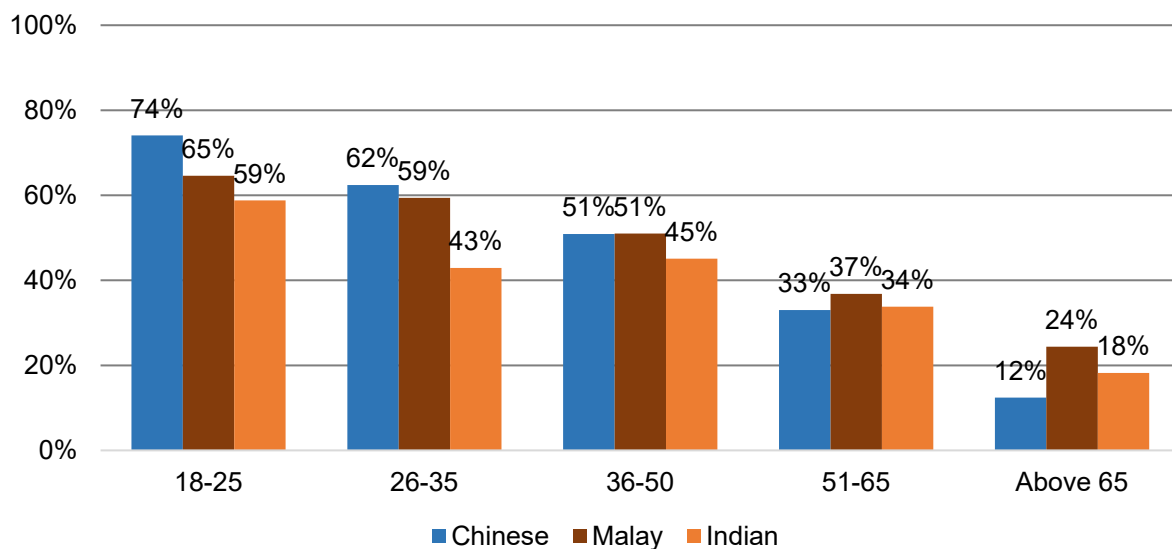
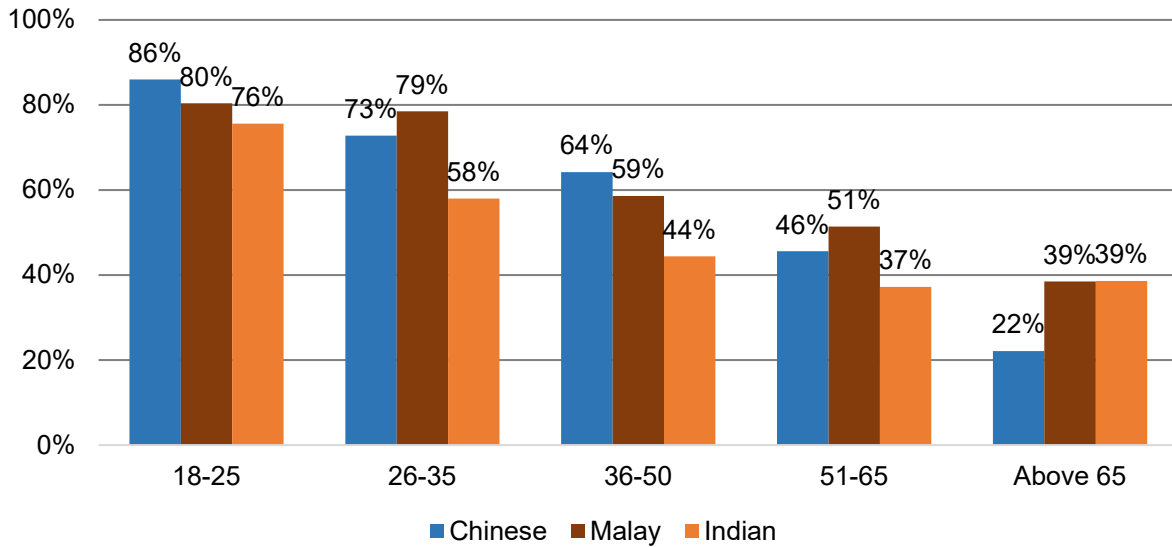


Figure 56: Proportion of respondents who can speak Singlish “well” or “very well”, by race and age (2018)



3.6.2 A large proportion of respondents who identified most with Singlish or reported strong proficiencies in speaking Singlish also indicated strong proficiencies in speaking Standard English, suggesting ability to “code-switch”

According to Wee, the premise of the Speak Good English Movement seems to stem from the potential of speaking Singlish interfering with one’s proficiency in speaking “standard” English (2018). It is hence interesting to explicate the reported English proficiency of respondents who indicated they spoke Singlish “well” or “very well”. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents who identified the most with Singlish reported speaking English at least well in 2013 and 2018 (see Figures 57 and 58). In addition, 93 per cent and 95 per cent of respondents who reported speaking Singlish at least “well”, also reported being able to speak English at least “well”, in 2013 and 2018, respectively (see Figures 59 and 60).

These responses suggest that while respondents may identify more with the use of Singlish rather than English, this does not in their opinion, impact their spoken English proficiency. The uptick of respondents who indicated they could speak English “very well” — despite either identifying more with Singlish or speaking Singlish “well” or “very well” — also suggests a general ability to “code-switch”, i.e., to maintain robust proficiencies in speaking Standard English in professional settings while utilising Singlish in more informal contexts to maintain a sense of camaraderie and shared identity amongst kith and kin.

Figure 57: English proficiency of respondents who identified the most with Singlish (2013)

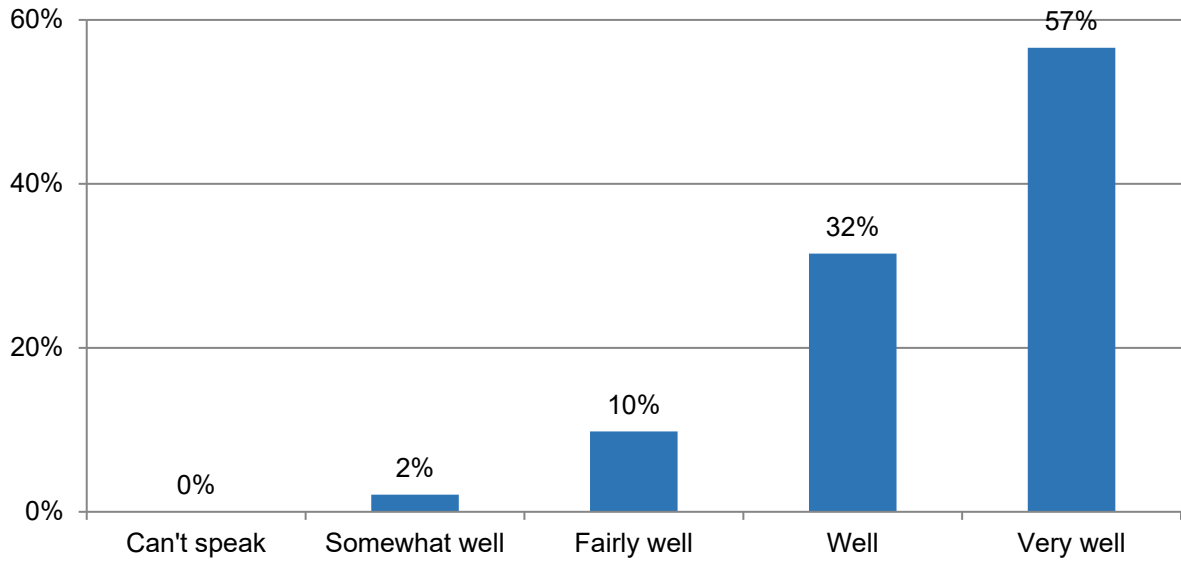


Figure 58: English proficiency of respondents who identified the most with Singlish (2018)

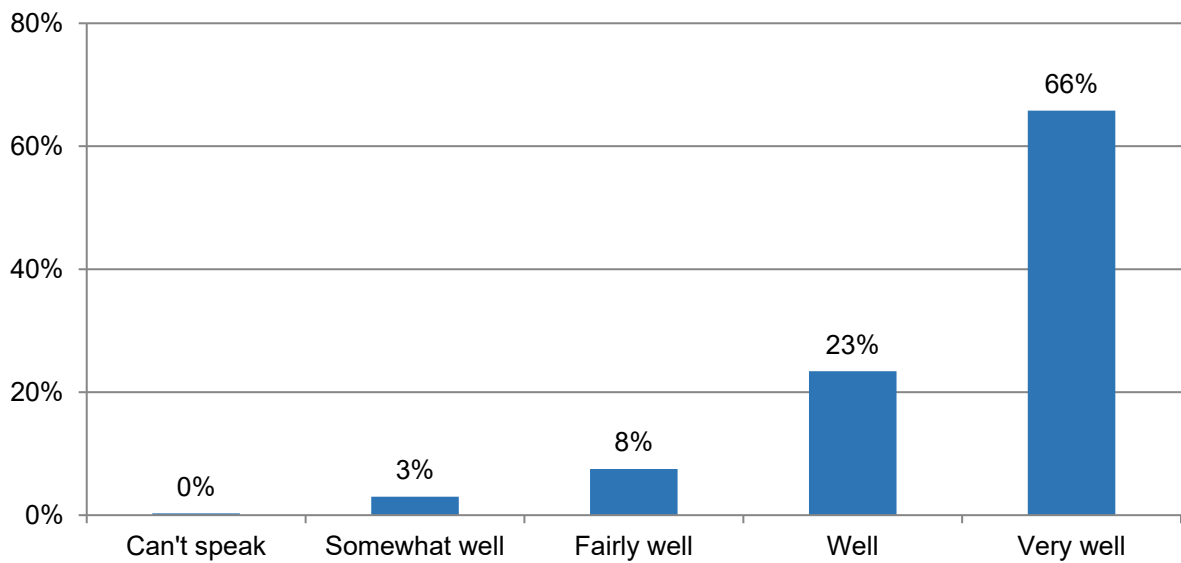


Figure 59: English proficiency of respondents who can speak Singlish “well” or “very well” (2013)

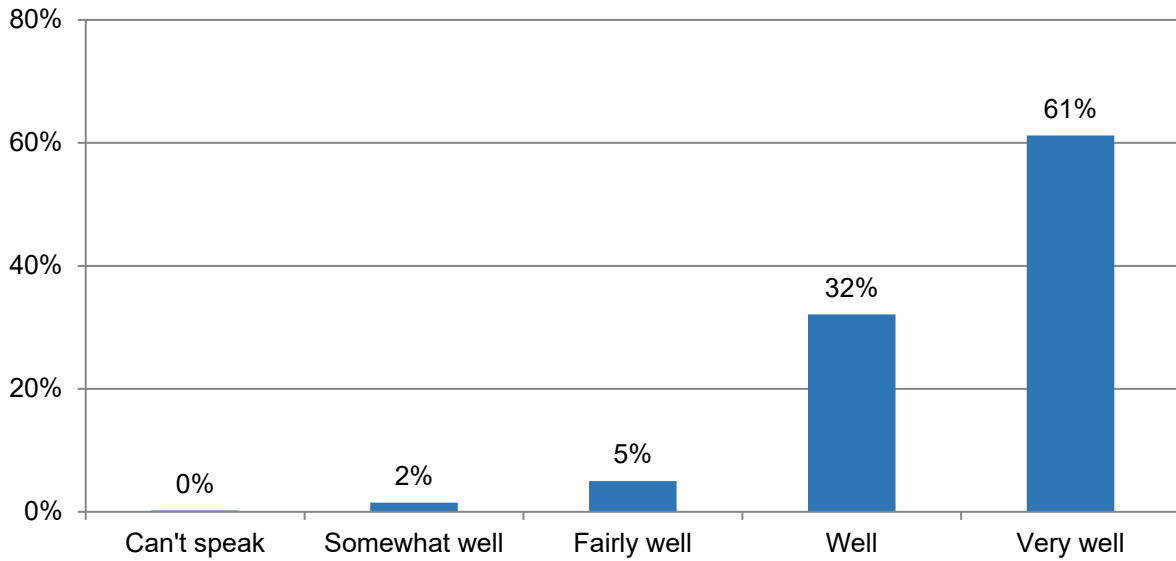
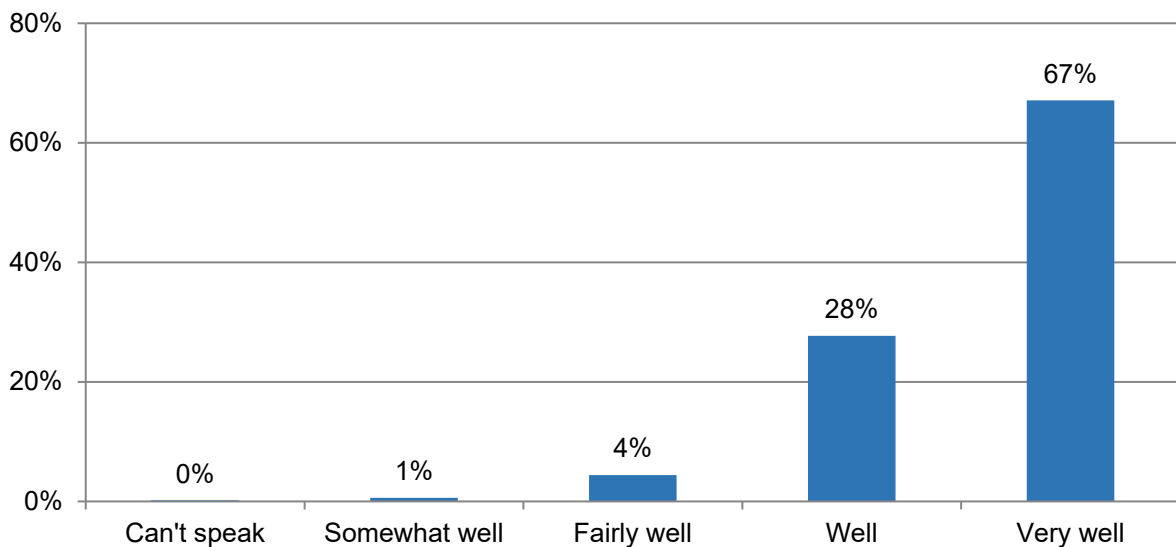


Figure 60: English proficiency of respondents who can speak Singlish “well” or “very well” (2018)

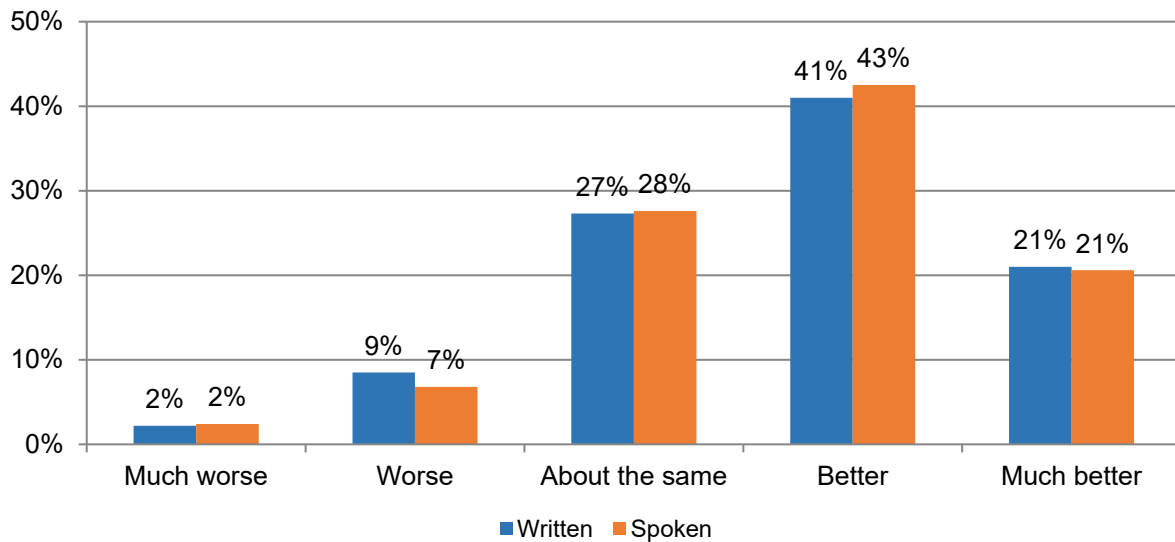


3.7 PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCIES OVER TIME

In the 2018 wave of the study, respondents were asked to evaluate the general standards of both English and Mother Tongue languages (in their spoken and written forms), as compared to 10 years ago. These questions were included to provide insight on the perceptions of the general population vis-à-vis the differences in language proficiencies over time; the responses may be used as a coarse proxy for their views on the efficacy of language policies in Singapore. The analysis presented below on respondents’ perceptions which are subjective in nature, is not reflective of an objective evaluation of language policy outcomes.

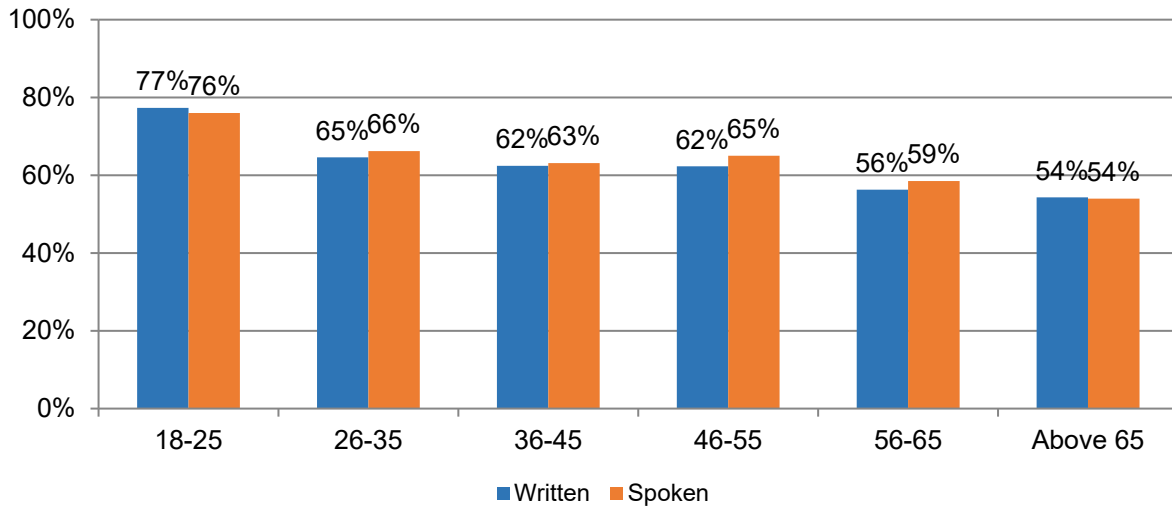
In general, the majority of the respondents (62 per cent) indicated that they felt the written English standard in Singapore is better or much better as compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 61). Similarly, the majority of the respondents (64 per cent) indicated the spoken English standard in Singapore is better or much better as compared to 10 years ago.

Figure 61: General English standard as compared to 10 years ago (2018)



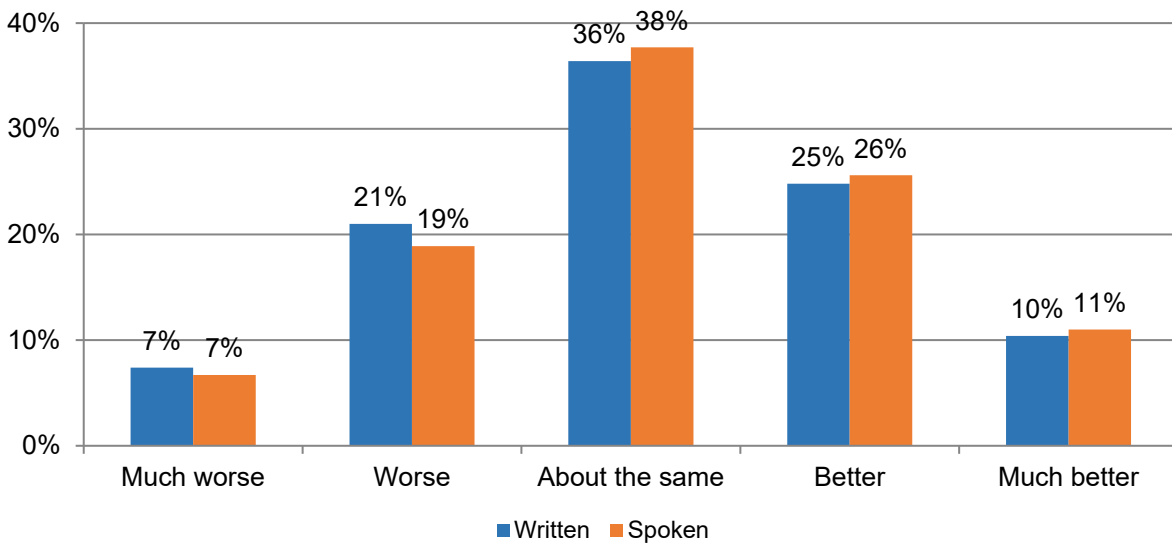
We analysed the results by respondents' age as well. Older respondents were less likely to think that the general standard of English today is better or much better as compared to the younger respondents (see Figure 62). Over three quarters of younger respondents aged between 18 and 25 indicated that the written and spoken English standards are better or much better as compared to 10 years ago. In contrast, the respective percentages for the older respondents aged above 65 are 54 per cent for both written and spoken English standards. This difference might be a result of the greater exposure of younger respondents to predominantly English-centric environments — perhaps in education, media and in other aspects of their everyday life, as compared to the elderly respondents.

Figure 62: Percentage of respondents who rated general English standard as "better" or "much better" compared to 10 years ago, by age cohort (2018)



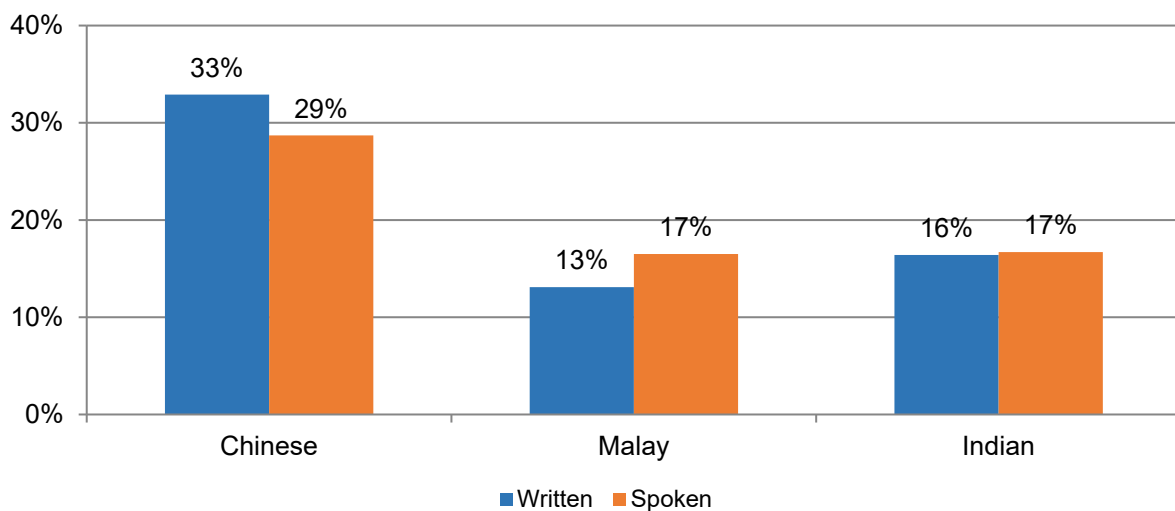
However, the respondents in the 2018 wave were more ambivalent when they evaluated the general standard of Mother Tongue languages today, as compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 63). As compared to English, there were lower proportions of respondents who felt that both the written and spoken Mother Tongue standards have become “better” or “much better” than 10 years ago. For example, 35 per cent of the respondents felt that the written Mother Tongue became “better” or “much better” as compared to 10 years ago, with 37 per cent feeling the same way for the spoken Mother Tongue language standard.

Figure 63: General Mother Tongue standard as compared to 10 years ago (2018)



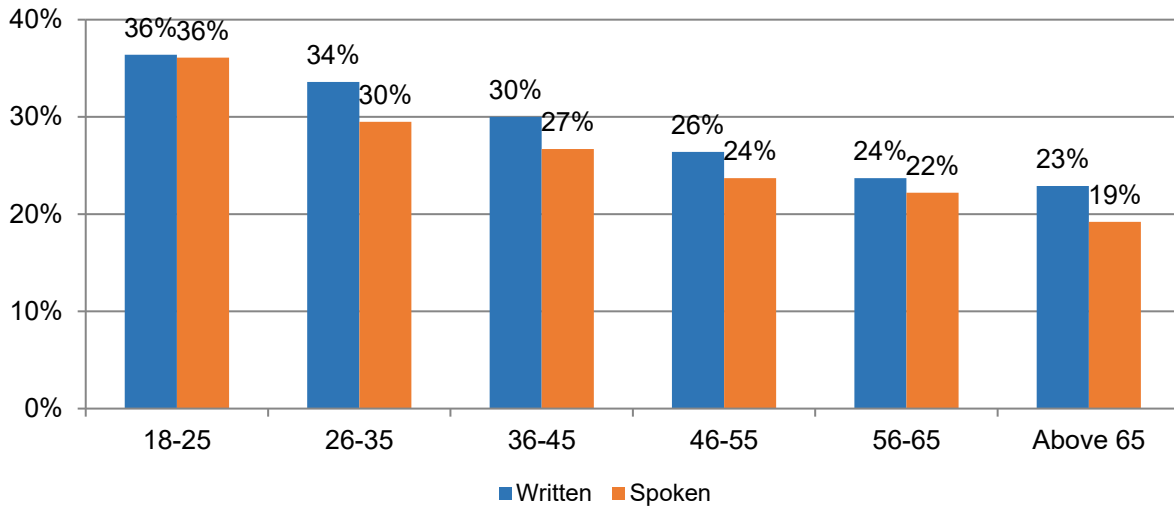
We next analysed the results with a focus on respondents' ethnicity and those who perceived a drop of spoken and written language standards over time. In this regard, we found that Chinese respondents were more likely to feel that the general written and spoken Mother Tongue standards are much worse or worse today, as compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 64). Thirty-three per cent and 29 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated that the written and spoken Mother Tongue language standards have become worse or much worse, respectively. Comparatively, only 13 per cent to 17 per cent of respondents of other ethnicities indicated likewise; they were less likely to perceive Mother Tongue standards as deteriorating.

Figure 64: Percentage of respondents who rated general Mother Tongue standard as worse or much worse, compared to 10 years ago, by race (2018)



Younger respondents were more likely to rate both the written and spoken Mother Tongue language standards as much worse or worse as compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 65). More than one-third of the respondents aged between 18 and 25 felt that the written and spoken standards of Mother Tongue languages today are worse or much worse than 10 years ago, while only about one in five of the respondents aged above 65 felt the same way.

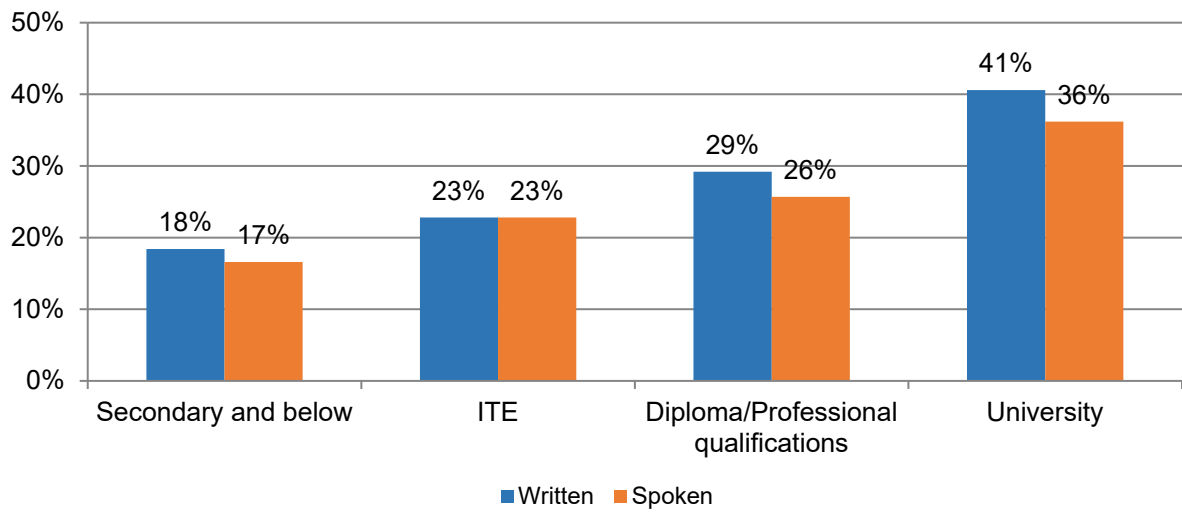
Figure 65: Percentage of respondents who rated general Mother Tongue standard as worse and much worse, compared to 10 years ago, by age group (2018)



In addition, highly educated respondents were more likely to rate both the written and spoken Mother Tongue language standards today as worse or much worse, as compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 66). Forty-one per cent and 36 per cent of respondents with at least a degree indicated that the written and spoken Mother Tongue standards have become worse or much worse, respectively, as compared to 10 years ago. In contrast, only 18 per cent and 17 per cent of respondents with a secondary level or lower education indicated likewise. This might be a result of university-educated respondents possessing a higher set of standards when examining matters such as language proficiency. In fact, among university-educated respondents, those who rated themselves very proficient in a language were more likely to perceive that standards in that particular language had worsened compared to those who reported lower proficiency levels.

Overall, these results which elicited respondents' perception of changes in language standards over time should be taken with some caution. The basis respondents used to compare current language standards with the state of affairs ten years ago is not easily apparent. For instance, our youngest respondents in the sample would have only been eight years of age, ten years prior to completing this survey. Their responses would then not have been based on any robust assessment of language standards when they were of that age. The results however reflect general notions of whether language standards have dropped compared to the recent past.

Figure 66: Percentage of respondents who rated general Mother Tongue standard as worse and much worse, compared to 10 years ago, by education level (2018)





Chapter 4
Language Use

CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE USE

4.1 LANGUAGE USE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

This section analyses the frequency of language used in various informal social settings, such as with friends or family (see Figures 67 and 68). Comparisons are drawn across languages and ethnic groups.

4.1.1 Indians likeliest to communicate in English with friends; Malays likeliest to converse in their Mother Tongue

In both waves, Indian respondents used English most frequently with friends socially, compared to their Mother Tongue or Singlish; 94 per cent indicated that they conversed with their friends in English “often”, “very often”, or “always” in 2018. In contrast, Malay (85 per cent) and Chinese (72 per cent) respondents were likelier to converse with their friends frequently in their respective Mother Tongues. This could potentially be attributed to linguistic diversity within the Indian community, whereby a number of Mother Tongues languages may be spoken by ethnic Indians other than Tamil, hence necessitating conversation in English or Singlish which would serve as common languages within the community instead.

Vis-à-vis the use of Singlish in conversations with friends, the survey results suggest that minority races were also more likely to utilise this colloquial vernacular relative to the majority Chinese too. For instance, 57 per cent and 64 per cent of Malays and Indians indicated the frequent use of Singlish when communicating with their friends in 2013, respectively, compared to under half of Chinese respondents. It is important though to recognise that more Chinese respondents are able to use Mandarin with their mostly Chinese friends. Minorities were less likely to use their official Mother Tongue languages especially when communicating with Chinese friends (who constitute a great part of their social networks).

There were no clear trends to distinguish the lower proportions of Indians in 2018 who reported using Singlish (from 64 per cent to 40 per cent). This could not be attributed to any rise in the demographics of Indians between the two waves such as an increased number of non-Singaporean born Indians in the 2018 wave, who would then presumably not use Singlish due to limited exposure to the language during childhood.

The LPIM study also recognises that Malays exhibit the greatest propensity to converse with their friends in their Mother Tongue. Ninety-one and 94 per cent indicated that they conversed with their friends in their Mother Tongue “often”, “very often”, or “always” in 2013 and 2018, respectively; the highest proportion of all ethnicities (see Figures 67 and 68). These figures suggest that a shared Mother Tongue language is an especially important unifying factor for the Malay ethnic community relative to Indians or Chinese — in line with extant scholarship depicting the language-centric nature of Malay culture (Mastor, Jin & Cooper, 2000; Reid, 2001).

Figure 67: Language used "often", "very often", or "always" with friends socially, by race (2013)

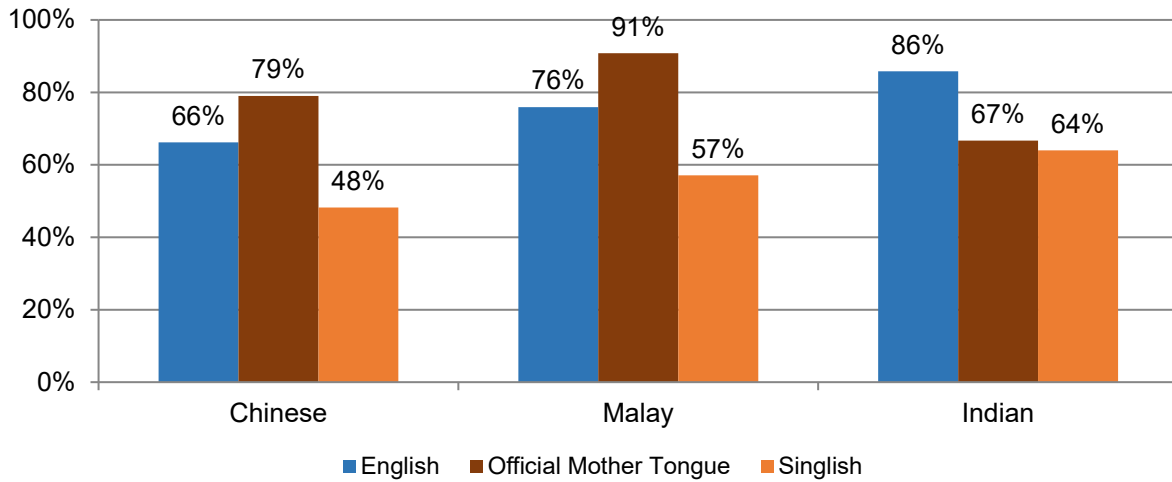
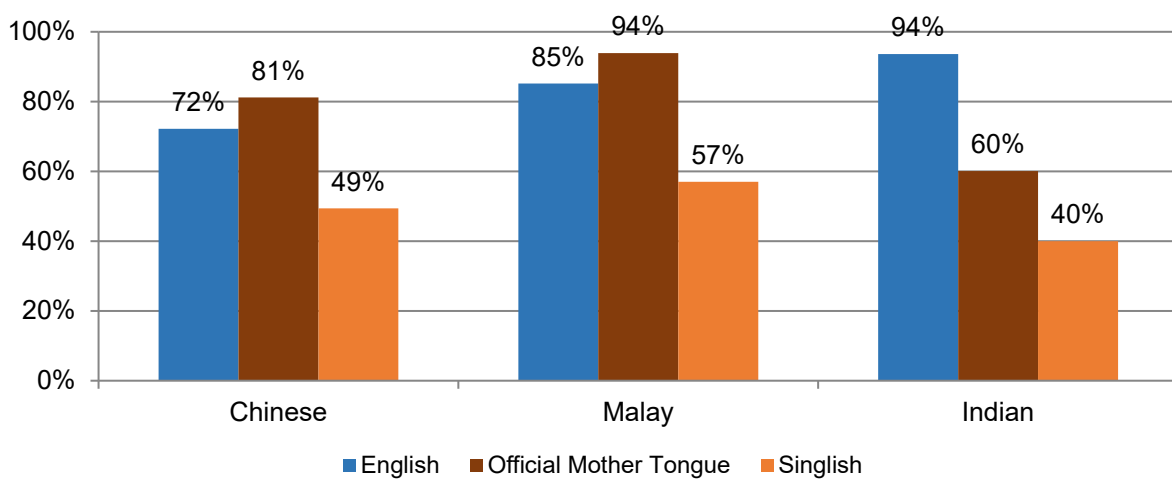


Figure 68: Language used "often", "very often", or "always" with friends socially, by race (2018)



4.1.2 Sizeable minority of Indians report conversing in Malay with friends, suggesting elevated numbers of Malay-Indian mixed-race relations over time

A more detailed, weighted breakdown of language use by ethnicity follows. A relatively small proportion of each ethnicity indicated the use of a Mother Tongue language other than their designated "official" Mother Tongue with their friends, illustrating the close relationship between ethnic identity and their respective Mother Tongue languages. For instance, less than 5 per cent of Chinese and Malay indicated they used a Mother Tongue other than Mandarin and Malay to converse with friends, respectively (see Figures 69 and 70). An exception to this trend is the slightly larger proportions of Indians who indicated they used Malay to converse with their friends (22 per cent in 2013 and 27 per cent in 2018). This is most likely because Indians have substantial number of inter-ethnic friendships and marriages with Malays. While

57 per cent of Chinese indicated that they had at least one Malay friend that they kept in touch occasionally, 78 per cent of Indians indicated this. Moreover among Indian Muslims, some learn Malay as a Mother Tongue in school instead of Tamil or other Indian languages, which would likely contribute to an increased propensity for relationships between Indians and Malays. There are also considerable numbers of Malay-Indian mixed marriages, which would also conceivably contribute to the use of Malay in their daily conversations (DoS, 2019b).

Figure 69: Percentage of respondents who speak the language of interest "often", "very often", or "always" with friends, by race (2013)

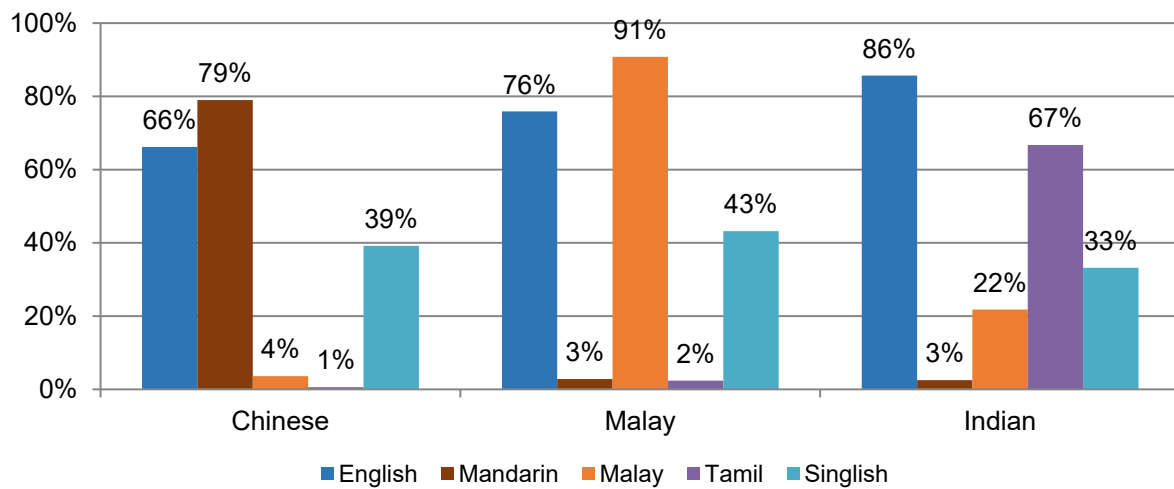
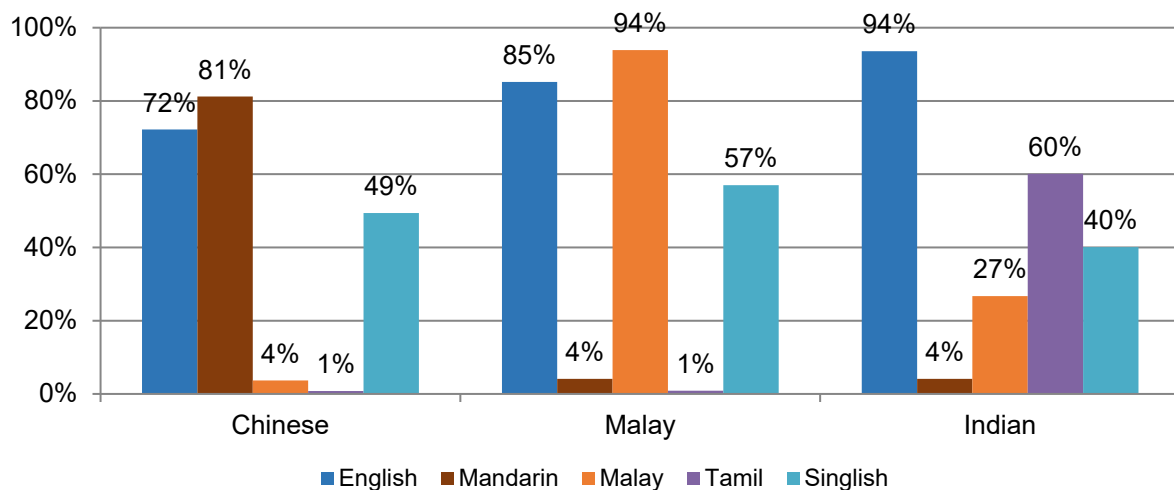


Figure 70: Percentage of respondents who speak the language of interest "often", "very often", or "always" with friends, by race (2018)



4.1.3 Younger respondents likelier to use English and Singlish in informal social settings; higher-educated respondents likelier to use Standard English. However, use of Singlish transcends class and is tied to nationality

The following section uses binary logistic regressions to examine how variables like education, age, housing type, citizenship and race influence the languages used in conversing with friends. The dependent variables are the respective languages that one speaks with friends. They are constituted as dummy variables that indicate whether a respondent speaks the language “often”, “very often” or “always”, as opposed to “never”, “rarely”, and “sometimes”. The following tables summarise the effects of each variable on the different languages that one speaks with friends, for the 2013 and 2018 waves, respectively (see Tables 5 and 6).

From the regressions, it is evident that the use of English and Singlish is generally more popular amongst younger respondents as the most frequent languages used when conversing with friends, regardless of ethnicity. The popularity of Singlish amongst younger respondents may be a result of them having exposure to the indigenous vernacular from birth or during childhood, in the context of the education system and the state narrative of embracing a multiracial societal fabric.

The use of English is also more popular amongst more educated respondents, which reaffirms studies establishing positive links between “standard” English language preferences and levels of educational attainment. People who reside in private housing were also more likely to use English with friends more frequently, as compared to people residing in public housing. This is indicative of the close association between English and a higher socio-economic status, since its frequency of usage increases with income and education. The use of English is also more popular among all ethnic minorities (Malay, Indian and Others), as compared to the majority Chinese — with reasons explicated in 4.1.1. Singapore citizens were also more likely to speak in English with friends as compared to Permanent Residents.

Regressions based on the 2018 wave also saw a negative relationship between the use of Mother Tongue languages amongst higher-educated ethnic minorities. In 2018, there was less frequent use of Malay to communicate with friends amongst higher-educated Malay respondents, as compared to the Malay respondents with a secondary and below level of education. This is in keeping with the increased focus on the use of English relative to Mother Tongue languages in post-secondary and tertiary education. This trend is also evident in the case of Indian respondents in 2013.

The regressions explicate some trends in Singlish language usage as well. The results show Singlish to be less popular amongst Indian respondents as compared to Chinese respondents in both waves of the study. Indian respondents might identify less with Singlish, given the dearth of Tamil vocabulary (and other Indian-origin languages) in Singlish, relative to the “contributions” of Mandarin, Chinese dialects, and the Malay language.

Interestingly, the use of Singlish is positively correlated with class (i.e., respondents who were more educated and resided in private housing were likelier to report greater usage of Singlish) in 2018. This trend holds even when excluding non-English and non-Singlish-speaking

respondents from the regression. This could be potentially attributed to the use of Singlish being associated with the lower strata of society; hence resulting in increased “self-censorship” in the use of Singlish by individuals of lower socio-economic status as an aspirational undertaking, and increased use of Singlish by their more secure, affluent counterparts. A second explanation could be differences in what constitutes Singlish across class divisions. A third possible underlying reason for this could be the increasing acceptance of Singlish over time as a marker of national identity, which transcends class. We also found that Singapore citizens were more likely to use Singlish with friends as compared to Permanent Residents — in line with the logic that Singlish is a localised English vernacular highly associated with shared national identity.

Table 5: Trends in language use with friends (binary logistic regression, 2013)

Predictors	English (All sample)	Singlish (All sample)	Mandarin (Chinese sample)	Malay (Malay sample)	Tamil (Indian sample)
<i>Degree and Above</i>	2.037***	.55***	.033	-1.024	-.826*
<i>ITE or Diploma</i>	1.195***	.403***	-.005	-.379	-.562
<i>Private or Condo</i>	1.685***	.121	.239	.301	-1.465*
<i>HDB 3–5 Room</i>	.364*	.222	.998***	.552	-.368
<i>Age</i>	-.045***	-.046***	-.026***	.017	.017
<i>SG Citizen</i>	1.391***	.811***	-.802***	-.524	-.212
<i>Malay</i>	.852***	.117			
<i>Indian</i>	1.484***	-.273*			
<i>Other Races</i>	1.603***	.12			
<i>Intercept</i>	.304	.366	2.523***	1.852	.968
<i>n</i>	3990	3815	2208	822	806
<i>Nagelkerke R-square</i>	.378	.186	.094	.042	.093
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	9	9	6	6	6
<i>Chi-square</i>	1180.872	538.828	181.793	9.417	23.135

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Omitted categories: Secondary and below education, HDB 1–2 Room, Singapore Permanent Resident, Chinese.

Table 6: Trends in language use with friends (binary logistic regression, 2018)

Predictors	English (All sample)	Singlish (All sample)	Mandarin (Chinese sample)	Malay (Malay sample)	Tamil (Indian sample)
<i>Degree and Above</i>	2.371***	.613***	-.072	-1.612**	-.321
<i>ITE or Diploma</i>	1.526***	.628***	.134	.034	-.186
<i>Private or Condo</i>	1.684***	.539**	-.078	18.517	-1.159
<i>HDB 3–5 Room</i>	.565**	.492**	.626**	-.428	-.446
<i>Age</i>	-.041***	-.042***	-.024***	.008	.008
<i>SG Citizen</i>	1.526***	.758***	-.349	-.238	-.35
<i>Malay</i>	1.330***	.263*			
<i>Indian</i>	2.160***	-.452**			
<i>Other Races</i>	2.964***	-.368			
<i>Intercept</i>	.047	.41	2.526***	3.405	.978
<i>n</i>	3832	3712	2204	830	720
<i>Nagelkerke R-square</i>	.424	.206	.066	.084	.038
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	9	9	6	6	6
<i>Chi-square</i>	1263.141	626.346	122.207	14.118	9.018

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$

Omitted categories: Secondary and below education, HDB 1–2 Room, Singapore Permanent Resident, Chinese.

4.2 LANGUAGE USE IN DOMESTIC HOUSEHOLD SETTINGS

This section examines the frequency of official Mother Tongue language use with different family members in the 2013 wave, by ethnicity. Due to exigencies in structuring a reasonably concise set of questions for each run of the RRL survey, questions pertaining to domestic household use of Mother Tongue were excluded in the 2018 run (which instead includes questions on language use in the workplace in place of domestic household language use).

4.2.1 Malays likeliest to use their official Mother Tongue to converse with family members at home; Chinese least likely to do so

When comparing the frequent use of official Mother Tongue languages when conversing with family members at home, the LPIM study finds that Malays are most likely to utilise their official Mother Tongue relative to other ethnic groups. For instance, 85 per cent or more of Malay respondents indicated they communicated frequently with their parents in their official Mother Tongue, as compared to just over 40 per cent of Chinese respondents and approximately 55 per cent of Indian respondents (see Figure 71). These figures further support the findings in 4.1.1, indicating similar trends in language use with friends for the Malay community.

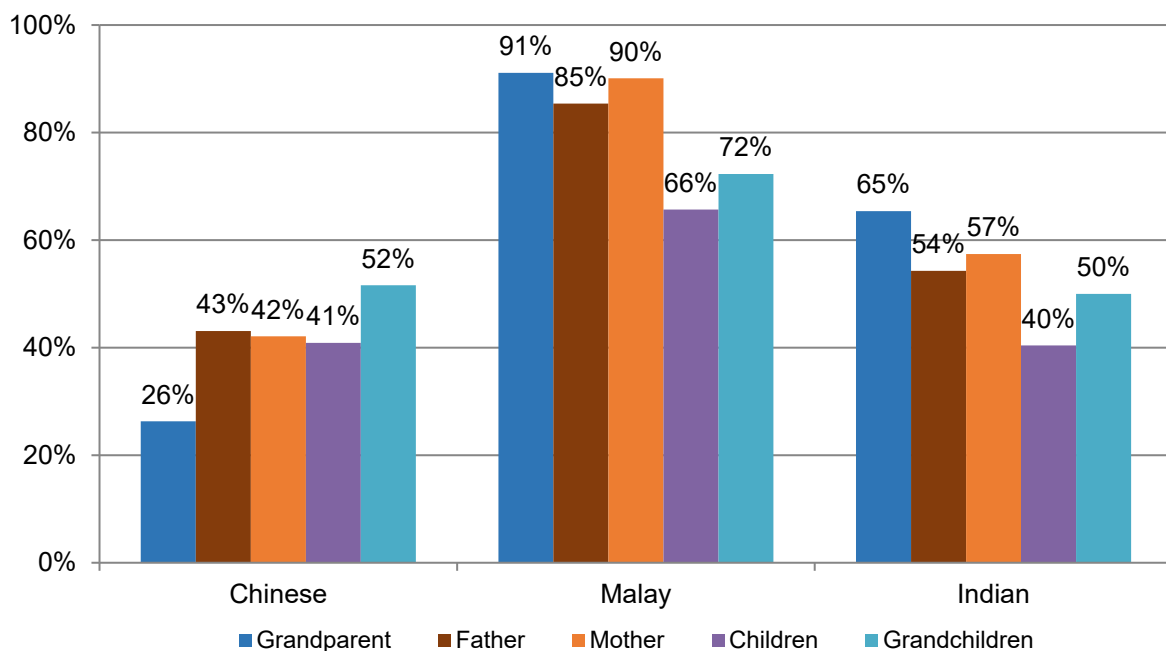
Ninety-one per cent of Malay respondents also indicated the frequent use of Malay when communicating with their grandparents, compared to just 26 per cent of Chinese and 65 per cent of Indians. The significantly lower proportions of Chinese respondents indicating likewise

can be attributed to the prevalent use of Chinese vernaculars by the older generation, prior to independence and the institution of the official languages and Bilingual Education Policy. This will be elaborated on in Section 4.3.

In tandem with the above findings, Malay respondents were also more likely to converse frequently with their children and grandchildren in Malay (approximately 70 per cent), compared to Chinese and Indians (under 50 per cent) in their respective official Mother Tongue languages. This trend has significant implications on the use of Mother Tongue languages over time, as this is contingent on the continued use of and the ability to remain proficient in ethnic communities' respective Mother Tongue languages.

For instance, with continued frequent exposure to Malay at home, younger Malays were likelier to maintain a working proficiency of the language — evidenced by the high propensity for Malay usage by the community across various settings. Conversely, a lowered or diminishing exposure to Mandarin for Chinese youth and Tamil for Indian youth at home would negatively impact their abilities to maintain their proficiencies — already illustrated in part by these findings. These trends are also likely to perpetuate in “vicious cycles” across future generations if the status quo is maintained for non-Malay communities.

Figure 71: Family members who stay together and converse most frequently in their official Mother Tongue, by race (2013)



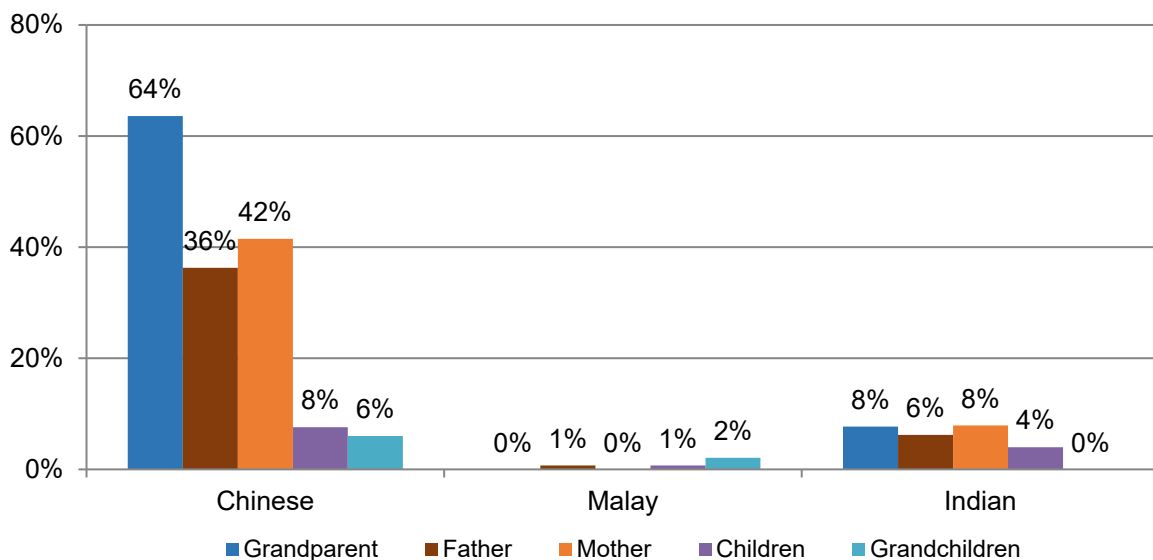
4.2.2 Two-thirds of Chinese reported conversing with their grandparents in their heritage language frequently, suggesting continued prevalence of Chinese vernaculars alongside standard Mandarin use

Based on the 2013 responses to the most frequent language used in a domestic household setting, we proceed to further dissect the responses reference to heritage languages. This is especially pertinent for the Chinese ethnic group, given the widespread use of Chinese vernaculars in the community pre-independence as opposed to “standard” Mandarin. The use of heritage languages in the Malay and Indian communities would be of less significance given the more established use of Malay and Tamil during the colonial era.

Based on the responses, Chinese respondents were most likely to report frequently using a heritage language when conversing with family members at home. In particular, the frequent use of heritage languages was reported most often in the context of conversations with older family members — especially grandparents. Sixty-four per cent of Chinese respondents reported using a heritage language with their grandparents, while over a third reported using it with their parents (see Figure 72). Less than 10 per cent reported communicating with their children and grandchildren in a heritage language.

These trends are in keeping with the widespread use of Chinese vernaculars such as Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese by older generations prior to the institution of official languages and the Bilingual Education Policy — entailing the use of “standard” Mandarin by younger generations in school. About two-thirds and one-third of Chinese respondents continue to converse with their grandparents and parents in their heritage language, respectively, which also suggests the continued prevalence of Chinese vernacular use in general Chinese household settings. Additionally, this may contribute in some part to the sustained use of Singlish, given the sizable contributions of Chinese vernaculars to Singlish such as vocabulary and expressions.

Figure 72: Family members who stay together and converse most frequently in their heritage language, by race (2013)



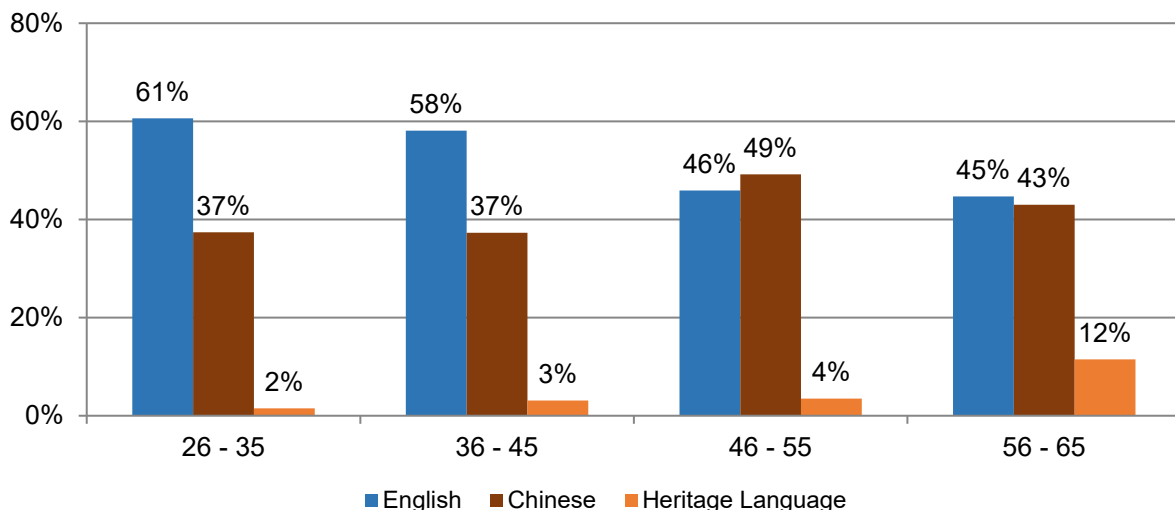
4.3 LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

This section spotlights the types of languages that parents use frequently with children with reference to race, age, and education levels. The findings, which are based on responses to relevant survey questions from the 2013 wave, shed light on the nature of language transmission within a primary family nucleus in Singapore.

4.3.1 Younger, more educated Chinese and Malay parents were far more likely to use English when conversing with their children compared to older, less educated counterparts

Age continues to influence the language used in parent-child communications within Chinese households. Younger parents were more likely to use English when speaking to their children; 61 per cent of parents between 26 and 35 years old reported using English the most frequently with their children, with this proportion dropping steadily to just 45 per cent of parents between 56 and 65 years of age (see Figure 73). In tandem with these findings, there is also a generally greater likelihood for older parents to converse with their children in Mandarin or associated dialects. For instance, under five per cent of parents 45 years and below reported conversing with their children most in a dialect, as compared to 12 per cent of parents aged 56 to 65 years old. *In toto*, these findings are in line with the prioritisation of the official languages and Bilingual Education Policy since independence.

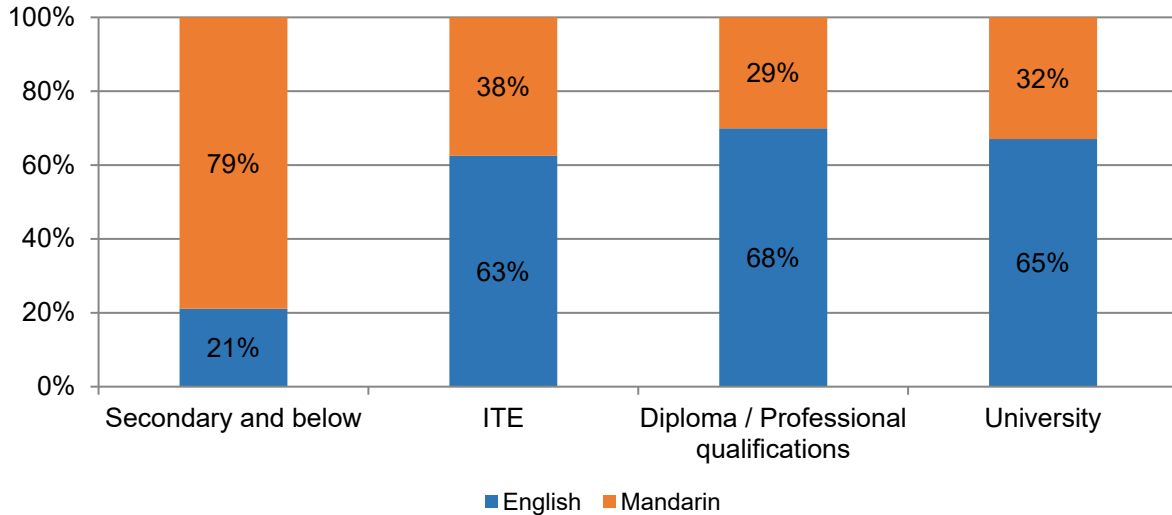
Figure 73: Languages used most frequently by Chinese respondents with children, by age cohort (2013)



Education is also a second differentiating factor impacting language used most frequently by Chinese parents to communicate with their children. In particular, when we look at the difference between young parents with secondary or below levels of education and those with post-secondary qualifications, we note that just over a fifth of lower-educated respondents reported using English the most frequently with their children, versus approximately two-thirds of higher-educated respondents (see Figure 74). This implies some impact on the frequency

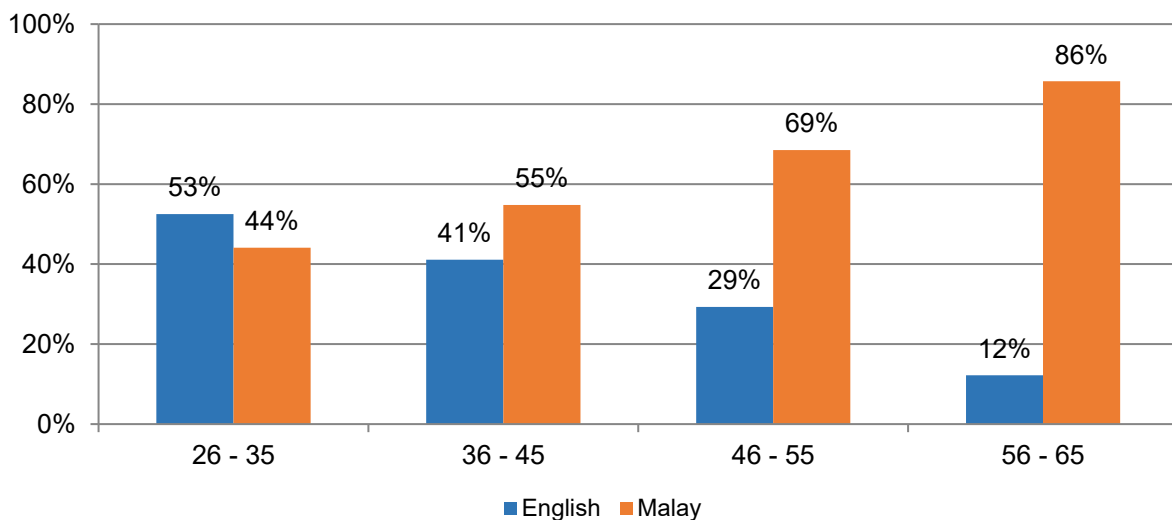
of language use and consequently, English, and Mandarin proficiency levels of children based on the education levels of their parents.

Figure 74: Languages used most frequently with children by Chinese respondents aged 26 to 35, by education level (2013)



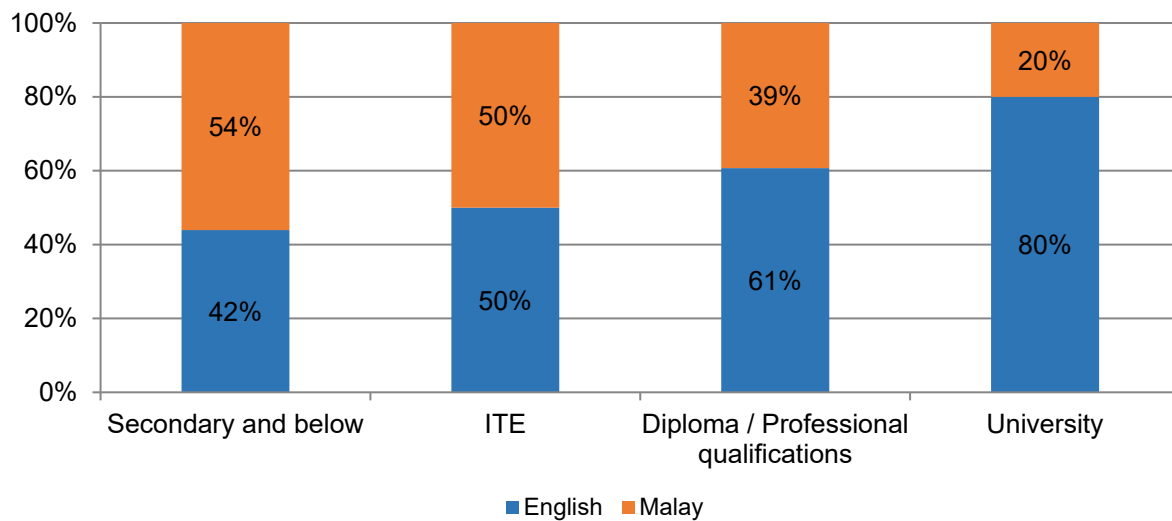
We observed a similar, though more marked trend for Malay respondents; younger parents were more likely to speak more frequently in English and less in Malay with their children. Fifty-three per cent of young Malay respondents between 26 and 35 years of age reported using English frequently with their children, as compared to just 12 per cent for Malay parents aged 56 to 65 years old (see Figure 75). Conversely, older Malay parents were most likely to use their official language (i.e., Malay) when conversing with their children — 86 per cent indicated so as compared to under half of their counterparts aged 26 to 35 years old.

Figure 75: Languages used most frequently by Malay respondents with children, by age (2013)



Clearer trends are noted vis-à-vis the role education plays in influencing parents' choice of language used with their children, within the Malay community. In particular, university-educated young Malay parents were most likely to converse in English, rather than Malay, with their children. Approximately 40, 50, and 60 per cent of Malay respondents with secondary or below, ITE, or diploma / professional qualifications, respectively, reported using English most frequently when communicating with their children; as compared to 80 per cent of their university-educated counterparts (see Figure 76).

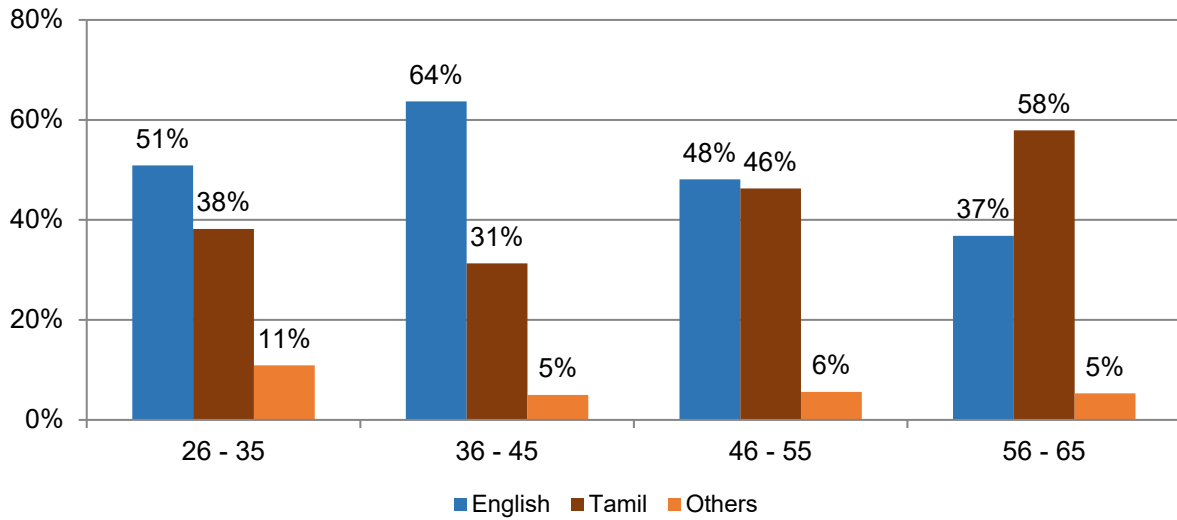
Figure 76: Languages used most frequently with children by Malay respondents aged 26 to 35, by education level (2013)



4.3.2 Younger Indian parents were more likely to converse with their children in a language other than English or Tamil, as compared to older Indian parents — though this proportion was relatively low

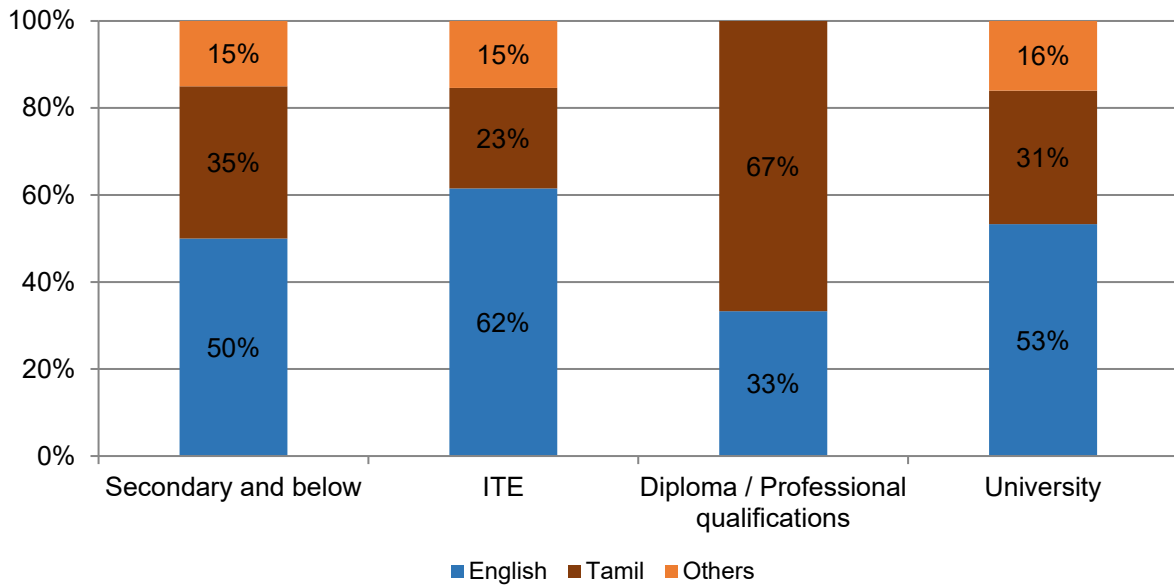
While a similarly small proportion of Indian respondents reported using a language other than English and their official Mother Tongue most frequently with their children, this proportion actually increases for younger parents. Eleven per cent of Indian parents aged 26 to 35 years old indicated most frequently using a language other than English or Tamil to converse with their children as compared to about five per cent of their older counterparts (see Figure 77). We posit that this is primarily due to the rising use of other Indian languages (e.g., Hindi, Bengali) due to a shift in population demographics brought about by increased inflows of non-Tamil speaking Indians (see Jain & Wee, 2019). Nonetheless, parent-child communications primarily in Tamil was more prevalent for older parents (58 per cent for parents 56 to 65 years old) as compared to parents under 45 years old (over 30 per cent).

Figure 77: Languages used most frequently by Indian respondents with children, by age (2013)



Education does not seem to have a consistent effect on the language frequently used with children by Indian respondents aged between 26 and 35 years of age. Those with an ITE education were the most likely to use English frequently with their children (62 per cent) (see Figure 78). Surprisingly, those with diplomas or professional qualifications were the least likely to do so (33 per cent). This is significantly lower than those with up to secondary school education (50 per cent). However, these findings could be impacted by the relatively small sample size of each sub-group that might have affected the proportions.

Figure 78: Languages used most frequently with children by Indian respondents aged 26 to 35, by education level (2013)



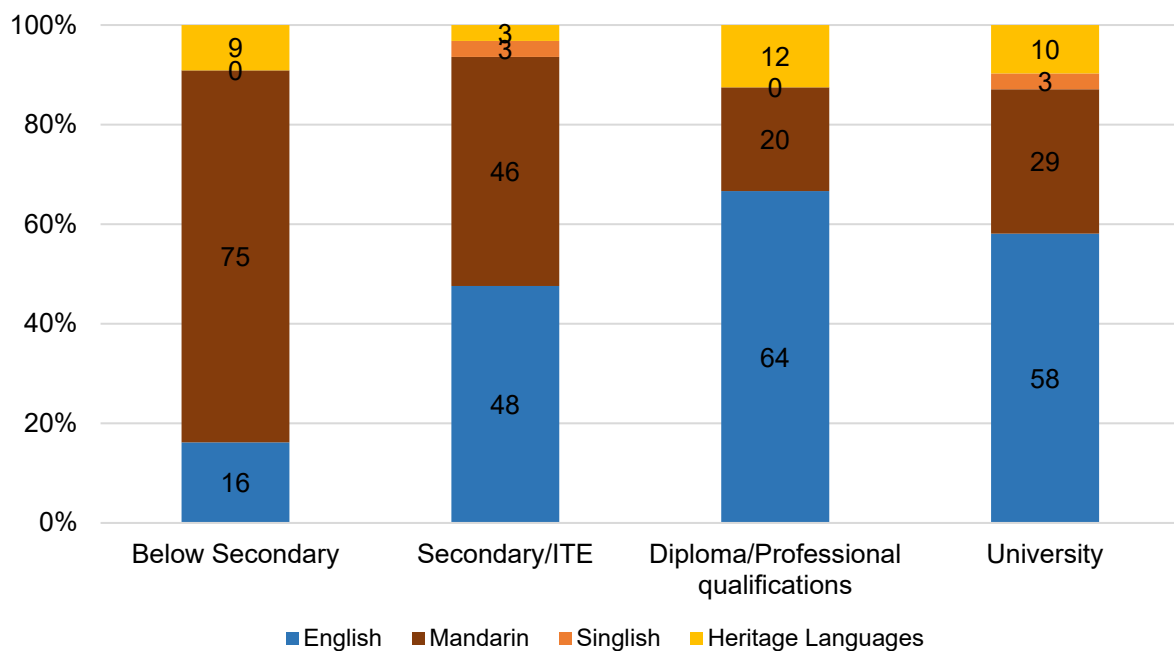
4.3.3 More educated Chinese grandchildren were likelier to converse with grandparents in English rather than Mandarin. However, findings stand in contrast to what grandparents reported, signalling potential multi-language conversations across generations or perceptual differences

Another issue-of-interest vis-à-vis language transmission is the impact of greater English use engendering language barriers between grandparents and grandchildren. Younger generations were most likely to lose the ability to communicate with their older counterparts due to shifts towards the use of English and official languages away from ethnic vernaculars. This is especially so for the Chinese community.

We begin by perusing languages Chinese respondents use with their grandchildren by education level. In general, higher education levels are correlated with English as a first language used by grandparents when conversing with their grandchildren. Sixteen per cent of grandparents with below secondary level educational qualifications indicated so, as compared to approximately 60 per cent of their counterparts with diploma and above qualifications (see Figure 79).

In the same vein, it is worthy of note that 75 per cent of those with secondary and below levels of education reported speaking to their grandchildren predominantly in Mandarin. While the proportion drops precipitously to about a quarter or less for more educated grandparents, we note too that proportions of grandparents that indicate the use of heritage languages when communicating with their grandchildren is approximately 10 per cent or less, regardless of education levels.

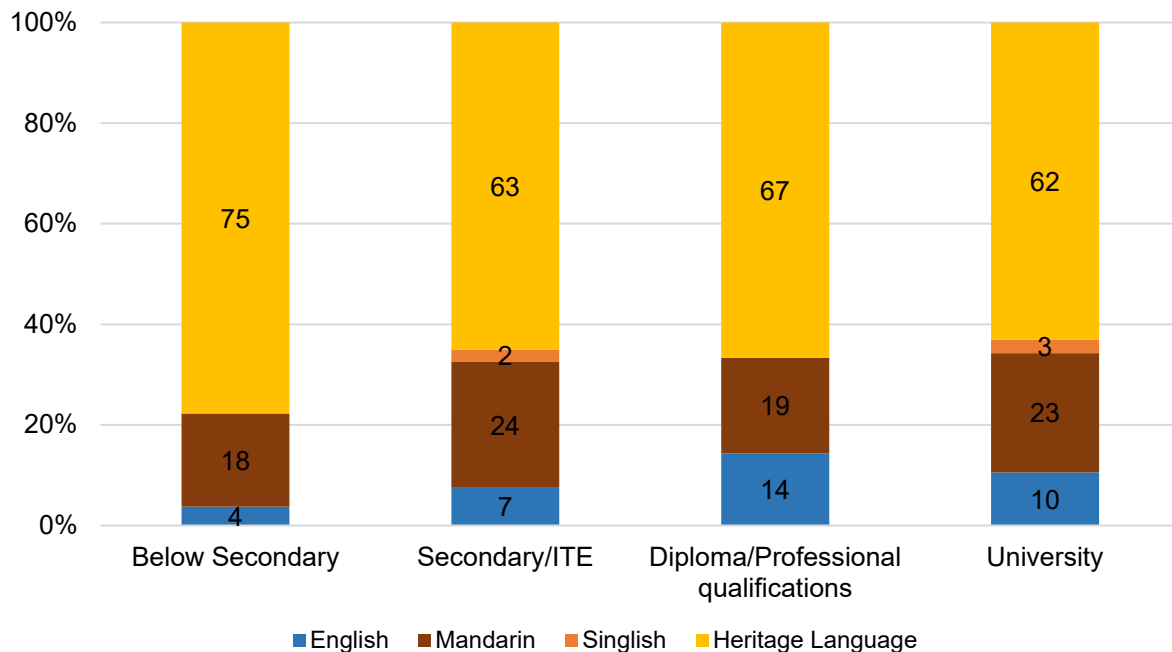
Figure 79: First language used with grandchildren for Chinese respondents, by education level (2013)



While the above findings suggest that in general, the majority of grandparents could still communicate with their grandchildren in English or Mandarin, these figures contradict the proportions of respondents indicating the various languages spoken with grandparents (see Figure 80). Across all educational levels, over three-fifths to three quarters of respondents reported using heritage languages with their grandparents — as opposed to English or Mandarin.

We posit that this discrepancy could be due to a confluence of two factors: 1) discrepancies in the perceptions of language most frequently used by grandparents with their grandchildren, and vice versa, due to differing “effort” needed to articulate their thoughts in a given language; and 2) potential multi-language conversations due to both parties able to understand both Mandarin and Chinese vernaculars, but were more comfortable speaking or responding in one of these languages.

Figure 80: First language used with grandparent for Chinese respondents above 35 years old, by education level (2013)



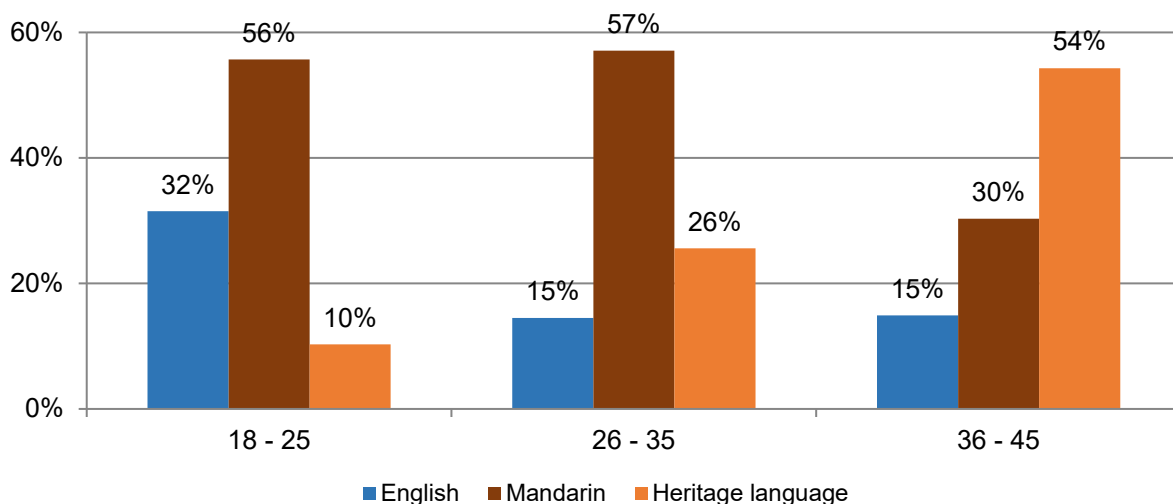
4.3.4 Younger Chinese were likelier to converse with their parents in Mandarin; older Chinese likelier to do so with heritage languages

This next section examines the frequency of usage of different languages with parents — a key part of language transmission from an individual’s formative years to adulthood. We segregate our analysis across ethnic groups, and by age cohorts and education levels. For concision, figures presented are with regard to communications between participants and their fathers, given the high correlation and generalisability between language used by participants with their fathers and with their mothers.

In general, older respondents were more likely to communicate frequently in heritage languages with their parents, in keeping with overall findings presented in earlier sections. Conversely, younger respondents with a weaker grasp of their heritage language reported less communication with their parents in heritage languages. In addition, younger, more educated respondents were also more likely to communicate with their parents in English — a finding that suggests the increased likelihood of higher-educated individuals' parents to understand English too.

For the Chinese community, more than half of respondents aged 18 to 25 (56 per cent) and 26 to 35 years of age (57 per cent) reported using Mandarin with their fathers most frequently (see Figure 81). Unsurprisingly, the likelihood of using English decreases with age, while the likelihood of using heritage languages increases significantly with age. Just a tenth of respondents aged 18 to 25 indicated using heritage languages most frequently when communicating with fathers, compared to over half of respondents aged 36 to 45 years old.

Figure 81: Languages used most frequently by Chinese respondents with father, by age (2013)



We then examine the languages spoken with respondents' fathers by education level. Respondents with below secondary levels of education were highly likely to use heritage languages or Mandarin with their fathers (72 per cent; see Figure 82). In tandem with these findings, the likelihood of using English increases as the education level of the child increases, from 0 per cent for individuals with below secondary levels of education to over a fifth for degree holders.

Surprisingly, the responses show that the majority of respondents with a bachelor's degree and above illustrate the predominant use of Mandarin by respondents when communicating with their fathers — contrary to the hypothesis that high educational attainment will dilute the frequency of the usage of non-English languages. In fact, Mandarin was used most frequently when communicating with one's father, for respondents with diploma and above education qualifications — signalling that Mandarin was often the prevailing common language across immediate generations.

The use of Mandarin with respondents' fathers was even more prevalent in the case of younger Chinese respondents too, with more than half of Chinese respondents below 35 years of age reporting using Mandarin most frequently with their fathers. For this group of younger respondents, they were also less likely to use vernaculars when conversing with their fathers (under 20 per cent) and more likely to use English, at about a quarter (see Figure 83). For younger respondents, education levels did not seem to have much of a significant impact on language used when conversing with their fathers too — with the exception of respondents indicating below secondary levels of education whereby no respondent indicated the use of English when conversing with their fathers at all.

Figure 82: First language used with father for Chinese respondents, by education level (2013)

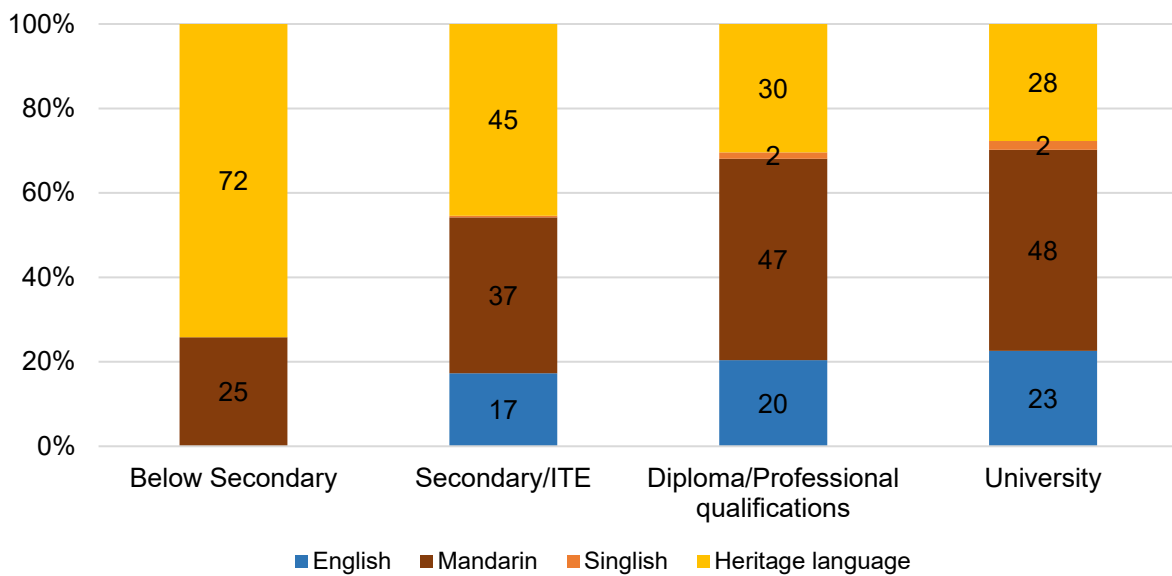
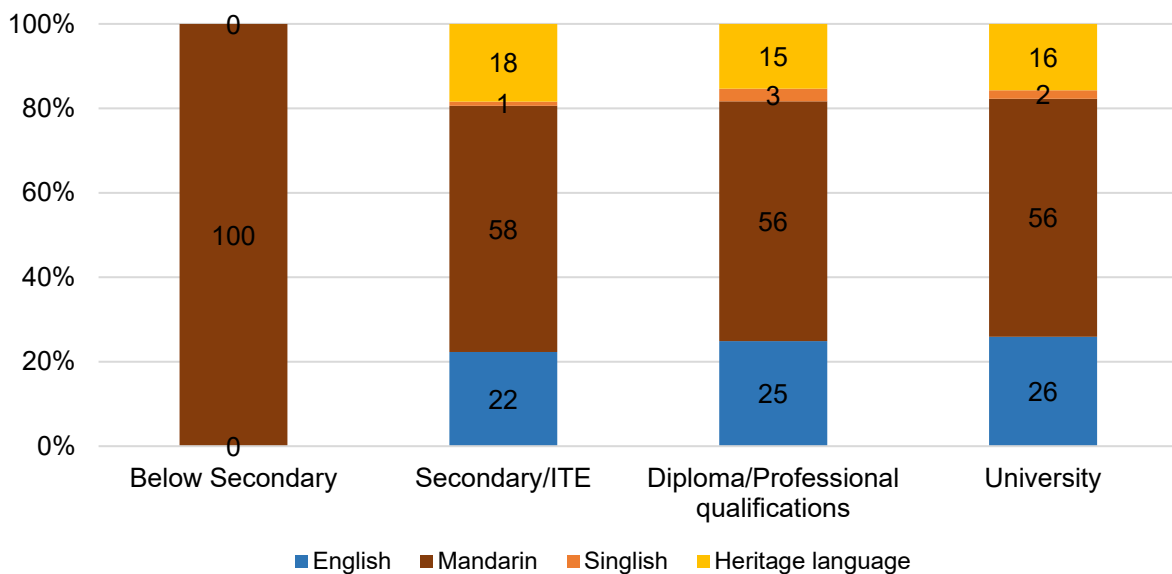


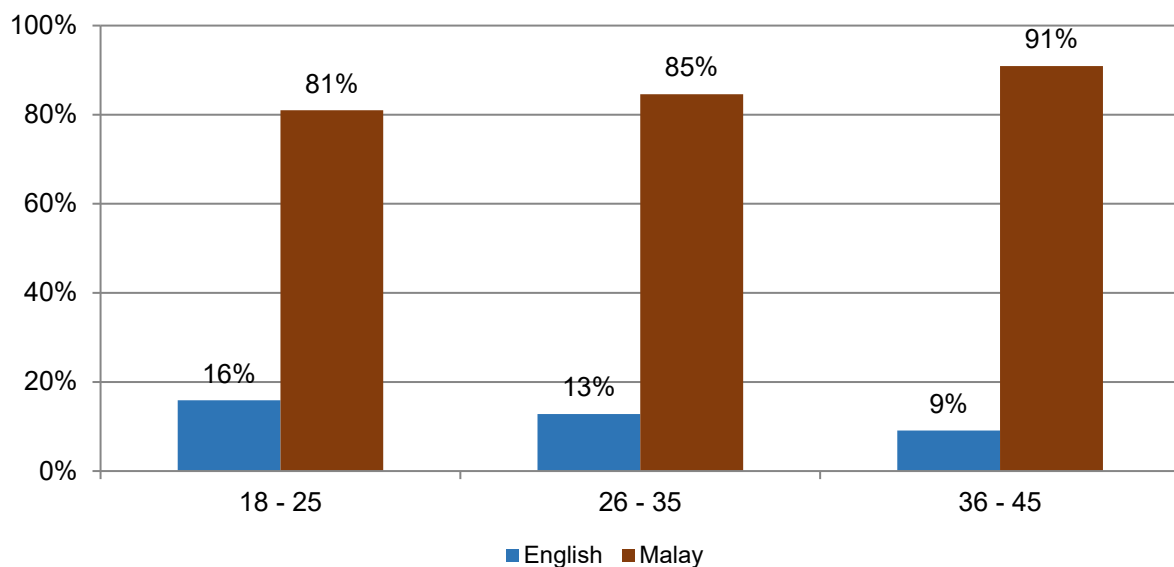
Figure 83: First language used with father for Chinese respondents 35 years-old and below, by education level (2013)



4.3.5 Malays exhibited the greatest tendency to converse with their fathers in their official Mother Tongue relative to other ethnicities, though more diploma and degree holders did so in English

Malay respondents exhibited the greatest tendency to use a Mother Tongue language (Malay, in this case) with their fathers as compared with their peers of other ethnicities. This is also consistent across all age groups and education levels. Over 80 per cent of Malay respondents indicated they used Malay most frequently when conversing with their fathers, with this proportion gradually increasing across age cohort (see Figure 84).

Figure 84: Languages used most frequently by Malay respondents with father, by age (2013)



When perusing results by education and age cohort, we still note the predominant use of Malay when communicating with one's father; over four-fifths for non-degree holders and about two-thirds for degree holders (see Figure 85). In keeping with these findings, the use of English for communication between respondents and their fathers is most prevalent for higher-educated respondents. Specifically, highly educated Malays aged 35 years old or younger were the least likely to report using Malay with their fathers most frequently (two-thirds for degree holders), as compared to their less educated counterparts where over 90 per cent for those indicated ITE, secondary, or lower qualifications (see Figure 86). However, the majority of them still spoke in Malay with their parents instead of English.

Figure 85: First language used with father for Malay respondents, by education level (2013)

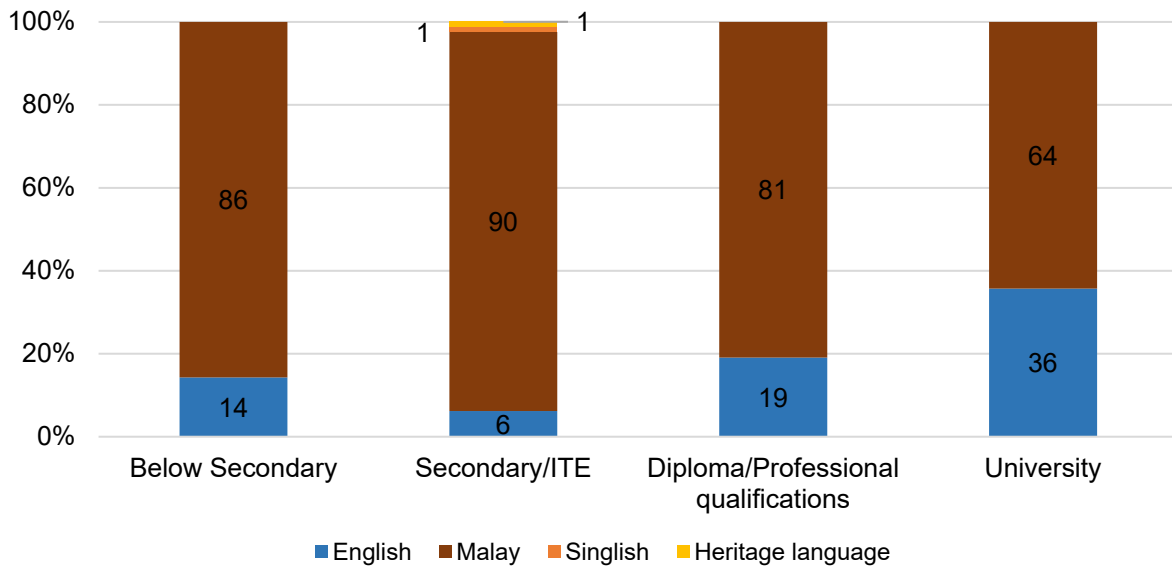
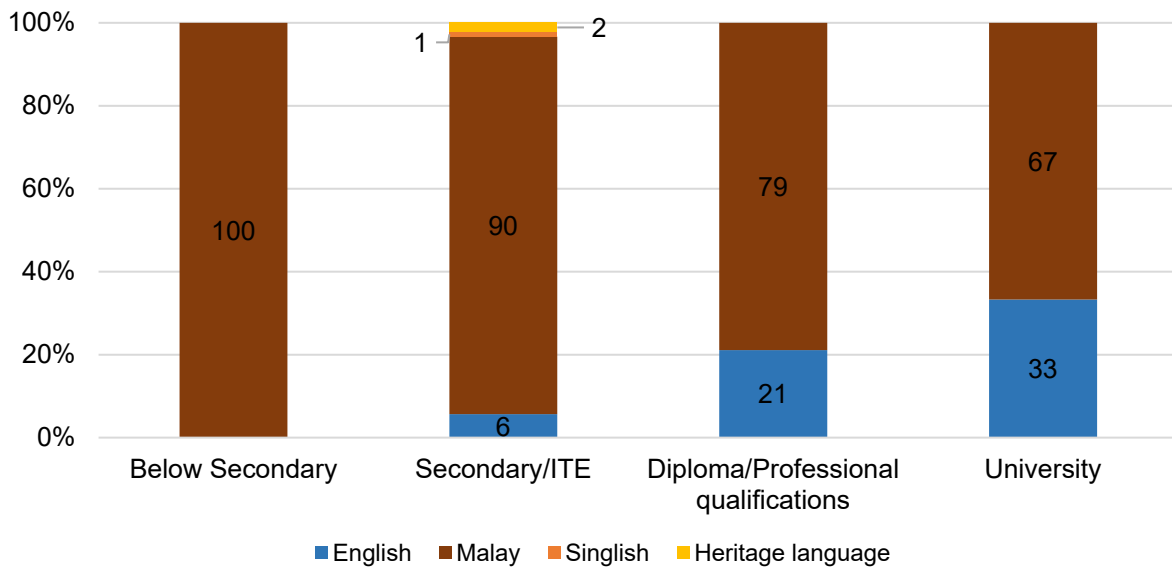


Figure 86: First language used with father for Malay respondents 35 years old and below, by education level (2013)

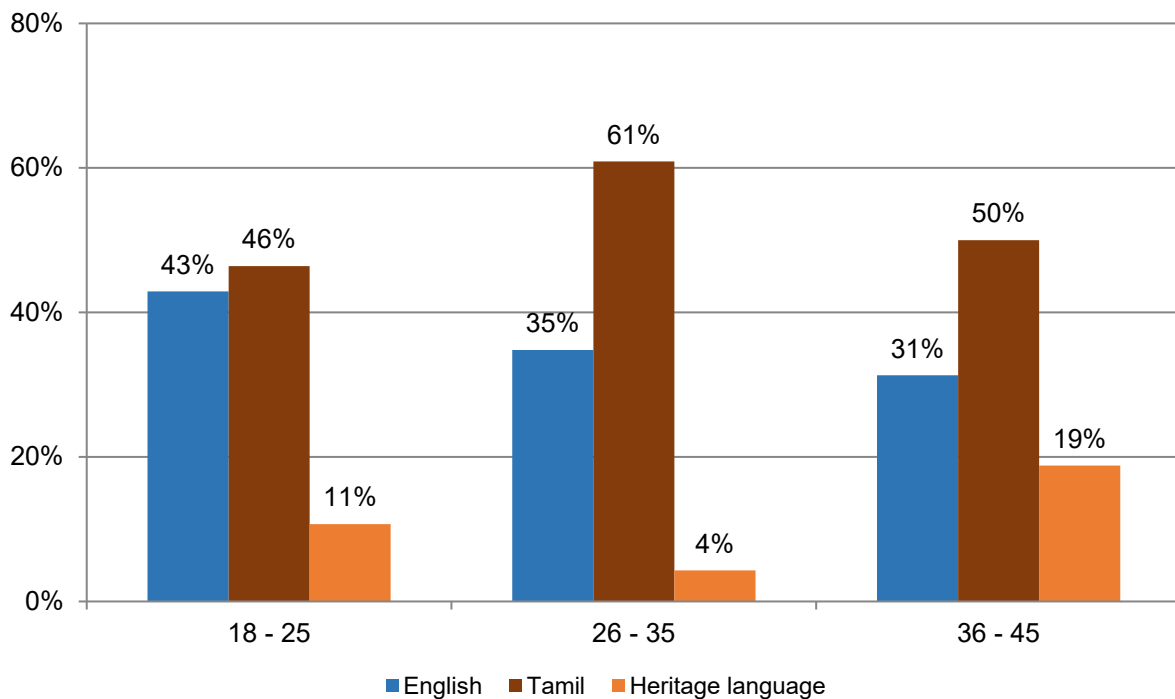


4.3.6 While Tamil was still the language most used in father-child communications, larger proportions of 26- to 35-year-old Indians indicated so compared to their younger or older counterparts

The findings for the Indian respondents had some marked differences from the other races. At the outset, the likelihood of frequent English usage with respondents’ fathers decreases gradually with age in line with findings for other ethnicities — 43 per cent for respondents aged 18 to 25 versus 31 per cent for those aged 36 to 45 (see Figure 87). However, respondents who were 26 to 35 years of age, were likely to use Tamil most frequently when communicating

with their fathers, even more so than their older and younger counterparts. Indian participants aged 26 to 35 were also the least likely to use heritage languages in a similar fashion. We posit again that these trends are due to the rising use of other Indian languages (e.g., Hindi, Bengali) due to shifts in population demographics and immigration in recent times — in line with findings from 4.3.2.

Figure 87: Languages used most frequently by Indian respondents with father, by age (2013)



When comparing responses across education levels, we note that Tamil appears to be the preferred language used with fathers among non-degree holding Indian respondents (see Figure 88). However, degree holders were more likely to report English as the most frequent language of communication with their fathers (48 per cent) as opposed to Tamil (39 per cent). These trends hold even when we limit the analysis to respondents 35 years old or younger (see Figure 89). Interestingly, marginally higher proportions of degrees also report the use of heritage languages in communication with fathers (13 per cent for all Indian respondents and 11 per cent for Indians 35 years and younger) compared to their non-degree-holding counterparts (under 5 per cent across all age cohorts).

Figure 88: First language used with father for Indian respondents, by education level (2013)

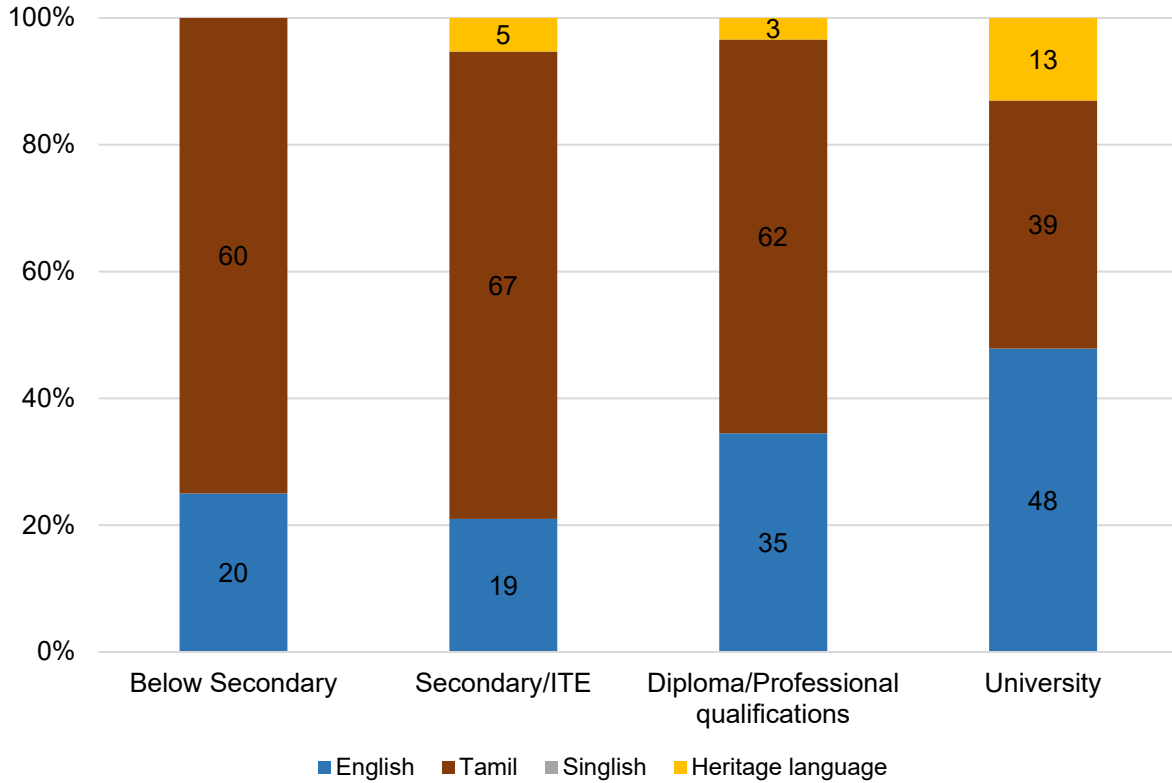
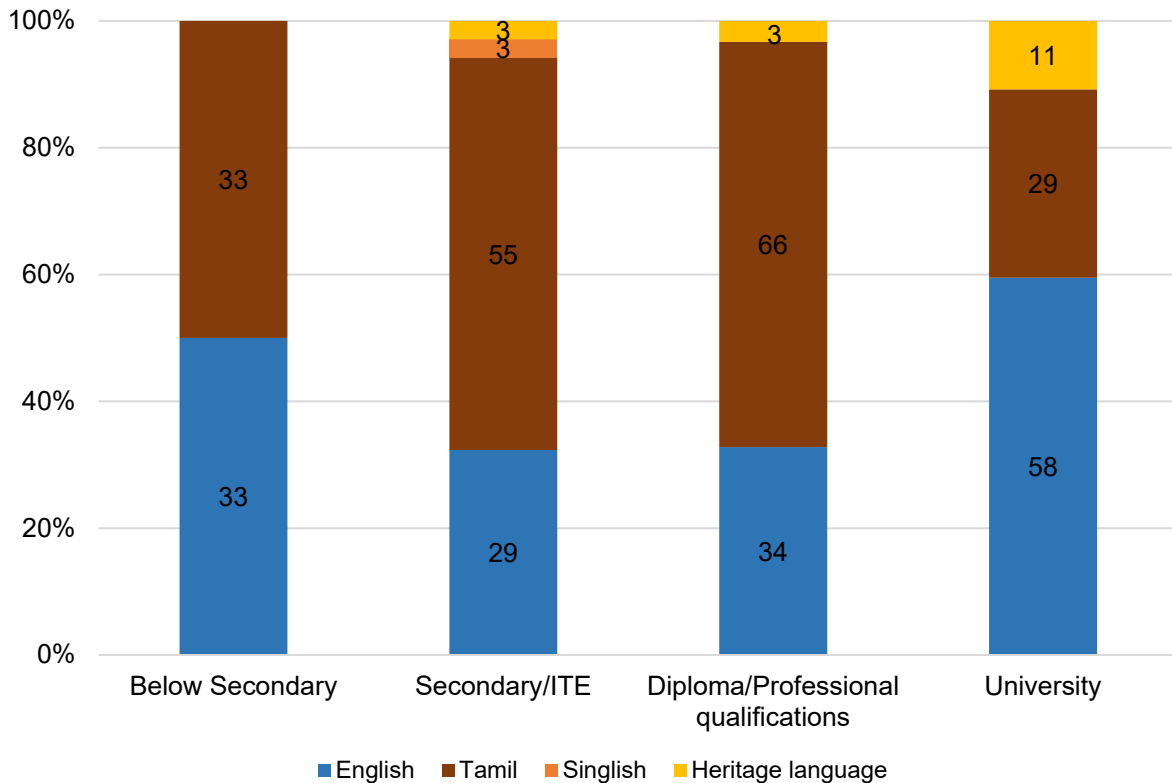


Figure 89: First language used with father for Indian respondents 35 years-old and below, by education level (2013)



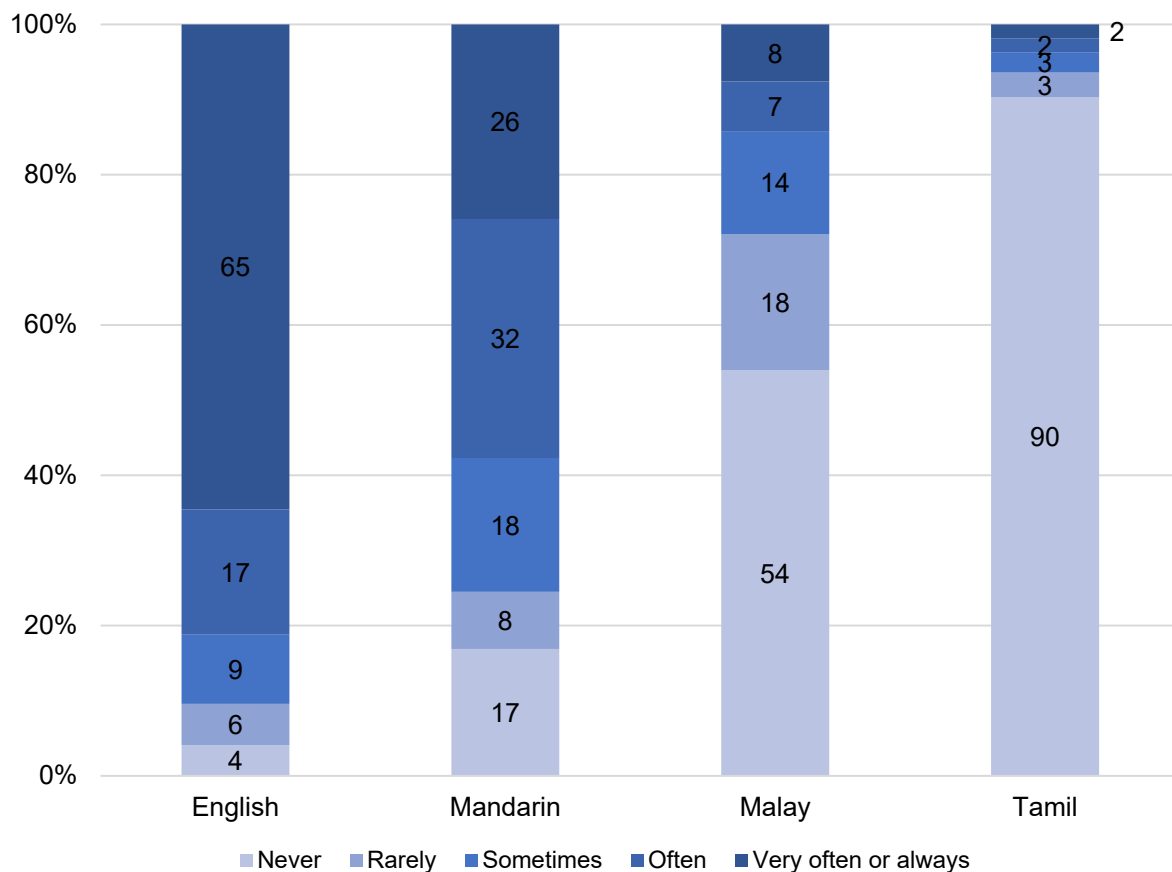
4.4 LANGUAGE USE AT WORK

Respondents in the 2018 RRL wave were also asked about the frequency with which they used various languages when communicating with co-workers in workplace settings. Insights from their responses enable some level of understanding with regard to the outcomes of English as the official working language, alongside the use of other official Mother Tongues.

4.4.1 English was still the most used language in the workplace, though significant numbers also reported frequently using Mandarin

The majority of respondents reported speaking English “very often” or “always” at work (65 per cent; see Figure 90). With respondents of all ethnicities included in the statistical breakdown, we note that more than a quarter of respondents reported speaking Mandarin “very often” or “always” at work — in line with the majority status of ethnic Chinese who are far more likely to encounter situations whereby Mandarin is understood by all their colleagues. As expected, less than 10 per cent of all respondents speak in Malay or Tamil “very often” or “always”, given these are minority-race languages. It is imperative to note that this result potentially indicates the possibility for ethnicity-based social exclusion in workplaces, whereby minority races may encounter the use of Mandarin rather than English, the official working language.

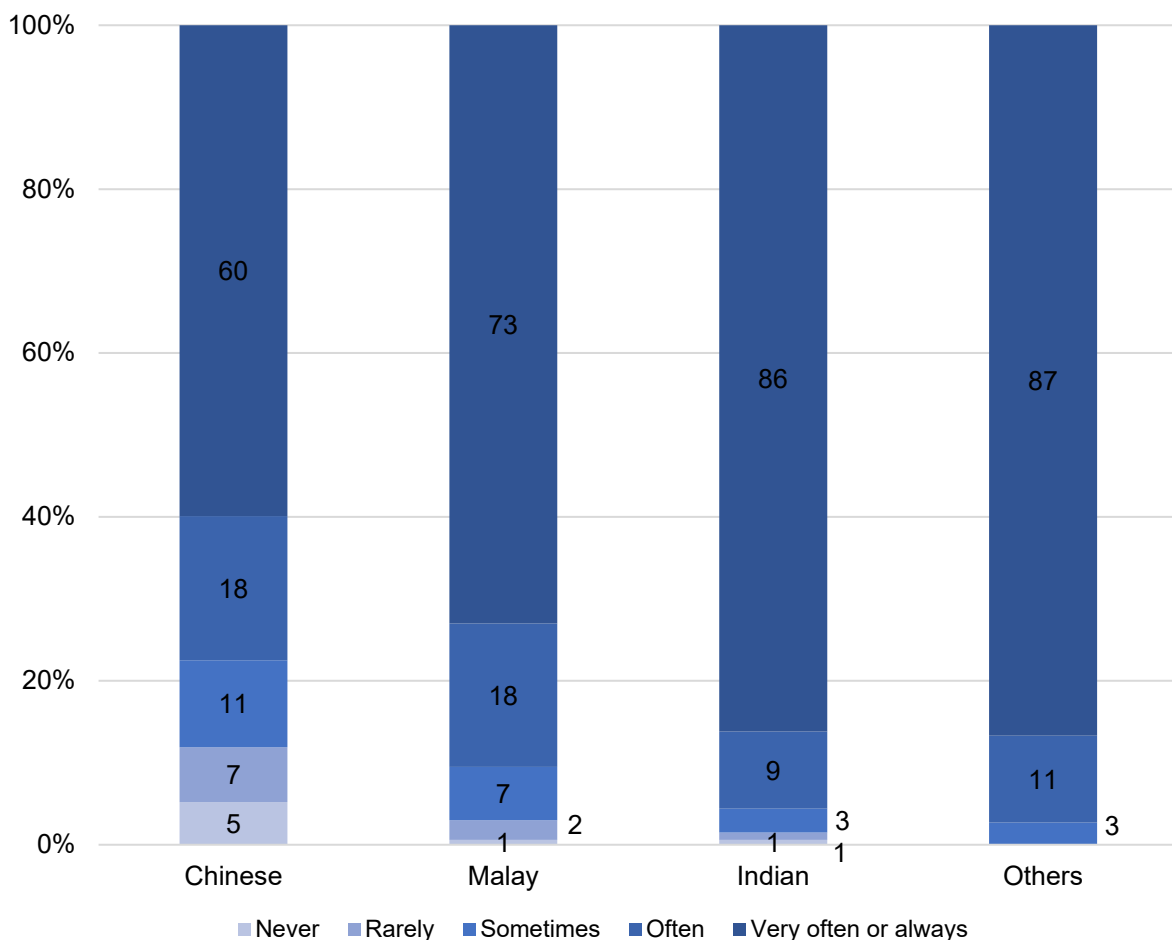
Figure 90: Frequency of various language use at work (2018)



4.4.2 The frequent use of Mandarin in the workplace was due to the majority status of ethnic Chinese, statistically entailing greater likelihood of racially homogeneous workplaces

The frequency at which various languages are used at work is then analysed according to race. Mirroring previous trends, Chinese respondents were the least likely to use English “very often” or “always at work” (60 per cent), as compared to ethnic minorities (73 to 87 per cent; see Figure 91). In addition, Chinese respondents were the most likely to “never” or “rarely speak in English at work (12 per cent). This might be a result of racially homogenous workplaces, such as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) run predominantly by Chinese families, where English usage is not a prerequisite. The usage of Mandarin in possibly racially heterogeneous workplaces may pose difficulties to ethnic minorities.

Figure 91: Frequency of English usage at work, by race (2018)

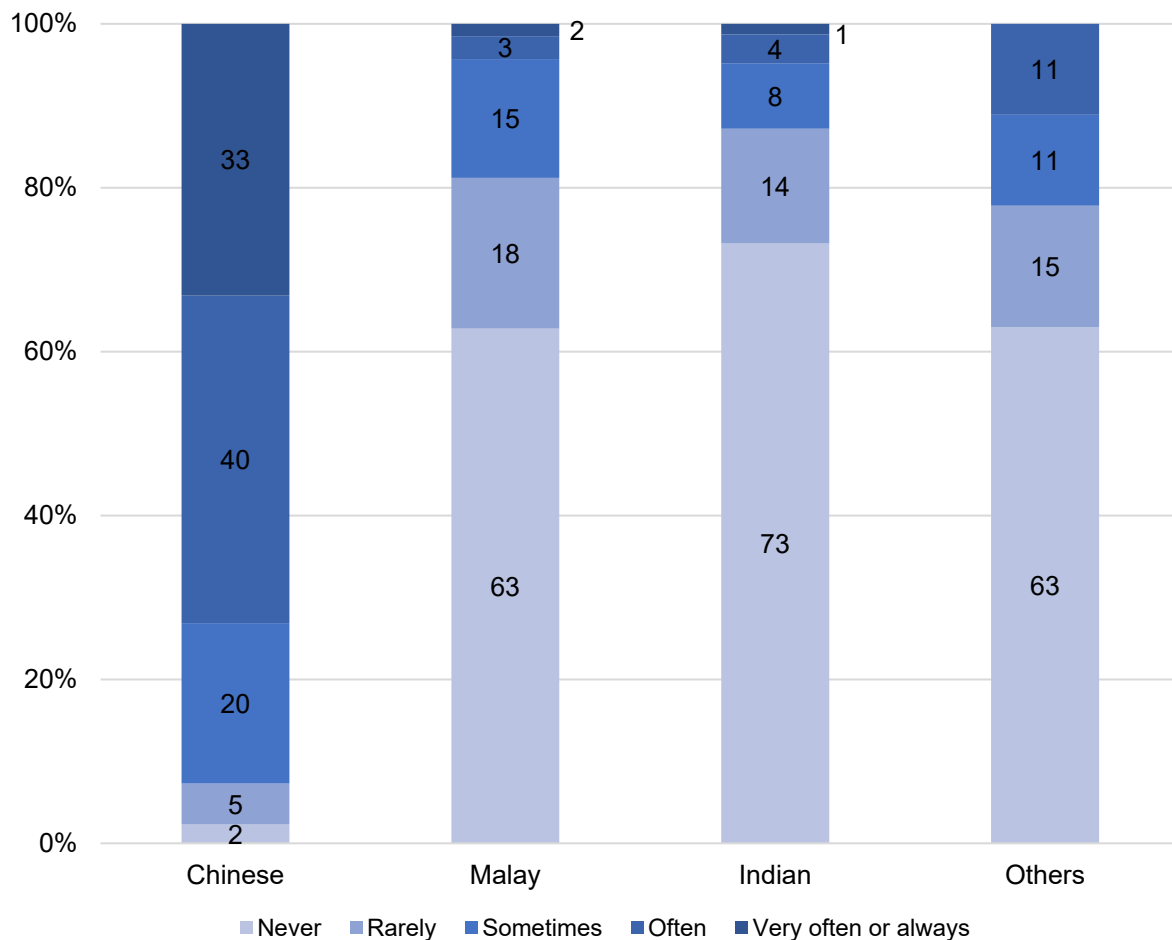


4.4.3 A significant minority of non-Chinese respondents indicated the use of Mandarin in the workplace at least “sometimes”

As highlighted previously, Chinese respondents were the most likely to speak in Mandarin “very often” or “always at work” (33 per cent), as compared to ethnic minorities (see Figure

92). However, it is interesting to note that substantial proportions of Malays (20 per cent), Indians (13 per cent), and respondents from other ethnic groups (22 per cent) indicate speaking in Mandarin at least “sometimes” at work. This could be indicative of 1) a significant minority of non-Chinese individuals picking up and using Mandarin in the workplace in order to better integrate; and 2) the workings of a multi-ethnic social construct in Singapore where individuals learn and use languages over and above their “officially” designated ones.

Figure 92: Frequency of Mandarin usage at work, by race (2018)

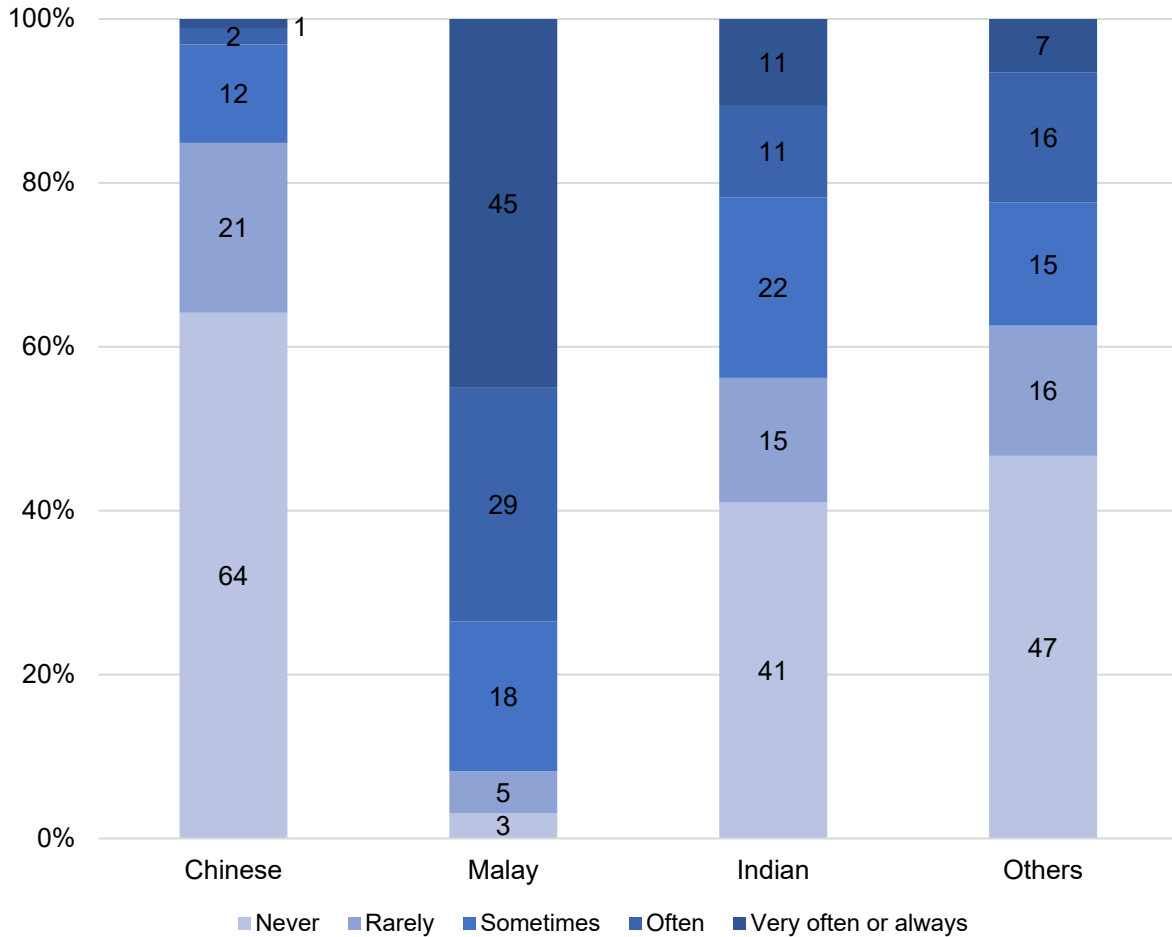


4.4.4 A significant minority of Chinese and Indian respondents likewise indicated the use of Malay at least “sometimes” in the workplace

Alongside our findings in 4.4.3 indicating a significant portion of ethnic minorities using Mandarin in workplaces, we additionally note the use of Malay by a sizeable proportion of Chinese respondents too — though the proportion is lower. While Malay respondents were the most likely to speak in Malay “very often” or “always at work” as expected (45 per cent), 15 per cent of Chinese indicate speaking in Malay at least “sometimes” at work (see Figure 93). The corresponding figure for Indians is 44 per cent, which suggests an augmented level of multi-ethnic interactions between the Indians and Malays as has been discussed in 4.1.2. More of the Chinese respondents who used Malay occasionally also tended to be older. This

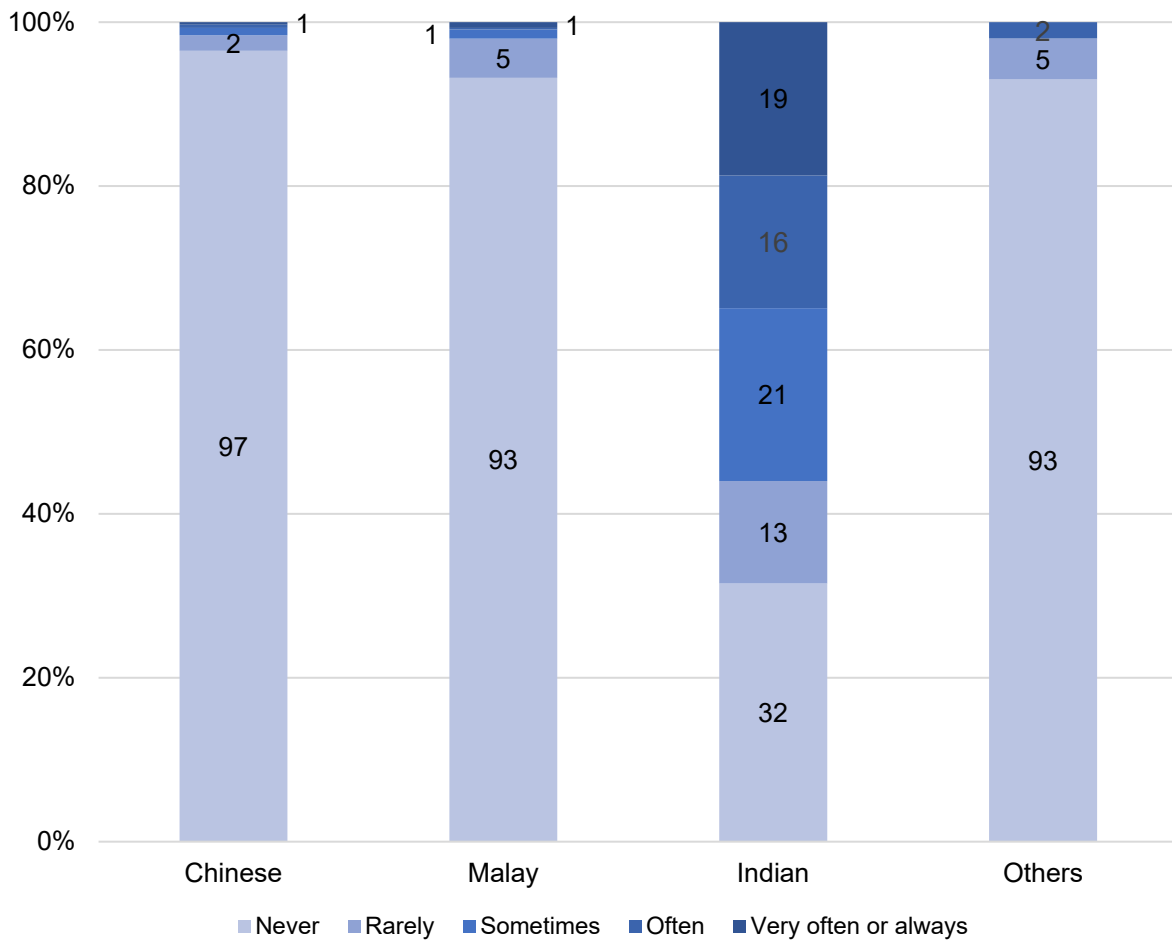
is consistent given that the use of Malay (at least “bazaar Malay”) was commonplace before and immediately after independence in Singapore (Chew, 2006; 2010).

Figure 93: Frequency of Malay usage at work, by race (2018)



Only 19 per cent of Indians indicate speaking Tamil “very often” or “always at work” — an even lower proportion relative to their responses for the Malay language (Figure 94). The corresponding figures for the use of Tamil by other ethnicities are below 5 per cent. We posit this is due to 1) the already-heterogeneous nature of the Indian community regarding the use of their Mother Tongue — for which many Indians speak some language other than Tamil (e.g., Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu); 2) the relative difficulty of non-Tamils picking up a working knowledge of Tamil due to immense differences in script and semantics compared to English and Malay (Ronen et al., 2014); and 3) the relative size of the Indian community compared to the Chinese and Malays, entailing diminished need to utilise Tamil in the workplace.

Figure 94: Frequency of Tamil usage at work, by race (2018)



4.5 APPROPRIATENESS OF SINGLISH USE

Respondents in the 2018 RRL wave were asked a series of questions on the appropriateness of using Singlish across different contexts. While Singlish is often deemed undesirable in formal situations, we query the views of RRL respondents on the use of Singlish across six scenarios to better understand the general perceptions of appropriateness in using such vernacular English as compared to “standard” English. These scenarios are listed in Table 7. A broadly defined hierarchy of situations is assumed, ranging from the context of education whereby we assume individuals will be generally averse to the use of Singlish due to prerogatives of imparting Standard English in curricula, to conversing with family or friends whereby the use of vernaculars is in keeping with the informal context.

Table 7: Situations listed for indication of Singlish use appropriateness in RRL

A. By school teachers during lessons (Education)	G. By radio or television presenters (Media)
B. By government officials or MPs during speeches (State, Official)	H. With stallholders at hawker centres or food courts (Commerce)
C. By government officials or MPs during informal interactions with residents (State, Informal)	I. With sales staff at department stores (Commerce)
D. With colleagues at work (Workplace)	J. By counter staff at government departments (State)
E. In emails to colleagues (Workplace)	K. Between family members (Private Relations)
F. With supervisors at work (Workplace)	L. Between friends or classmates (Private Relations)

4.5.1 Singlish is considered most appropriate in private settings such as conversations with family and friends, but not in educational settings and official state communications

At the outset, the majority of respondents remained averse to the use of Singlish in educational settings, as well as official state communications. Approximately two-thirds of respondents indicated it was “never appropriate” or “rarely appropriate” for teachers to use Singlish during lessons in school settings, as well as for government officials or Members of Parliament (MPs) to use Singlish in their speeches for public consumption (see Figure 95). These results support the premise that Standard English is viewed as the *de facto* language in keeping with the formal nature of state communications, as well as the importance attributed to the cultivation of Standard English proficiency in schools.

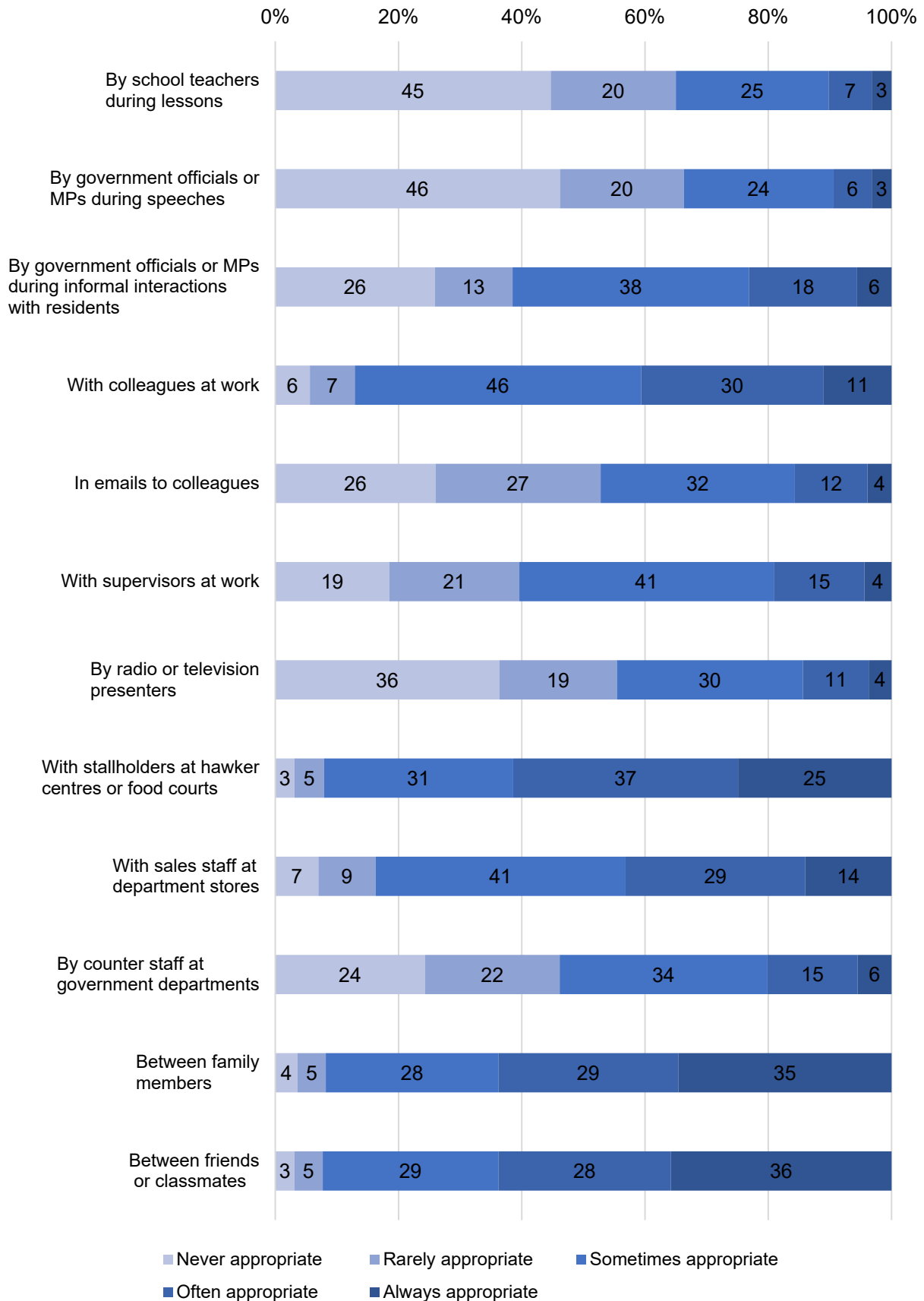
Respondents also attributed significant importance to the use of Standard English, as opposed to Singlish by the media and written communications in workplace contexts. Over half of respondents indicated it was “never appropriate” or “rarely appropriate” for radio or television broadcasters (55 per cent) and workplace emails (53 per cent) to incorporate Singlish. These trends reflect majority views of the media in Singapore as a relative bastion of the use of Standard English in line with state prerogatives, and the formal nature of written communications in a work setting.

Opinion is more divided with regard to the use of Singlish for state representatives in less formal settings. Forty-six per cent of respondents indicated it was “never appropriate” or “rarely appropriate” for counter staff working in government departments to communicate in Singlish. However, 34 per cent felt it was “sometimes appropriate”, with the remaining 21 per cent felt it was “often” or “always appropriate”. This reflects divergences in viewpoints regarding the formal (or informal) nature of service-level staff representing the state in communications with citizens. Similar trends were observed regarding the use of Singlish in informal communications between government officials and MPs with residents.

Meanwhile, the use of Singlish in informal workplace contexts has more support amongst the populace. A substantial proportion indicated some level of ambivalence or tractability to this regard; 46 per cent felt it was “sometimes appropriate” for Singlish to be used when speaking with colleagues at work, while 41 per cent felt it was “often” or “always appropriate”. While these proportions drop in a scenario whereby respondents speak in Singlish to their supervisors, this is possibly due to the need for more “proper” interactions in keeping with hierarchical disparity.

Finally, the use of Singlish is considered to be most appropriate by respondents in private settings, such as between family members, friends, or classmates. Nearly two-thirds indicated it was “often” or “always appropriate” for Singlish to be used in these settings, with 28–29 per cent of respondents indicating it was at least “sometimes appropriate”. Singlish was also widely accepted (at least “sometimes” or more often) in the context of interactions in the commerce space — such as with stallholders at hawker centres or food courts (93 per cent), and with sales staff in department stores (84 per cent).

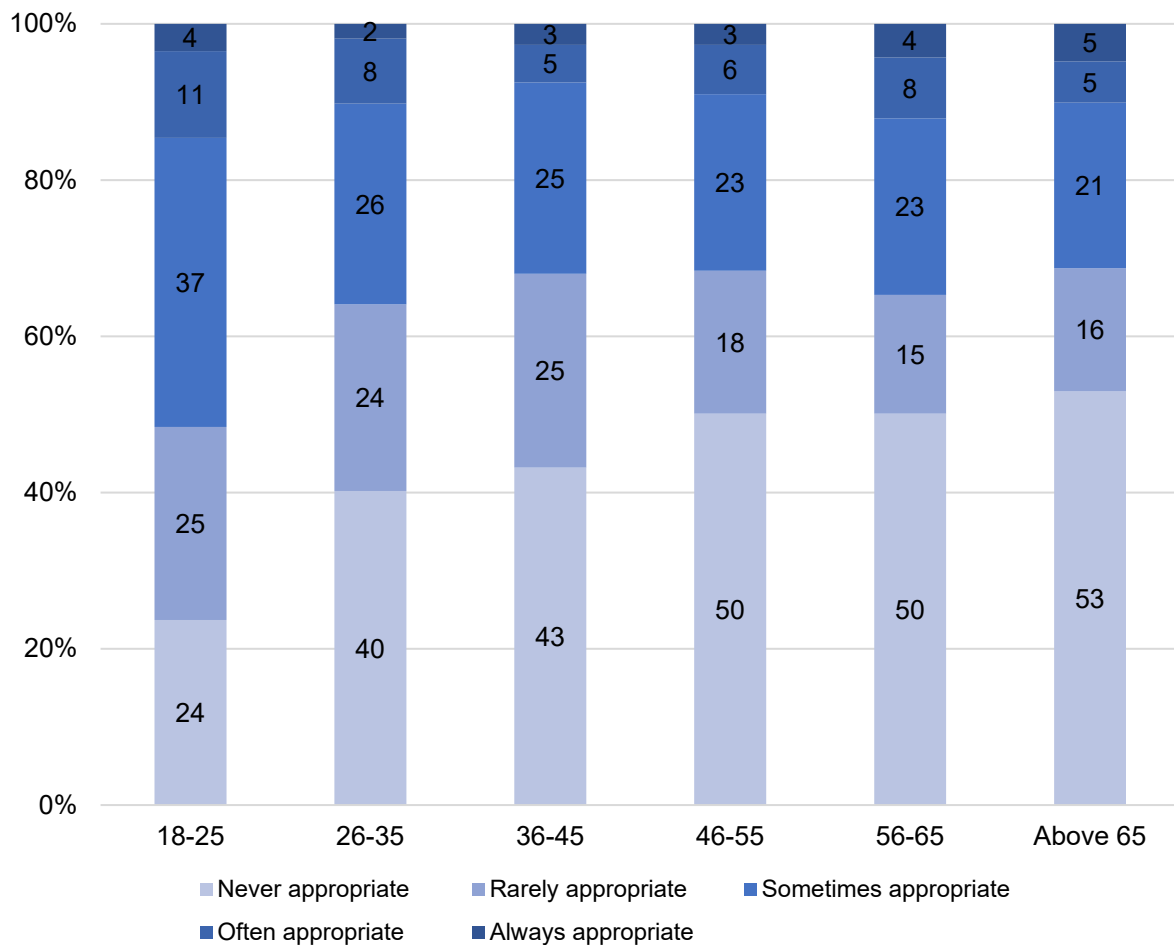
Figure 95: Appropriateness of the use of Singlish in different contexts (2018)



4.5.2 Perceptions on the appropriateness of Singlish use in educational contexts are negatively impacted by age and education levels

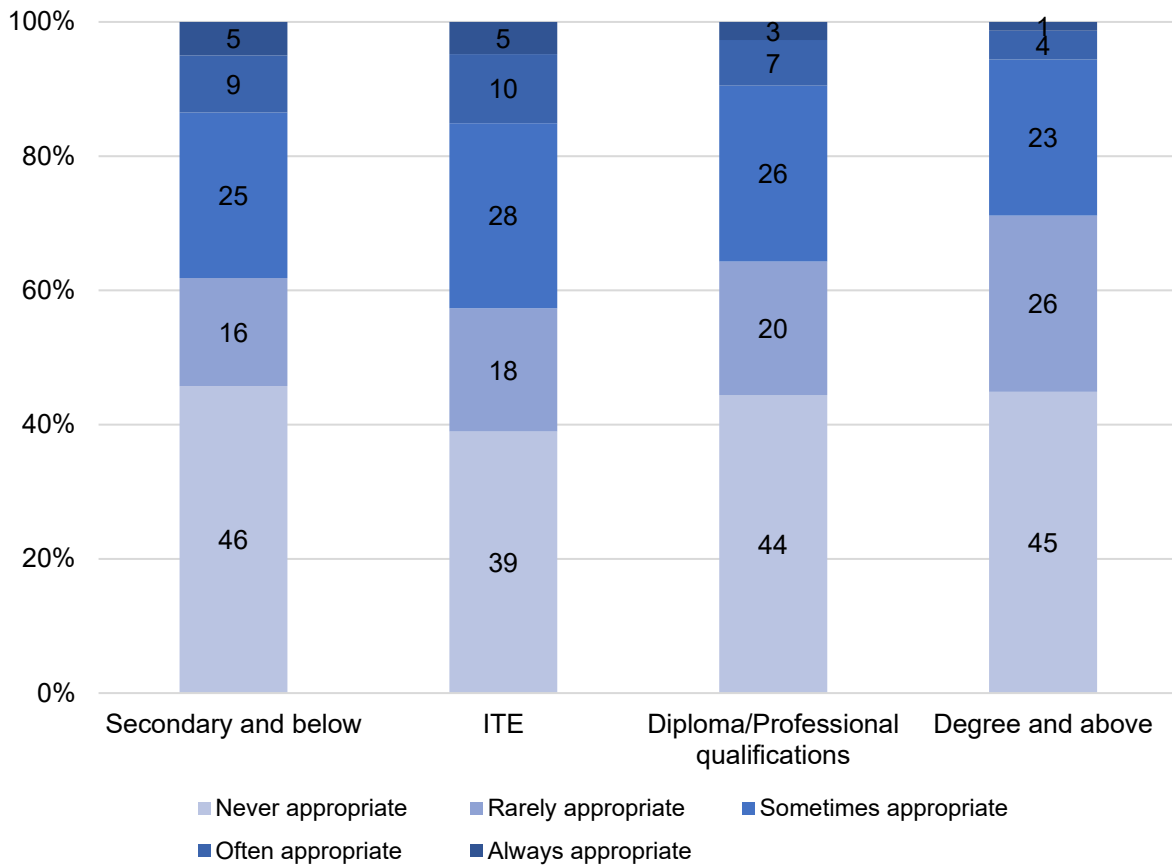
When we analysed the responses to the education scenario by age, we found that older respondents were generally more likely to think that it is “never appropriate” for teachers to use Singlish during lessons in school. For example, only 24 per cent of younger respondents aged between 18 and 25 felt that it is “never appropriate” for teachers to use Singlish during lessons in school, compared to over half of older respondents aged above 65 (see Figure 96).

Figure 96: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by school teachers during lessons, by age group (2018)



In addition, when responses were analysed by education level, we find that higher-educated respondents were also more likely to deem Singlish usage by teachers during lessons in school as inappropriate. However, education exerts a diminished impact on perception relative to age cohort. Degree-holding respondents were the most likely to deem Singlish usage by teachers during lessons “never” or “rarely appropriate”. Seventy-one per cent of them found it inappropriate, as compared to under two-thirds of non-degree holders (see Figure 97).

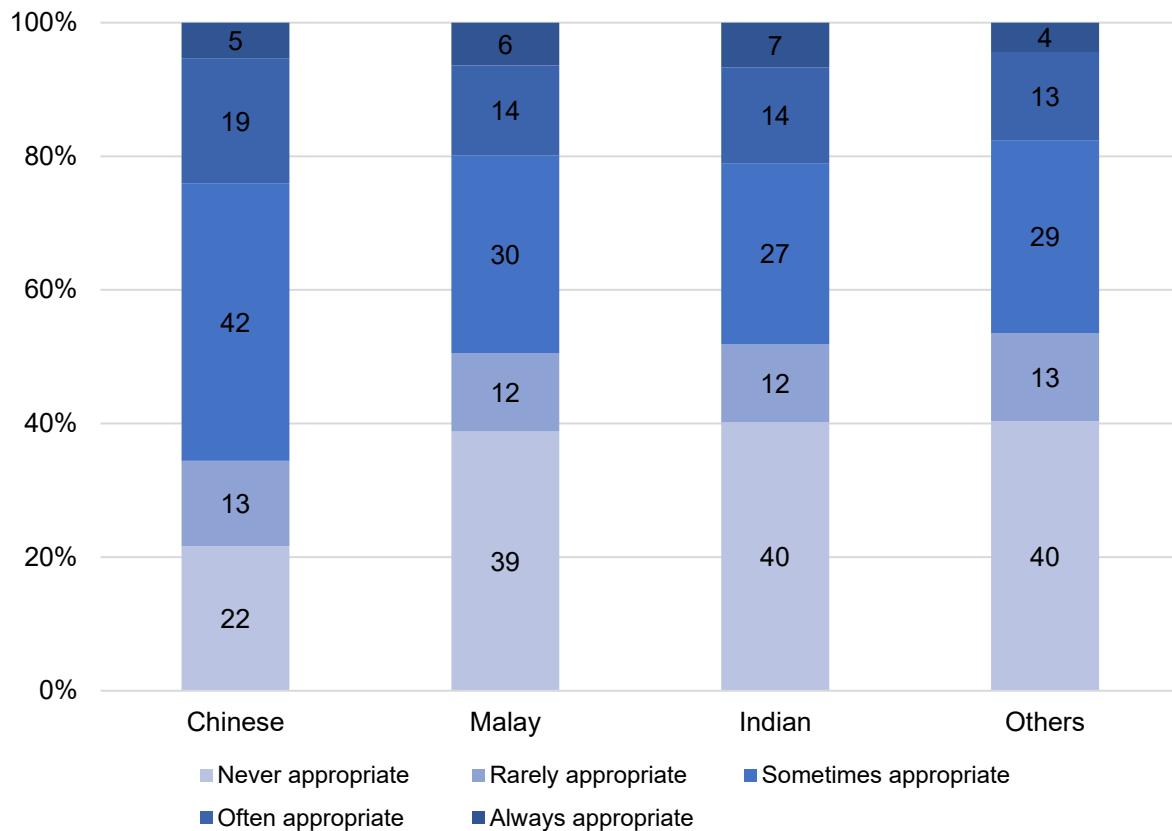
Figure 97: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by school teachers during lessons, by education level (2018)



4.5.3 Perceptions of appropriateness of Singlish use by government officials or MPs in informal interactions with residents are related to ethnicity and education levels

When we analysed the results by ethnicity, we find Chinese respondents least likely to think that it is “never appropriate” for government officials or MPs to use Singlish during informal interactions with residents (22 per cent; see Figure 98). This is in contrast to approximately 40 per cent of non-Chinese respondents indicating likewise. Two potential reasons for this difference could be 1) minority ethnicities viewing the use of Standard English in communications between state representatives and citizenry as key to preserving the impartial, non-discriminatory nature of governance; 2) slightly stronger associations of the use of Singlish with the Chinese majority relative to the minority ethnicities, by virtue of the extensive incorporation of Chinese vernaculars in Singlish relative to other languages.

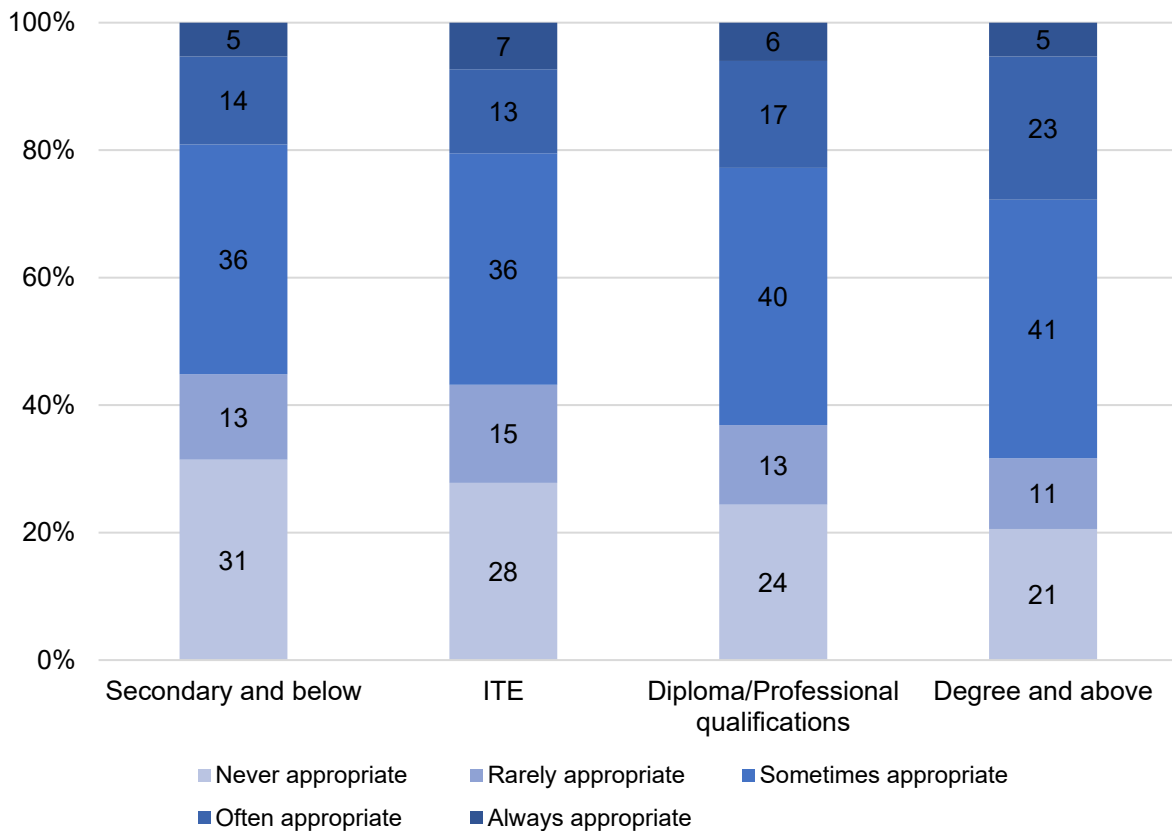
Figure 98: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials or MPs during informal interactions with residents, by race (2018)



Interestingly, respondents who were more highly educated were less likely to think that it is never appropriate for government officials or MPs to use Singlish during their informal interactions with residents. In other words, they were more likely to view Singlish usage by government representatives as appropriate in interactions with citizenry. Only 21 per cent of degree-holding respondents indicated that it is “never appropriate” for government officials or MPs to use Singlish during informal interactions with residents, as compared to 31 per cent of respondents with a below-secondary level of education (see Figure 99).

While this finding seems to stand in contrast with findings on the use of Singlish in educational settings presented in 4.5.2, we posit that higher-educated respondents may have a more nuanced understanding on linguistic appropriateness across different settings, and perhaps perceive the need for state representatives to exhibit a sense of understanding and connection with their electorate through the use of a common vernacular.

Figure 99: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by government officials or MPs during informal interactions with residents, by education level (2018)



4.5.4 In the same vein, perceptions on the appropriateness of Singlish use in work settings and frontline state interactions are related to ethnicity too

When it came to using Singlish at work or frontline public services interactions, non-Chinese respondents were somewhat more likely to find it “never” or “rarely appropriate”. For example, 51 per cent of Chinese respondents felt that it was never or rarely appropriate to use Singlish in email correspondences to colleagues, as compared to 56 and 63 per cent of Malay and Indian respondents, respectively (see Figure 100). Similarly, 37 and 42 per cent of Chinese respondents indicated it was “never” or “rarely appropriate” to use Singlish in communications with workplace superiors and for counter staff in government departments to use Singlish, respectively.

These proportions stand in contrast with over half of non-Chinese respondents indicating likewise (see Figures 101 and 102). These results further support the findings in 4.5.3 on minorities placing greater importance on the non-discriminatory nature of governance, including the use of the neutral Standard English in communications, as well as stronger associations of Singlish with Chinese vernaculars, relative to Malay and Tamil.

Figure 100: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish in emails to colleagues, by race (2018)

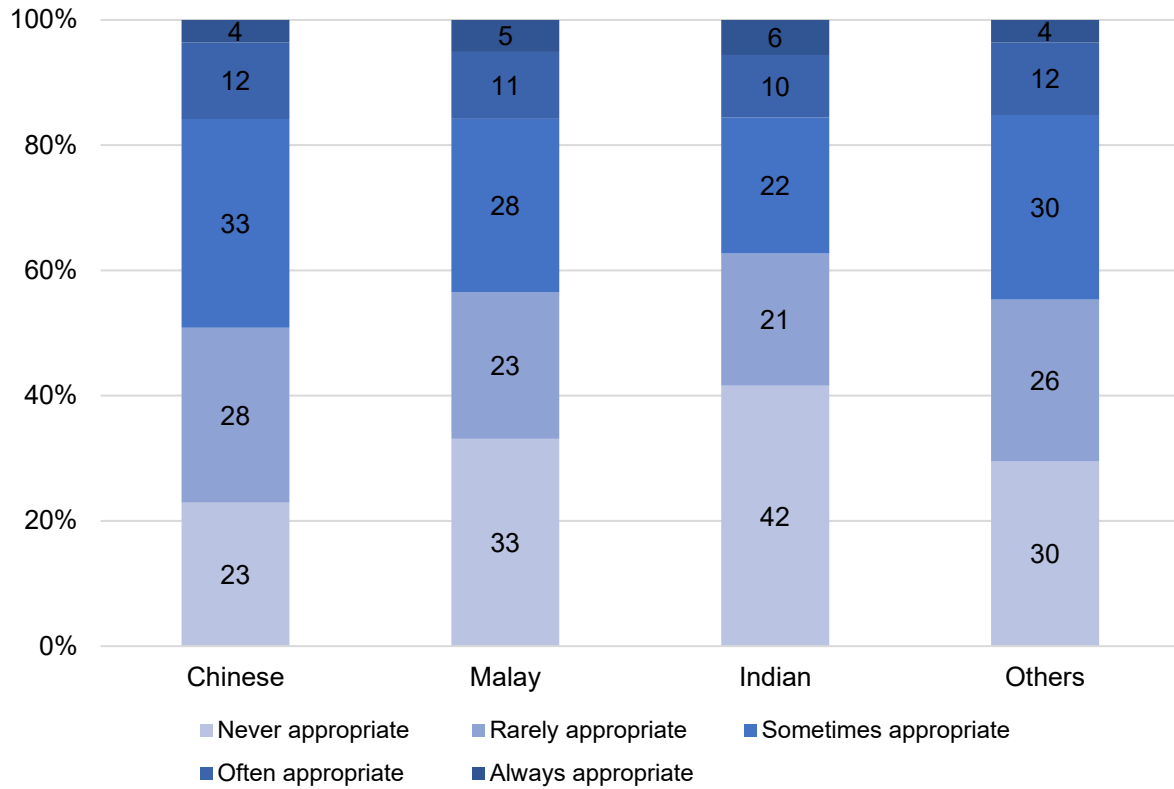


Figure 101: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish with their supervisors at work, by race (2018)

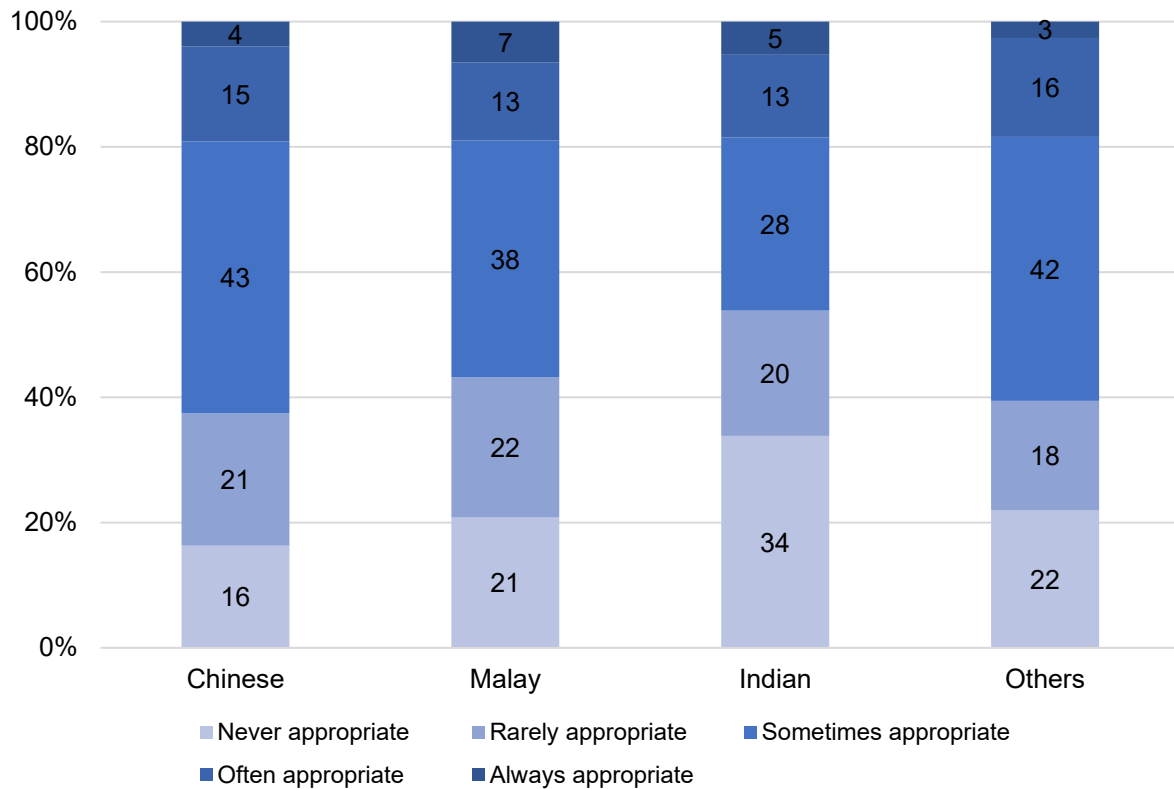
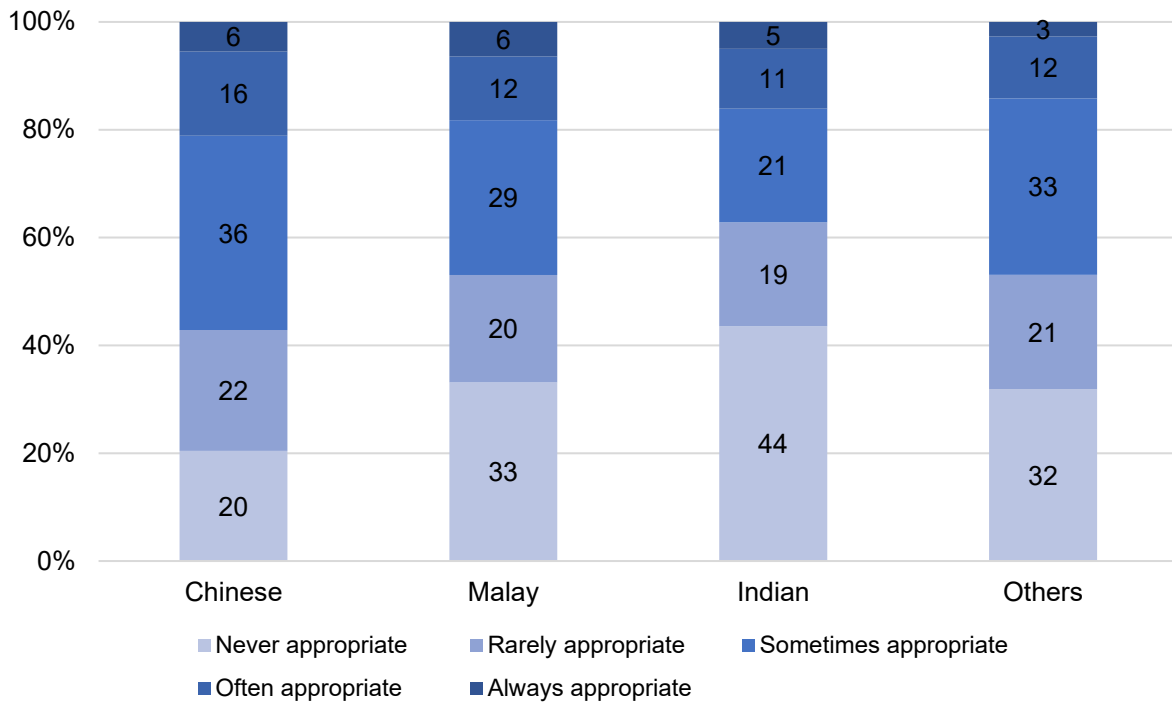


Figure 102: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by counter staff at government departments, by race (2018)



4.5.5 Interestingly, upper-middle class respondents were most likely to view the use of Singlish in work settings and frontline state interactions as appropriate, relative to their less and more-affluent counterparts

We then dissect perceptions of the appropriateness of using Singlish in work and frontline state interaction settings. When the results were analysed by housing type, we find that interestingly, respondents who resided in HDB 5-room, executive and maisonette flats were the most likely to find using Singlish between colleagues at work “always” or “often” appropriate (44 per cent) (see Figure 103). Similarly, over a fifth (22 per cent) of these respondents also felt that the use of Singlish by counter staff at government departments was “always” or “often” appropriate (see Figure 104) — higher than their better-off and less well-off counterparts.

There is no discernible linear relation between housing type and the use of Singlish; instead, we note that respondents residing in the smallest and largest housing types (1–2 Room HDB flats and landed properties) were significantly less likely to view the use of Singlish as “always” or “often” appropriate (36 and 24 per cent for the colleagues and frontline government interaction scenarios, respectively). Perhaps among those who were of lower socio-economic positions, who tend to speak more often in a vernacular language, the use of Singlish seems to be incorrect. Considerable attempts across workplaces to educate service workers about the use of Standard English may also contribute to these trends, since these workers may hail from lower-income backgrounds and housing types. As such they may reason that if English is to be used, it should be a standard variety rather than Singlish.

Figure 103: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish between colleagues at work, by housing type (2018)

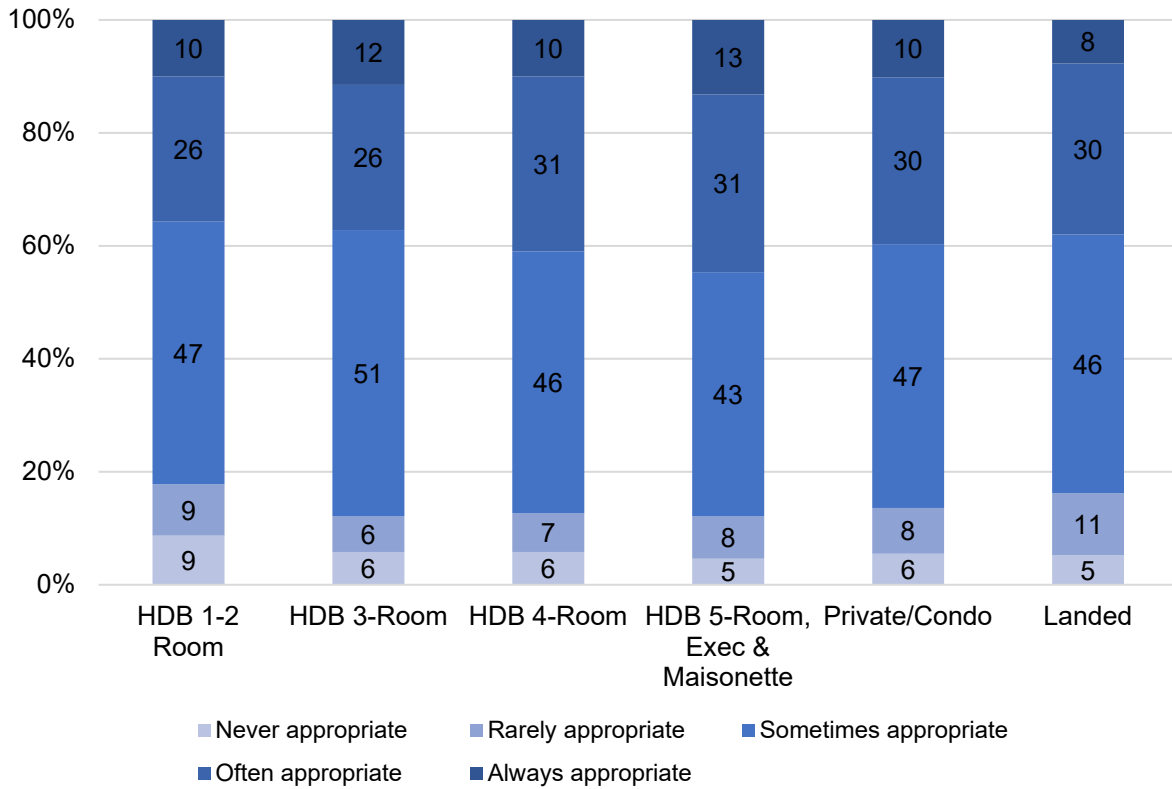
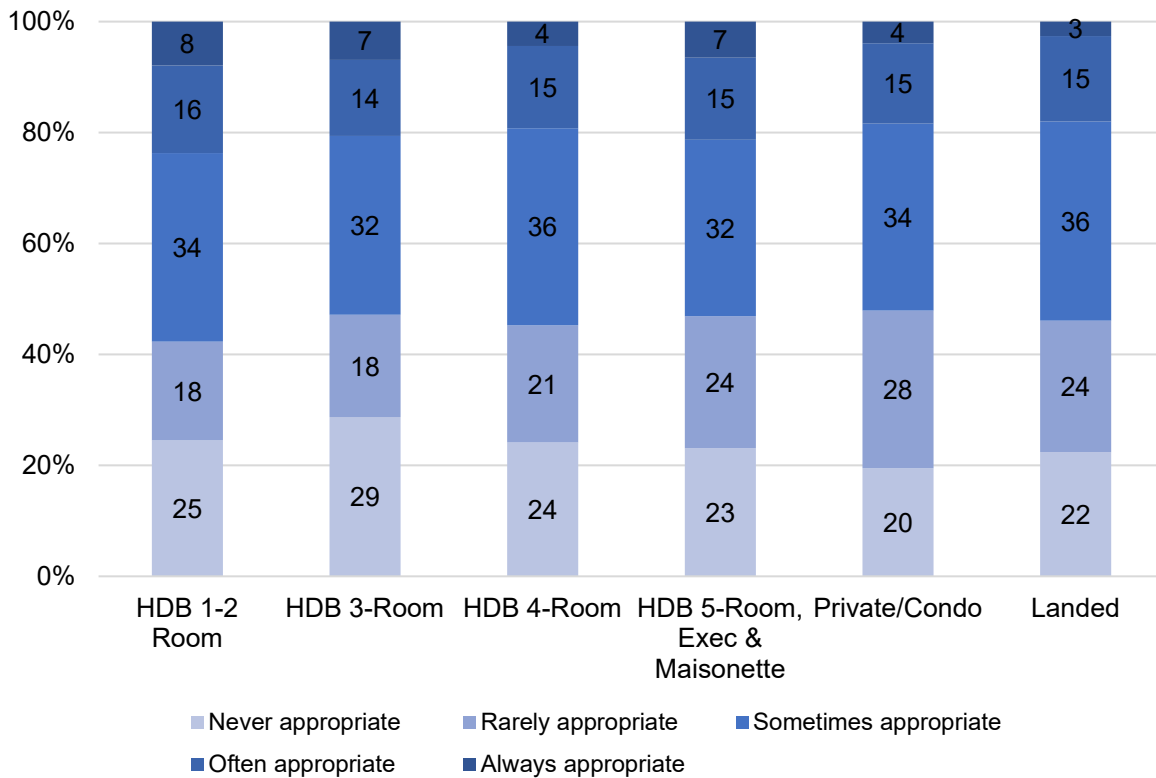


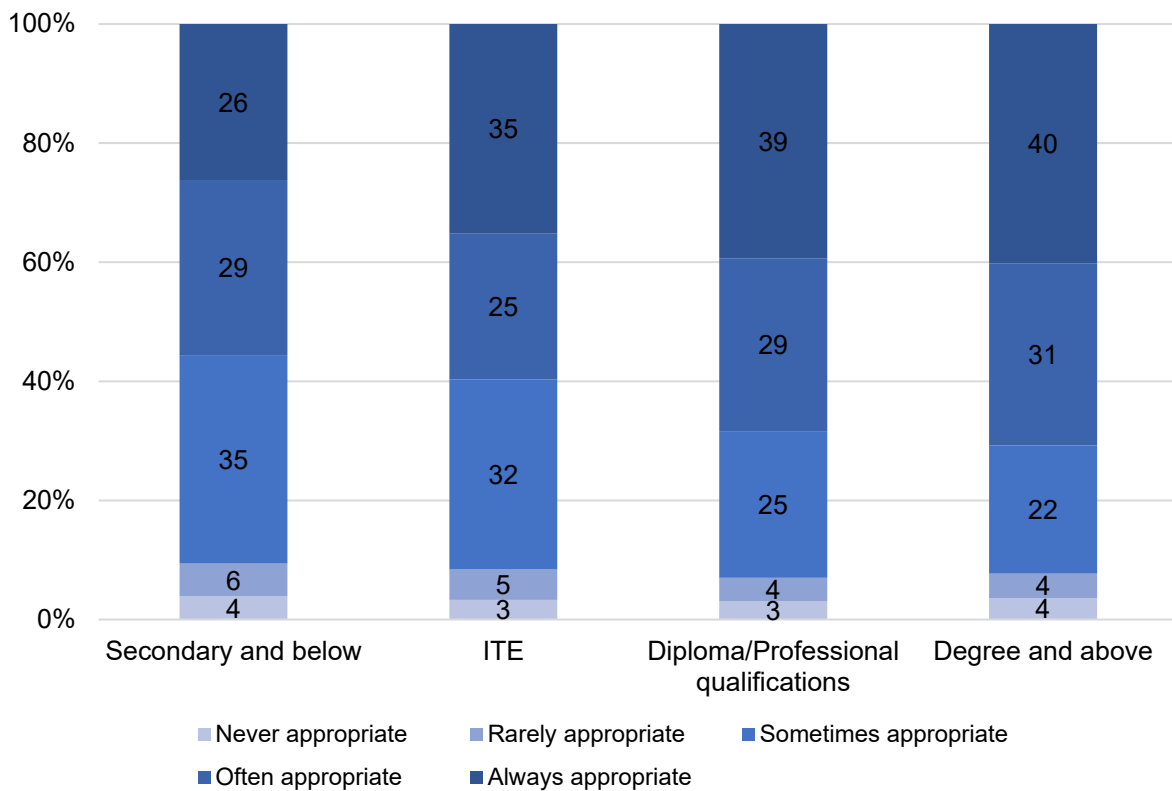
Figure 104: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish by counter staff at government departments, by housing type (2018)



4.5.6 Higher-educated respondents were more likely to deem the use of Singlish in informal, familial settings as appropriate compared to their less-educated peers

Interestingly, respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to deem the usage of Singlish between family members “always” or “often” appropriate relative to their less-educated peers. Seventy-one per cent of degree holders indicated so, as opposed to under 60 per cent of respondents with ITE or lower educational qualifications (see Figure 105). While this finding again seems to stand in contrast with findings on the use of Singlish in educational settings presented in 4.5.2, this could be a result of the ability of more highly-educated groups to code-switch, possibly due to their perception of Singlish as providing “practical and valuable linguistic options” (Goh, 2016, p. 749); alongside a more nuanced understanding of what informal situations entail in terms of linguistic appropriateness, social relevance or connections.

Figure 105: Respondents' perception on the use of Singlish between family members, by education level (2018)





Chapter 5

Language and Identity

CHAPTER 5: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

5.1 LANGUAGE IDENTITY IN SINGAPORE

This section of the survey aims to examine language identity in Singapore and to document the types of languages that resonated the most with respondents of various backgrounds. To capture this, our survey offered respondents several options: English, their official Mother Tongue, Singlish, their father's heritage language, and their mother's heritage language. There was also an option to fill in a language other than the above.

In keeping with previous scholarship, our findings in this chapter are still strongly indicative of how Singaporeans perceive being able to read, write and speak their officially designated Mother Tongue to be important to their ethnic identity. For instance, in a 2017 CNA-IPS Survey on Ethnic Identity in Singapore, more than 86 per cent of respondents across all ethnicities found it at least "somewhat important" for someone who considers himself or herself as a Singaporean Chinese, Malay, or Indian to be able to read, write and speak Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil respectively (Mathew et al., 2017, 21-22).

However, when we take these findings in tandem with those presented below, we note a marginal increase of respondents who identified most with English rather than their official Mother Tongues. The following sections peruse these trends in-depth and across ethnic, age, and education demographics. In general, this reflects the rise of bilingualism in Singapore in line with state policy, as well as the role of bilingualism in sustaining notions of both national identity and ethnic identity in Singapore.

5.1.1 There is a marginal increase in the proportion of the populace identifying with English the most, rather than their Mother Tongue languages

The results show that in 2018, approximately one-third of respondents indicated they identified with English the most, a 4 percentage point increase from 2013 (see Figures 106 and 107). This occurred at the expense of the proportions of respondents indicating they identified most with their official Mother Tongue languages (35 per cent and 28 per cent in 2013 and 2018, respectively). Nonetheless, the figures still illustrate the strength of the state's language policies vis-à-vis the designation of official languages, as well as the Bilingual Education Policy. A growing minority also indicated they identified with Singlish the most (from four per cent in 2013 to eight per cent in 2018).

Figure 106: "Which language do you identify with most?" (2013)

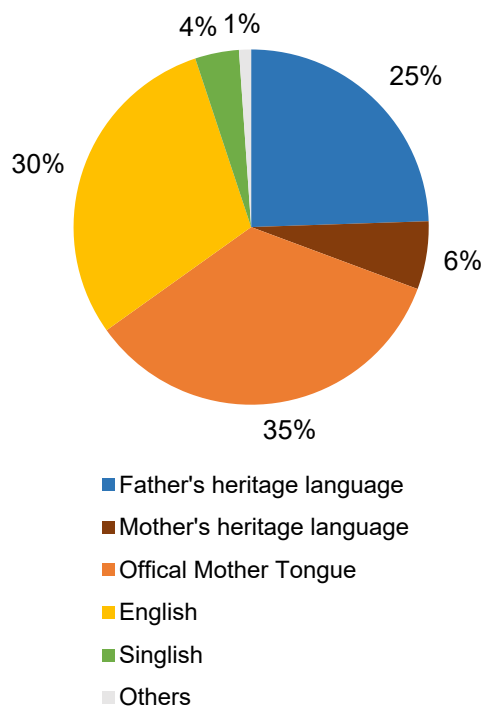
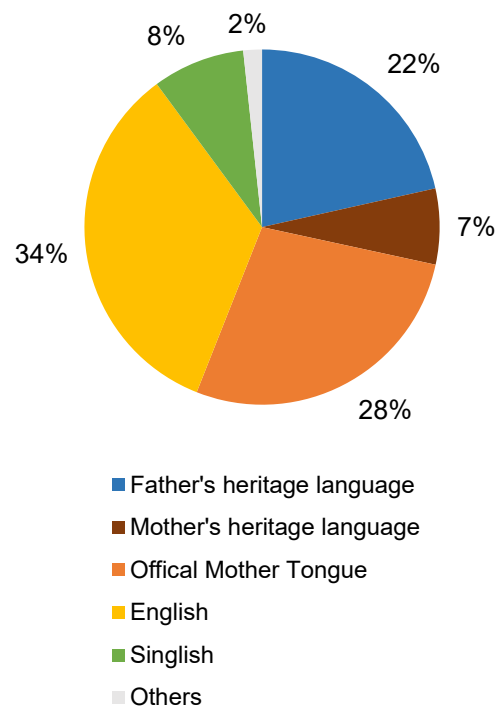


Figure 107: "Which language do you identify with most?" (2018)



5.1.2 The Chinese and Indians have increasingly identified with English as opposed to their Mother Tongues or heritage languages, possibly due to the impact of globalisation and immigration. Meanwhile, the links between Malay language and identity remain, or have grown more robust

We then examined ethnic differences in language identity. In 2013, more Malay and Indian respondents were likely to identify with their parents' heritage language, Chinese respondents had the strongest sense of identification with Mandarin, their official Mother Tongue language (see Figure 108).

This changed in 2018. Malay respondents were more likely to indicate they identified with their official Mother Tongue language the most; an illustration of the strong links between Malay language and identity (see Figure 109). Meanwhile, Indians were more likely to identify with English. Similarly more in the Chinese community had shifted their identification away from Mandarin towards English — a sign of increased influence of English-speaking economies and cultures in industry and society leading to more cosmopolitan, global identities adopted by perhaps both Singaporean Indians and Chinese.

Figure 108: "Which language do you identify with most", by race (2013)

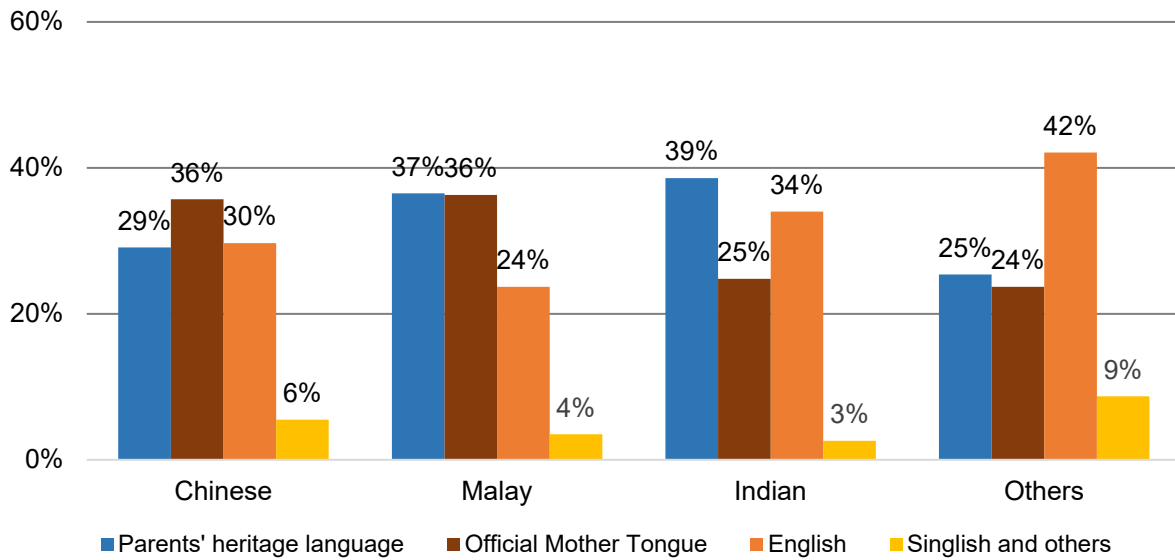
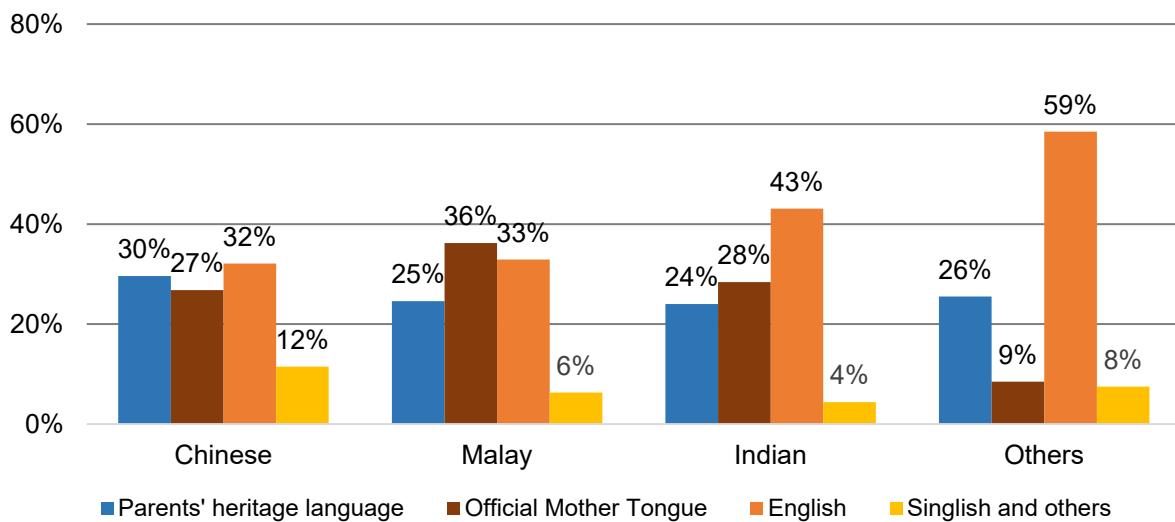


Figure 109: "Which language do you identify with most", by race (2018)



5.1.3 Younger respondents were more likely to identify the most with English, in line with findings on language proficiency. Older cohorts gravitated towards their Mother Tongues and heritage languages anchoring their identity, although this trend has diminished marginally

We then analysed the language respondents identified with the most by age. We find that respondents between 18 and 25 years of age identified the most with English, in contrast with their older peers (see Figures 110 and 111). This aligns with previous findings of younger respondents being more proficient in English. In addition, identification with English also rose slightly for 18–25 year olds in 2018. Older respondents in 2013 were more likely to identify

with their respective Mother Tongue languages; 29 per cent of 18–25 year-old respondents reported identifying with their Mother Tongue language as compared to 38 per cent of 51–65 year-old respondents. Interestingly, this identification with Mother Tongue amongst older cohorts dropped in 2018. More respondents 51 years old and older reported identifying most with their parents' heritage language rather than their official Mother Tongue language, in contrast to reversed trends in 2013. This shift may be due to a renaissance of heritage languages in Singapore society, with increased interest in tracing one's roots and revitalising heritage languages alongside a perceived relaxation of state attitudes (Agence France-Pressé 2017; Bokhorst-Heng & Silver, 2017; Ng, 2017).

Figure 110: "Which language do you identify with most", by age (2013)

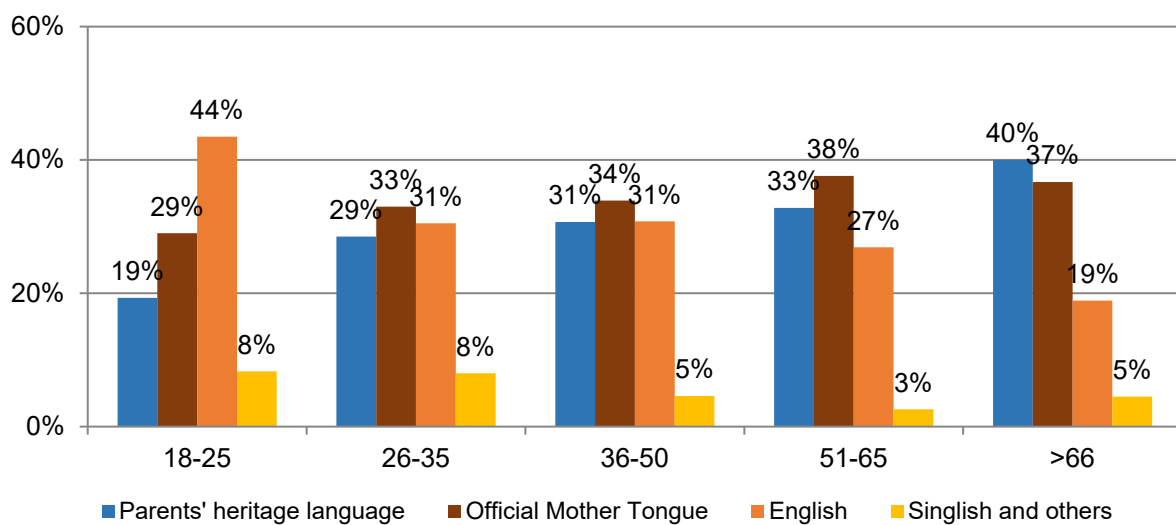
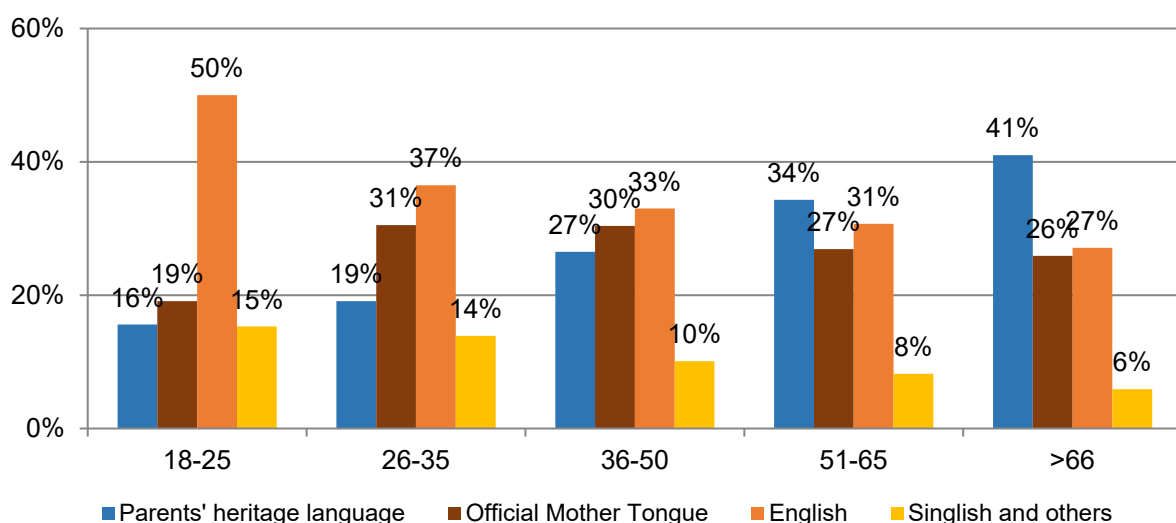


Figure 111: "Which language do you identify with most", by age (2018)



5.1.4 The link between affluence and identification with English language remained strong

We subsequently analyse results by income level. In 2013, respondents earning less than \$3,500 tend to identify more with official Mother Tongue or heritage languages, while respondents earning more than \$3,500 tended to identify more with English (see Figure 112). These trends hold true in 2018 as well. In 2018, respondents earning less than \$1,500 identified more with heritage languages, while respondents across all other income groups identified more with English (Figure 113). This is indicative of the greater economic value attached to English relative to other languages, an attachment that is universally recognised in Singapore.

Figure 112: "Which language do you identify with most", by income (2013)

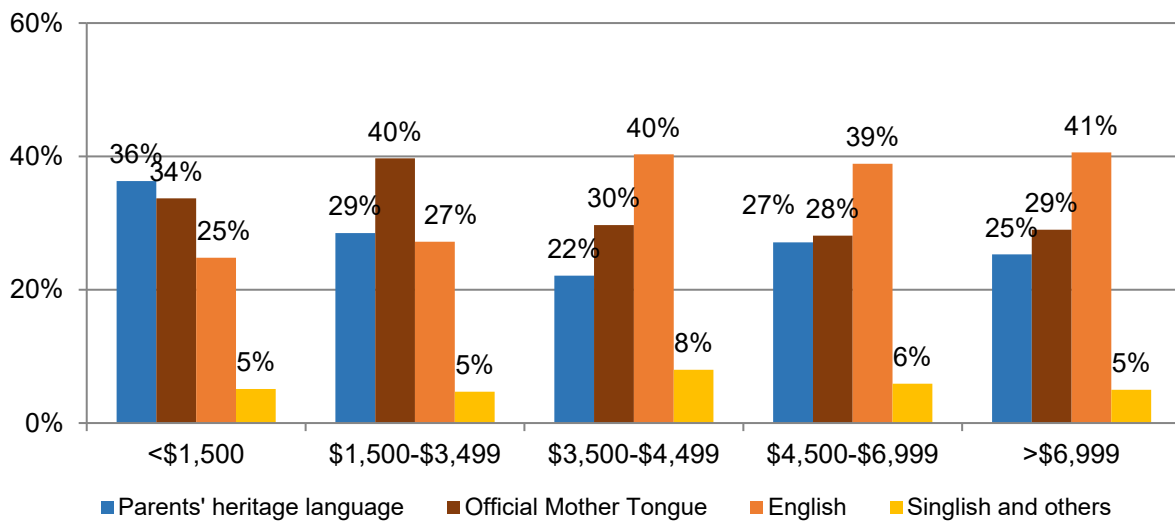
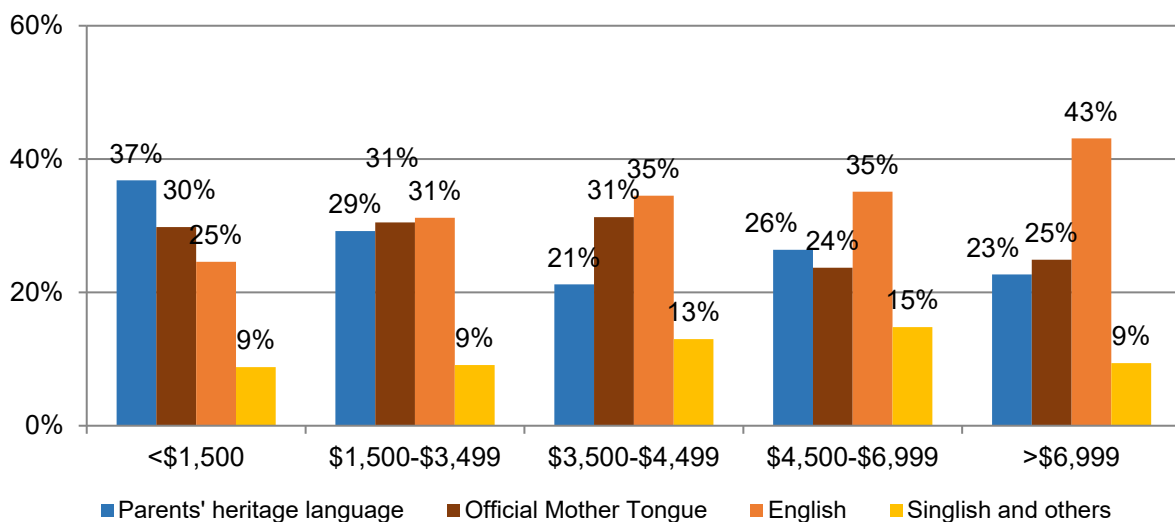


Figure 113: "Which language do you identify with most", by income (2018)



5.1.5 Nationality and most frequently used language are the top two components identified by respondents as key contributors to their sense of identity

To examine the rank and importance of language as an identity component, we asked respondents to rank the importance of language, along with other identity components, to one's overall sense of identity. These components are listed in Table 8.

Table 8: Components of identity listed for ranking by importance in RRL

A. Race	F. Gender (not included in 2018 RRL iteration)
B. Religion	G. Educational level (not included in 2018 RRL iteration)
C. Official Mother Tongue	H. Profession / occupation (not included in 2018 RRL iteration)
D. Language used most frequently	I. Singapore
E. Heritage language (not included in 2018 RRL iteration)	J. Country where you family came from originally

Across both the 2013 and 2018 RRL iterations, the top two identity components that respondents felt contributed the most to their overall sense of identity are nationality (Singapore) as well as the language they use most frequently (see Figures 114 and 115). Approximately two-thirds of respondents also thought that official Mother Tongue languages were at least important in defining their overall sense of identity across both runs of the survey. In contrast, heritage languages were considerably less important in shaping one's overall sense of identity based on responses. These findings are reflective of the success of the state's language policies vis-à-vis the designated official languages as well as the Bilingual Education Policy.

Figure 114: "How important are each of the following items below to your overall sense of identity?" (Important/ Very Important) (2013)

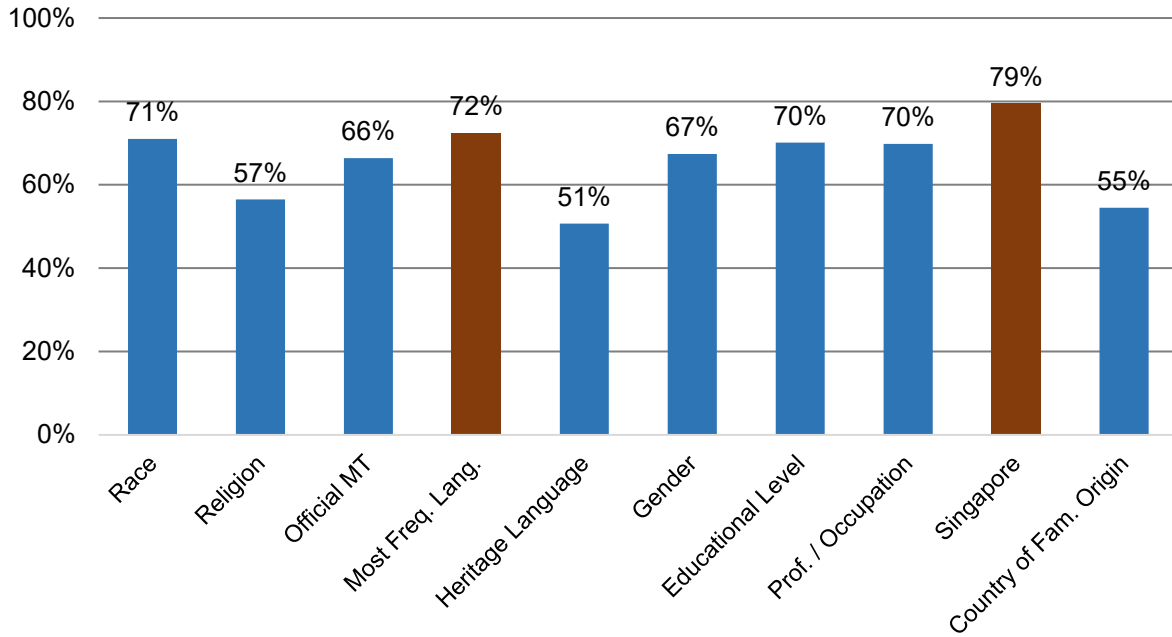
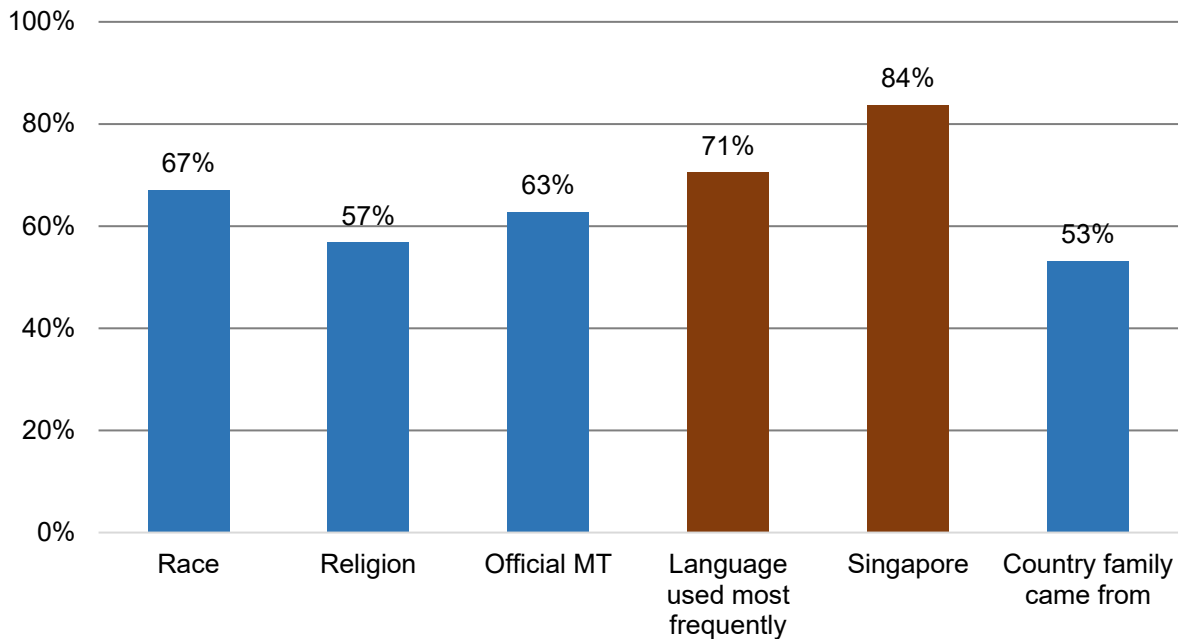


Figure 115: "How important are each of the following items below to your overall sense of identity?" (Important/ Very Important) (2018)



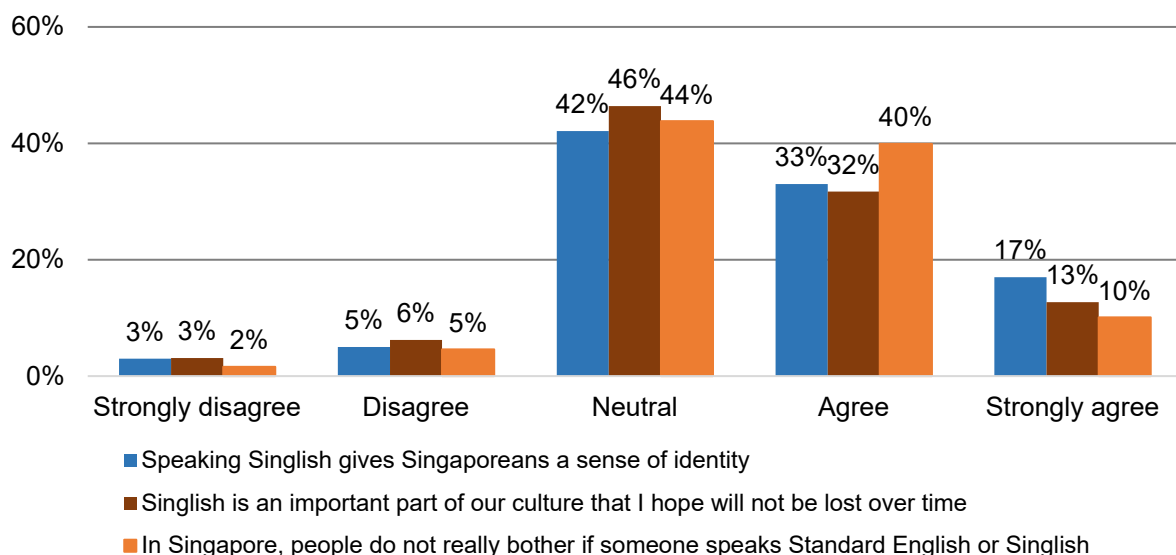
5.2 SINGLISH AS PART OF SINGAPOREAN IDENTITY

In the 2018 RRL iteration, we additionally examined respondents’ perceptions of Singlish as part of national identity, as well as the appropriateness of its usage. The responses serve as a barometer of national perceptions regarding the importance of Singlish in defining a shared national identity, as well as perceptions of the vernacular relative to the use of Standard English.

5.2.1 Approximately half of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, and that people are not bothered if someone speaks Standard English or Singlish

Approximately half of RRL respondents (50 per cent) indicated agreement or strong agreement that speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity (see Figure 116). Just under half of respondents at least agree that Singlish is an important part of Singapore’s culture that they hope will not be lost over time (45 per cent). Similar proportions indicated ambivalence over the appropriateness of using Singlish as opposed to Standard English; 50 per cent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “in Singapore, people are not bothered if someone speaks Standard English or Singlish. These findings indicate that there is some level of acceptance of Singlish as integral to national identity and consciousness, although perceptions in the city-state are split down the middle.

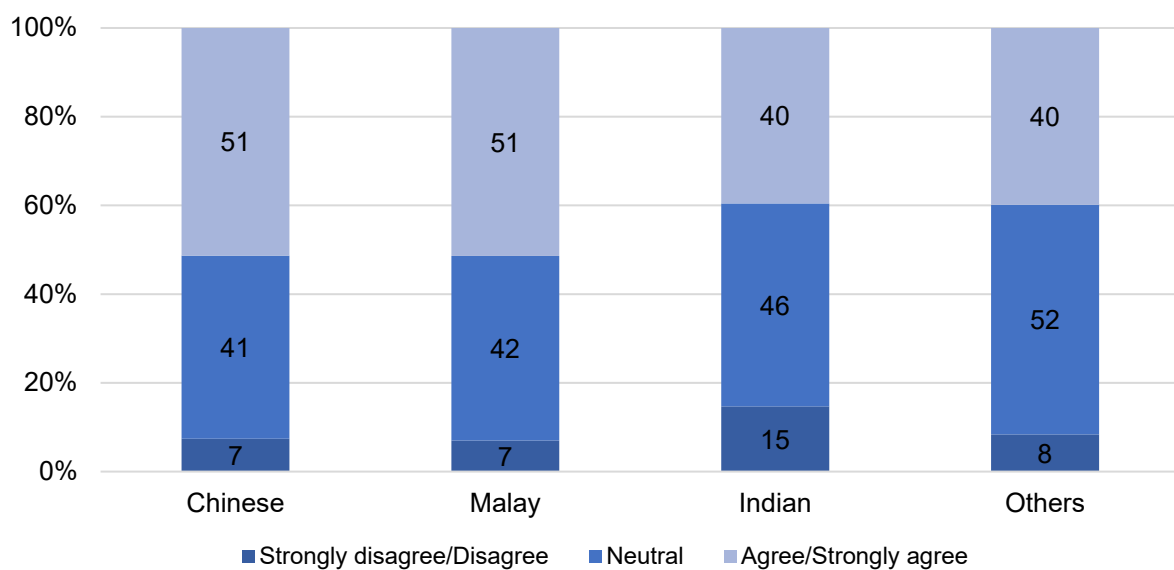
Figure 116: Respondents opinions on statements regarding Singlish in Singapore (2018)



5.2.2 Chinese and Malays were more likely than Indians and “Others” to feel speaking Singlish contributes to a sense of identity

We also examined respondents’ perceptions on whether speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, with reference to ethnicity. Indian respondents were the most likely to disagree (15 per cent) with the notion that Singlish accords Singaporeans a sense of identity, as compared to just 7 per cent for other ethnicities (see Figure 117). One potential reason could be the relatively heavier incorporation of Chinese vernaculars and Malay vocabularies and syntax in Singlish, compared to Tamil.

Figure 117: "Speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity", by race (2018)





Chapter 6

Cohesion & Differentiation

CHAPTER 6: COHESION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Languages have varying perceptual and economic values attached to them. For example, some communities may accord speakers of a certain language more prestige or capital (social, cultural, and economic), as compared to others. In the case of Singapore, English tends to have more prestige attached to it relative to other Mother Tongue or heritage languages, given English's status as the official working language. Nonetheless, as an economic hub with high connectivity to English-speaking markets, China, Malay-speaking economies in Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, the ability to communicate in Chinese, Malay and Tamil in Singapore is of substantial value too.

Given the disparate perceptions of value for each language, it is inevitable that differentiation will consequently occur to varying extents. For instance, individuals may prefer to interact socially in a certain language; interactions in the context of the administration of public services may also be impacted. In the following sections, we examine 1) the relative linguistic capital of the four official languages; 2) perceptions of language discrimination across a variety of settings such as the administration of public services and social interactions; and 3) the role of language in promoting social cohesion in Singapore, and language prejudice over time.

6.1 LINGUISTIC CAPITAL

The 2013 survey asked respondents to rate their perceptions of various languages, which was measured by their perceptions of how much harder speakers of a particular language would have to work, relative to speakers of other languages, in order to lead a prosperous life in Singapore.

6.1.1 Malay and Tamil speakers were generally perceived as having to work “harder” or “much harder” than their English and Mandarin-speaking counterparts to secure a prosperous life

Respondents across ethnicities had rather consistent perceptions for English speakers, Malay speakers, and Tamil speakers. Less than one-fifth of respondents thought that English speakers would have to work “harder” or “much harder” than other language speakers (see Figure 118). Conversely, 40 per cent or more of respondents across ethnicities felt that Malay and Tamil speakers would have to work “harder” or “much harder” than speakers of other languages to lead a prosperous life.

From this, it is evident that respondents across ethnicities were likely to be in agreement that Malay and Tamil speakers would have a tougher time leading prosperous lives in Singapore, in relation to Mandarin or English speakers. This attests to the economic value and utility attached to the latter two languages, as the official working language and the Mother Tongue of the majority Chinese population, respectively. However, socio-economic factors extending beyond language use and relating to individual ethnic communities should also be considered, in addition to the above.

Interestingly, Chinese respondents were more likely to think that Mandarin speakers would have to work harder to have a prosperous life in Singapore (33 per cent), as compared to their minority-race peers (17 to 23 per cent). This could be indicative of racial privilege, i.e., the non-ability of the ethnic Chinese to acknowledge the benefits of belonging to the majority race. An overall breakdown of the perceptions of the general population alongside language- and ethnicity-delineated figures are shown in Figures 119 through 124 for comparison.

Figure 118: Language speakers who have to work harder or much harder than others in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore, by race (2013)

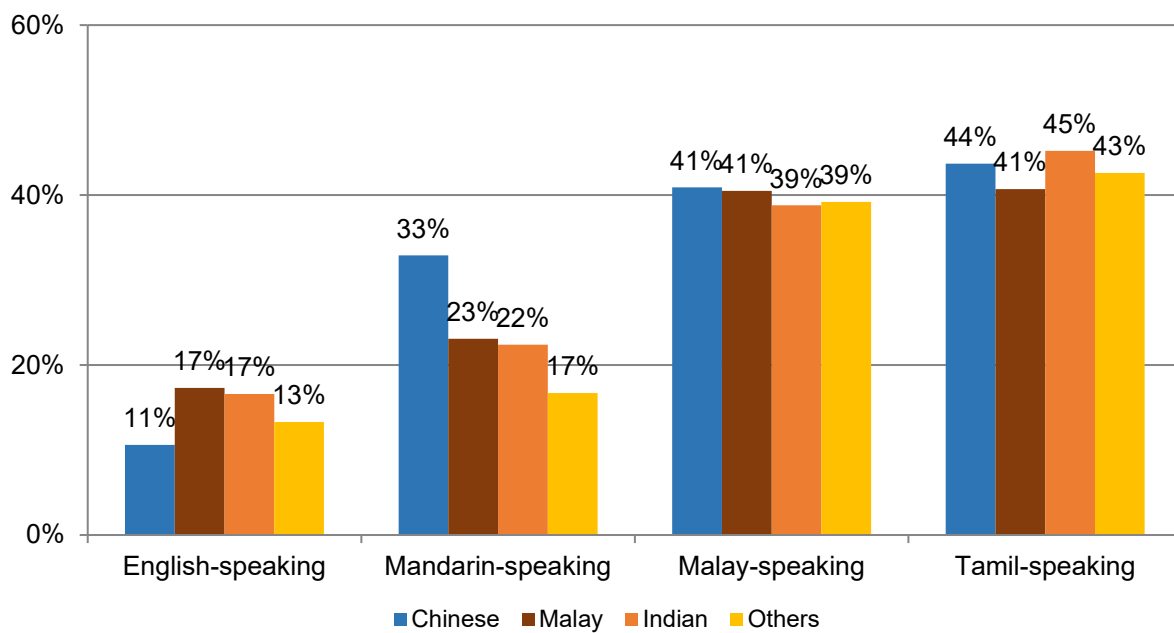


Figure 119: "How hard do you think people with different language preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?" (2013)

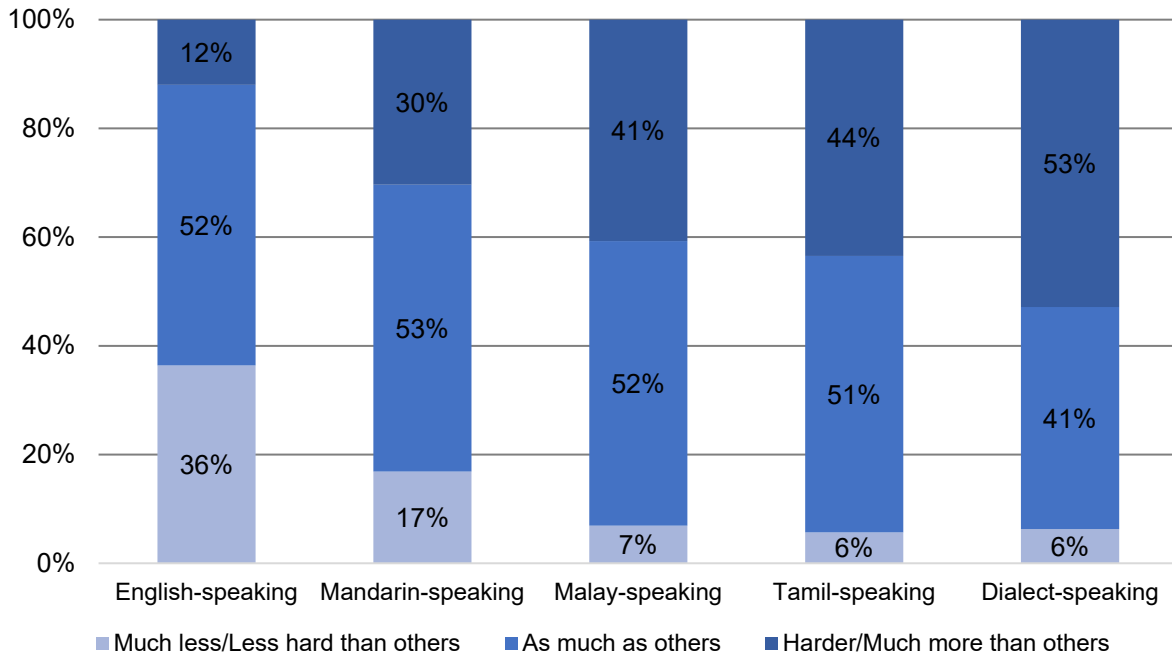


Figure 120: "How hard do you think people with English-speaking preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?", by race (2013)

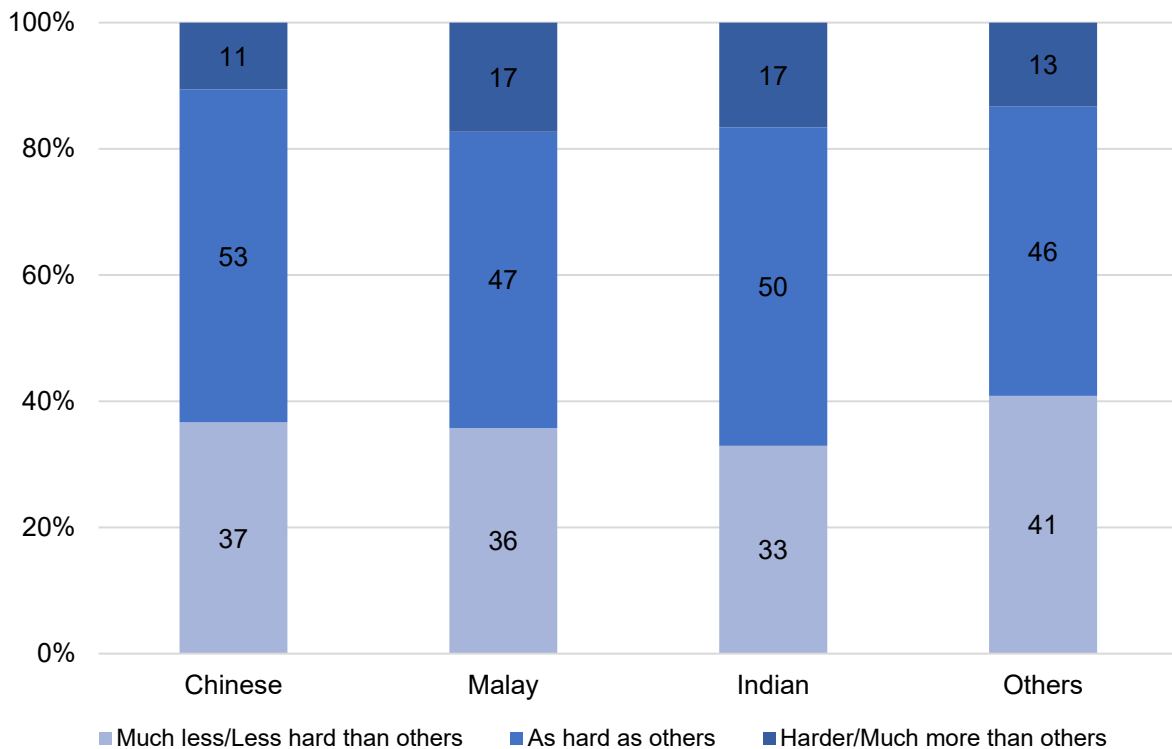


Figure 121: "How hard do you think people with Mandarin-speaking preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?", by race (2013)

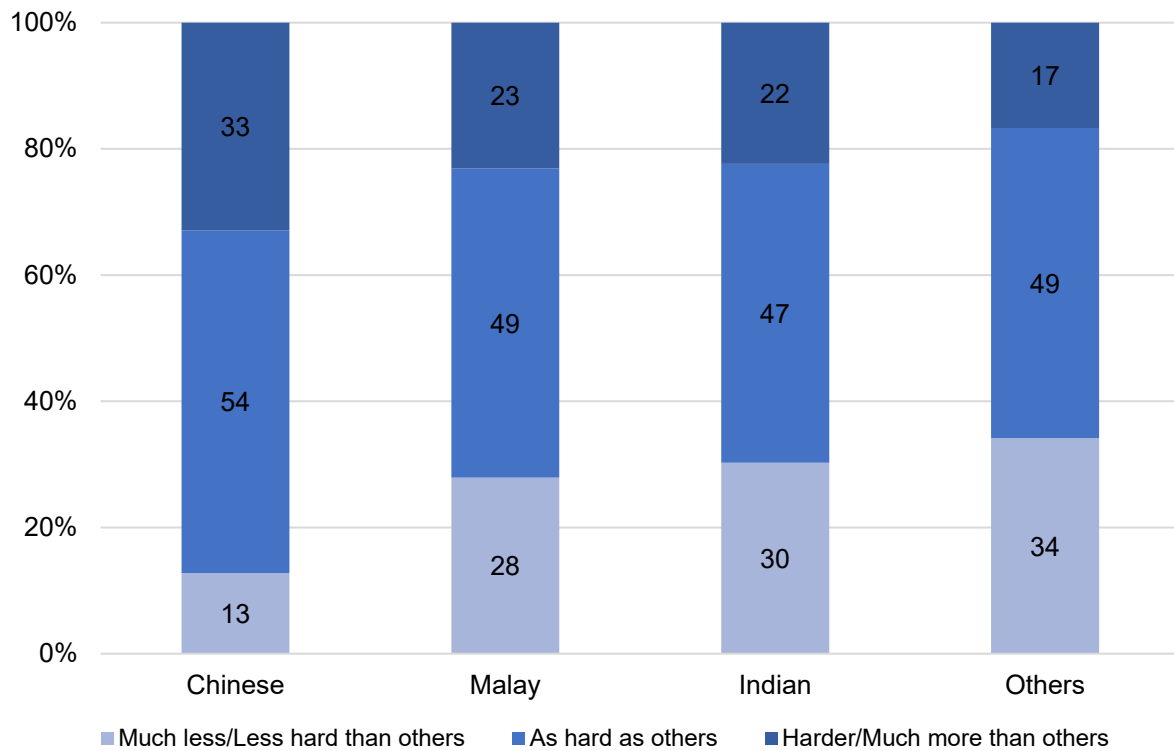


Figure 122: "How hard do you think people with Malay-speaking preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?", by race (2013)

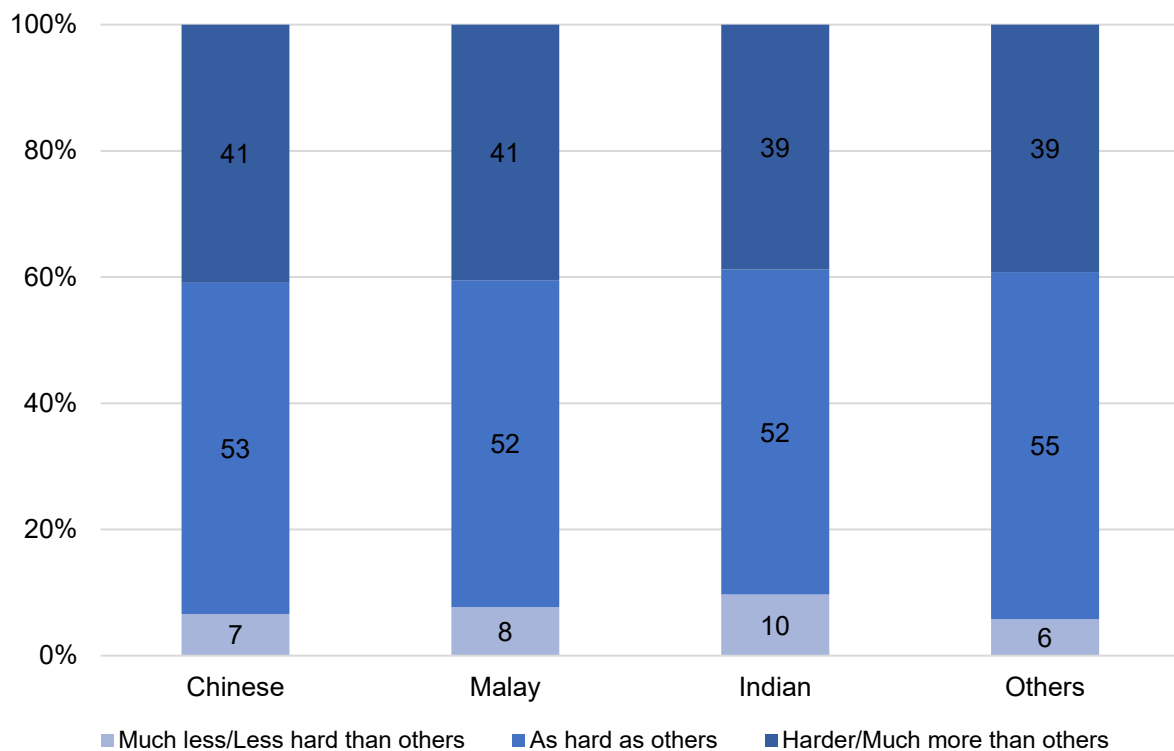


Figure 123: "How hard do you think people with Tamil-speaking preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?", by race (2013)

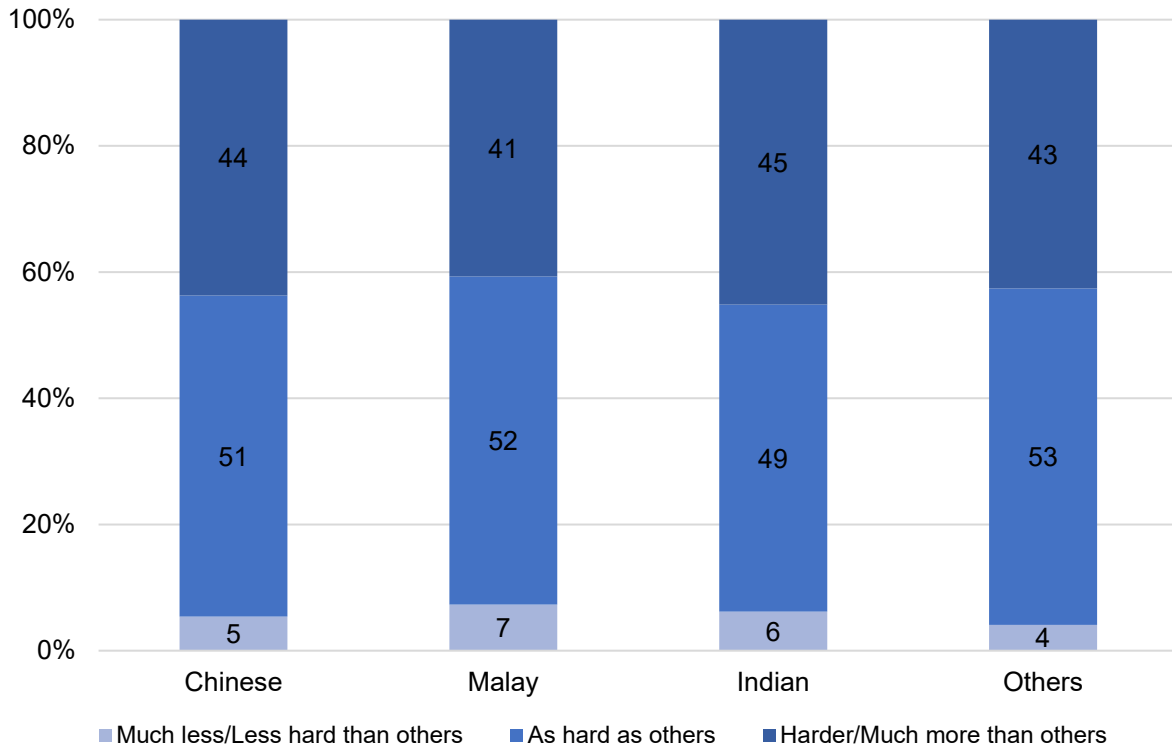
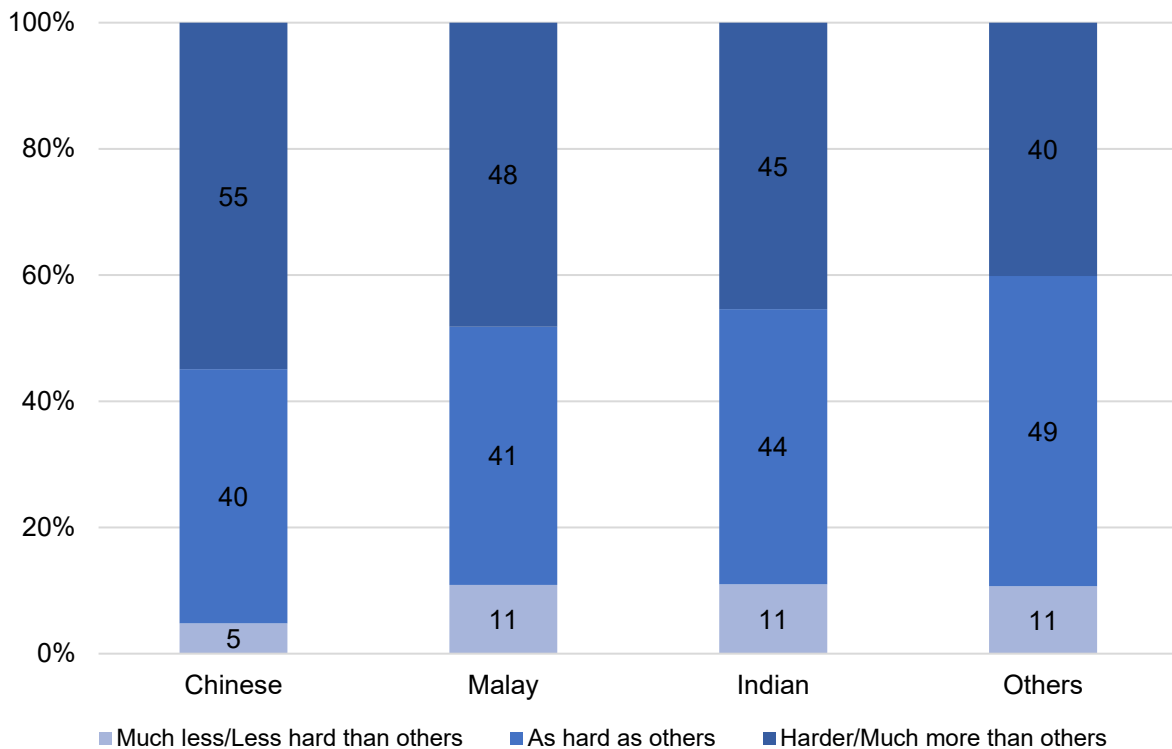


Figure 124: "How hard do you think people with dialect-speaking preferences have to work in order to have a prosperous life in Singapore?", by race (2013)



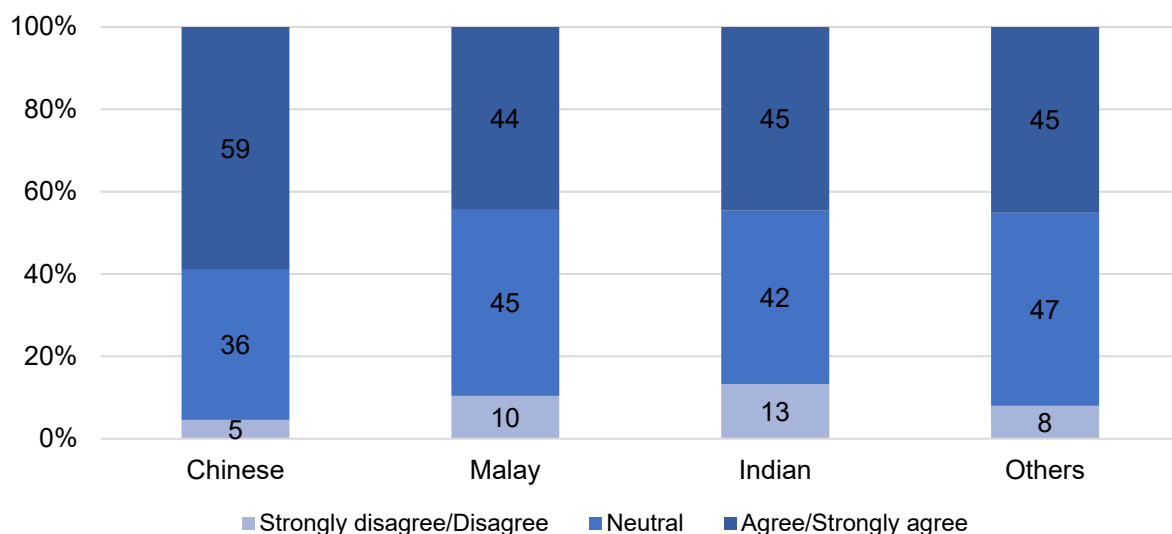
In toto, these findings reaffirm the belief that speaking English in Singapore grants an individual greater linguistic capital, as those who speak predominantly English are perceived to not have to work as hard to attain a prosperous life relative to their Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, or dialect-speaking peers. Mandarin, while seen as having less linguistic capital, is viewed somewhat disparately by the majority Chinese and their ethnic minority counterparts — likely owing to the utility of Mandarin in Singapore in business and industry with China.

Relative to Mandarin, Malay and Tamil languages are perceived as having much less linguistic capital, owing to significantly fewer speakers in the city-state, along with lower usage in a globalised context. Heritage languages are viewed as having the least linguistic capital, likely due to their decreasing relevance and use in contemporary times.

6.1.2 Chinese respondents were most likely to agree or strongly agree that speaking an official Mother Tongue language well would be advantageous in work and business both locally and abroad

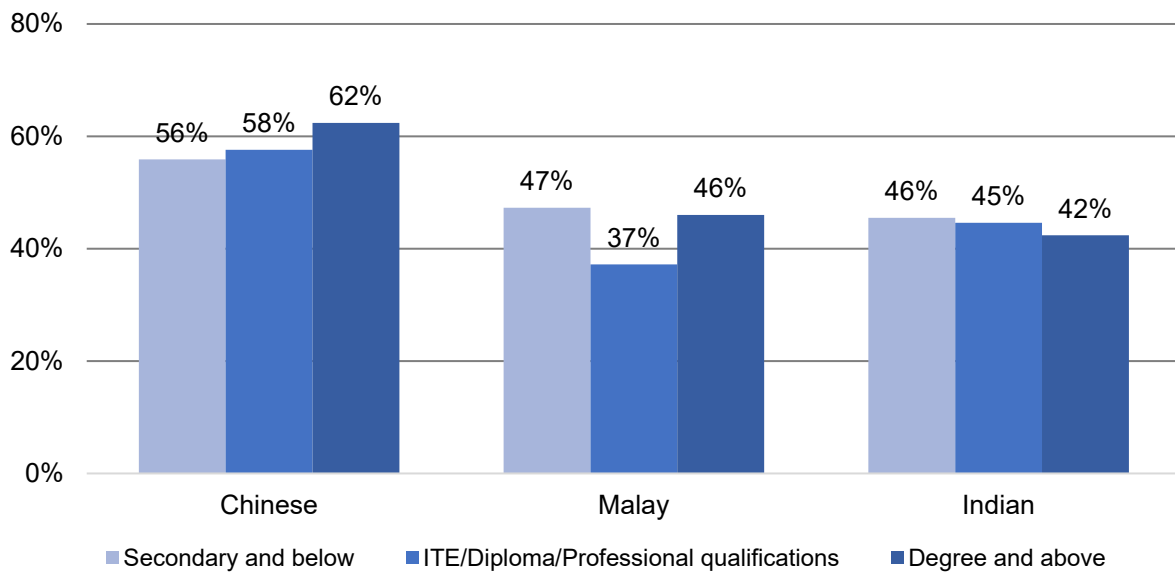
The 2018 survey wave also aimed to examine respondents' perceptions of whether being able to speak an official Mother Tongue language well would grant them an advantage in work and business in Singapore. When this was analysed according to race, it was evident that the majority of Chinese respondents agreed or strongly agreed that speaking an official Mother Tongue language well would be advantageous, in keeping with the findings in 6.1.1 vis-à-vis Mandarin (see Figure 125). Conversely, less than half of the non-Chinese respondents felt the same way. This shows that respondents were aware that the ability to speak in Mandarin is functional in Singapore; it helps construct ties in work and business that are predominantly Chinese-centric. Malay and Tamil languages are seen as less functional, even amongst the Malay and Indian respondents.

Figure 125: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by race (2018)



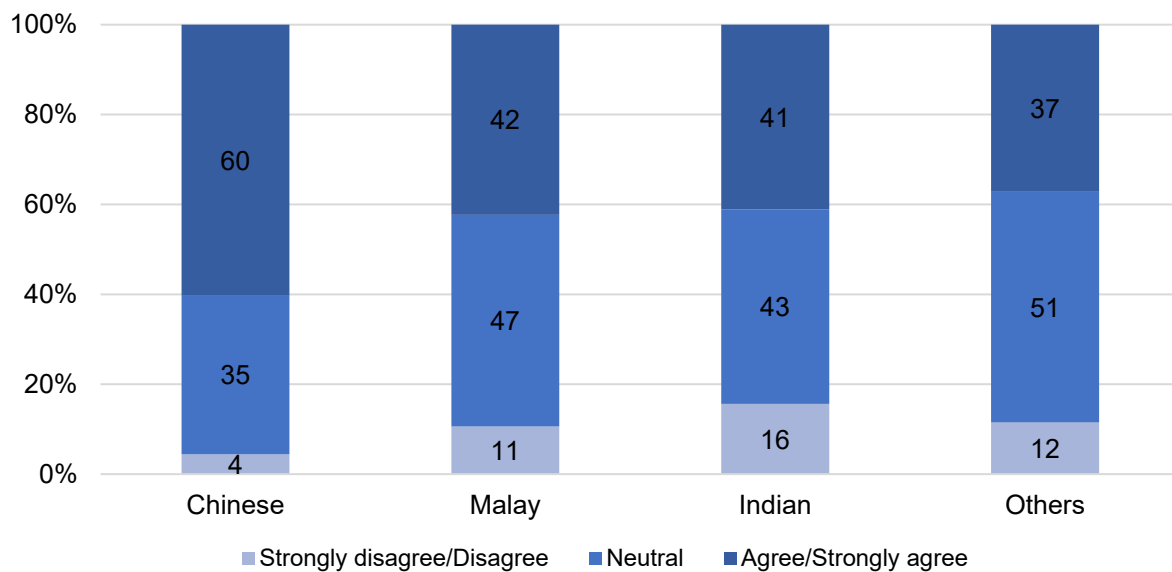
Interestingly, education does not affect respondents' perceptions of the advantages of knowing various official Mother Tongue languages in Singapore's job and business market, regardless of respondents' ethnicity (see Figure 126). More than half of Chinese respondents, across all levels of education, still agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that being able to speak an official Mother Tongue gives them an advantage in work and business. Similarly, ethnic minorities, regardless of level of education, perceive their Mother Tongue languages as advantageous in Singapore's job and business markets.

Figure 126: Agreement / strong agreement with "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business in Singapore", by race and education (2018)



Similar trends emerged when examining respondents' perceptions of the advantages of speaking their Mother Tongue language in the international work and business sphere (see Figure 127). The majority of Chinese respondents (60 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while less than half of respondents of other ethnicities felt the same way. This could potentially be a result in the rise of China's influence globally, which has amplified the functionality and utilisation of Mandarin around the globe.

Figure 127: "Being able to speak an official Mother Tongue well gives you an advantage in work and business internationally", by race (2018)



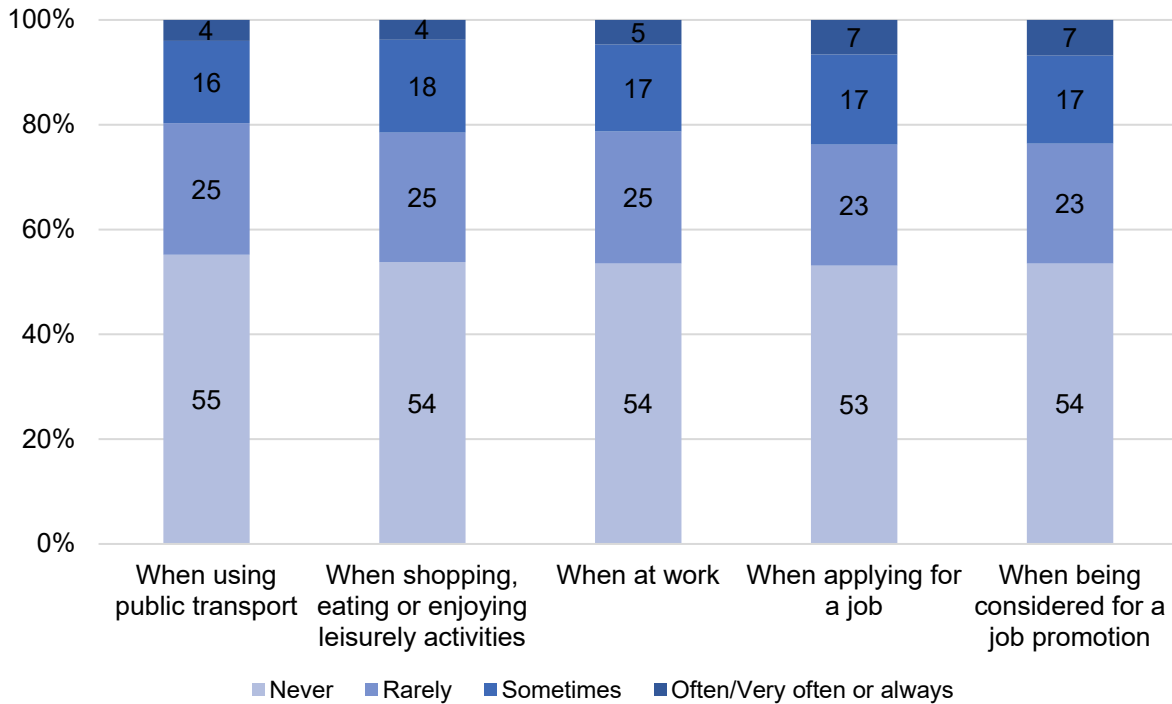
6.2 PERCEPTIONS OF LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION

This section aims to examine respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of linguistic discrimination in Singapore and their personal encounters of any preferential treatment based on language spoken. We asked respondents if they experienced any linguistic discrimination across various areas of their lives.

6.2.1 Majority of respondents indicated they "rarely" or "never" felt discriminated in everyday life on the basis of language

A large proportion, or over three-quarters, of the respondents reported that they "rarely" or "never" felt linguistically discriminated when using public transport; shopping or engaging in leisurely activities; working; applying for a job; or being considered for a job promotion (see Figure 128). This reflects the general neutrality vis-à-vis the use of language, in keeping with a multi-ethnic societal fabric replete with state narratives of racial harmony and stability. Even amongst respondents who indicated otherwise, only approximately 5 per cent felt they were "often", "very often", or "always" discriminated based on language in everyday life across the five given scenarios.

Figure 128: "How often do you feel linguistically discriminated in these areas of your everyday life?" (2013)

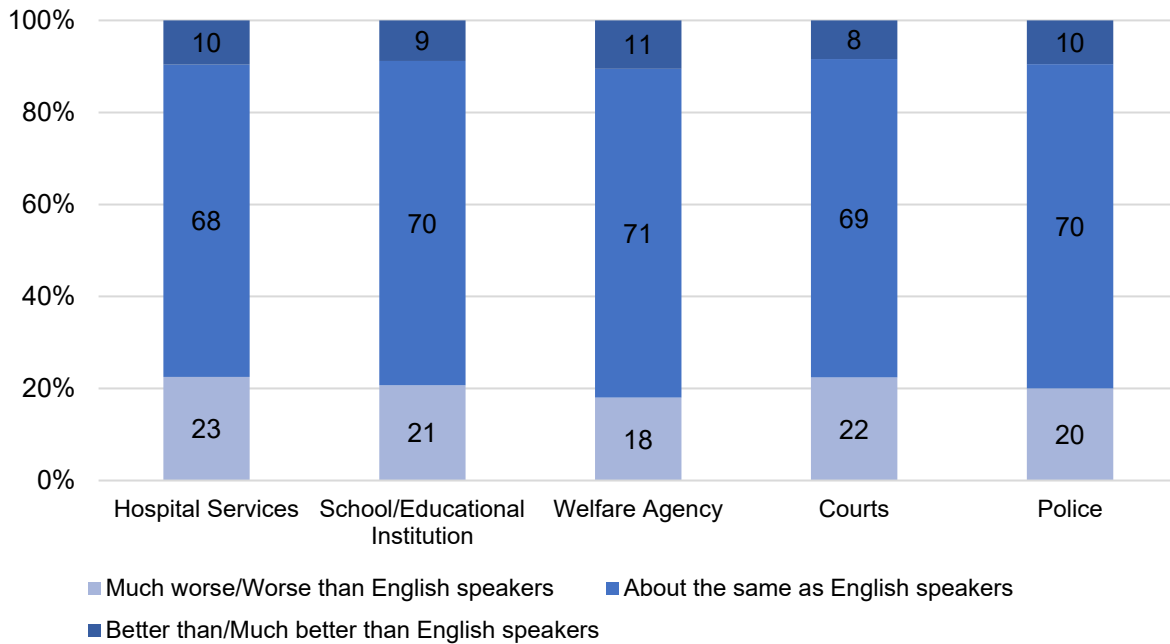


6.2.2 The same trends noted in 6.1.1 hold in healthcare, education, social, legal, and enforcement settings, with slight variations in perceptions across the different ethnicities

We proceeded to sharpen the analysis by asking respondents who did *not* speak English most of the time, on how well they thought they were being treated when using public services, as compared to English speakers. A majority of these respondents (approximately 70 per cent) felt they were treated similarly (i.e., “about the same”) as English speakers (see Figure 129).

Nonetheless, a sizeable minority (about 20 per cent) felt they were treated worse than English speakers when using these public services, which could likely stem from the designation of English as the official working language and potentially impact the dispensing of public services if citizens spoke in a language other than English (e.g., in terms of form-filling, official communications, or conversations with frontline civil servants).

Figure 129: Responses for individuals who do not speak English most of the time outside their homes for "How well do you think you are treated when using these public services in comparison with English speakers?" (2013)



We also examined perceptions of linguistic discrimination in hospital services and courts, based on respondents' ethnicities, relative to English speakers. The majority of respondents who do not predominantly speak English, did not perceive being linguistically discriminated in comparison to English speakers, when using healthcare and legal services. This finding was evident across respondents of all ethnicities.

However, Chinese respondents who were not predominantly speakers of English were slightly more likely to report feeling treated "worse" or "much worse" than those who spoke English when perusing hospital services, compared to English speakers (under a quarter) (see Figure 130). Only 11 per cent and 6 per cent of Malay and Indian speakers indicated likewise, respectively. Slight variations are also noted for the courts; about a quarter of Chinese and Indians felt they were treated "worse" or "much worse" relative to English speakers, compared to just 14 per cent of Malays (see Figure 131).

Figure 130: Responses for individuals who do not speak English most of the time outside their homes for "How well do you think you are treated when using hospital services in comparison with English speakers?", by race (2013)

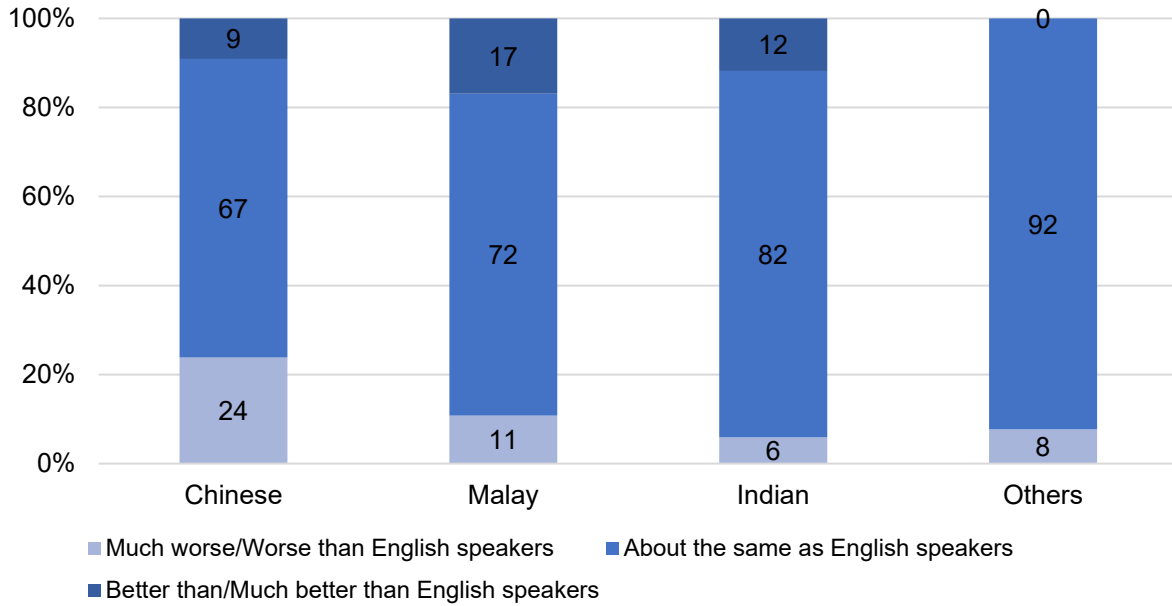
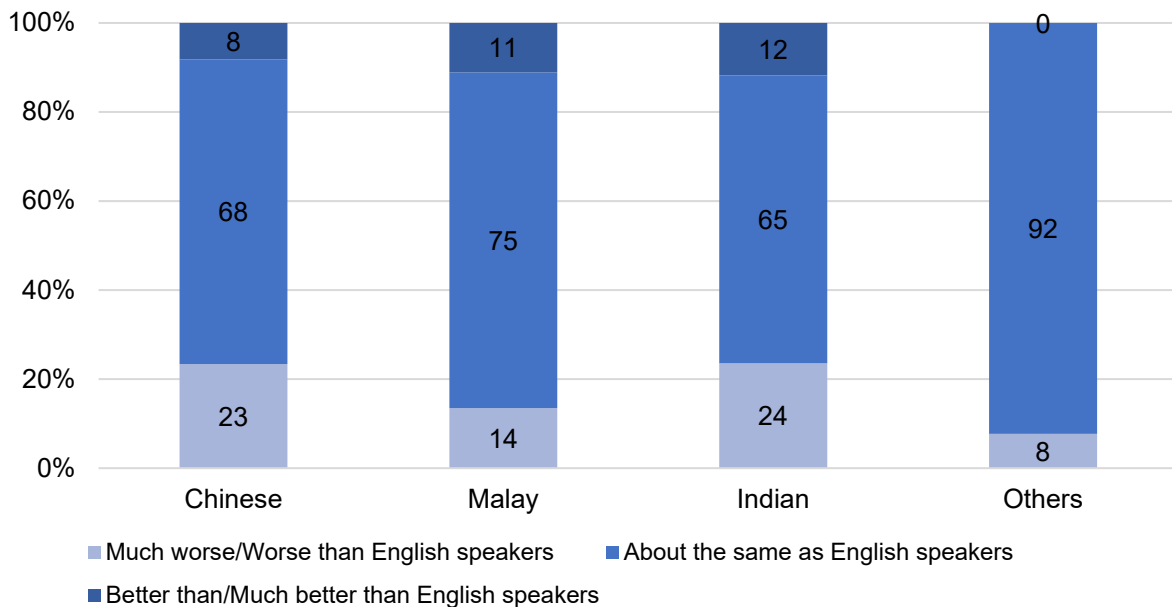


Figure 131: Responses for individuals who do not speak English most of the time outside their homes for "How well do you think you are treated at the courts in comparison with English speakers?", by race (2013)



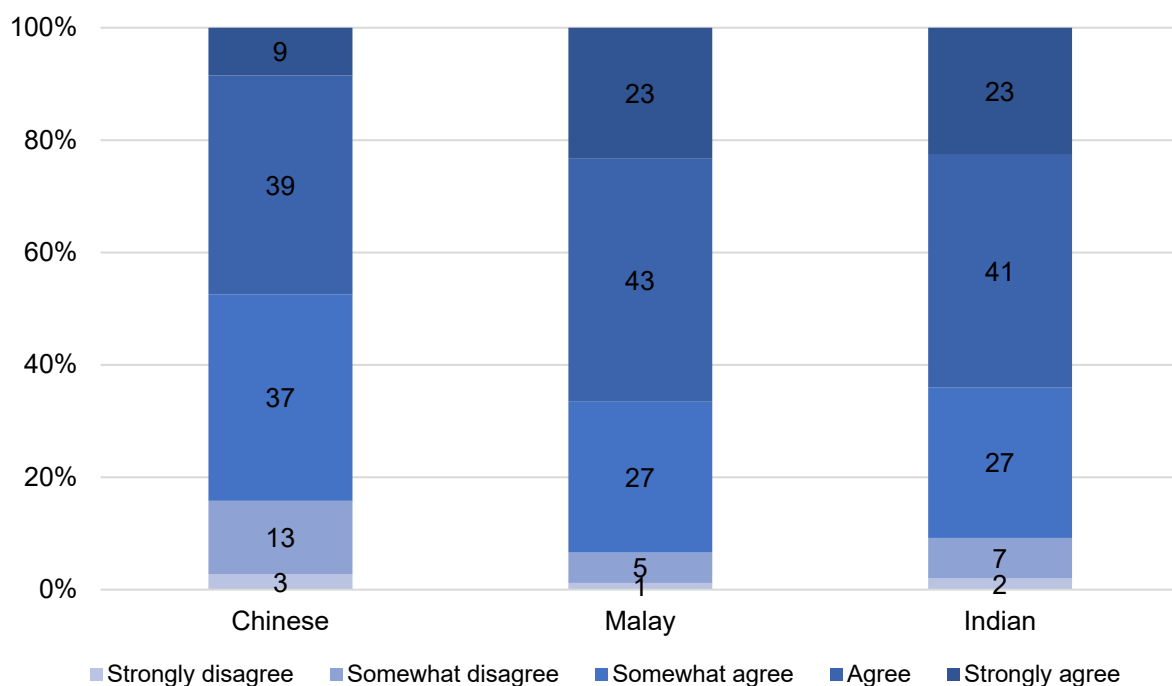
6.2.3 In general, most were agreeable to meeting and getting to know others who speak a language other than their own; however, ethnic minorities indicated a stronger level of agreement relative to the majority Chinese

Aside from public services, people are likely to gauge the level of linguistic discrimination they experience from everyday social interactions. Hence, we gave respondents some statements and polled their responses to examine if people were antagonistic towards those who spoke languages different from their own.

In general, a large majority of all respondents were open to interacting with people who spoke a language other than their own. Most respondents (84 to 93 per cent), regardless of ethnicity, agreed to varying extents that they liked meeting and getting to know people who are dominant speakers of a language other than their own (see Figure 132). However, Chinese respondents were slightly less likely to be open to such situations (84 per cent), as compared to their Malay (93 per cent) and Indian counterparts (91 per cent).

In addition, the strength of agreement across the ethnicities significantly vary; 23 per cent of Malay and Indian respondents “strongly agreed” that they liked meeting and getting to know people who speak languages different from the ones they speak, as compared to only 9 per cent of Chinese respondents. When taken *in toto* with findings from the IPS Survey on Language, Race and Religion, this is potentially indicative of greater insularity amongst Chinese respondents as compared to their minority-race counterparts (Mathew et al., 2019).

Figure 132: "I like meeting and getting to know people who speak a language other than the language that I most frequently use", by race (2013)



6.2.4 However, the populace has become increasingly wary of language diversity; under a quarter of respondents indicated they would be uncomfortable with public speeches made in an official language they did not speak, and the inability of service staff to speak English

Respondents were asked about their levels of comfort towards various linguistic discrimination scenarios. At the outset, respondents in 2013 seemed more tolerant of language diversity; over half of the respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement that they were fine if others around them spoke a language they did not speak (see Figure 133). This result could be due to an implicit acceptance of language diversity in Singapore and an understanding that it is common to encounter different languages.

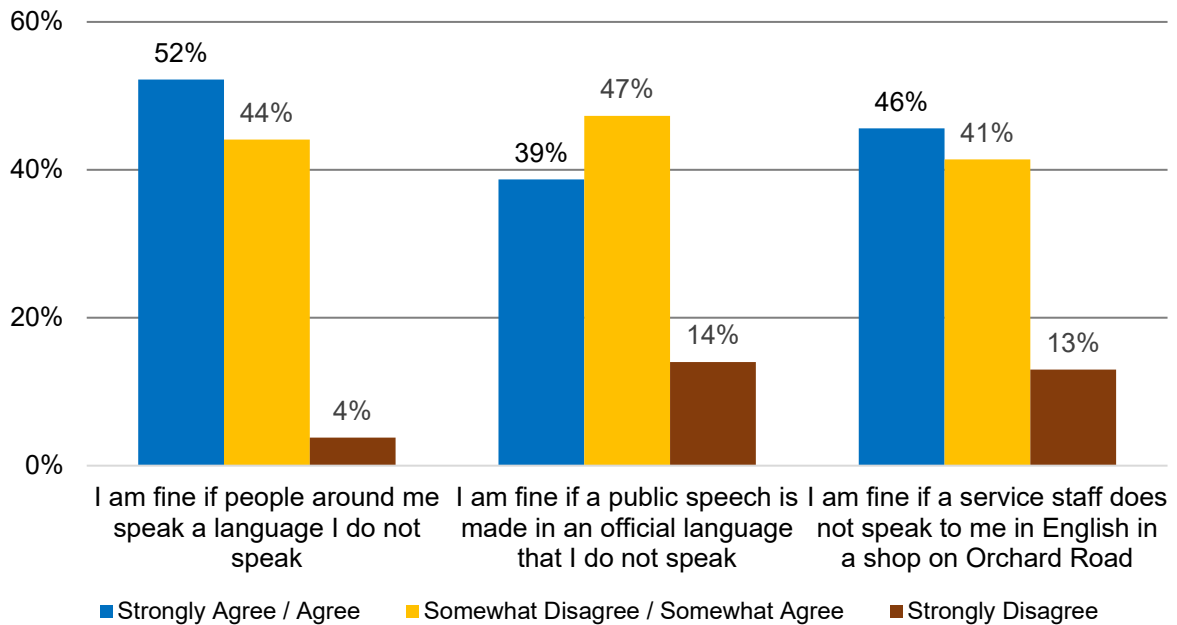
However, this acceptance of language seems to have decreased in 2018. The proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they were fine with others around them speaking a language they did not speak fell to 39 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 134). Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents who indicated clear discomfort rose to 10 per cent. While a direct comparison of the two waves for this question may be challenging given the differences in the scales used across both instalments of the survey, it is nonetheless evident that a significant minority takes issue with the use of a language they did not speak across public settings.

This could indicate that Singaporeans have become more intolerant of language diversity over the last few years. One possible reason for this could be the increased discourse on racial discrimination over the past few years; of which the awareness of socially excluding others by speaking in languages they did not understand could have been augmented. Another reason could also be the rise of anti-immigration sentiments; potentially leading to increased discomfort with encountering foreign languages.

In both 2013 and 2018 RRL iterations, respondents were also more likely to be uncomfortable with public speeches and sales pitches being made in a language foreign to them. For example, 22 per cent of respondents “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” they would be fine hearing a public speech made in an official language different from their own in 2018. Similarly, 24 per cent “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” they would be fine if service staff in Orchard Road shops were unable to speak to them in English. These proportions have risen significantly from 2013, where under 15 per cent respondents indicated likewise.

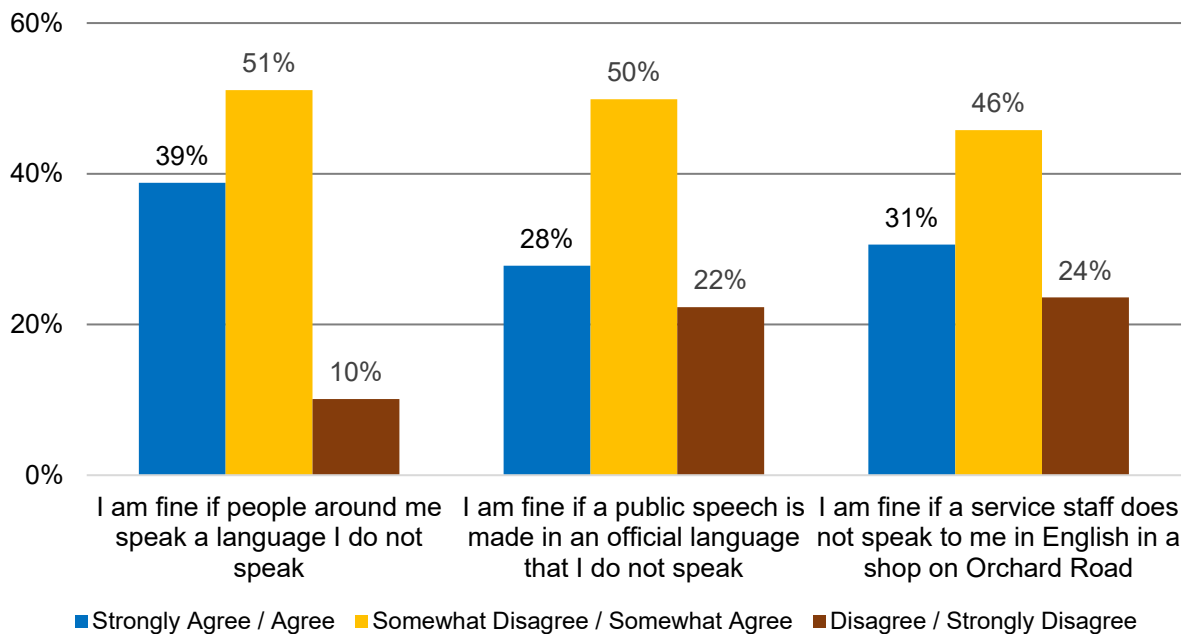
This trend could stem from expectations of the public space in Singapore to be predominantly English, given Singapore’s multiculturalism and the status of English as the *lingua franca*. In light of increased social awareness of exclusion and immigration trends, respondents may be more likely to perceive these scenarios as a breach of the linguistic equilibrium and feel a sense of injustice and social exclusion.

Figure 133: Perceptions of linguistic discrimination in various scenarios (2013)^



^Scale used for 2013 and 2018 vary; comparative analyses should be treated with caution.

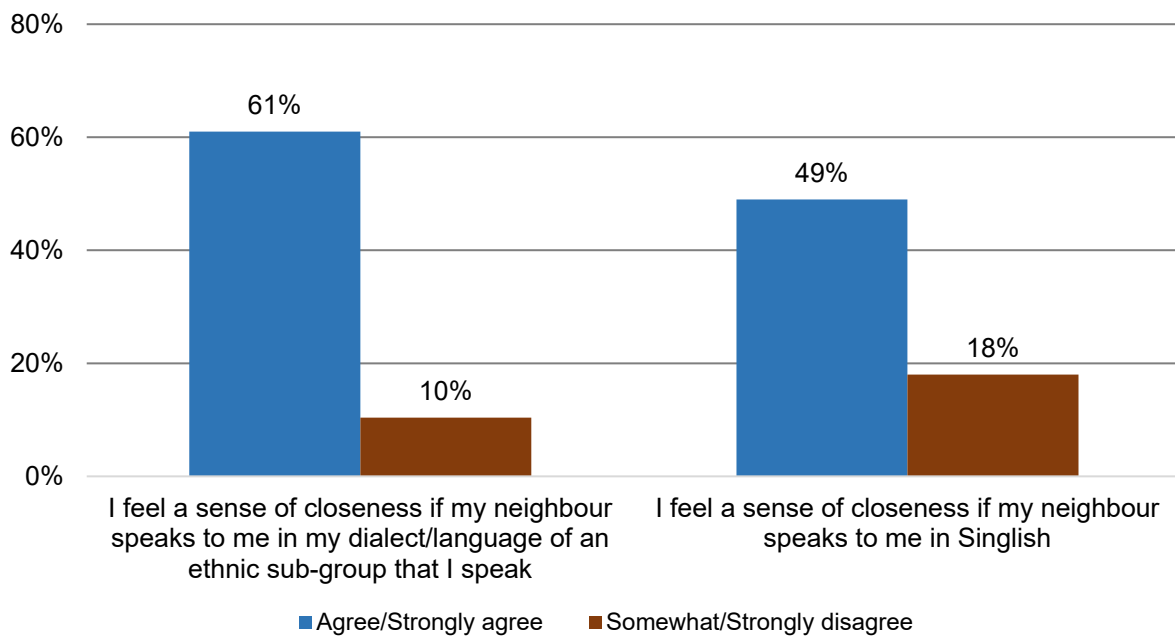
Figure 134: Perceptions of linguistic discrimination in various scenarios (2018)



6.2.5 Respondents were more likely to feel a sense of closeness with their neighbours if they conversed in a mutually intelligible heritage language

Respondents were also likely to perceive heritage languages as a means to strengthen bonds with neighbours. About six in 10 respondents reported similar sense of closeness when being spoken to in their heritage language, an indication that these languages are still important in preserving ties within ethnic groups and maintaining social cohesion (see Figure 135). However, this intra-ethnic social cohesion through speaking in heritage languages may at times be at the expense of interracial interactions. Nonetheless, close to half of the respondents from the 2013 wave reported feeling a sense of closeness with their neighbours, if their neighbours spoke to them in Singlish.

Figure 135: Language preference when interacting with neighbours (2013)

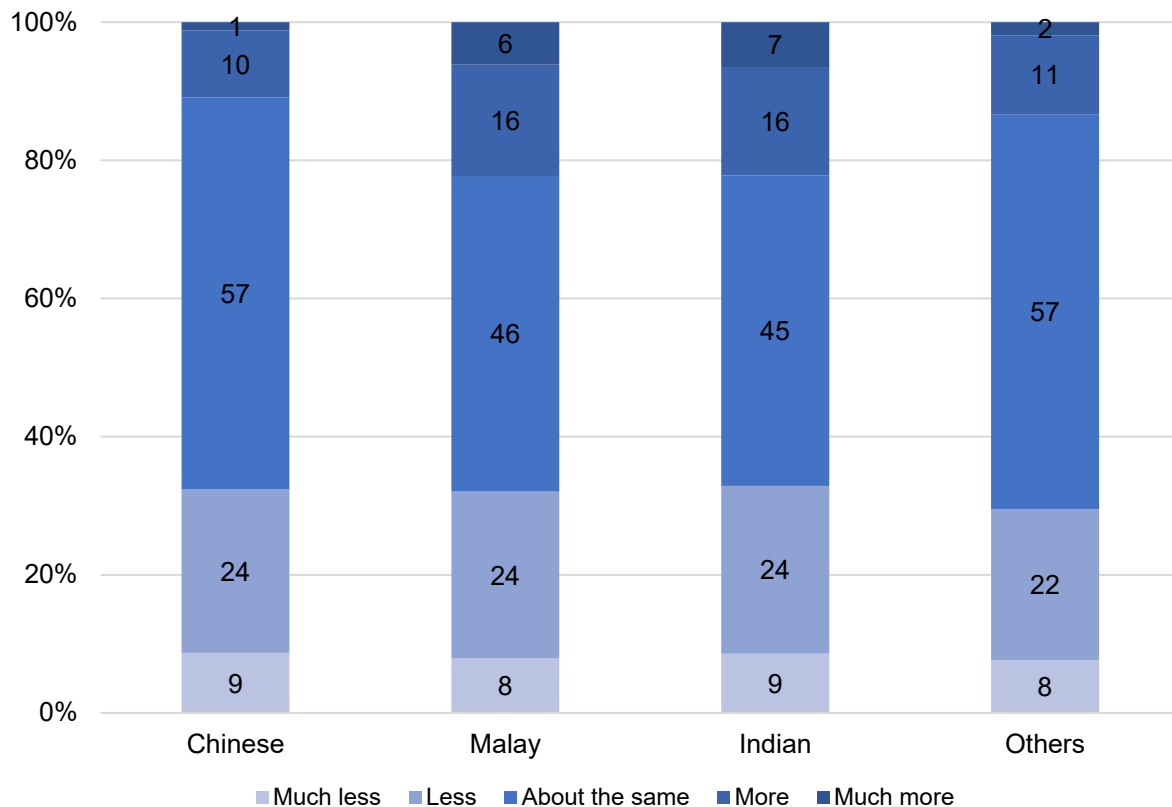


6.2.6 While the majority of respondents felt that prejudice on the basis of language has remained the same or decreased compared to five years ago, over a fifth of ethnic minorities indicated otherwise, which warrants further study

The 2018 wave of the study also examined respondents' evaluations of language prejudice in Singapore over the years. About a third of respondents across ethnicities indicated they felt "much less" or "less" prejudice based on language today compared to five years ago (see Figure 136). Close to half of respondents felt that such prejudice remained "about the same" as five years ago. In addition, Chinese respondents were the least likely to feel that there is "more" or "much more" language prejudice in Singapore today than five years ago (11 per

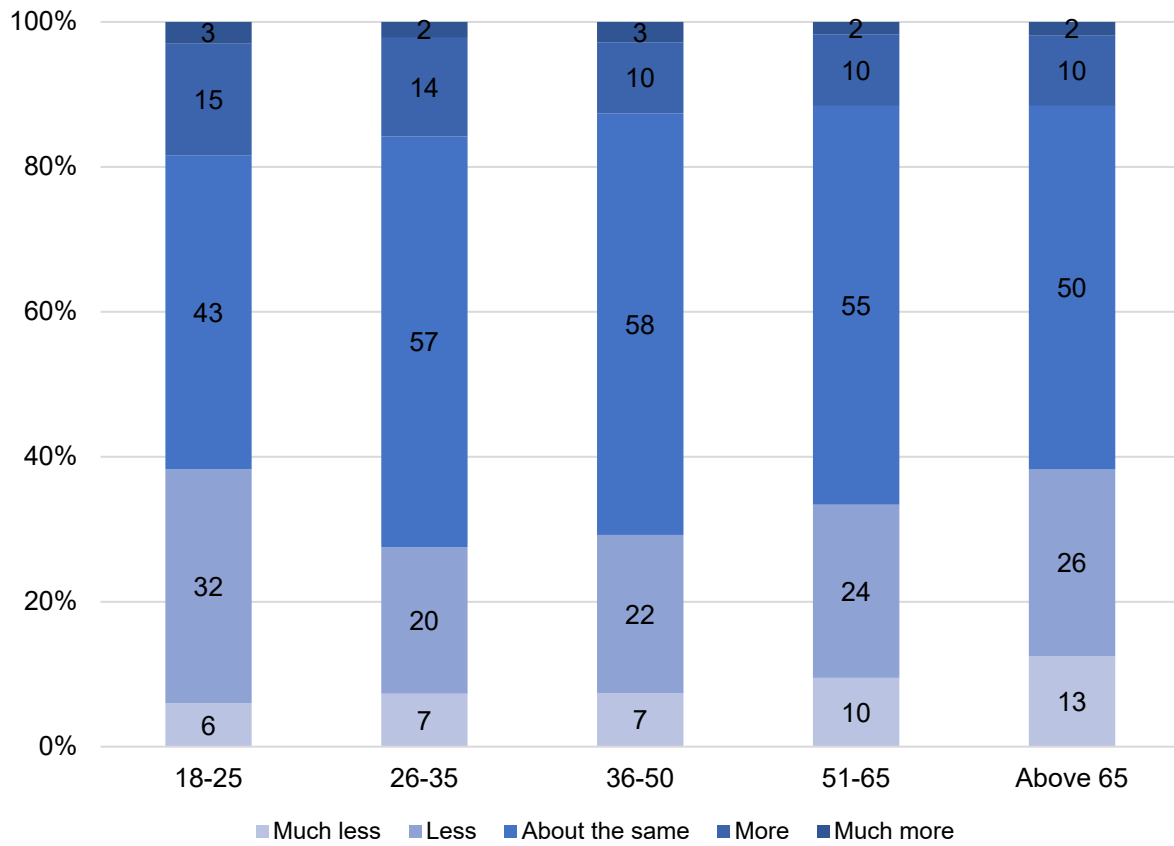
cent); in contrast, over a fifth of Malay and Indian respondents felt likewise. This discrepancy between the dominant ethnic group and ethnic minorities could be due to the reduced sensitivity of the majority Chinese to potential language prejudice. This is in line with trends associated with perceptions arising from one's majority status (Mathew et al., 2019). The sizeable minority amongst Malays and Indians who indicated an uptick in language prejudice warrants greater attention and further study.

Figure 136: Respondents' perceptions on language prejudice today in Singapore, compared to five years ago, by race (2018)



We also examined the results by age. Younger respondents were more likely to indicate increased prejudice based on language today compared to five years ago. Close to one in five respondents in the youngest age cohort indicated there is “more” or “much more” language prejudice than five years ago, compared to 12 per cent of respondents aged above 35 (see Figure 137). However, respondents in the youngest age cohort were also least likely to perceive a large decline in language prejudice relative to five years ago (6 per cent indicating “much less”) compared to their older counterparts (over 10 per cent for respondents 51 years and above). We attribute this to an increased awareness and appreciation of prejudice based on language amongst younger age cohorts.

Figure 137: Respondents' perceptions on language prejudice today in Singapore, compared to five years ago, by age (2018)





Chapter 7

Policy Reception

CHAPTER 7: POLICY RECEPTION

Language policies in Singapore shape language practices in both private and public spaces and signal appropriate language usage in public spaces. The official language policy accords official status and recognition to English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Amongst these four official languages, English is both the working language and the *lingua franca*, while Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, are deemed the official Mother Tongue languages of the ethnic groups. Mother Tongue languages are perceived as providing Singaporeans a sense of Asian identity and heritage against the backdrop of the high consumption of Anglophone culture; as a result, students are expected to learn these languages in schools. This section aims to examine the reception of the state language policies amongst Singaporeans.

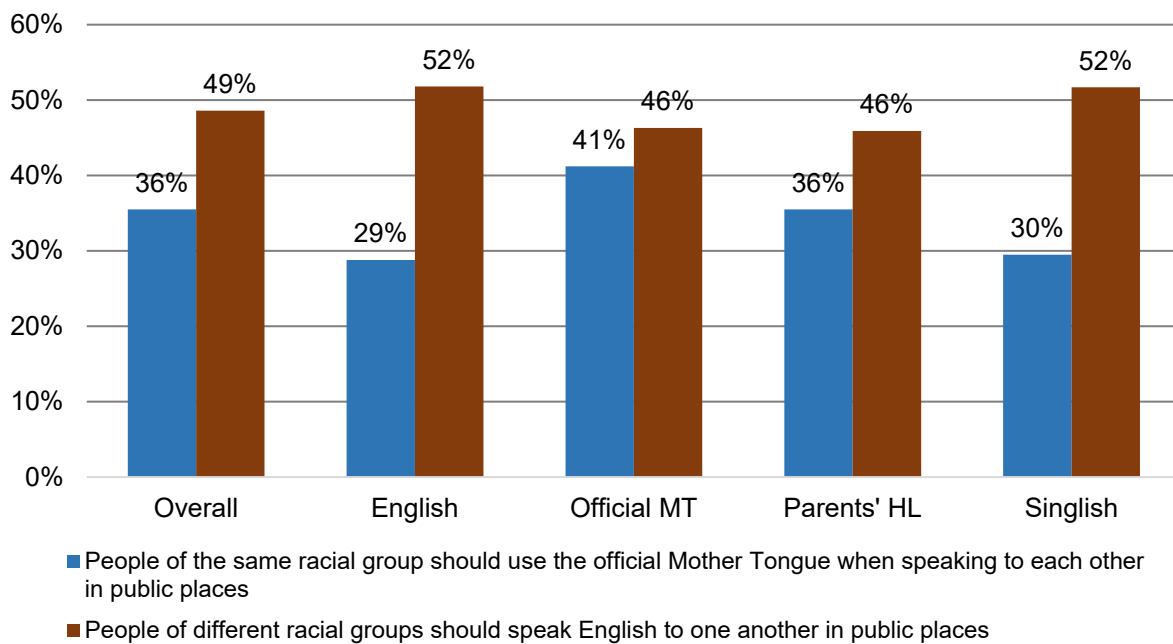
7.1 LANGUAGE USE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In the RRL survey, we examined respondents' attitudes towards the use of language in the public sphere by measuring their levels of agreement with a list of statements.

7.1.1 Over one-third of respondents agreed that official Mother Tongues should be used for intra-ethnic communication in public spaces, signalling an augmented sense of needing to avoid social exclusion due to language

Just over one-third of respondents agreed that the official Mother Tongues should be used for intra-racial communication in public places (see Figure 138). The greatest variation in response was between respondents who identified most with their official Mother Tongue (41 per cent) and those who identified most with English (29 per cent). This illustrates the potential viewing of the public space in Singapore as one that should be intelligible to all, and a healthy awareness of the need to avoid socially excluding others within the public space. In addition, just under half of all respondents indicate that people of different racial groups should speak in English to one another in public spaces. Overall, this shows that respondents, regardless of language identification, have accepted the status of English as *lingua franca*.

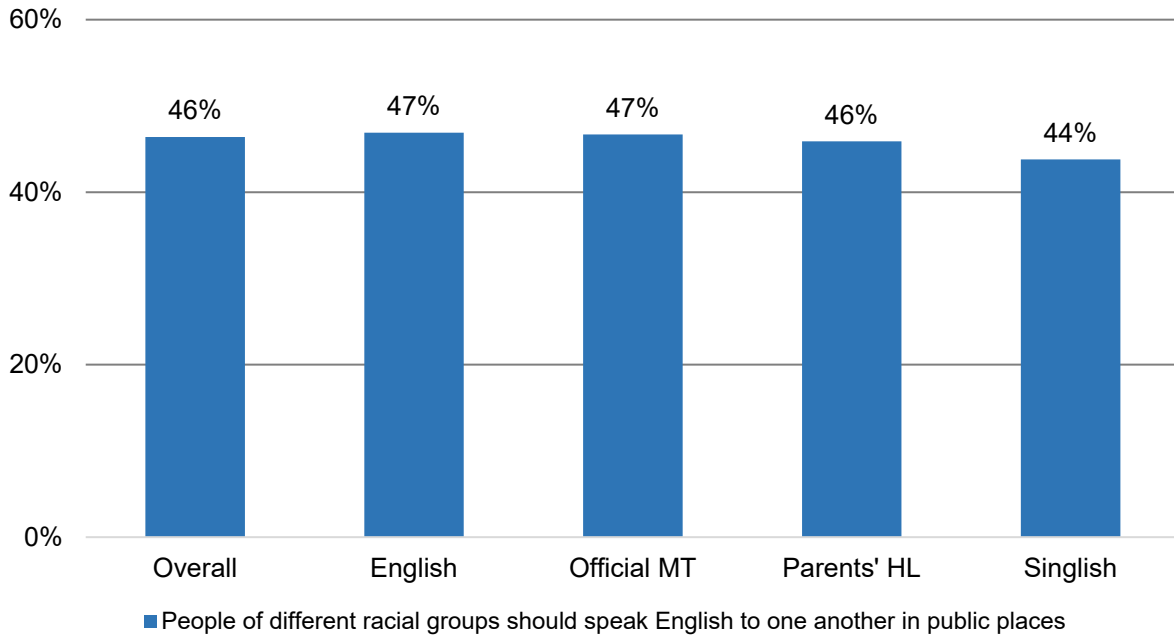
Figure 138: Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to statements on language use in public spaces, by language one identifies most with (2013)



7.1.2 In the same vein, just under half of respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement that inter-ethnic communication in the public space should be in English, signalling continued support of avoiding social exclusion and maintaining the use of English in public spaces

As for interracial communication, about half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that people of different racial groups should speak in English to each other in public places in both waves. Understandably, respondents who identified most with English or Singlish showed the greatest support for this statement in 2013. In 2018, there was no statistically significant difference between the views of respondents identifying with different languages the most. Those who identified with their official Mother Tongues were just as likely as their English-identifying counterparts, to agree that people of different racial groups should speak in English to each other in public spaces (see Figure 139).

Figure 139: Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to statement on language use in public spaces, by language one identifies most with (2018)

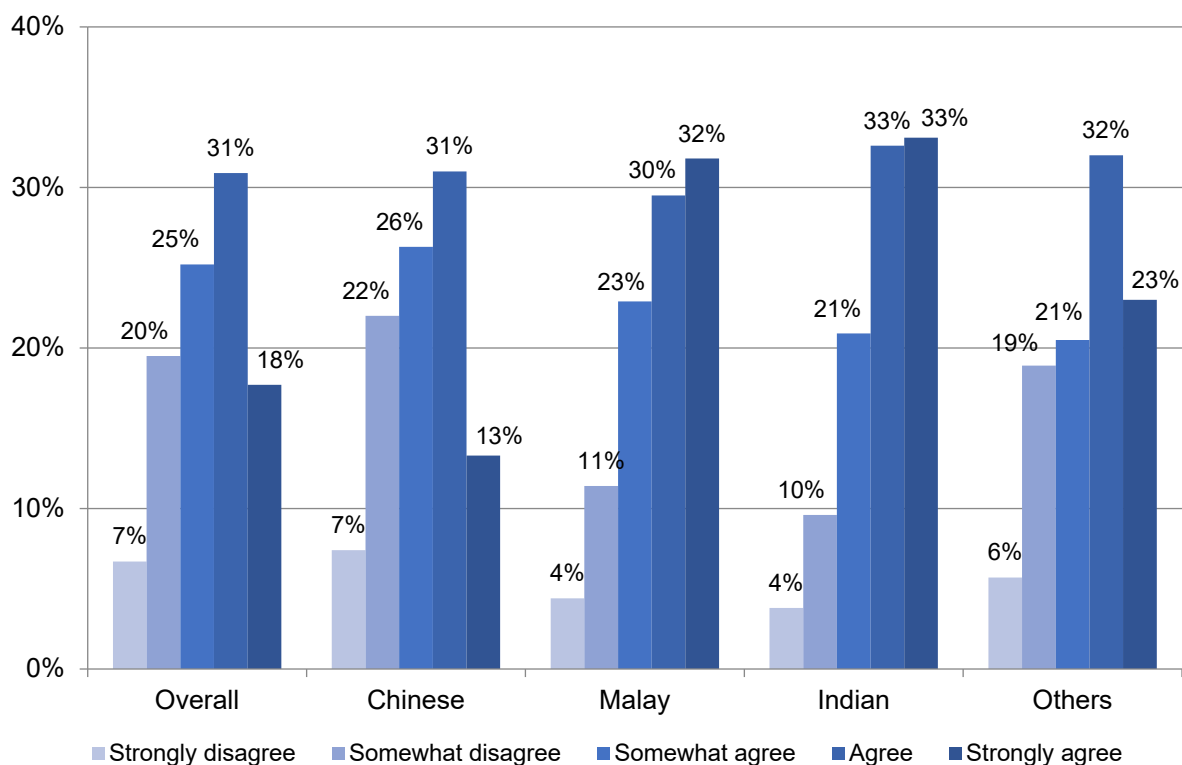


7.1.3 Ethnic minorities were more likely to support the use of English in public spaces and be cognizant of avoiding social exclusion

We also examined these results by respondents' ethnicity. It is interesting to note that Chinese respondents seem to be the least linguistically inclusive relative to the other races. In 2013, 29 per cent of Chinese respondents disagreed that people of different racial groups should speak in English to each other in public places, as compared to 15 per cent of Malay and 14 per cent of Indian respondents (see Figure 140). In 2018, with a different scale, 17 per cent of Chinese respondents disagreed that people of different racial groups should speak in English to each other in public places, as compared to 8 per cent of Malay and 12 per cent of Indian respondents (see Figure 141).

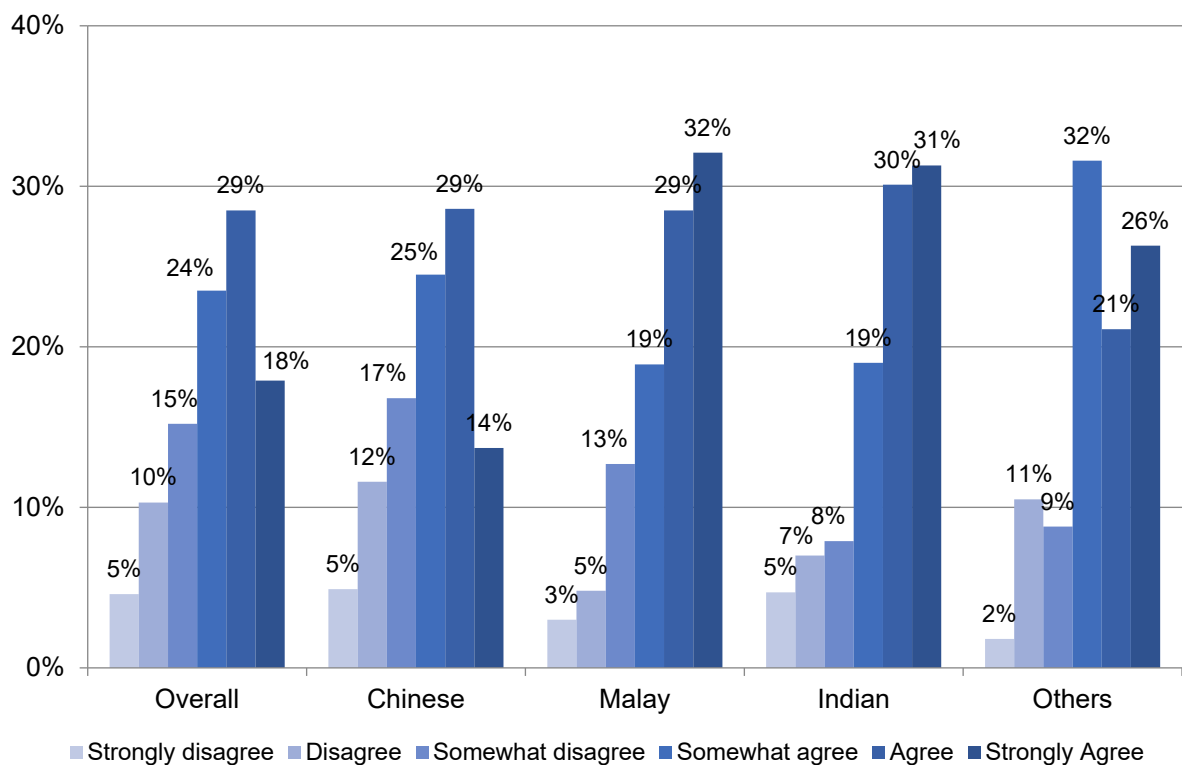
One potential reason for this could be increased awareness of racial privilege and linguistic discrimination through the rise of more race-based discourse in the media and public consciousness over the last few years. In addition, the experience of linguistic discrimination by ethnic minorities could have shaped their desire for more linguistic inclusivity in public spaces through the use of English as a common language.

Figure 140: "People of different racial groups should speak English to each other in public places", by race (2013)



^Scale used for 2013 and 2018 varies; comparative analyses should be treated with caution.

Figure 141: "People of different racial groups should speak English to each other in public places", by race (2018)



7.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT

Next, the RRL survey examines respondents' attitudes towards the government's interventionist approach to language management. These responses are mostly juxtaposed with those presented in Section 7.1.

7.2.1 The majority of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that people should be able to use their own preferred language in public spaces, and that the state should not attempt to influence personal language use

More than 70 per cent of respondents agreed that they should have the freedom to use their preferred language, as long as they were able to communicate effectively (see Figure 142). A sizeable proportion of respondents (53 to 62 per cent) also felt that the government should not try to influence their personal language use. Respondents who identified most with Singlish, their heritage language or their official Mother Tongue were more likely to feel this way. This should be understood in the context of state intervention vis-à-vis the language domain across different points in time.

In the years soon after independence, the government sought to discourage the use of dialects; even restricting well-liked Cantonese movies. In the 1980s, the state pushed for English medium education, and merged Nanyang University with the University of Singapore to help the former switch to English as the language of instruction. In the 1990s and through the early 2000s, the government responded to the growing popularity of Singlish — especially in broadcast media programmes such as *Phua Chu Kang* — with a series of policies and initiatives promoting the use of Standard English.

Conversely, respondents who identified the most with English or “Other” languages (a very small proportion) were the least likely to harbour resentment towards the interventionist approach to language management. A potential reason for this could be concerns regarding the state's prerogative to deprioritise non-English languages in favour of a more globally and economically valued language, as perceived by non-English speakers.

Chinese respondents were most likely to prefer a non-interventionist approach by the state in shaping personal language use, as compared to their minority counterparts (see Figure 143). This could potentially be an artefact of English language proficiency; for instance, the Indian community is relatively more proficient in English as illustrated in previous sections, and would hence take less issue with the state's push to use Standard English across educational and workplace settings.

Figure 142: Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to statements on language choice freedom, by language one identifies most with (2013)

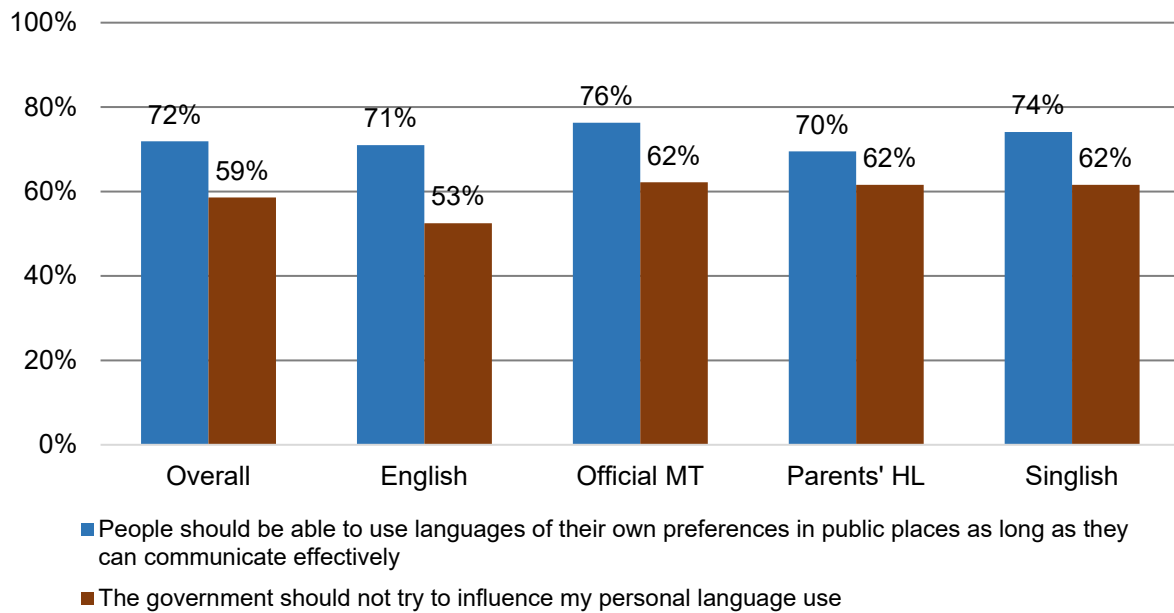
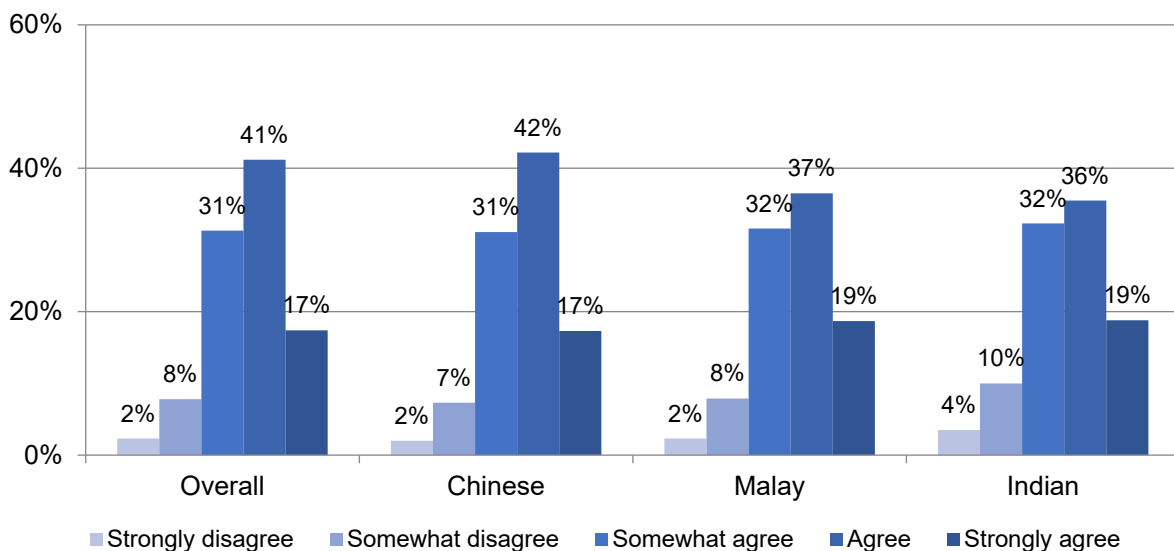


Figure 143: "The government should not try to influence my personal language use", by race (2013)

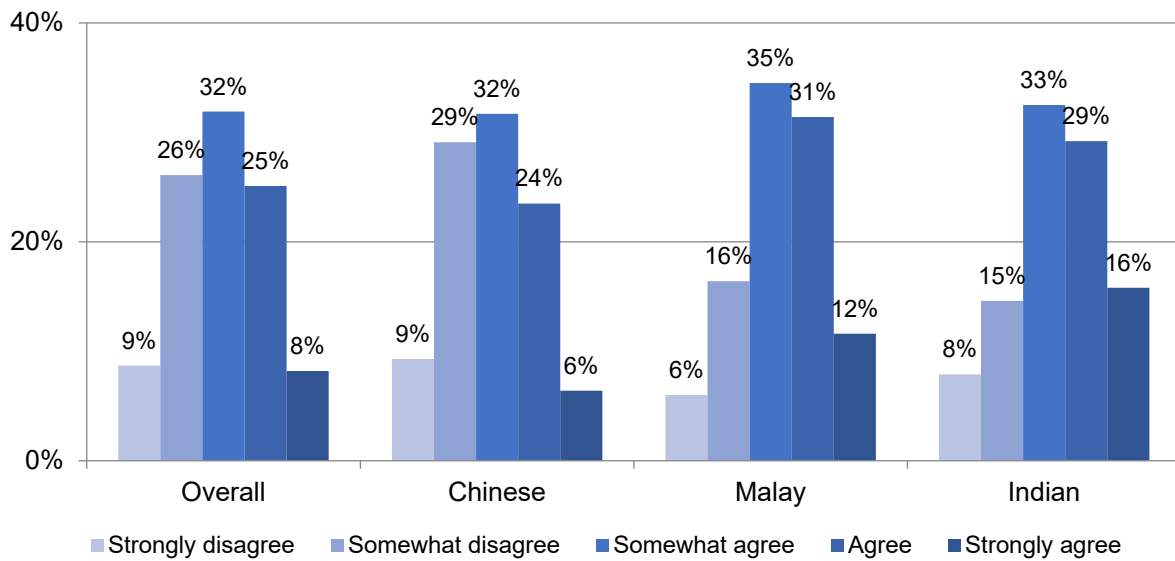


7.2.2 Ethnic minorities were more likely to feel that the state should do more to curb the use of Singlish; across ethnicities, however, most still thought otherwise or were neutral to government intervention

Respondents were asked if the government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore. The 2013 wave found that ethnic minorities were more likely to feel that more should be done to curb the use of Singlish; 43 per cent of Malay and 45 per cent of Indian

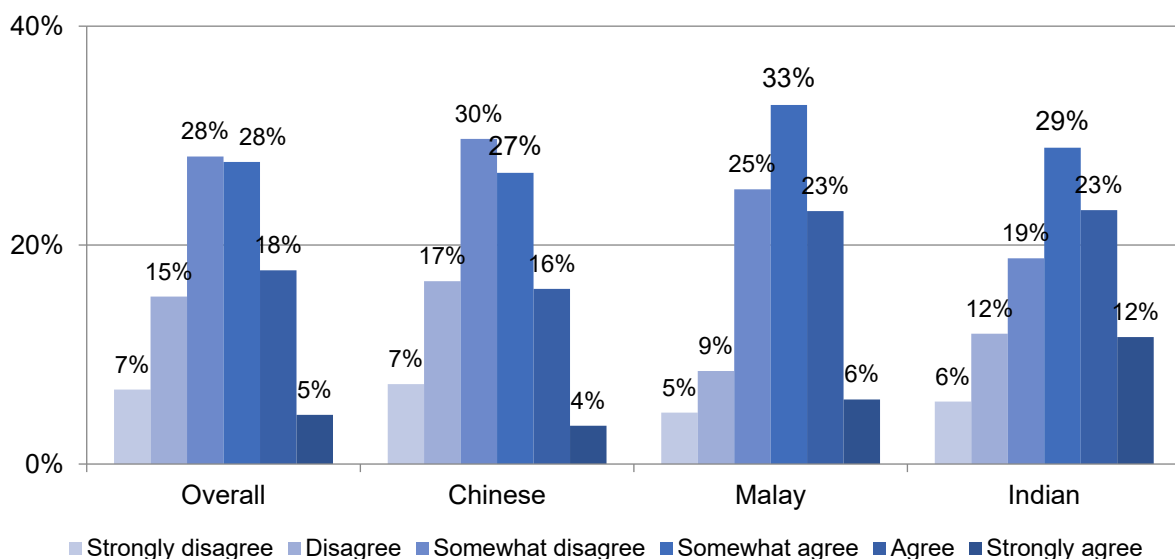
respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this, as compared to just 30 per cent of Chinese respondents (see Figure 144). This trend seemed to be mirrored in 2018, albeit with a different response scale presented to participants. Twenty-nine per cent of Malay and 35 per cent of Indian respondents agreed or strongly agreed that more should be done to curb the use of Singlish, as compared to 20 per cent of Chinese respondents (see Figure 145). As previously mentioned, this could be a result of more extensive incorporation of Chinese vernaculars in the construction of Singlish, as compared to other ethnic minority languages; alongside increased affinity felt by the majority Chinese population with Singlish.

Figure 144: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by race (2013)



^Scale used for 2013 and 2018 varies; comparative analyses should be treated with caution.

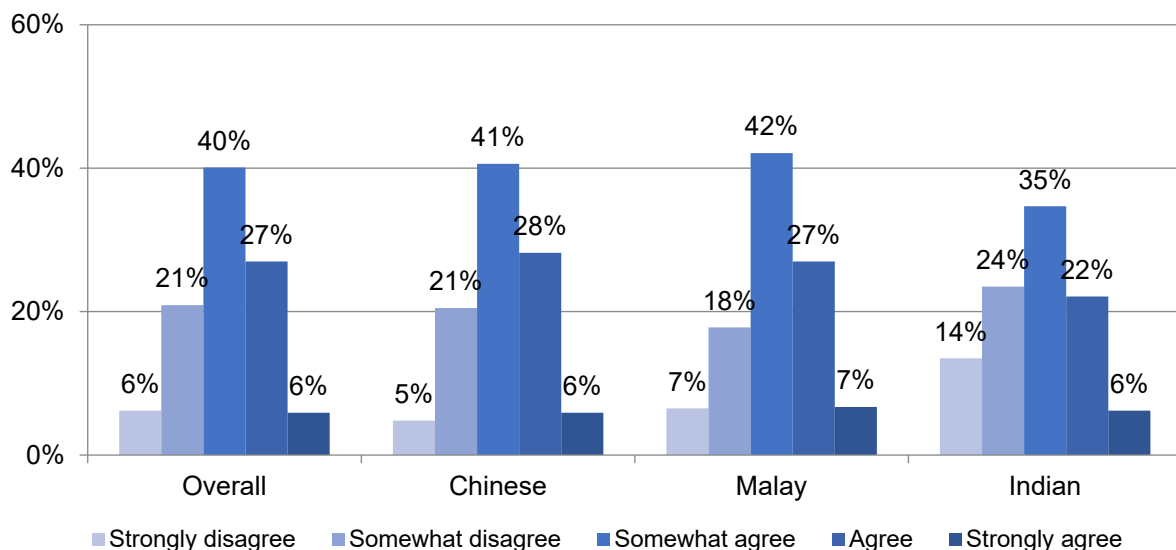
Figure 145: "The government should do more to curb the use of Singlish in Singapore", by race (2018)



7.2.3 Chinese and Malay respondents were slightly more likely to support increased recognition for people using heritage languages; however most still felt otherwise or were neutral

The 2013 survey also examined respondents' perceptions of granting heritage languages more recognition. Chinese and Malay respondents were slightly more likely to perceive the importance of recognising heritage languages; 34 per cent of Chinese and Malay respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this, as compared to 28 per cent of Indians (see Figure 146). It is also worth noting that more than four in 10 Chinese and Malay respondents and more than a third of Indian respondents were neutral about the acknowledgement of heritage languages, suggesting a lack of affinity with these languages in favour of embracing a state-driven prioritisation of English.

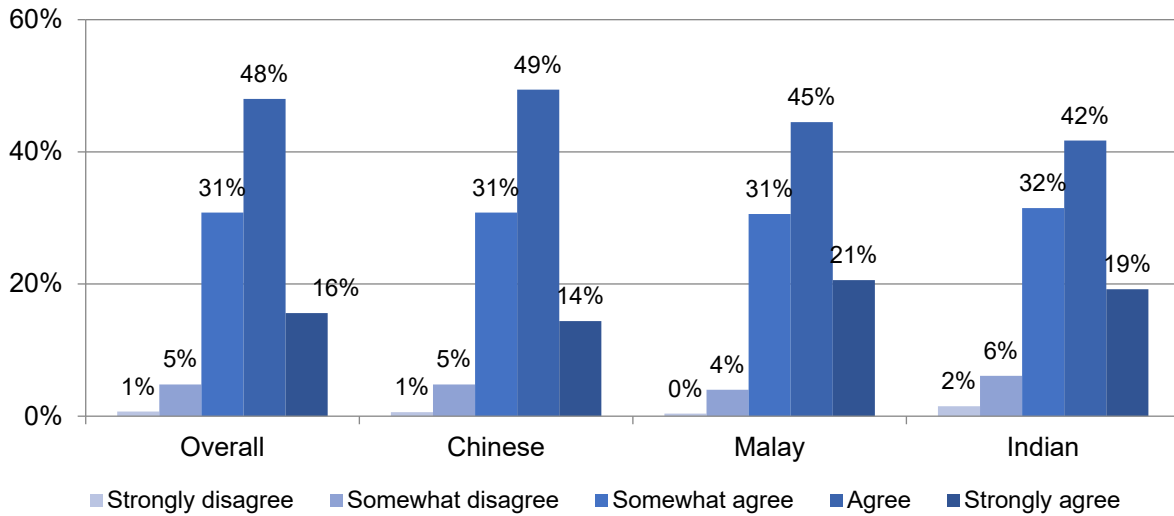
Figure 146: "People who use heritage languages should be given more recognition than those they have now", by race (2013)



7.2.4 About two-thirds of respondents regardless of ethnicity “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the government should help all language groups preserve and maintain their traditions and customs

While less than 35 per cent of respondents felt that heritage languages should be accorded more recognition, they were very supportive of the government helping ethnic groups preserve and maintain their languages and cultures (see Figure 147). More than half of respondents across all three dominant ethnic groups agreed that the government should help all language groups, including heritage language groups, preserve and maintain their traditions and customs. It is interesting to note that respondents across all ethnicities were equally likely to feel this way, despite Chinese and Indian communities having more heritage languages than the Malay community.

Figure 147: "The government should help all language groups, including heritage language groups, preserve and maintain their traditions and customs", by race (2013)

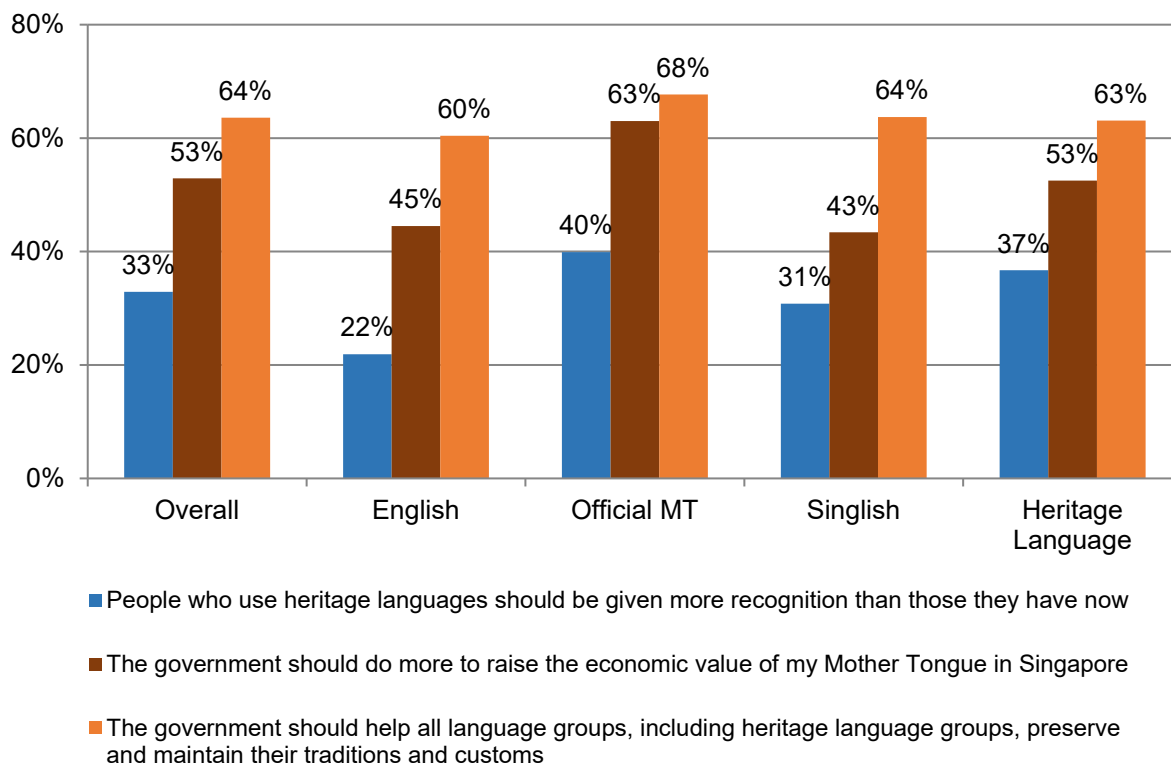


7.2.5 In general, respondents prioritised state support in preserving and maintaining language traditions and customs, over and above increased recognition of languages or raising economic value of Mother Tongues

Respondents’ opinions of proposed governmental measures for language support are consolidated in Figure 148. Amongst all three proposed measures on language support, the measure that garnered the most support was that of the government having to help all language groups — including heritage language groups — preserve and maintain their traditions and customs. The measure that was the least popular was that of granting more recognition to heritage languages.

We also examined the results according to the language respondents identify with the most. Only a fifth of the respondents who identified with English agreed that it was important to accord more recognition to heritage languages, which makes sense as they might have less affinity for these languages. More than half of those who identified with a heritage language or an official Mother Tongue language agreed that the government should do more to raise the economic value of Mother Tongues in Singapore.

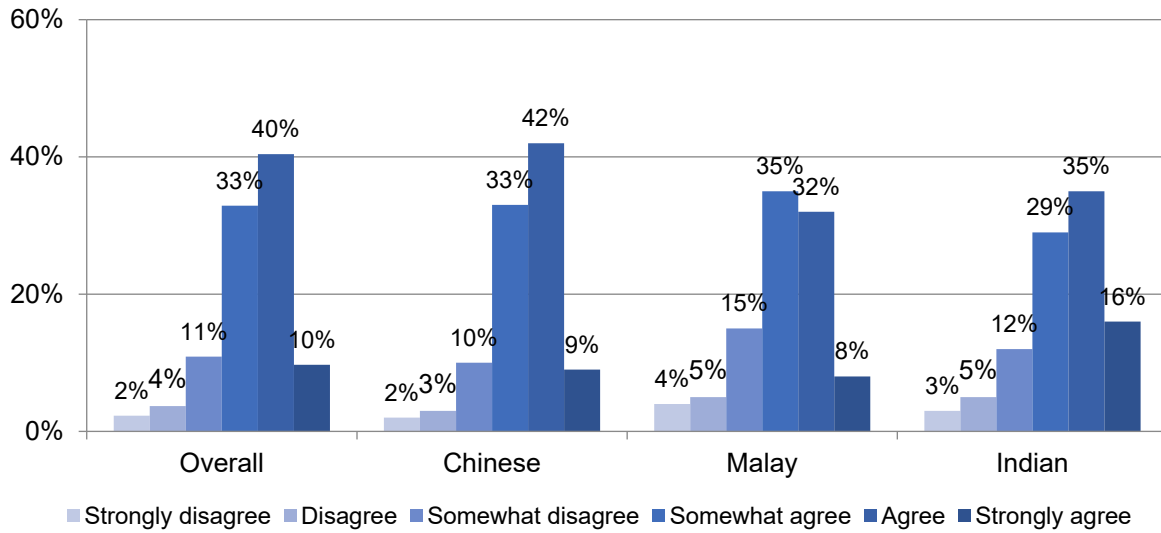
Figure 148: Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to statements on language group support, by language one identifies most with (2013)



7.2.6 Chinese respondents were more likely than their counterparts to agree that the state has maintained a fair system for all regardless of language proficiency

The 2018 wave of the study also examined respondents' perceptions of whether the government has maintained a fair system or policy for everyone in Singapore, regardless of language proficiency. The results were then analysed by respondents' ethnicity. Chinese respondents were the most likely (84 per cent) to indicate agreement to various extents that the government has maintained a fair system for everyone, regardless of language proficiency (see Figure 149). This was in comparison to 80 per cent or less of minority respondents who agreed to varying extents that a fair system has been maintained so far. This could stem from a stronger perception of language discrimination experienced by minorities in Singapore, in tandem with their lived experiences.

Figure 149: Respondents' perceptions of whether the government has maintained a fair system for everyone in Singapore, regardless of language proficiencies, by race (2018)



7.3 MOTIVATION TO SPEAK OFFICIAL LANGUAGES WELL

The 2018 wave of the study also set out to examine factors that would motivate respondents to speak English or their Mother Tongue languages well, based on respondents' perceptions.

7.3.1 Respondents identified an environment with proficient speakers and support within the education system as key factors integral to motivating them to speak English and their Mother Tongue well

Based on responses from the RRL survey, the two most influential factors motivating respondents to speak English well are: 1) having an environment where people speak English well (77 per cent); and 2) support from school and teachers for students (76 per cent; see Figure 150). Environment is also perceived as the most influential factor in motivating respondents to speak their Mother Tongue well (71 per cent; see Figure 151). However, an awareness of the advantages of speaking the language well is the next most important factor identified by respondents (69 per cent), followed by support from school and teachers for students (69 per cent).

Figure 150: Respondents' perceptions of whether various measures would motivate them to speak English well (2018)

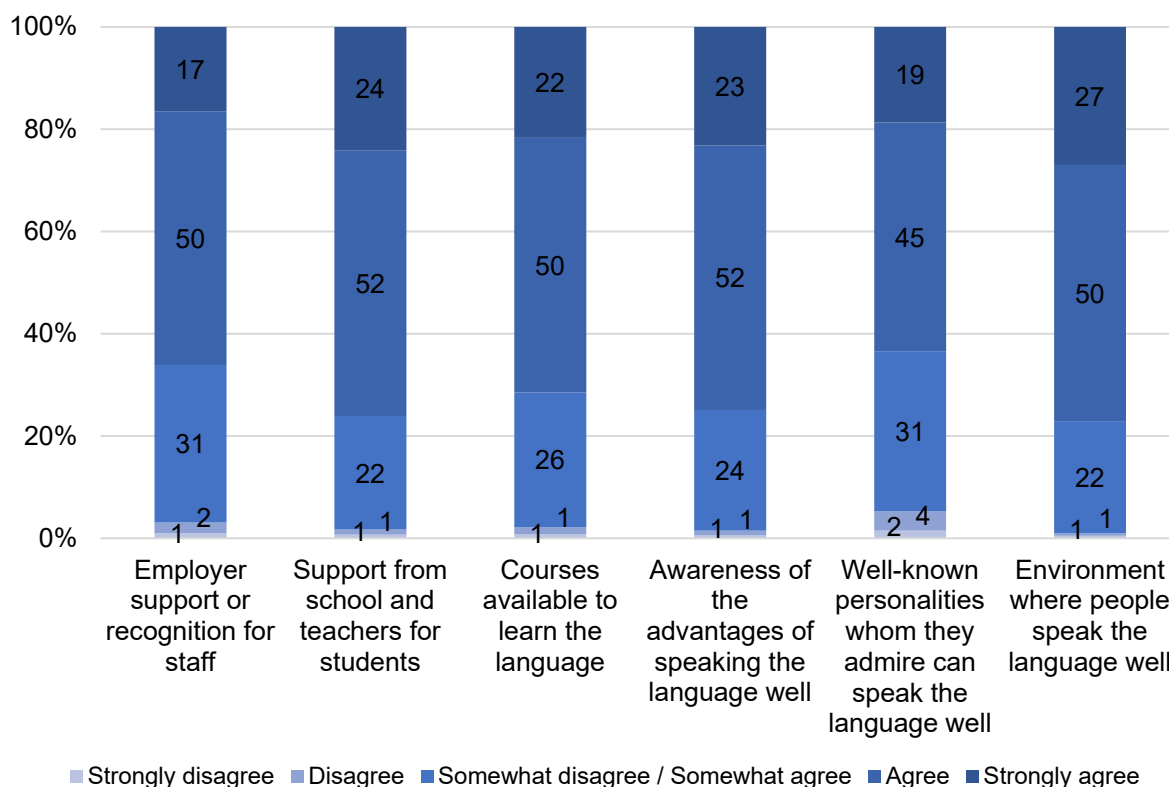
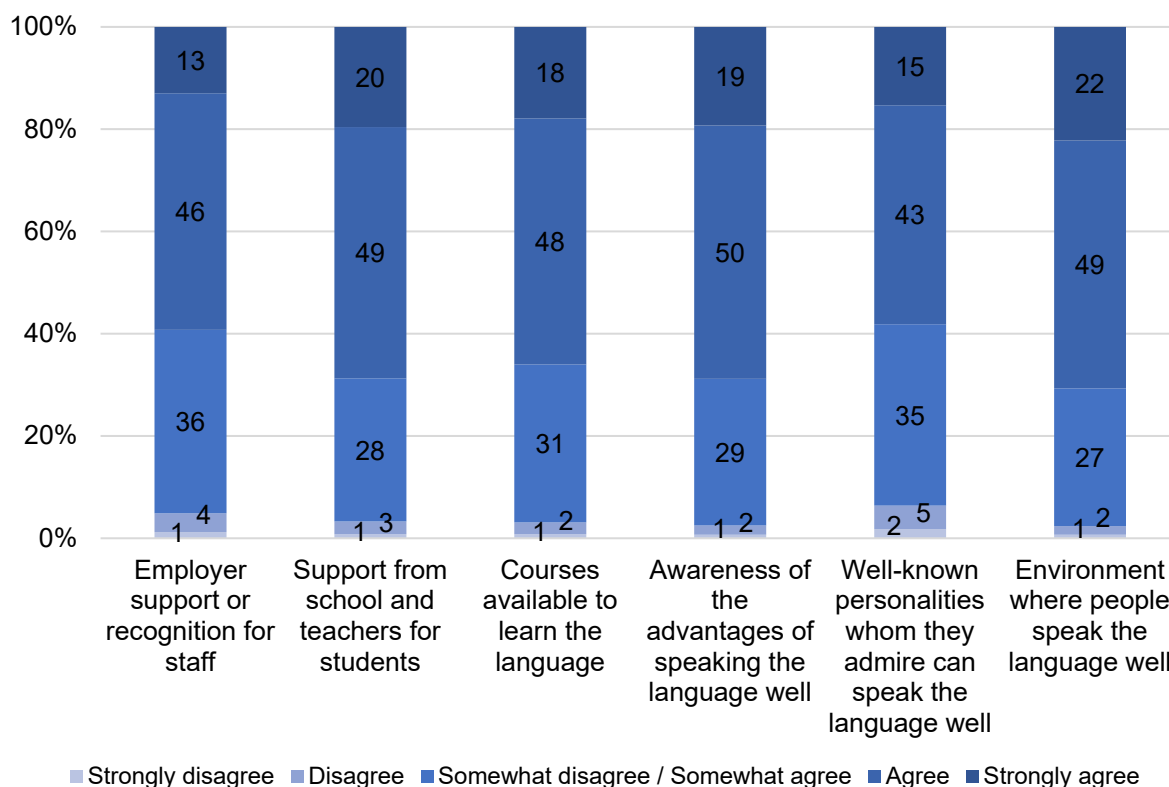


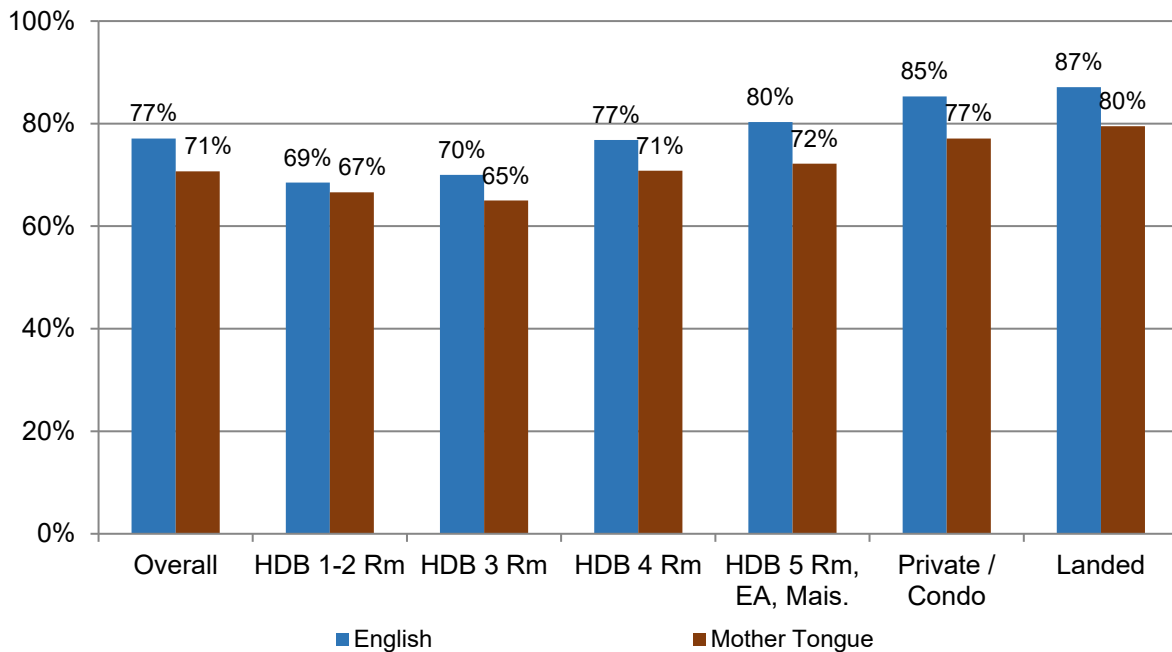
Figure 151: Respondents' perceptions of whether various measures would motivate them to speak their Mother Tongue well (2018)



7.3.2 Awareness of the relationship between environment and linguistic proficiency is correlated with affluence

We further examined the group of respondents who agreed that being immersed in an environment where a particular language was spoken well would motivate them to speak the language well. We analysed the results by housing type and found a marked correlation; respondents residing in larger, more affluent housing types were more likely to agree that an environment where a particular language was spoken well would motivate them to speak the language well (see Figure 152). For example, 87 per cent of respondents residing in landed properties felt that environment was an important motivating factor to speaking English well, as compared to 69 per cent of respondents residing in 1–2 room HDB apartments. This suggests an augmented awareness of the impact of environment on proficiency that comes with increased affluence and perhaps greater education.

Figure 152: Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that an environment where people speak the language well would motivate them to speak the language well, by housing type (2018)





Chapter 8

Summary of Key Findings & Implications

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

8.1 SHIFTS IN LANGUAGE TRENDS

Over the years, various studies (Dixon, 2009; Gupta & Siew, 1995) have examined the processes and effects of language management in Singapore. One of the most influential outcomes of language policy and management in Singapore is the gradual phasing out of heritage languages, with a shift to the adoption of Mother Tongue languages. Both the nature and extent of this language shift differed across various ethnic groups. The Chinese community witnessed a shift from Chinese dialects to both English and Mandarin; the Malay community started incorporating more English into vernacular habits, alongside Malay (which was still predominantly spoken, read and written); while the Indian community witnessed a shift from Indian languages to predominantly, the English language.

Findings from our survey lend credence to these trends, and support previous studies documenting these language shifts across various ethnic communities. While a large proportion (90 per cent) of Malay Singaporeans could still speak their official Mother Tongue language at least “well”, the numbers who had stated that they also speak English “well” has increased.

This language shift is also evident in the Chinese community. While 71 per cent of Chinese respondents reported being able to use heritage languages to communicate with friends and family in 2013, this number dropped to 57 per cent in 2018, indicating a gradual loss of proficiency in heritage languages over time. This phenomenon is more prevalent amongst the younger Chinese, with less of them being able to converse in heritage languages. Heritage languages are perceived primarily as a tool for communication with grandparents in the private sphere. In contrast, the majority of the Chinese community reported proficiency in using Mandarin, signalling its strength.

Both Indian respondents and respondents from other ethnic communities reported high proficiency levels in English in both 2013 and 2018. Both these groups also reported high levels of heritage language maintenance in 2013, but the reported heritage language proficiency within the Indian community fell in 2018. These two communities speak a diverse range of heritage languages, and this survey is unable to ascertain language shift patterns for non-Chinese and non-Malay ethnic groups.

8.2 BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND PROFICIENCY

Overall, bilingual proficiency has strengthened across all age groups from 2013 to 2018, suggesting that increasingly, respondents can speak both English and their respective Mother Tongue languages at least “well” (measured by how well they can communicate with friends and family in a particular language).

In 2013, about three-quarters of younger respondents rated their English proficiency as “very well”, while around half rated their Mother Tongue language proficiency as “well” to “very well”.

In other words, around three-quarters of young school leavers and working adults under 35 were able to use both English and Mandarin well enough to communicate with family and friends. Bilingualism amongst Chinese respondents was especially prominent; approximately half to two-thirds of young Chinese respondents reported the ability to speak both English and Mandarin well enough, to talk about technology, politics, and religion in these languages.

Hence, it is evident that learning two languages at the same time does not necessarily affect mastery of either one of them; speakers have the potential of acquiring both languages with reasonable levels of proficiency. Most Singaporeans undergo an English-centric education system with all subjects being taught in English; with the exception of their respective Mother Tongue languages which are taught as a second language. This system has produced an effectively bilingual workforce; one that is capable of functioning in a multicultural setting through communicating in English, whilst maintaining their respective cultures through their Mother Tongue languages.

About one-third of all respondents aged above 65 reported the ability to speak both English and their respective Mother Tongue languages at least well enough to talk about family and friends. While older respondents in general were less bilingually proficient than younger respondents, results show that more of the older respondents were at least somewhat proficient in English. For example, while 31 per cent of Chinese respondents aged above 65 reported not being able to speak English in 2013, this number fell to only 18 per cent in 2018. A potential reason for this could be the increased learning of basic English among older persons, perhaps because of the prevalent use of English for official announcements and the fact that their children and grandchildren are increasingly using English. However, considering there is still a considerable portion of older persons who are not proficient in English, it is important to continue to ensure that information is still being understood by this segment of the population.

The 2018 wave of the study also asked respondents about the frequency of language use at work. English remains the most predominantly spoken language at work for all respondents. However, fewer Chinese respondents (60 per cent) reported always speaking English at work, as compared to at least 70 per cent of respondents from other ethnicities. Interestingly, substantial proportions of non-Chinese respondents (13 per cent to 22 per cent) reported speaking Mandarin sometimes, often, or always at work.

The results above suggest that while Singapore's multi-ethnic social fabric is generally harmonious, linguistic exclusion may occur in some workplaces where Mandarin is often spoken. This makes it difficult for non-Mandarin speakers to ease into social networks. It will be important for more public education to be provided on this matter — pervasive English use at workplaces can greatly enhance the integration of diverse ethnic groups.

However, it will be impractical to dictate the language used in the many social interactions that occur in the workplace. Singapore's multiracial policies promote the preservation of the respective cultures of ethnic groups including their languages which are considered among the most important markers of ethnic identity. Given that Singapore has a majority Chinese population who will keep their ethnic identity and language alive, it will be important to provide opportunities for non-Mandarin speakers to learn conversational Mandarin. Mandarin

proficiency should not however be expected of minority workers; otherwise this will be a case of linguistic assimilation which is incompatible with Singapore's multiracialism.

Moreover, the majority of respondents in 2018 were more likely to feel that the general spoken and written English standards have improved over the last 10 years, but they were less likely to feel the same about spoken and written Mother Tongue language standards. Therefore, the rise in bilingual proficiencies over the years could be attributed to growing proficiency in English, rather than Mother Tongue proficiency. The finding that younger respondents across all ethnicities, below 36 years of age communicate with their children predominantly in English further supports this trend of an English-centric bilingual proficiency.

8.3 HERITAGE LANGUAGES

Both waves of the RRL survey show that the heritage language proficiency of respondents decreases with age. This lack of proficiency in their parents' heritage languages might translate into strained communication between the younger generation and their grandparents, or parents. However, heritage language proficiency (i.e., speaking the language at least "well", to be able to communicate with family and friends) has decreased over time (from 2013 to 2018) across all age groups. The sharpest decline in heritage language proficiency occurs within the Chinese population, for respondents aged 36–50, and respondents aged 26–35.

While some uptick in interest and uptake of heritage languages have been qualitatively observed in the past few years, this still comes on the back of a sustained decline of heritage language use soon after independence. The latter can be attributed to a host of factors such as state policies regulating languages on broadcast media and radio; alongside a shift in focus towards the official languages such as the Bilingual Education Policy, and the launch of the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" more than four decades ago.

8.4 LANGUAGE HIERARCHIES

The official language policy was implemented using ethnicity as a factor of differentiation, in assigning Mother Tongue languages. Despite equal allocation of resources to all official Mother Tongue languages, Chinese and Malay respondents were more likely to identify with their official Mother Tongue languages, while Indian respondents and respondents of other ethnicities were more likely to identify more with English. Similarly, younger respondents were more likely to identify with English, while older respondents were more likely to identify with official Mother Tongue or heritage languages. Low-income respondents were more likely to identify with official Mother Tongue or heritage languages, while high-income respondents were more likely to identify with English.

A hierarchy of languages is evident from the 2013 wave of the survey, with English being perceived as the language with the greatest linguistic capital. Results found that English speakers were perceived by non-English speakers as not having to work as hard as non-English speakers to lead a prosperous life in Singapore. Next to English, Mandarin was

perceived as having linguistic capital, especially by ethnic minorities who felt that Mandarin speakers did not have to work as hard to attain a prosperous life in Singapore.

There was also a differential allocation of linguistic capital to different official Mother Tongue languages. Respondents who were ethnic minorities accorded more value to Mandarin, while Chinese respondents did not perceive Mandarin according them greater privileges. In addition, Chinese respondents may be slightly oblivious to the existence of linguistic discrimination in Singapore, especially with reference to the languages used by ethnic minorities. However, in the 2018 wave of the study, Chinese respondents were more likely to acknowledge that speaking in Mandarin comes with advantages in work and business, both in Singapore and internationally.

Given that English and Mandarin are likely to continue to be dominant languages considering their global presence, it is important to continue to establish the value of Malay and Tamil; the value of these languages needs to be conceived beyond their economic utility.

8.5 PERCEPTIONS OF SINGLISH

Although Singlish was not the language that respondents identified with the most (in both 2013 and 2018 waves), around half of the respondents in the 2018 wave felt that speaking Singlish gives Singaporeans a sense of identity, and they were not bothered if someone speaks in Standard English or Singlish. This shows a gradual acceptance of Singlish as part of national identity.

Additionally, when respondents were asked about the appropriateness of speaking in Singlish in different contexts, the majority of them felt that it was appropriate (always or often appropriate) to speak in Singlish with family members, friends or classmates, as well as stallholders at hawker centres or food courts. Indian respondents were less favourable to speaking in Singlish, especially in formal contexts such as at work, by government officials or by counter staff at government departments. Degree holders were a little more open to Singlish when used with family members, friends, and even by MPs during informal interactions with residents, but they found Singlish inappropriate in school settings, when used by teachers during lessons.

While Singlish has become popularised as part of national identity, it will be important to always balance its cultural value vis-à-vis its utility for global communication. The need to maintain Standard English in education and formal work processes is well established and accepted by the population.

8.6 LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT

The effects of language policies on attitudes and behaviours are evident throughout this book. The use of English as the country's *lingua franca* increases proficiency and affinity to the language, inflating the perception of capital associated to it. This phenomenon is observed amongst Singaporeans, regardless of demographics, and has been steadily growing from

2013 to 2018. This is indicative of the potential influence of other factors, such as the rise of globalised identities, on linguistic identities.

Trends were reversed in the case of Mother Tongue and heritage languages. There was a decline in perceived proficiency levels of Mother Tongue and heritage languages over the years. These languages were also imbued with less capital, according to Singaporeans. The streamlining of Mother Tongue languages unintentionally contributed to the erosion of a multitude of heritage languages. However, this loss in proficiency did not undermine affinity to these languages. Singaporeans still felt connected to their Mother Tongue and heritage languages, signalling the need for sustained provision of spaces for these languages to survive and thrive.

However, the maintenance of Mother Tongue and heritage languages must not be at the expense of interracial communication. Close to a third of Singaporeans in the 2013 wave of the survey felt that people of similar ethnic backgrounds should resort to their respective Mother Tongue languages for intra-racial communication in public places. This unfortunately makes interracial communication difficult. Simultaneously, there was great support for policies that promote the use of English in public spaces for interracial communication. Close to half of Singaporeans, across both 2013 and 2018, felt this way. These trends might indicate a lack of consensus over state language ideologies, and the need for more public outreach to secure agreement.

Moving forward, we examine possible factors of motivation to speak English and Mother Tongue languages well. Most Singaporeans today are positively receptive to these factors of motivation. The three proposals that garnered the most support were: (1) being immersed in an environment where people speak the language well, (2) getting support from schools and teachers, in the case of students, and (3) being aware of the advantages that accompany speaking the language well. Future policy trajectories could thus be centred on outreach and education of language benefits; or using popular culture, media, and prominent personalities to augment the appeal of unpopular but important languages.

However, future policy deliberations must take into account perceptions towards language policies. Many Singaporeans, as found in the 2013 wave of our study, do not favour interventionism, which was characteristic of most language campaigns and policies. Respondents preferred liberty in selecting their languages of choice, as long as they do not compromise on effective communication. Policymakers are thus tasked with delicately balancing the needs of different language groups, without too much intrusion into the private sphere of language use.

In the context of these results, it might be useful to re-evaluate current language policies. An emerging trend that could help reshape language policies would be that of code-switching, which refers to “the systematic alternate use of two or more languages in a single utterance or conversational exchange for communicative purposes” (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Levine, 2011). Various studies show the growing prevalence of hybridity in spoken languages in Singapore. An ethno-methodological study by Vaish and Roslan shows how teenagers in Singapore perceive language in identity construction: they accept “Singlish as the language of solidarity” and they build interracial bonds and friendships through incorporating a little of Malay and Mandarin when interacting with one another (2011). Xie and Cavallaro also

document the popularity of code-switching amongst young Chinese respondents, who were more likely to favour code-switching relative to English (2015).

Straying from compartmentalised methods of teaching English and Mother Tongue languages, current pedagogies could be reimagined and reworked in accordance to code-switching. The dominant use of code-switching by young Singaporeans is indicative of the gradual blurring of lingual lines and the need for languages to not be taught in isolation, but instead, in relation to each other (Bokhorst-Heng & Caleon, 2009). Pedagogies stand to benefit from incorporating code-switching when teaching languages, teaching them in fluid and dynamic ways. A blending of English, Mother Tongue languages, heritage languages, which may resemble Singlish, could contribute to establishing a national identity through hybridity in language. Nonetheless, the current emphasis on building strong competencies in the use of Standard English should not be compromised in light of its value in industry and across borders.

With the constant flux of global trends and identities, language use, attitudes and behaviours are in constant states of evolution. If unmanaged, languages that we care deeply for can erode. Given the significance of ethnic languages to our multicultural identity, language policies remain relevant as ever today, to prevent this erosion. However, policy deliberation on this matter needs to remain flexible in view of global trends and be in close collaboration with its recipients and other stakeholders, to ensure maximum effect for its intended recipients.



Annex 1
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Annex 2

Acknowledgements



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the four of us have the pleasure of bringing this substantive publication to fruition, this would not have been possible without the gracious support of our colleagues over the years who contributed commentary, suggestions, and critiques across various iterations of this manuscript. We would like to specially mention and thank Assoc. Prof. TAN Ying Ying, Dr CHIANG Wai Fong, Dr TENG Siao See, Dr Ritu JAIN, Dr TEO Kay Key, and Ms ZHANG Jiayi for their insights and contributions.

We would also like to thank a number of public agencies for extending their time and energies towards the betterment of this piece. In particular, we are grateful for the comprehensive inputs from the National Heritage Board as Language Councils Secretariat. These inputs were collated with much effort by Ms Nurul Afiqah IBRAHIM.

The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Planning and Development Division also contributed valuable commentary and feedback which we took on board to produce a significantly more robust rundown of our research findings in the final version of this publication. In particular, we are grateful for Dr Elizabeth PANG, Ms Angeline HO, and Dr Jocelyn LIM, who took time out to run through a full version of this publication and provide their insights.

We thank LEONG Wenshan for her excellent copyediting assistance.



Annex 3

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