

**LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LANGUAGE SHIFT  
OF TAMILS IN MAURITIUS**

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment for the award  
of*

***Doctor of Philosophy***

*in*

***Applied Linguistics***

*by*

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***January 2026***



## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this thesis entitled **Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Tamils in Mauritius**, submitted by **Dahini Ponnen** bearing Registration Number **22HAPH01**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics**, is a bonafide work carried out by the latter under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publications before submission of the thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of an acceptance letter or a reprint in the relevant area of her research:

1. Ponnen, D., & Arulmozi, S. (2025). Tamil Identity in Mauritius: Linguistic and Cultural Preservation in a Multilingual Context. *African Identities* 1-13 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2025.2556876>
2. Ponnen, D., & Arulmozi, S. (2025). "Intergenerational Transmission of Tamil in Mauritius: A Sociolinguistic Analysis" *Jadavpur Journal of Languages and Linguistics Volume 8, Issue 1* 201- 210.

The student has made presentations at the following conferences, where the latter has:

1. Presented a paper entitled "Exploring Linguistic Diversity in Mauritius", 51<sup>st</sup> All India Conference of Dravidian Linguistics, held at Tamil University, Tanjavur, on 28th June 2024.
2. Presented a paper entitled "Worship of Lord Murugan at Kovil Montagne", at the International Muthamizh Murugan Conference, 3<sup>rd</sup> Arupadai Veedu, Palani, on 24th and 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2024.

3. Presented a paper entitled “Language and Religious Identity among Tamils in Mauritius” at a 3–day conference on “Voices of India and Beyond: Mobility, Sustainability, and Technology” at Woxsen University, Hyderabad, on the 28th to 30th August 2024.
4. Presented a paper entitled “Tamil Identity in Mauritius: Linguistics and Cultural preservation amidst Multilingualism”, at the International Conference on Indian Linguistics Tradition and Indigenous Knowledge System, held at North Eastern Hill U, Shillong, on 28th February 2025.

Furthermore, the student has completed the following courses towards fulfilling the coursework requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Program.

<b>Course</b>	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Pass/Fail</b>
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Research Oriented Readings	AL824	4	Pass
Research & Publication Ethics	AL826	2	Pass

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## DECLARATION

I, **Dahini Ponnen**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Tamils in Mauritius**”, submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Professor S. Arulmozi, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been previously submitted in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET. A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

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## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) ADDRESSED BY THIS RESEARCH**

This research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:

1. **SDG 4 - Quality Education**
2. **SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities**
3. **SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities**
4. **SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**
5. **SDG 17 - Partnership for the Goals**

### **How the work incorporated in the thesis addresses the above SDGs:**

The study contributes to *SDG 4: Quality Education* by promoting inclusive and equitable access to learning through the preservation and teaching of the Tamil language in Mauritius. By examining institutional initiatives, teacher training, and curricular reforms, the research underscores how heritage language education promotes lifelong learning opportunities and cultivates cultural awareness among learners.

In relation to *SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities*, this study addresses linguistic and cultural disparities by advocating for the inclusion of minority languages within national education systems, thereby empowering marginalised communities and promoting social equity. It further supports *SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities* by demonstrating how language preservation enhances cultural heritage, strengthens community identity, and contributes to the sustainability of multicultural societies.

Moreover, the research is linked to *SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*, as it highlights the importance of inclusive policies and institutional support for linguistic and cultural diversity, key elements in promoting social harmony and cultural justice. Finally, the study aligns with *SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals* through its emphasis on collaboration between governmental agencies, educational institutions, cultural associations, and international Tamil organisations. These partnerships are essential for sustaining linguistic diversity and ensuring that local cultural preservation efforts contribute to global sustainable development objectives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Thank you, God, for always showering me with your blessings!*

*First and foremost, I would like to thank myself for never giving up, even when the path seemed impossible. I am genuinely proud of how far I have come, for persevering through challenges, for staying strong despite doubts, and for proving that resilience and determination can turn obstacles into milestones.*

*I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, **Professor S. Arulmozi**, for being the most supportive mentor one could ask for. Your deep and insightful knowledge has guided me throughout this research journey. Your understanding, patience, and constant willingness to help have made this work possible. Thank you for being more than a typical supervisor. Your encouragement and belief in my abilities have truly inspired me. Thank you for all the support and guidance throughout this journey.*

*I want to extend my gratitude to my Doctoral Research Committee, **Dr N. Ramesh** and **Dr Sriparna Das**, for their invaluable guidance and thoughtful feedback throughout this journey. I am also profoundly grateful to the **University of Hyderabad** and the **Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies (CALTS)** for providing the resources and a conducive environment that fostered my academic growth. I would like to extend my gratitude to the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** for this invaluable opportunity to conduct my research in India under the African Scholarship Scheme.*

*I wish to extend my biggest thanks to the one professor whose strict side is as important as her fun side, **Dr Gracious Mary Tensen**. Thank you for always being there to boost my morale each time I felt like it was getting too much. Thank you for all the therapy sessions, which are always accompanied by the most delicious food, such as the Wednesday KFC days or Popeyes eating days. Thank you to the one who introduced me to having chai with parotta (pazhampoti), and the one who would roast herself.*

*Special mention to the office staff, **Mr Murthy**, who is always helping me, especially with the administrative work.*

*To my mom, **Mrs Soobhajini Ponnen**, thank you, Mom, for always being there no matter what. The one person who would randomly call me for her “écouter non” sessions. The one who makes my life brighter and reminds me every day that I am better than this, and always pushes me to do my best. Thank you, Mom, for always being there, supporting me, and making everything possible. Thank you for not being the typical mother and for actually helping me from day one and at every step of my dreams. Thank you for showing me that one woman can make a real difference if we truly want to.*

*To **Mr Nadarajen Ponnen**, thank you, Yoven, for being there as a fatherly figure in my life. Thank you for giving me the wings to fly. I know, as an elder brother, you have sacrificed a lot for me, and I hope I have made you proud. Thank you for setting the bar so high that today I can finally fly on my own, and for showing me that success is a ladder you cannot climb with your hands in your pockets. Thank you for always being there for me.*

*My most enormous gratitude goes to **Mr Hiresh Maha** (Adarsh-Laddoo). Thank you would be an understatement, but the biggest thanks go to you for being here during the most difficult times of my PhD journey. The one who would patiently listen to me venting my frustrations and even get angry at random people he doesn't know, because they are making my life difficult (best-friend goals – things he signed up for). Thank you to the person I have cried to the most*

*and laughed with the most in my life. Thank you for reminding me that the Dr. title is way more important than anything else in my life, and for keeping me motivated a little more every day. This would not have been completed without your support.*

*This journey was a rollercoaster ride, but the people I met along the way made it a truly memorable experience.*

*While **Prosper Kipaya** always made sure to bless me with his philosophical talks (life is like a door), we also had the most epic information distribution sessions together. We have some of the most amazing memories, from running marathons together to playing football and attending church; you have made life in Tagore better. **Nancy Tserenjav** was always there with her motherly love and affection, which she showered upon me. You made my life in Tagore better, especially with the delicious food that you would carefully prepare for me or the food that we would prepare together while learning from each other's cultures. Thank you for the Sunday "socialising" days accompanied by FitFood, or the random "socialising" days that we have anywhere in Tagore, irrespective of the place and time. Thank you for the constant support, as well as the evening walks and runs.*

*Thank you, **Adithi EP**, for introducing me to the most delicious foods in Hyderabad, including Wednesday Biryani Day at NRC Canteen, and for all the random night road trips we took to explore the city's food scene. The one person who would surely ensure I tried almost all the Hyderabad Street foods and went out for special Ramadan foods in Tolichowki, or walked on the streets of Charminar and visited the Dargah. Life in HCU was great because of you.*

*Lastly, a huge thank you to all the people who helped me directly or indirectly in completing my thesis, and thank you to the ones who also left along the way and taught me not to trust and believe people easily.*

*I would like to dedicate this work to the loving memory of my late father, **Mr Loganaden Ponnem**, and my late grandfather, **Mr Rajoovel Poinoosawmy**, whose blessings, values, and dreams have been my guiding light. Their unwavering love and belief in my potential continue to inspire me every day. This achievement is as much theirs as it is mine.*

*"To nurture a language is to keep the heartbeat of a people alive  
It is to remember who we were, understand who we are, and shape who we will become."*

**Dahini Ponnem**

## Table of Contents

### Chapter I Introduction

1.0 Background of the Study	2
1.1 Ethnolinguistic Study of Tamils in Mauritius	3
1.2.1 Language Maintenance	4
1.2.1.1 Definitions by Key Scholars	5
1.2.1.2 Key Aspects of Language Maintenance	7
1.2.1.3 Factors Supporting the Maintenance of Tamil in Mauritius	8
1.2.1.4 Challenges to Language Maintenance	9
1.2.2 Language Shift	10
1.2.2.1 Definitions by Key Scholars	11
1.2.2.2 Causes of Language Shift	12
1.2.2.2.1 Socioeconomic Factors	13
1.2.2.2.2 Political and Institutional Pressures	13
1.2.2.2.3 Social and Cultural Influences	14
1.2.2.2.4 Demographic Factors	14
1.2.2.2.5 Attitudinal and Psychological Factors	14
1.2.2.3 Stages of Language Shift	15
1.2.2.4 Consequences of Language Shift	16
1.2.3 Language Contact	16
1.2.3.1 Definitions by Key Scholars	17
1.2.4 Language Attitude	19
1.2.4.1 Definitions by Key Scholars	20
1.2.4.2 Key Aspects of Language Attitude	21
1.2.5 Pioneers in the Field of Sociolinguistics	22
1.2.5.1 William Labov	23
1.2.5.2 Dell Hymes	23
1.2.5.3 Basil Bernstein	23
1.2.5.4 Joshua A. Fishman	23
1.2.5.5 Nancy Dorian	24
1.2.5.6 Michael Clyne	24

1.2.5.7 Suzanne Romaine	24
1.2.5.8 Teresa L. McCarty	24
1.2.5.9 Other Influential Contributors	24
1.2.6 Sociolinguistic Situation	25
1.2.6.1 Diaspora and Tamil	25
1.2.6.1.1 The Tamil Diaspora	25
1.2.6.1.2 Reasons for Tamil Migration	25
1.2.6.1.3 Cultural Identity in the Diaspora	25
1.2.6.2 Diglossia and the Tamil Language	26
1.2.6.3 Tamils in different countries	26
1.2.6.3.1 Native Tamil Homeland	26
1.2.6.3.2 Countries with Colonial-Era Tamil Migrations	27
1.2.6.3.3 Countries with Modern Tamil Diaspora	28
1.2.6.3.4 Other Regions	29
1.3.1 Mauritius: The Geographical Landscape	29
1.3.1.1 A Volcanic Island	29
1.3.1.2 Coastline and Coral Reefs	30
1.3.1.3 Mountain and Valleys	30
1.3.1.4 Lakes, Rivers, and Natural Reserves	31
1.3.1.5 Offshore Islands and Marine Life	31
1.3.2 History of Mauritius	31
1.3.2.1 The Dutch Settlement	32
1.3.2.2 The Evolution of Mauritius: A Linguistic and Cultural Mosaic	33
1.3.2.3 The British Takeover and the Rise of Indentured Labour	33
1.3.2.4 The Arrival of the Chinese and the Path to Independence	34
1.3.3 Demographic Situation of Mauritius	35
1.3.3.1 Population Size and Growth	35
1.3.3.2 A Cultural Mosaic: The People of Mauritius	35
1.3.3.3 Urbanisation and Population Density	36
1.3.3.4 Ageing Population: A New Challenge for Mauritius	37
1.3.3.5 Migration and Workforce	37
1.3.4 The Socioeconomic Landscape of Mauritius	37

1.3.4.1 The Economic Transformation	38
1.3.5 The Linguistic Situation in Mauritius	38
1.3.5.1 Mauritian Creole (Kreol Morisien)	40
1.3.5.2 English and French	40
1.3.5.3 Ancestral languages	40
1.3.5.4 Tamil	41
1.3.6 Education System of Mauritius	41
1.3.6.1 Education Policy Framework	42
1.3.6.2 Educational Structure	42
1.3.6.2.1 Pre-Primary Education	42
1.3.6.2.2 Primary Education	43
1.3.6.2.3 Secondary Education	44
1.3.6.2.4 Tertiary Education	44
1.3.7 Language in Education	44
1.3.8 Tamil Banknotes Controversy	45
1.3.9 Tamil Diaspora in Mauritius	47
1.4 Research Problem	48
1.5 Research Questions and Hypothesis	49
1.5.1 Research Questions	49
1.5.2 Hypothesis	49
1.6 Research Objectives	50
1.7 Significance of the Study	50
1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study	51
1.9 Research Gap	52
1.10 Contribution to Knowledge	52
<b>Chapter II Review of Literature</b>	
2.0 Introduction	55
2.1 Language Maintenance	55
2.1.1 Theoretical Foundations	56
2.1.2 Sociocultural Drivers of Maintenance	57
2.1.3 Global Case Studies	58

2.1.4 Mauritius Context	61
2.2 Language Shift	62
2.2.1 Theoretical Approaches to Language Shift	62
2.2.2 Global Case Studies in Language Shift	63
2.2.3 Language Shift in Mauritius	65
2.3 Language Contact	66
2.3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Language Contact	66
2.3.2 Contact Phenomena in Diasporic Contexts	67
2.3.3 Language Contact and Creolisation in Mauritius	70
2.3.4 Contact-Induced Structural Changes	70
2.3.5 Identity, Symbolism, and Language Choice	71
2.4 Language Attitudes	71
2.4.1 Understanding Language Attitudes	71
2.4.2 Positive Attitudes and Their Effects	72
2.4.3 Negative Attitudes and Language Decline	75
2.4.4 Intergenerational Differences in Language Attitudes	77
2.4.5 Language Attitudes in the Mauritian Context	79
2.4.6 Motivation in Language Learning: Gardner and Lambert's Socio-Educational Model	82
2.4.7 Q Methodology in Sociolinguistic and Language Attitude Research	83
2.5 Tamils in Diasporas	85
2.5.1 Historical Trajectories and Global Settlement Patterns	85
2.5.2 Patterns of Language Use and Transmission	85
2.5.3 Intergenerational Challenges	89
2.6 Tamils in Mauritius	91
2.6.1 Historical Background and Demographics	91
2.6.2 Language Use Across Domains	91
2.6.3 Education and Institutional Support	91
2.6.4 Media, Technology, and Youth Engagement	92
2.6.5 Intergenerational Challenges and Identity	92
2.6.6 Policy and Cultural Implications	93

## **Chapter III Methodology**

3.1 Introduction	95
3.2 Research Design	95
3.3 Population and Sample of the Study	96
3.4 Instruments of the Study	98
3.4.1 Semi-structured Interview Guide	98
3.4.2 Sociolinguistic Questionnaire	98
3.4.2.1 Structure of the Questionnaire	99
3.4.3 Language Attitude Questionnaire	100
3.4.3.1 Structure of the Language Attitude Questionnaire	101
3.4.4 Community Profile Metadata	101
3.5 The Community Profile	102
3.6 Q Methodology	102
3.6.1 Development of the Q Sample	103
3.6.2 Q-Sorting Procedure	103
3.6.3 Analysis of Q-Sorts	103
3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire	104
3.8 Data Collection and Statistical Analysis	104
3.8.1 Data Collection	104
3.8.2 Statistical and Qualitative Analysis	105
3.8.3 Triangulation and Integration	106
3.9 Ethical Considerations	107
3.10 Procedure of the Study	108

## **Chapter IV Data Analysis**

4.1 Introduction	110
4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents	110
4.2.1 Gender and Age	111
4.2.2 Marital Status	112
4.2.3 Educational Background	113
4.2.4 Ethnicity	113
4.2.5 Geographical Location	114

4.2.6 Mother tongue and Ancestral Language	115
4.3 Language Use	115
4.3.1 Dominant Language and First Language Acquired	115
4.3.1.1 Dominant Language	116
4.3.1.2 First Language Acquired	116
4.4 Language Learning Methods	117
4.4.1 Learning Methods	117
4.5 Ancestral Language Proficiency Across Demographic Factors	118
4.5.1 Tamil Proficiency by Sex	119
4.5.2 Tamil Proficiency by Age Range	120
4.5.3 Tamil Proficiency by Marital Status	121
4.5.4 Tamil Proficiency by Educational Background	122
4.5.5 Tamil Proficiency by Ethnicity	123
4.5.6 Tamil Proficiency by Geographical Location	124
4.5.7 Tamil Proficiency by Mother Tongue	126
4.6 Language Proficiency by Age Group (LSRW)	127
4.6.1 Understanding Vs Age Group	128
4.6.2 Speaking vs Age Group	129
4.6.3 Reading vs Age Group	131
4.6.4 Writing vs Age Group	132
4.7 Language Use Across Domain	133
4.7.1 Language Use in the Home Domain	133
4.7.2 Language Use in the Education Domain	135
4.7.2.1 Ancestral Language Instruction: Gaps between Policy and Practice	135
4.7.2.2 Institutional Support and Digital Initiatives	136
4.7.2.3 Conferences and Teacher Training	136
4.7.3 Language Use in Cultural Domain	137
4.7.4 Language Use in the Work Domain	139
4.8 Attitudes and Perspectives Toward Tamil	141
4.8.1 Perceived Importance of Tamil	141
4.8.2 Emotional Attachment v/s Practical Use	143
4.8.3 Generational Differences in Attitude	145

4.9 Q Methodology	147
4.9.1 Factor Extraction and Explained Variance	148
4.9.2 Factor Extraction Criteria	148
4.9.3 Factor Loading and Participant Distribution	149
4.9.4 Interpretative Naming of Patterns	151
4.9.4.1 Factor A: Traditionalist	151
4.9.4.2 Factor B: Symbolic Users	152
4.9.4.3 Factor C: Pragmatic Learners	153
4.9.5 Ideal Q-sort Table and Interpretation of Each Factor	154
4.9.5.1 Factor A- Traditionalist	154
4.9.5.2 Factor B- Symbolic Users	156
4.9.5.3 Factor C- Pragmatic Learners	157
4.9.6 Visualisation of Factor Profile	159
4.9.7 Summary of Q Methodology Findings	160
4.10 Thematic Insights from Community Perspectives	161
4.10.1 Intergenerational Responsibility and the Role of Parents	161
4.10.2 Educator Motivation and Curriculum Reform	162
4.10.3 Community Engagement and Cultural Organisations	162
4.10.4 Digital Resources and Informal Learning Opportunities	163
4.10.5 Institutional Support and Limitations	163
4.10.6 Personal Commitments and Future Contributions	164
4.11 Conclusion	164
<b>Chapter V Discussion</b>	
5.1 Introduction	168
5.2 Thematic Discussion	169
5.2.1 Demographic Influence on Language Proficiency	169
5.2.2 Symbolic Attachment vs. Practical Utility	170
5.2.3 Language Use Across Domains	171
5.2.4 Attitudes and Perspectives	172
5.2.5 Role of Institutions and Community Organisations	174
5.2.6 Community Voices and Agency	176

5.2.7 Summary of the Thematic Discussion	177
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## **Chapter VI Conclusion**

6.1 Introduction	180
6.2 Summary of Key Findings	180
6.3 Theoretical Implications	181
6.4 Practical Implications	182

6.5 Contribution of the Study	182
6.6 Limitations	183
6.7 Directions for Future Research	183
<b>Chapter VII Recommendations</b>	
7.1 Introduction	186
7.2 Educational Interventions	186
7.2.1 Strengthening Primary and Secondary Education	187
7.2.2 Higher Education and Teacher Training	187
7.2.3 Informal Learning and Digital Resources	188
7.3 Community and Institutional Engagement	188
7.3.1 Role of Temples and Religious Institutions	189
7.3.2 Socio-Cultural Organisations and NGOs	189
7.3.3 Family and Home Domain	189
7.3.4 Collaboration Between State and Community	190
7.4 Policy and Structural Support	190
7.4.1 Government Language Policy	190
7.4.2 Institutional Frameworks	191
7.4.3 Teacher Training and Professional Development	191
7.4.4 Media and Technology Integration	191
7.4.5 Cultural and Financial Support	192
7.5 Conclusion	192
7.6 Final Reflection	193
<b>References</b>	<b>194–205</b>
<b>Annexures</b>	<b>206-228</b>

## List of Tables

Table 3.1	Data Collection and Analysis Summary Chart	107
Table 4.1	Languages in cultural practices, illustrating how Tamil is maintained symbolically through rituals and festivals, while its communicative role declines, with observed impacts on cultural identity.	138
Table 4.2	Language use in the work domains, highlighting the dominance of English and French in professional contexts, compared to Tamil's limited symbolic or supportive role	140
Table 4.3	Participants' perceptions of the importance of Tamil, illustrating strong symbolic value despite reduced everyday functional use.	142
Table 4.4	Emotional attachment and practical use of Tamil, showing mean scores, medians, and standard deviations for participants' responses	144
Table 4.5	Comparison of attitude toward Tamil, between older (50+ years) and younger (18-35 years) participants, based on mean score across statements	146
Table 4.6	Factor extraction results, showing eigenvalues and variance explained for the underlying attitudinal dimensions toward Tamil	148
Table 4.7	Factor structure from Q methodology, showing extracted factors, interpretative labels and their main orientations toward Tamil language maintenance and shift	153

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Position of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean	30
Figure 1.2	Anonymous engraving of Dutch activity in Mauritius in 1598	32
Figure 1.3	Ethnolinguistic group and languages of Mauritius, adopted and recreated from Rajah-Carrim 2005:319	36
Figure 1.4	Proportion of the population by language most often spoken at home, Republic of Mauritius, 2011 and 2022 Population Censuses	39
Figure 1.5	Enrolment in Pre-Primary schools, March 2019-2024	43
Figure 1.6	Enrolment in Primary schools, March 2019-2024	43
Figure 3.1	Flowchart showing the procedure of the study	108
Figure 4.1	Gender distribution of participants	111
Figure 4.2	Age distribution of participants	111
Figure 4.3	Marital status distribution of participants	112
Figure 4.4	Distribution of participants according to educational background	113
Figure 4.5	Ethnic affiliation of participants	114
Figure 4.6	Geographical distribution of participants	114
Figure 4.7	Distribution of participants reported by mother tongue	115
Figure 4.8	Distribution of participants according to the dominant language	116
Figure 4.9	Distribution of participants according to the first language acquired	117
Figure 4.10	Distribution of participants according to the learning methods of Tamil	118
Figure 4.11	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across gender groups	120
Figure 4.12	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across age groups	121
Figure 4.13	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency among participants based on marital status	121

Figure 4.14	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency among participants with different educational backgrounds	123
Figure 4.15	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across different ethnic groups	124
Figure 4.16	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency among participants living in urban v/s rural areas	126
Figure 4.17	Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across participants with different reported mother tongues	127
Figure 4.18	Age-based differences in understanding Tamil, reflecting generational variation in ancestral language maintenance	128
Figure 4.19	Comparison of Tamil speaking proficiency among participants by age groups	130
Figure 4.20	Comparison of Tamil reading proficiency among participants by age groups	131
Figure 4.21	Comparison of Tamil writing proficiency among participants by age groups	132
Figure 4.22	Participants-to-factor loadings heatmap	150
Figure 4.23	Top and bottom five ideal Q-sort scores for factor A (Traditionalist)	154
Figure 4.24	Top and bottom five ideal Q-sort scores for factor B (Symbolic users)	156
Figure 4.25	Top and bottom five ideal Q-sort scores for factor C (Pragmatic learners)	158
Figure 4.26	Ideal Q-sort ranking by factor	160

# **CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION**

## **1.0 Background of the Study**

Language is not merely a means of communication, but a fundamental expression of cultural identity, social belonging, and historical continuity. In multilingual and postcolonial societies, the vitality or decline of a language reflects deeper processes of migration, power relations, and cultural transformation. The study of language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) has therefore become a central theme in sociolinguistics, particularly in contexts where minority or heritage languages coexist with dominant national or global tongues.

Mauritius offers a distinctive and fertile ground for examining these dynamics. The island's linguistic mosaic is shaped by centuries of colonisation, slavery, and indentured migration. It comprises English, French, Mauritian Creole, and several ancestral languages such as Tamil, Bhojpuri, Urdu, Telugu, and Hindi. Despite constitutional recognition of linguistic pluralism, the hierarchy of usage reveals an imbalance: English and French dominate education, administration, and media; Mauritian Creole functions as the lingua franca of everyday interaction, while ancestral languages are largely restricted to ceremonial or religious spheres.

Within this complex sociolinguistic ecology, the Tamil language occupies a unique position. Introduced by South Indian indentured labourers during the nineteenth century, Tamil has long served as a cornerstone of spiritual, cultural, and communal identity among Mauritian Tamils. Yet, although it continues to thrive in temples and religious rituals, its everyday communicative use has sharply declined, particularly among younger generations. This dual existence, symbolic preservation alongside functional erosion, illustrates the challenges faced by heritage languages in maintaining both relevance and vitality.

Understanding the processes that sustain or undermine Tamil in Mauritius is therefore critical to the broader discourse on language maintenance and shift. It provides insights into how multilingual communities negotiate linguistic identity, education, and modernity amid globalisation. Moreover, examining Tamil in the Mauritian context contributes to comparative scholarship on diaspora, heritage-language revitalisation, and ethnolinguistic resilience.

## 1.1 Ethnolinguistic Study of Tamils in Mauritius

The Tamil community in Mauritius represents one of the most resilient diasporic groups in the Indian Ocean, maintaining linguistic and cultural continuity despite generations of social and linguistic transformation. Within the island's diverse landscape, Tamils stand out for their rich religious traditions, robust institutional networks, and ongoing efforts to preserve their heritage language.

Tamil was brought to Mauritius in the nineteenth century through the migration of indentured labourers from southern India, particularly from districts such as Thanjavur, Madurai, and Tirunelveli. Employed mainly on sugar estates, these labourers established temples, cultural associations, and mutual-aid societies that became central pillars of Tamil communal life. Over time, these institutions fostered both spiritual cohesion and cultural continuity, serving as vital vehicles for transmitting values, rituals, and, to some extent, the language itself.

Today, Tamil continues to play an important symbolic and ritual role within Mauritian society. It is used prominently in Hindu temples, during festivals such as *Thaipusam Cavadee*<sup>1</sup>, *Deepavali*<sup>2</sup>, and *Navaratri*<sup>3</sup>, and in the recitation of devotional hymns. Yet in everyday communication, most Mauritian Tamils rely on Mauritian Creole, French, or English. This pattern reflects a broader linguistic reality in which ancestral languages serve primarily as ethnic markers rather than functional media of daily interaction. The phenomenon of partial language maintenance, where Tamil persists through ritual and culture but declines as a spoken vernacular, illustrates the nuanced complexities of language survival in diasporic contexts.

From an ethno-linguistic perspective, the Tamil community exhibits both strength and vulnerability. Institutional support exists through Tamil teaching in schools, the activities of the Tamil Speaking Union, and programmes organised by the Mauritian Tamil Cultural Centre Trust. Nonetheless, intergenerational transmission remains

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<sup>1</sup> thaipusam Cavadee is a major Tamil Hindu festival honouring Lord Murugan, marked by fasting, penance, and the carrying of the *cavadee* (a symbolic burden) in a devotional procession. The festival holds deep cultural and spiritual significance among Tamil communities in South India and the diaspora, including Mauritius.

<sup>2</sup> Deepavali, or the Festival of Lights, is a Hindu festival symbolizing the victory of light over darkness and good over evil, celebrated with prayers, illumination, and communal harmony.

<sup>3</sup> Navaratri is a Hindu festival spanning nine nights in honour of the Divine Mother, symbolizing the victory of good over evil and celebrated with prayer, fasting, and cultural devotion.

fragile. The dominance of Creole in informal settings, coupled with the use of English and French in education and employment, contributes to a gradual erosion of Tamil fluency and everyday use.

Studying the ethno-linguistic situation of Tamils in Mauritius is therefore essential for understanding how small diasporic communities negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities within a multilingual nation. It offers critical insight into the mechanisms of language maintenance and shift, the intersection of religion and education, and the role of institutional frameworks in sustaining minority languages. Moreover, it underscores how heritage languages can remain powerful symbols of belonging even when their communicative domains contract.

In this context, the present research seeks to explore how the Tamil community in Mauritius maintains, transforms, and redefines its linguistic identity. Employing both sociolinguistic and ethnographic perspectives, the study examines factors influencing language retention, speakers' attitudes across generations, and the broader implications for cultural continuity. Ultimately, this ethno-linguistic inquiry contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of language and identity within the Mauritian multicultural landscape.

The following section discusses the theoretical and sociolinguistic background of language maintenance and shift, which provides the conceptual foundation for this study.

### **1.2.1 Language Maintenance**

Language maintenance involves the conscious or unconscious efforts made by individuals, families, communities, or institutions to sustain the use of a language across generations. In multilingual societies, this often becomes crucial when minority or heritage languages begin to lose ground to more dominant national or global languages. Such decline is typically driven by sociopolitical pressures, educational systems, economic opportunities, or shifting cultural identities. In these contexts, language maintenance is not only about preserving communication, but also about safeguarding cultural heritage and group identity.

Mauritius is a country where English and French dominate formal domains, and Mauritian Creole is widely spoken in everyday life; therefore, maintaining the use of Tamil presents unique challenges. For many within the Tamil community, language use is closely tied to cultural and religious practices, identity, and ancestral heritage.

### **1.2.1.1 Definitions by Key Scholars**

Haugen (1972) defines language maintenance as “the continued use of a language by a speech community despite pressures to adopt another language”. Haugen was a pioneer in the field of sociolinguistics and language planning. His work on bilingualism and language ecology explored how languages survive or shift under social pressures. He emphasised that language maintenance requires conscious efforts, such as institutional support like education, government policies and community involvement. His early work laid the foundation for future studies in language shift, revitalisation, and planning.

Gal (1979) describes language maintenance as “a situation where a linguistic group retains its traditional language across generations despite external pressures for linguistic shift”. Gal’s research focused on bilingual communities, especially in Europe. She studied how social factors, including gender, migration, and urbanisation, influence whether a group maintains or shifts its language. She introduced sociological factors influencing language maintenance, such as economic advantages and community identity.

Dorian (1981) sees language maintenance as “the conscious or unconscious efforts of a community to resist language shift and preserve its linguistic heritage”. Dorian’s research focused on small, declining language communities, mainly Scottish Gaelic speakers. She observed that speakers often shift to a dominant language due to social and economic pressures, but some communities make formal and informal efforts to sustain their linguistic traditions. Her work highlighted the vulnerability of minority languages and introduced the concept of language obsolescence, linking it to maintenance and shift.

Fishman (1991) defines language maintenance as “the process by which a speech community continues to use its language in the face of competition from a more dominant language”. Fishman is one of the most influential figures in language planning and sociolinguistics. He introduced the Reversing Language Shift (RLS),

which focuses on strategies to sustain or revive endangered languages. His work provided a practical framework for language revitalisation, stressing the importance of education, religious institutions, media, and community efforts in language maintenance.

Romaine (1995) describes language maintenance in the context of bilingualism and diglossia, stating that it involves “preserving the use of a native or heritage language within a community while facing external pressures from a dominant language”. Romaine’s work focuses on multilingual societies and the dynamics between dominant and minority languages. She examined how linguistic diversity can be sustained through social structures and policies. She brought attention to societal bilingualism and the factors contributing to language maintenance, including intergenerational transmission and educational policies.

Trudgill (2000) explains language maintenance as “the continued use of a minority or indigenous language in a multilingual setting, often due to strong ethnic identity and institutional support”. Trudgill is known for his work in sociolinguistics and dialectology. He emphasised the role of identity and group solidarity in sustaining language use, especially in multilingual societies. His research highlights how linguistic prestige and ethnic identity contribute to language maintenance, stressing the importance of government policies and community-driven initiatives.

Spolsky (2004) defines language maintenance as “the efforts of individuals and communities to continue using a language in a setting where other languages are more dominant”. Spolsky’s work is rooted in language policy and planning, and he examines how education, government policies, and media influence language maintenance. His definition encompasses individual efforts, such as those of families and small communities, and institutional efforts, such as those of education and government initiatives, making it one of the most comprehensive perspectives on language maintenance.

The concept of language maintenance has developed progressively, with scholars contributing diverse perspectives over the decades. Haugen (1972) and Gal (1979) were among the first to conceptualise language maintenance as the resistance to language shift, highlighting the role of social pressure and group cohesion. Building on this, Dorian (1981) and Fishman (1991) shifted the focus toward the conscious and

unconscious efforts of communities to sustain their linguistic heritage, often in response to dominant language pressures. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Romaine (1995) and Trudgill (2000) explored the connections between language maintenance, ethnic identity, and societal bilingualism, stressing the importance of intergenerational transmission and supportive social structures. Spolsky (2004) later offered a more integrative view, acknowledging both grassroots efforts by individuals and families and top-down influences from institutions, including education systems and language policies. Collectively, these scholars have enriched the theoretical understanding of language maintenance by linking it to broader sociocultural, political, and identity-based factors.

These theoretical contributions offer a valuable lens through which to examine the dynamics of Tamil language maintenance in Mauritius. Like the communities studied by Fishman and Dorian, the Tamil population in Mauritius faces increasing pressure from dominant languages such as English, French, and Mauritian Creole, which are more prominent in education, media, and daily communication. The intergenerational transmission of Tamil, particularly in non-religious and informal domains, appears to be weakening, echoing Romaine's concerns about the role of societal bilingualism in shifting language priorities. However, Tamil continues to hold cultural and religious significance, aligning with Trudgill's emphasis on ethnic identity as a motivating factor in language retention. Spolsky's broader framework is especially relevant to the Mauritian case, as both institutional efforts (e.g., Tamil language instruction in schools, religious organisations) and community-driven initiatives (e.g., Tamil cultural festivals and heritage education) play a role in sustaining the language. These overlapping factors highlight the complex, multi-level nature of language maintenance in a multilingual, postcolonial society like Mauritius.

### **1.2.1.2 Key Aspects of Language Maintenance**

Language maintenance involves deliberate efforts by individuals, families, communities, and institutions to preserve and promote the continued use of a language across generations. One of the most essential aspects is intergenerational transmission, where the language is actively spoken at home and passed from parents to children. This ensures that the language remains alive in everyday communication. Education also plays a central role. When a language is included in school curricula, supported by

trained teachers and quality learning materials, it gains both visibility and legitimacy. Community-based education programs and ancestral language classes also contribute significantly to this goal.

Institutional support is equally important. Government policies that recognise and protect minority languages, through funding, official recognition, and promotion in public life, can contribute to their survival and status. In the digital age, the presence of a language in media platforms, including television, radio, social media, and mobile applications, helps make it more accessible and engaging, especially for younger speakers. Cultural and religious practices, including festivals, rituals, and performances, also significantly reinforce language identity and encourage its use in communal contexts.

Positive language attitudes and community pride motivate individuals to continue using the language. When speakers view their language as a valuable part of their identity, they are more likely to engage in efforts to maintain it. Finally, economic incentives and social opportunities, such as job prospects or scholarships requiring language proficiency, can further encourage language learning and usage. Effective language maintenance is thus multi-faceted, requiring a combination of family effort, educational support, community engagement, institutional backing, and digital integration.

In the next section, the various factors that contribute to the maintenance of Tamil in Mauritius will be discussed.

### **1.2.1.3 Factors Supporting the Maintenance of Tamil in Mauritius**

The maintenance of Tamil in Mauritius relies on a combination of social, educational, cultural, and institutional efforts that work together to support its continued relevance across generations. One of the most important factors is intergenerational transmission, when families speak Tamil at home, not just during religious ceremonies or cultural events, but as part of everyday communication. This informal use helps children internalise the language as something living and practical, rather than symbolic.

In the formal education system, Tamil is offered as an optional subject in many primary and secondary schools. However, its long-term impact remains limited due to various challenges such as low enrollment, limited teaching hours, and a lack of updated

learning materials. However, strengthening teacher training and expanding the presence of Tamil in curriculum content could enhance its visibility and legitimacy in the classroom.

Institutional support also plays a critical role. Government recognition of Tamil through the funding of cultural events, support for language learning programmes, and inclusion in state media helps reinforce its public value. Various initiatives like Tamil drama competitions, cultural festivals, and community-run language schools create meaningful spaces where the language is actively used and celebrated. These efforts collectively contribute to the preservation of Tamil in a society where dominant languages like English, French, and Mauritian Creole continue to shape linguistic preferences.

In addition, in this digital era, media and digital engagement are becoming increasingly important in reaching younger generations. Tamil-language television programs, radio shows, and digital content on social media platforms can help reinforce linguistic familiarity and interest. Cultural and religious practices such as the *thaipusam cavadee*, *Pongal* celebrations, and temple rituals provide valuable spaces where Tamil continues to be used and valued within the community. Fostering positive attitudes towards the language, particularly among youth, is essential. When Tamil is viewed not just as a cultural relic but as a meaningful part of one's identity, the motivation for its use increases. Furthermore, opportunities in professional and academic domains, such as scholarships or cultural roles that require Tamil proficiency, can incentivise its active learning and use. These elements form a comprehensive framework for sustaining Tamil in Mauritius amid ongoing pressures from language shift.

#### **1.2.1.4 Challenges to Language Maintenance**

In Mauritius, it is quite difficult to maintain a minority, heritage or ancestral language. The multilingual context presents numerous challenges, particularly for Tamil speakers in Mauritius. One of the most significant barriers is the dominance of the majority languages, such as Mauritian Creole, French, and English. These languages are more prevalent in education, media, and professional settings. The linguistic hierarchy often leads Tamil-speaking families to prioritise these dominant languages to improve their children's academic and economic prospects, thus weakening the intergenerational

transmission of Tamil. Additionally, Tamil lacks strong institutional support within the national educational system, where it is generally offered as an optional subject with limited instructional hours and resources.

The attitudinal factors also play a role. The community members, especially the youth, may view Tamil as less relevant or modern than global languages. These factors contribute to diminishing the motivation to learn or use it. The language's usage is further restricted by a lack of exposure beyond religious and cultural settings, thus reducing opportunities for practical application in everyday life.

Technological influence presents another challenge, as the majority of digital content consumed by younger generations is in English, French, or Hindi. At the same time, Tamil-language media remains limited and less engaging. Moreover, urbanisation and migration both within Mauritius and abroad contribute to a shift in language preferences, especially among young generations exposed to cosmopolitan environments.

Language maintenance is an ongoing process that requires collective efforts from individuals, communities, and governments. Language maintenance is crucial in preserving cultural identity and ensuring linguistic diversity in a multilingual country like Mauritius. While dominant languages like English and French play significant roles in education and business, sustained efforts in education, policy-making, and the media can help maintain indigenous and minority languages for future generations.

### **1.2.2 Language Shift**

Language shift refers to the gradual process through which a speech community reduces or stops using its heritage language in favour of a more dominant language. In Mauritius, this phenomenon is observable among Tamil speakers, where younger generations increasingly use Mauritian Creole, English, or French in daily life while Tamil is often limited to religious or ceremonial contexts. This shift is influenced by a range of social and economic pressures, including the role of dominant languages in education, employment, and media. Over time, reduced intergenerational transmission and declining everyday usage may lead to the marginalisation or even loss of the ancestral language within the community. Recognising and addressing the factors that contribute to this shift is crucial for developing effective strategies to maintain the Tamil language in the country.

### 1.2.2.1 Definitions by Key Scholars

According to Uriel Weinreich (1953), language shift occurs when “a speech community moves from using one language to another in habitual domains of life.” Weinreich was one of the first linguists to study bilingualism systematically. He observed that language shift happens when speakers gradually abandon their native language in favour of the dominant language, especially in multilingual societies. His work laid the foundation for later studies on language contact, interference, and bilingualism, which influenced research on language shift.

Ferguson (1959) described language shift as “a process occurring when diglossic communities replace their low-status (L) language with the high-status (H) language”. Ferguson’s work on diglossia examined the coexistence of two language varieties in a society where one is prestigious, for example, French and English, and the other is stigmatised, such as Creole or indigenous languages. He connected language shift with social prestige, showing that communities abandon their native languages when they perceive the dominant language as more beneficial.

Haugen (1972) describes language shift as “the gradual displacement of one language by another due to economic, political, and social pressures”. Haugen, a pioneer in language planning, analysed how economic and political factors contribute to language displacement. His work emphasised external pressures such as colonialism and globalisation as key drivers of language shift, distinguishing it from internal linguistic changes.

Fishman (1991) describes language shift as “the replacement of a group’s native language with another, leading to intergenerational discontinuity”. Fishman’s research focused on Reversing Language Shift (LRS) and the importance of intergenerational transmission in language survival. He developed the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), a key tool for measuring the severity of language shift and devising revival strategies.

Dorian (1994) defines language shift as “a process that leads to the gradual erosion of a minority language, often starting with the youngest generations”. Dorian’s studies on Scottish Gaelic and East Sutherland Gaelic documented how social mobility and stigma accelerate language loss.

Romaine (1995) states that “language shift occurs when bilingual or multilingual speakers progressively reduce their use of one language in favour of another due to socio-economic advantages”. Romaine explored bilingualism and diglossia, examining how language policy, education, and migration drive language shift. She linked language shift with urbanisation and globalisation, emphasising the role of education and institutional policies in language replacement.

Spolsky (2004) describes language shift as “a decline in the use of a language within a community due to a lack of institutional support and intergenerational transmission”. Spolsky’s work on language policy and planning shows how government decisions impact language maintenance and shift. He integrated institutional and individual perspectives, demonstrating that language shift is not merely a natural process but a result of deliberate policies.

Over time, the definitions of language shift have evolved. While Weinreich (1953) and Ferguson (1959) linked bilingualism and diglossia, showing how dominant languages replace minority languages, Haugen (1972) introduced economic and political factors as key drivers of this phenomenon. Fishman (1991) highlighted the role of intergenerational transmission and developed tools to reverse language shift. Dorian (1994) documented language obsolescence in marginalised communities. While Romaine (1995) connected urbanisation, globalisation, and education to language shift, Spolsky (2004) showed how government policies and institutional support can prevent or accelerate language loss.

#### **1.2.2.2 Causes of Language Shift**

Several factors, including socioeconomic, political, and institutional pressures; social and cultural influences; demographic factors; and attitudinal and psychological factors, contribute to the causes of language shift.

#### **1.2.2.2.1 Socioeconomic Factors**

People often switch to a more dominant language for economic opportunities if it provides better job prospects and economic stability. In Mauritius, English and French are the dominant languages in education, government, and business. Therefore, proficiency in these languages is often viewed as essential for career growth, which can discourage the use of Tamil in professional settings.

Many people move from rural areas to urban areas for various reasons. The movement often exposes the speakers to a dominant language, thus reducing the use of their native language. Other factors that cause movement are trade, international business, and technological advancements, which promote dominant languages like English, thus leading to the decline of local languages. In addition, Tamil speakers in Mauritius migrate to urban areas for work, where they are more exposed to Mauritian Creole, English, and French in their daily interactions, thereby reducing the practical use of Tamil.

#### **1.2.2.2.2 Political and Institutional Pressures**

Some governments promote national or official languages through policies, often at the expense of minority languages. Even in courts, media and public services, the official use of the dominant language is preferred, thus discouraging the use of minority languages. However, although Tamil is recognised as part of Mauritius' linguistic diversity, it is not an official language for administration, law, or significant political discourse. The national media primarily operates in English, French, and Mauritian Creole, thus limiting Tamil's exposure.

Most educational institutions use the dominant language for instruction. Therefore, the younger generations may prefer it over their native tongue as they find learning other languages irrelevant. In Mauritius, English is the official medium of instruction in schools, while French is widely used in practice. Tamil or other Indian languages are taught as an optional language. Still, many parents prefer their children to focus on language, which is perceived as more beneficial for academic and career advancement.

#### **1.2.2.2.3 Social and Cultural Influences**

In society, the dominant language is often associated with a higher social status, leading to the voluntary abandonment of minority languages. Television, the internet, and social media are often presented in dominant languages, thereby reducing exposure to minority languages. In the cultural aspect, religious institutions may promote a particular language for rituals and services, influencing linguistic choices.

In Mauritius, many Tamil-speaking families intermarry with non-Tamil speakers, resulting in the dominance of more widely spoken languages, such as Mauritian Creole, at home. Nowadays, the young generations are more influenced by English and French media, as well as Bollywood, which prioritises Hindi over Tamil. Tamil entertainment is available, although it is not as widely consumed. The available entertainment in Tamil is also very limited on the radio and television. On the radio, programs are broadcast at specific times and on select radio stations, whereas on television, there are channels like Jaya TV or Vijay TV; however, the audience is smaller. While Tamil is also used in Hindu temples and cultural ceremonies, many Tamil-speaking Mauritians are either Hindus or Christians who also practice religious rituals in Sanskrit, English, or French, thereby reducing the everyday use of Tamil.

#### **1.2.2.2.4 Demographic Factors**

It is often observed that people who migrate for work, education, or safety may adopt the dominant language of their new region. Many Mauritians migrate to English-speaking or French-speaking countries for work or education, reinforcing the dominance of these languages over Tamil. Another cause of language shift is a decrease in the speaker population. If the number of native speakers is small or decreasing due to ageing or low birth rates, the language shift will accelerate. In the Mauritian context, with fewer young speakers using Tamil as their primary language at home, the generational transmission of the language weakens, contributing to its gradual loss.

#### **1.2.2.2.5 Attitudinal and Psychological Factors**

Parents tend to prioritise teaching their children a dominant language to secure better opportunities. Many Tamil-speaking parents prioritise English and French to provide their children with better academic and career prospects. Another cause of language shift is the desire for identity and assimilation. Some communities may shift languages

to integrate into a larger, dominant society and avoid discrimination. Tamil is sometimes perceived as a community language rather than a language of upward mobility. Some Tamil Mauritians prefer using Mauritian Creole or French in social settings to blend in with the broader population.

If maintaining the native language requires extra effort, such as attending heritage schools, speakers may opt for an easier alternative. In Mauritius, it is perceived as difficult to maintain the language. Learning Tamil requires formal education and practice, but often lacks sufficient institutional support. Therefore, many people find it easier to focus on more dominant languages.

### **1.2.2.3 Stages of Language Shift**

Language shift is a gradual process that unfolds across several stages, typically beginning with bilingualism and potentially culminating in the complete loss of a language. Scholars have outlined different frameworks to understand this progression. Fishman (1991), through his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), describes how languages weaken when they are no longer passed down within families and lose functionality in key societal domains. In a simplified four-stage model, the process begins with the community adopting a dominant language alongside their heritage language. This is followed by domain loss, where the native language is restricted to limited functions such as home use or religious practices. This is succeeded by intergenerational disruption, where younger generations cease to acquire or use the language, and ultimately, language death, where fluent speakers no longer exist, and the language survives, if at all, in symbolic or archival forms (Dorian, 1981; Romaine, 2000).

In the context of Mauritius, the Tamil-speaking community has been experiencing this shift due to various social, economic, and institutional pressures. Many Tamil families are now bilingual or multilingual, often using Mauritian Creole, French, or English in addition to Tamil. However, the use of Tamil is increasingly restricted to specific domains such as religious rituals and cultural festivals. This reflects the second stage of the language shift, known as domain loss, where the language's practical, everyday functions diminish. Intergenerational disruption is becoming evident as younger Tamil Mauritians tend to understand the language passively but rarely use it in daily communication (Dorian, 1981; Romaine, 2000). Without active revitalisation efforts,

the community risks moving toward the final stage of language shift, where Tamil may survive only in symbolic or ceremonial contexts.

#### **1.2.2.4 Consequences of Language Shift**

Language shift has profound implications for communities undergoing this transformation, particularly in terms of cultural continuity, identity, and knowledge transmission. One of the most significant consequences of language shift is the erosion of cultural identity, as language is a vital carrier of a community's values, history, and worldview. For Tamil speakers in Mauritius, the gradual decline in Tamil usage threatens to sever ties with traditional practices, such as storytelling, ritual chants, religious hymns, and oral histories, that are deeply embedded in the language. Additionally, language shift creates an intergenerational divide, where younger Tamil Mauritians may no longer speak or fully understand the language of their elders, leading to a breakdown in familial and cultural communication. This disruption also leads to the loss of traditional knowledge encoded in the language, such as ethical teachings, spiritual philosophies, and cultural expressions unique to Tamil heritage. The shift further reduces linguistic diversity, contributing to a global trend of language homogenisation that undermines cultural richness. Within the community, the loss of language may diminish collective pride and weaken social cohesion, especially if the dominant language, such as English, French, or Mauritian Creole, is perceived as a symbol of modernity and success. Moreover, abandoning the ancestral language may limit the cognitive and educational benefits of bilingual speakers. However, the continuation shift may eventually result in language death, with Tamil being retained only in symbolic or ceremonial forms rather than as a living and spoken medium of communication.

#### **1.2.3 Language Contact**

Language contact refers to the interaction between speakers of different languages, typically resulting in linguistic exchange and transformation. Thomason (2001) defines language contact as all linguistic influences that arise when two or more languages or language varieties come into sustained interaction. These interactions can lead to various linguistic phenomena, depending on the nature and intensity of the contact.

Key outcomes of language contact include lexical borrowing, structural convergence, code-switching, the emergence of pidgins and creoles, language shift, and, in extreme cases, language death. Borrowing is one of the most common consequences and may involve not only vocabulary but also phonological and grammatical features. More profound contact scenarios, especially those involving societal bilingualism or language dominance, can lead to grammatical restructuring and convergence between the languages involved.

Thomason (2001) emphasises that language contact outcomes are not solely determined by structural compatibility between the languages but are significantly shaped by social, political, and psychological factors. For instance, power relations between groups, language prestige, speaker attitudes, and institutional policies all play crucial roles in determining the direction and depth of influence. Moreover, language shift often results from prolonged contact where one language gradually replaces another in various domains of use, influenced by sociopolitical and economic pressures.

In multilingual societies such as Mauritius, where Tamil coexists with languages like Creole, English, and French, language contact has played a pivotal role in shaping the Tamil community's linguistic repertoire and the dynamics of language maintenance and shift. Understanding these contact-induced processes is essential for analysing how Tamil has adapted, persisted, or declined across generations.

### **1.2.3.1 Definitions by Key Scholars**

Schuchardt (1884) was among the first linguists to systematically study language contact, “emphasising that languages are never completely isolated; they always influence one another when they come into contact”. His work was focused on creoles and pidgins, recognising that languages mix naturally when speakers of different linguistic backgrounds interact. He also challenged linguistic purism, arguing that contact between languages is a normal and inevitable phenomenon.

Meillet (1921) defined language contact as “the interaction between languages due to social, cultural, or political influences, leading to linguistic borrowing and change”. His work influenced historical linguistics, analysing how languages evolve through borrowing, convergence, and hybridisation. He showed that language change is often externally influenced rather than purely internal development.

Weinreich (1953) described language contact as “the use of two or more languages in the same community, leading to bilingualism, borrowing, and structural influence between languages”. His work laid the foundation for modern contact linguistics, focusing on language interference, where one language affects the structure of another. He introduced key concepts like codeswitching, lexical borrowing, and structural convergence.

According to Haugen (1956), language contact is “the process by which speakers of different languages interact, leading to various degrees of linguistic influence, from simple borrowing to complete language shift”. His work made significant contributions to the study of bilingualism and language planning, examining how languages coexist and influence each other. He introduced the terms "borrowing" and "interference" to explain how languages adopt words and structures.

Ferguson (1959) described language contact within the framework of diglossia, where “different languages or varieties serve distinct functions in a society, influencing each other while maintaining separate domains”. His work explored sociolinguistic dynamics, showing how languages maintain functional separation despite influence. His model explained how multilingual societies manage language contact without necessarily leading to language shift.

Fishman (1968) viewed language contact as “the sociolinguistic phenomenon where languages influence each other due to bilingualism and community interactions”. His work on Reversing Language Shift (RLS) examined how language contact can either lead to maintenance or shift. He connected language contact with identity, prestige, and intergenerational transmission.

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) define language contact as “the direct or indirect influence of one language on another, leading to a spectrum of outcomes from minor lexical borrowing to full language convergence or replacement”. Their book, entitled *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*, introduces a structural model that explains how contact leads to linguistic change. They classified language change due to contact into different types: borrowing, shift, pidginization, creolisation, and convergence.

Language contact is a natural linguistic process that shapes the evolution, structure, and vitality of languages. In multilingual countries like Mauritius, language contact plays a crucial role in shaping everyday communication, identity formation, and sociocultural practices. With English as the official language, French widely used in administration and media, and Mauritian Creole spoken across informal settings, the linguistic landscape of Mauritius is inherently diverse and dynamic. Within this environment, Tamil exists as a heritage and community language among Tamil-speaking Mauritians, many of whom are bilingual or trilingual.

As a result, Tamil is constantly in contact with the more dominant languages, leading to a variety of contact-induced phenomena such as code-switching, lexical borrowing, and structural influence. These interactions can enrich the Tamil spoken in Mauritius, but also pose challenges to its purity and sustained intergenerational transmission. For instance, younger generations may incorporate Creole or English terms into Tamil conversations, resulting in hybridised speech patterns that reflect both linguistic creativity and potential language shift. Furthermore, educational policies, media consumption habits, and socio-economic pressures can accelerate this shift by limiting the functional domains where Tamil is actively used, especially outside of religious or ceremonial contexts.

Understanding these contact-induced processes is essential for analysing how Tamil has adapted, persisted, or declined across generations. Language contact in Mauritius does not merely result in linguistic borrowing or structural convergence but is embedded in deeper socio-political and cultural dynamics. These include issues of language prestige, identity negotiation, educational access, and community cohesion. Thus, the study of language contact in Mauritius, particularly as it relates to Tamil, requires not only linguistic analysis but also an interdisciplinary understanding of the historical, social, and institutional forces shaping the country's multilingual reality.

#### **1.2.4 Language Attitude**

Language attitude refers to the beliefs, feelings, and evaluations that individuals or communities hold toward a specific language, dialect, or linguistic variety (Baker, 1992). These attitudes can be explicit or implicit, positive or negative, and they significantly influence language behaviour, including patterns of language use,

intergenerational transmission, language maintenance, and language shift (Garrett, 2010). Positive language attitudes can foster pride, active usage, and efforts toward preservation, while negative attitudes may lead to linguistic abandonment or marginalisation. In the Mauritian context, the Tamil language is often viewed through a dual lens: on one hand, it is seen as a marker of ethnic and religious identity, particularly during temple ceremonies and cultural festivals; on the other, it is sometimes perceived as lacking economic or social utility compared to dominant languages such as English, French, and Mauritian Creole. These perceptions influence the language choices of Tamil-speaking families, particularly in urban areas where dominant languages are often associated with education, modernity, and social advancement. Consequently, the attitudes of parents, educators, and young people toward Tamil play a critical role in determining whether the language is actively maintained or gradually displaced in favour of more dominant tongues. Understanding language attitudes is therefore crucial for any effective policy or community effort aimed at revitalising Tamil and ensuring its relevance across generations.

#### **1.2.4.1 Definitions by Key Scholars**

Lambert (1960) defines language attitude as “the affective, cognitive, and behavioural reactions individuals hold toward different languages and their speakers”. Lambert was a pioneer in language and social psychology, introducing the matched-guise technique to measure unconscious biases toward different languages and accents. His work revealed that language attitudes are linked to social prestige, group identity, and stereotypes, influencing how speakers perceive different languages and their speakers.

Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) define language attitude as “the motivation and affective disposition toward learning and using a language influenced by social and cultural factors”. Their research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) introduced two key types of motivation. They are integrative motivation, which involves learning a language to integrate into a cultural group, and the second is instrumental motivation, which involves learning a language for practical benefits, such as jobs. Their model demonstrated that positive attitudes enhance language learning success, influencing future studies on language acquisition and bilingualism.

Giles (1973) defines language attitude as “the perception of language varieties and their speakers, shaped by social status and group identity”. Giles developed the

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), demonstrating that people adjust their language in response to social dynamics. His research connected language attitudes to power dynamics, accommodation strategies, and group identity.

According to Trudgill (1974), language attitude is “the social evaluation of language forms, accents, and dialects, reflecting societal norms and prejudices”. His work in sociolinguistics examined how regional and class-based accents influence people’s perceptions. He demonstrated that non-standard accents are often stigmatised, while standard varieties are associated with intelligence and prestige.

Fasold (1984:148) defines language attitude as “people’s feelings about their own language and the languages of others, which shape linguistic behaviour and policy decisions”. Fasold’s work in sociolinguistics and language policy examined language prestige, bilingualism, and code-switching. He linked language attitudes with language maintenance, shift, and policy-making.

Preston (1989:3) describes language attitude as “folk linguistic perceptions of language varieties based on subjective evaluations rather than objective linguistic features”, introducing Perceptual Dialectology to emphasise how non-linguists’ views can shape social attitudes and stereotypes. His research showed that subjective attitudes toward language can influence real-world social interactions and stereotypes.

Spolsky (2004:4) defines language attitude as “the set of beliefs, feelings, and reactions that individuals and communities have toward languages, which influence language policy and use”. His work is focused on language policy, language planning, and multilingualism. He highlighted that language attitudes shape governmental policies and language education programs.

#### **1.2.4.2 Key Aspects of Language Attitude**

Language attitude encompasses the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dispositions individuals or communities hold toward a language and its use. The affective aspect relates to emotional attachment or feelings such as pride, shame, or indifference, which influence how strongly people identify with their language. The cognitive aspect involves beliefs about the language’s usefulness, prestige, and relevance. If a language is perceived as modern and economically advantageous, it is more likely to be maintained. The behavioural aspect is revealed in actual language practices, such as

whether individuals choose to speak the language at home, consume media in it, or pass it on to their children. These aspects are also shaped by motivational factors, including instrumental motivation, which is driven by practical benefits such as education or employment, and integrative motivation, which stems from a desire to maintain cultural identity and group cohesion.

Moreover, societal and peer influences play a significant role in shaping language attitudes. When a language is respected and associated with a positive identity within a community, its speakers are more likely to value and preserve it. On the other hand, social stigma or mockery can drive speakers, especially youth, to abandon it. Language ideologies also shape language attitudes, which are deep-seated beliefs about which languages are more prestigious or civilised. Such ideologies often elevate dominant languages and marginalise minority ones. Additionally, the representation of a language in media and education strongly affects public perception. Positive portrayal and regular exposure through school curricula, television, radio, and digital platforms can reinforce favourable attitudes and encourage active use.

Language attitudes have a significant impact on language use, learning, and preservation. Understanding these attitudes in multilingual societies, such as Mauritius, helps shape language policies and promote linguistic diversity.

### **1.2.5 Pioneers in the Field of Sociolinguistics**

In this section, the different pioneers and their contributions to the field of sociolinguistics will be discussed.

The discipline of Sociolinguistics, especially in the areas of language maintenance and shift, has evolved significantly over the past few decades, and all of this was made possible due to the foundational work of several pioneering scholars. These individuals have laid the theoretical and methodological groundwork for understanding how language operates within society, how it is transmitted across generations, and the factors contributing to its maintenance or decline. This section provides a critical overview of the most influential figures whose scholarship continues to shape contemporary discourse in these areas.

### **1.2.5.1 William Labov**

William Labov is often referred to as the “father of sociolinguistics”. He revolutionised the study of language variation through empirical research that connected linguistic patterns with social structures. His seminal work, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (1966), demonstrated that linguistic variables correlate systematically with social class, ethnicity, age, and gender. Labov’s variationist approach introduced robust quantitative methods to linguistics, thus enabling the analysis of language change in real-time.

### **1.2.5.2 Dell Hymes**

Dell Hymes made a pivotal contribution by developing the ethnography of communication, advocating for a broader view of language competence. His concept of communicative competence challenged the Chomskyan linguistic models by emphasising the social contexts in which language is used. Hymes (1974) also introduced the SPEAKING model, which offers a framework for analysing speech events across cultures.

### **1.2.5.3 Basil Bernstein**

Bernstein's (1971) sociolinguistic theory explored how languages reflect and reinforce social class divisions. His distinction between elaborated and restricted codes highlighted how linguistic socialisation within different social classes can impact educational outcomes and perpetuate inequality. Although his theory has been criticised, it remains influential in the fields of education and linguistic anthropology.

### **1.2.5.4 Joshua A. Fishman**

Joshua Fishman, a towering figure, was instrumental in formalising the study of language maintenance and shift. His *Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS)*, domain analysis concepts, language loyalty, and diglossia have been widely adopted. His seminal work, *Reversing Language Shift* (1991), remains a cornerstone in efforts to revitalise endangered languages. Fishman emphasised the importance of community-driven strategies and intergenerational language transmission for sustaining linguistic diversity.

#### **1.2.5.5 Nancy Dorian**

Dorian (1981) explained language attrition, speaker variation, and the socio-psychological dimensions of language loss through her long-term ethnographic work with East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland. Her identification of semi-speakers and focus on small-scale speech communities contributed to a more nuanced understanding of language death processes.

#### **1.2.5.6 Michael Clyne**

Clyne's (1991) work in the Australian context emphasised language contact, immigrant multilingualism, and language policy. His studies highlighted the importance of ethnolinguistic vitality and demonstrated the impact of broader sociopolitical structures on language maintenance within diasporic communities.

#### **1.2.5.7 Suzanne Romaine**

Suzanne Romaine is a key voice in bilingualism and language contact. She contributed to theoretical clarity through works such as *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (1989). She provided frameworks for understanding code-switching, diglossia, and language shift within multilingual societies.

#### **1.2.5.8 Teresa L. McCarty**

Teresa McCarty specialises in Indigenous language education and has extensively researched language revitalisation in Native American communities. Her work integrates sociolinguistic theory with educational policy and practice, foregrounding the role of schools, identity, and community activism in reversing language shifts.

#### **1.2.5.9 Other Influential Contributors**

There are other noteworthy scholars, which include Peter Trudgill, who expanded on the Labovian methods in dialectology and language contact studies; Einar Haugen, who introduced the notion of language ecology and early frameworks of language planning; Ofelia Gracia, who is known for her work on translanguaging and bilingual education; and Colin Baker, who has extensively contributed to bilingual education research policy.

## **1.2.6 Sociolinguistic Situation**

In this section, the sociolinguistic situation of Tamil will be explained in terms of the Tamil diaspora, the reasons for migration of Tamils, and the cultural identity of the people will be discussed. The statistics of the Tamil people in various countries where they have migrated will also be included in this section.

### **1.2.6.1 Diaspora and Tamil**

The Tamil diaspora represents one of the world's oldest and most widespread ethnolinguistic diasporas. The Tamil community originated in the southern part of India and the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. The Tamil communities have expanded globally due to historical, economic, and socio-political factors. Tamils have established vibrant communities across continents, from the colonial era indentured labour system to the contemporary migrations driven by globalisation and conflict. This section examines the global presence of Tamils and the historical contexts of their migration.

#### **1.2.6.1.1 The Tamil Diaspora**

The Tamil diaspora is both ancient and contemporary, thus comprising communities established through colonial labour migration and more recent waves driven by conflict and economic globalisation. Tamil communities are found across Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East. These diasporic groups have retained strong cultural ties to their homelands, often manifesting in religious observance, language use, and community institutions.

#### **1.2.6.1.2 Reasons for Tamil Migration**

Tamil migration historically occurred due to colonial indentured labour systems and later due to civil unrest, particularly in Sri Lanka. In modern times, economic and professional opportunities have led to further dispersion. While some migrated under duress, others sought better educational and economic prospects abroad voluntarily.

#### **1.2.6.1.3 Cultural Identity in the Diaspora**

A complex interplay of tradition, adaptation, and integration shapes Tamil identity in the diaspora. Cultural practices such as festivals (*Pongal*, *Deepavali*, *Thaipusam*

*Kavadi*), cuisine, traditional attire, and naming customs serve as vital tools for identity preservation. Temples and community organisations often act as cultural hubs, reinforcing Tamil values and practices.

#### **1.2.6.2 Diglossia and the Tamil Language**

Diglossia is a sociolinguistic phenomenon where two varieties of the same language coexist within a community, each serving distinct functions. Charles A. Ferguson (1959) popularised the term by identifying a High (H) variety, used in formal contexts, and a Low (L) variety, used in everyday speech. Tamil is a classic example of a diglossic language.

In Tamil, the High Tamil is used in classical literature, religious texts, education, and formal media. At the same time, Low Tamil refers to the spoken dialects used in informal settings such as the home, the market, and casual conversation. These varieties differ significantly in grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, often requiring separate learning paths for native speakers and students. While the High Tamil carries cultural prestige and is linked to heritage and formal education, the Low Tamil represents emotional and community identity. This duality allows Tamil to navigate different social roles effectively, but can also create challenges in schooling and intergenerational communication.

#### **1.2.6.3 Tamils in different countries**

Tamils have migrated to various countries from their homeland, which is India. There are countries with a colonial past, while others have a modern Tamil diaspora. Some of these countries even consider Tamil as one of their official languages. In this part, the statistics of the migration and the reasons for migration will be discussed.

##### **1.2.6.3.1 Native Tamil Homeland**

India is the motherland of Tamil civilisation, with the state of Tamil Nadu being the cultural and linguistic heartland. According to the 2011 Indian Census, there are approximately 69 million native Tamil speakers. Tamil is one of the 22 scheduled languages and even enjoys official status in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The state promotes Tamil through compulsory education, robust literary production, and state-

sponsored media. The preservation and promotion of Tamil in India serve as a model for language maintenance in diaspora contexts.

According to the 2012 Census of Sri Lanka, the Tamil population constitutes approximately 15.3% of the total population in Sri Lanka. The Tamil community is divided into two main groups: Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, also known as Hill Country Tamils. The latter are descendants of labourers brought by the British to work on tea plantations. The Sri Lankan Civil War, which was from 1983 to 2009, significantly impacted the Tamil population, thus leading to mass displacement and emigration. Despite the challenges, Tamil remains one of the official languages, and community efforts continue to preserve the language and cultural heritage.

#### **1.2.6.3.2 Countries with Colonial-Era Tamil Migrations**

Malaysia is home to an estimated 1.8 million Tamils, primarily descendants of indentured labourers brought by the British during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Tamil is taught in national-type schools and used in religious and cultural settings. However, assimilation pressures and the dominance of Malay and English pose challenges to Tamil language maintenance.

Singapore recognises Tamil as one of its four official languages. The 2020 Census reported nearly 200,000 Tamil citizens and permanent residents. Tamil is included in the national curriculum, and the government supports Tamil media and cultural programming. The community actively preserves and promotes Tamil through temples, associations, and public events.

The Tamil community in Mauritius, estimated at around 72,000, 5.83% of the population, traces its roots to indentured labourers from South India. Tamils have maintained their cultural identity through religious festivals like *Thaipusam Cavadee*, *Thimeedhi* (Fire walking ceremony), the construction of temples, and Tamil language education. Nevertheless, the language shift towards Creole and French among the younger generation is a growing concern.

Tamils in South Africa, numbering over 250,000, are concentrated mainly in KwaZulu-Natal. They are descendants of indentured labourers who arrived in 1860. Despite apartheid-era challenges, the community has preserved Tamil culture through temples, religious institutions, and cultural organisations.

Fiji's Tamil population, which once exceeded 110,000, is now estimated to be around 80,000 due to emigration and assimilation. While Tamil cultural practices persist, language retention is limited, with most Indo-Fijians adopting English or Fijian as their primary language.

Réunion Island hosts approximately 126,000 Tamils, locally referred to as "Malbars." Though French is the dominant language, Tamil religious rituals and cultural expressions remain strong. Language maintenance efforts are limited, but cultural identity persists through Hindu festivals and temple worship.

#### **1.2.6.3.3 Countries with Modern Tamil Diaspora**

Canada's Tamil population, primarily concentrated in Toronto, exceeds 230,000. The majority are Sri Lankan Tamils who arrived as refugees or economic migrants. The community-run schools, cultural organisations, and Tamil Heritage Month contribute to the preservation of language and identity.

The United Kingdom hosts an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Tamils, predominantly from Sri Lanka. London and other major cities are centres of Tamil cultural life, with temples, media outlets, and weekend schools playing vital roles in maintaining heritage.

The United States is home to approximately 340,000 Tamil speakers, including both Indian professionals and Sri Lankan refugees. Tamil Sangams across states organise events, classes, and cultural activities that support language retention and community building.

Australia reported over 120,000 individuals of Tamil ancestry in its 2021 Census. Community centres, language schools, and temples in cities like Sydney and Melbourne facilitate the transmission of Tamil culture and language.

There are around 125,000 Tamils in metropolitan France, mainly from Sri Lanka. Despite linguistic integration into French society, Tamil temples and associations help preserve cultural identity.

Germany, Switzerland and Norway host a significant number of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Germany and Switzerland estimate populations to be 50,000 and 40,000, respectively, while Norway has about 13,000. The community networks focus on

language education, cultural programs, and religious observances to sustain Tamil identity.

#### **1.2.6.3.4 Other Regions**

The Middle East has a large Tamil expatriate workforce, especially in the UAE, with approximately 400,000 and Saudi Arabia, 350,000. Due to transient labour policies, long-term settlement is rare, but informal networks and religious gatherings help maintain linguistic and cultural ties. New Zealand's small Tamil population, around 10,000, is growing. Tamil associations and cultural events support community cohesion and language maintenance. Tamils arrived in the Caribbean as indentured labourers during the 19th century. While the Tamil language has largely faded, cultural remnants survive in religious practices and family traditions. Identity has merged with the broader Indo-Caribbean community.

The Tamil diaspora reflects a complex interplay of historical migration, cultural retention, and identity transformation. Despite the diverse challenges they face, Tamils worldwide continue to uphold their language and traditions, making significant contributions to the multicultural tapestries of their host societies.

### **1.3.1 Mauritius: The Geographical Landscape**

Mauritius, a small and breathtaking island nation, is situated in the Indian Ocean, approximately 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) east of the southeast coast of Africa. Despite its small size, the island boasts a diverse and dramatic landscape shaped by its volcanic origin, lush greenery, and stunning coastlines. Mauritius, Rodrigues, and the Reunion Islands form part of the Mascarene Archipelago.

#### **1.3.1.1 A Volcanic Island**

Mauritius was formed millions of years ago by volcanic activity. Though its volcanoes are long extinct, their impact is still visible in the island's rugged mountains, craters, and basaltic rock formations. Unlike the flat coral atolls of the Maldives, Mauritius has an undulating terrain with dramatic peaks and deep valleys that add to its natural charm. The island covers an area of about 2040 square kilometres (787 square miles), but what it lacks in size, it makes up for in beauty.



Figure 1.1 Position of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean

Source of the image: Google Earth (Accessed on 5th March 2025)

### 1.3.1.2 Coastline and Coral Reefs

One of Mauritius' most defining features is its stunning coastline. The island is surrounded by over 160 kilometres (99 miles) of white sandy beaches bordered by a protective coral reef. This reef acts as a natural barrier, creating calm, turquoise lagoons that are perfect for swimming, snorkelling, and supporting marine biodiversity. Some famous beaches include Flic en Flac, which is known for its long stretch of soft sand and breathtaking sunsets. In contrast, Belle Mare is known as a paradise for early risers who enjoy peaceful, turquoise waters and the iconic Le Morne Brabant Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage site, frames Le Morne Beach.

### 1.3.1.3 Mountains and Valleys

Although Mauritius is known for its beaches, its interior landscape is equally fascinating. The island is home to several mountain ranges, with the highest peak being Piton de la Petite Riviere Noire, which stands at 828 meters. Among the famous mountains is Le Pouce, which is popular with hikers for its panoramic views of Port-Louis; Corps de Garde, which is a rugged peak overlooking the western coast; and Le Morne Brabant, which is more than just a mountain; it holds historical significance as a refuge for escaped slaves. Mauritius also has lush plains, waterfalls, and valleys, such as Black River Gorges National Park, a dense forest home to rare birds, waterfalls, and hiking trails, and Tamarind Falls, a spectacular multi-tiered waterfall nestled in the island's highlands.

#### **1.3.1.4 Lakes, Rivers, and Natural Reserves**

While Mauritius does not have major rivers, several short rivers and streams flow from the mountains to the coast. Some notable ones include the Grand River Southeast, the longest river leading to a beautiful waterfall, and Riviere Noire, known for fishing and boat trips. The ancient volcanic activity also forms crater lakes. Grand Bassin, also known as the Ganga Talao, is a sacred Hindu Lake surrounded by temples. Trou aux Cerfs is another fitting example of a dormant volcanic crater, offering panoramic views of the island.

#### **1.3.1.5 Offshore Islands and Marine Life**

Mauritius is not just a single island; it has several smaller islands and islets nearby, each with its own charm. Some of the eminent ones include Ile aux Cerfs – A paradise for beach lovers and water sports enthusiasts; Ile aux Aigrettes – A natural reserve protecting rare plant and animal species; and Ile aux Benitiers, which is known for its crystal-clear waters and ‘Crystal Rock’ formation.

The marine ecosystem around Mauritius is incredibly rich, featuring coral reefs, lagoons, and a diverse array of sea life, including dolphins, sea turtles, and colourful fish.

#### **1.3.2 History of Mauritius**

Mauritius is an island whose present linguistic, cultural, and demographic situation must be analysed in terms of its history. According to Toussaint (1972), there is no record of any indigenous population in Mauritius at the time of its discovery by Swahili seamen in the 12th century.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese landed on the island, naming it *Ilha do Cirne*. The Portuguese explored the surrounding islands. The Mascarene Islands, which include Mauritius, Rodrigues and Reunion Island, were named after the Portuguese navigator Pedro Mascarenhas. Rodrigues Island, which is also part of Mauritius, was named after its discoverer, Diego Rodriguez. However, the Portuguese did not settle on Ilha do Cirne; instead, they used it as a port of call.

### 1.3.2.1 The Dutch Settlement

The Dutch marked the first settlement in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1598, the Dutch first landed on the island. They named the island Mauritius after their Prince Maurice van Nassau. At the time, Mauritius was emerging as a strategically significant land base between the Cape of Good Hope and the East. The islands served as resupply points and launch sites for raids on other countries' ships. Mauritius was also gaining recognition for its endemic ebony *Diospyros tessellaria*, which was becoming quite popular in Europe. The increasing interest in Mauritius from numerous nations, particularly the French and British, who visited the island several times, drove the Dutch to conquer it in 1638. The first impression of the island was abundance. The island's flora and fauna were rich. The animals were easy to hunt; birds were easily caught, and fish were plentiful.

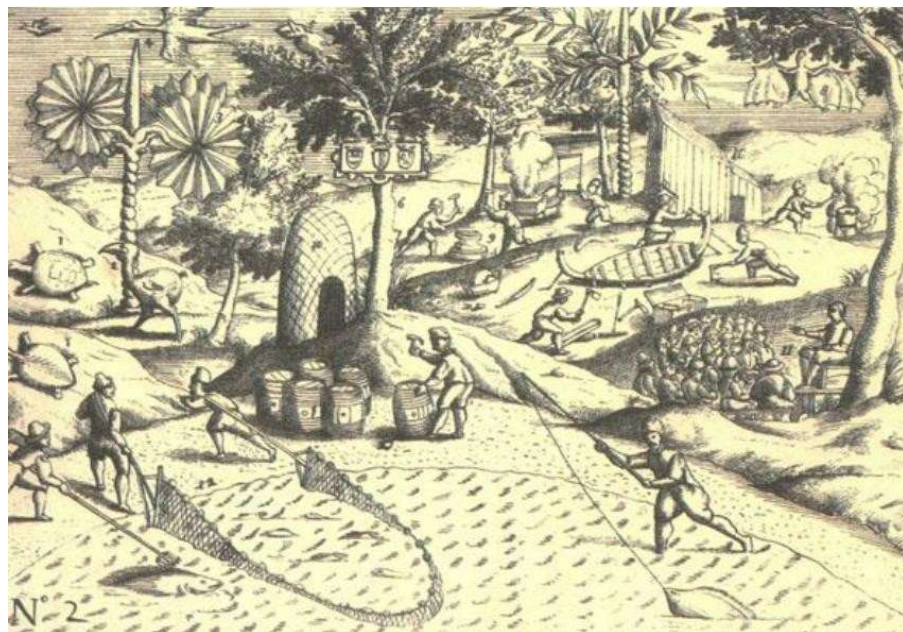


Figure 1.2 Anonymous engraving of Dutch activity in Mauritius in 1598 (Source: ResearchGate)  
(Accessed on 5th March 2025)

The Dutch overexploited the island and eventually abandoned it, leaving behind a devastated landscape with destroyed fauna and flora. The Dodo, the endemic bird of Mauritius, became extinct during the Dutch settlement on the island. Although the Dutch did not significantly impact the island, the names of some places testify to their presence, for example, Flacq, Pieter Both Mountain, and Plaines Wilhems.

After the Dutch, the French took possession of the island in 1715. Then, the French Compagnie des Indes occupied the neighbouring Reunion Island, which was then known as *Ile Bourbon*. They named the island *Ile de France*. However, the first French settlers arrived on the island in 1721, along with their slaves, whom they had brought from Mozambique, Madagascar, and India.

### **1.3.2.2 The Evolution of Mauritius: A Linguistic and Cultural Mosaic**

The cultural and linguistic diversity of Mauritius began to take shape with the arrival of the French and enslaved people from various parts of the world. Under French rule, the island saw significant economic and cultural development, with the cultivation of cotton, indigo, and, most importantly, sugarcane being reintroduced. As the sugar industry flourished, more enslaved individuals were brought to the island, contributing to its growing prosperity. During this period, the island, then known as *Île-de-France*, became a hub of economic activity.

French and Mauritian Creole were the primary languages spoken at the time (Baker & Corne, 1986). By the late 18th century, a new wave of settlers arrived from India, including craftsmen and traders. The craftsmen, mainly from Pondicherry, were brought to help build the capital, Port Louis. Over time, they integrated into the Coloured Population, a group composed of free individuals of mixed ancestry. Meanwhile, Indian traders, primarily from Gujarat, managed to preserve their traditions, religion, and language. As a result, *Île de France* became home to a variety of spoken languages during the French era.

The French also had certain practices regarding the enslaved population. Those who became too old to work were sometimes set free, and enslaved women who bore children with their French masters could also gain their freedom. Their children were often categorised as free Coloured Persons or "Mulattos," forming a distinct ethnic group (Eriksen, 1998). Though they were lighter-skinned than the African slaves and fluent in French, they were not fully accepted into the Franco-Mauritian elite.

### **1.3.2.3 The British Takeover and the Rise of Indentured Labour**

Due to its strategic position in the Indian Ocean, *Île de France* became a target for the British, who captured it in 1810 and renamed it Mauritius. English was introduced as the language of administration and education, but French remained widely spoken. In

fact, even the few British families who settled in Mauritius adopted French (Beaton, 1859; Stein, 1997). As a result, English never achieved the same level of influence on the island as the French. Meanwhile, Mauritian Creole continued to be used by the general population.

A significant turning point came in 1835 with the abolition of slavery. To sustain the sugar plantations, thousands of workers were brought from India under a system of indentured labour. These workers, commonly referred to as "coolies" or "Biharis" (since many came from Bihar), also hailed from Bengal and present-day Bangladesh. They spoke a range of languages, including Bhojpuri, Tamil, and Telugu, with Bhojpuri being the most widely spoken (Stein, 1982). The indentured labourers were both Hindus and Muslims. Some assimilated into the Coloured Population, while others retained their distinct cultural and religious identity, preserving their family structures, traditions, and languages (Carter, 1995). By 1909, the Indian-origin population had grown to approximately 450,000.

During the 1830s, another wave of Gujarati traders arrived in the region. Unlike the indentured labourers, these merchants were free individuals who migrated in search of business opportunities (Benedict, 1965). Many were Muslim and were categorised based on their region of origin; for example, those from Surat were called Surtees, while those from Kutch were known as Memans. Surtees spoke Gujarati, whereas Memans communicated in Kutchi, a dialect of Gujarati.

#### **1.3.2.4 The Arrival of the Chinese and the Path to Independence**

The island also saw an influx of Chinese immigrants, primarily from southern China, who arrived as free individuals in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many established themselves in retail and commerce, with the majority speaking Hakka, while a smaller number spoke Cantonese (Stein, 1982; Eriksen, 1999).

By the mid-20th century, large-scale immigration to Mauritius had slowed, and the island's demographic composition remained largely unchanged. The nation eventually gained independence on March 12, 1968, marking a new chapter in its history. Two decades later, on March 12, 1992, Mauritius officially became a republic, solidifying its status as a sovereign nation.

This rich and complex history of migration, cultural exchange, and linguistic diversity continues to shape Mauritius's identity, making it a true melting pot of traditions, languages, and heritage.

### **1.3.3 Demographic Situation of Mauritius**

Mauritius, a small nation in the Indian Ocean, has a unique and diverse demographic landscape shaped by historical migration, economic development, and social policies. With a unique blend of cultures and a shifting demographic structure, the country faces both opportunities and challenges as it moves forward.

#### **1.3.3.1 Population Size and Growth**

Mauritius has a population of approximately 1.27 million people. However, unlike many developing nations, its population growth has slowed significantly in recent years. Official data indicate a slight annual population decline of approximately 0.3%. This is largely due to lower birth rates, which have fallen as more Mauritians opt for smaller families, and an ageing population, which has led to a natural decrease in numbers.

Government initiatives in the past promoted family planning, resulting in a significant decline in fertility rates over the decades. While this helped improve living conditions, it now raises concerns about an ageing workforce and the sustainability of pension systems.

#### **1.3.3.2 A Cultural Mosaic: The People of Mauritius**

Mauritius is often described as a melting pot of cultures, with its population tracing its origins to India, Africa, China, and Europe.

- **Indo-Mauritians** form the majority, descended from indentured labourers brought to the island in the 19th century.
- **Creoles**, who have African and Malagasy heritage, make up a significant portion of the population.
- **Sino-Mauritians**, the descendants of Chinese immigrants, play a significant role in the country's business and trade sectors.

- **Franco-Mauritians**, whose ancestors were among the early French settlers, continue to have a notable presence in agriculture and commerce.

This diversity is reflected in the country’s festivals, languages, and everyday life, where multiple religions, cuisines, and traditions coexist harmoniously.

The figure below illustrates the various ethnic and religious groups that comprise the Mauritian Population.

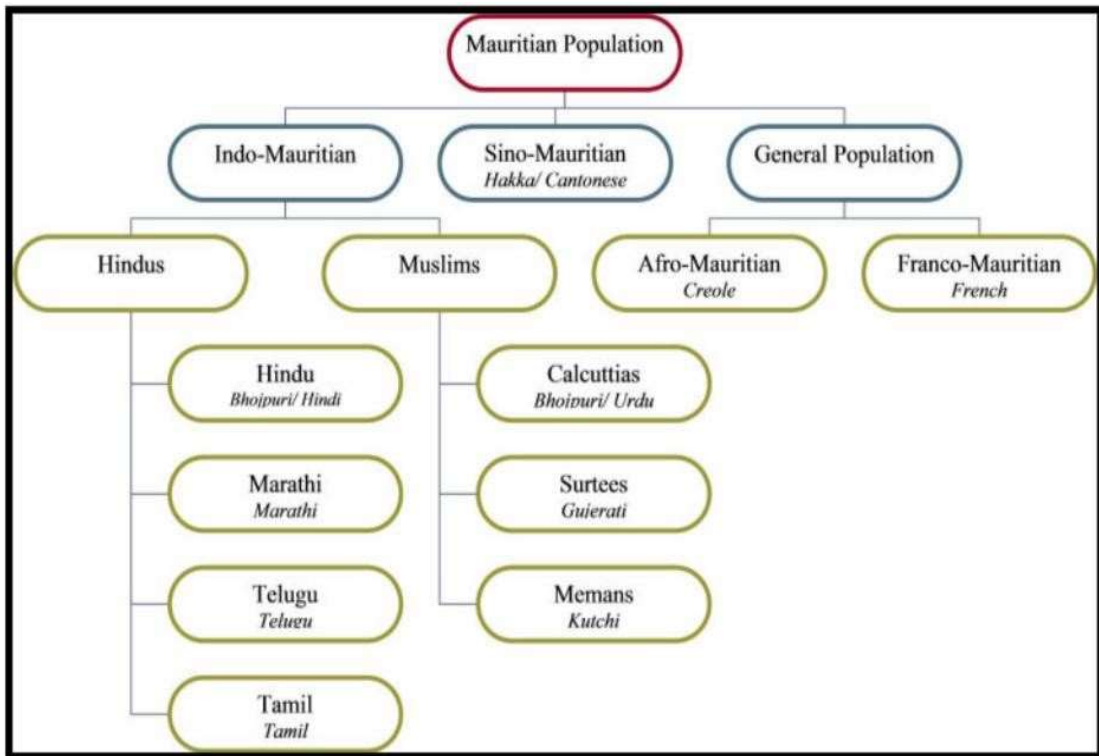


Figure 1.3: Ethnolinguistic group and languages of Mauritius, adapted and recreated from Rajah Carim 2005:319

### 1.3.3.3 Urbanisation and Population Density

Mauritius is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with about 626 people per square kilometre. Despite this, urbanisation is not as extreme as in many other nations; only about 41% of the population lives in cities.

Major towns, such as Port Louis, Curepipe, and Vacoas-Phoenix, serve as economic and administrative hubs, while many Mauritians continue to reside in smaller towns and villages. Urban areas offer better infrastructure, job opportunities, and modern lifestyles, but they also face challenges like traffic congestion, housing shortages, and environmental concerns.

#### **1.3.3.4 Ageing Population: A New Challenge for Mauritius**

One of the most significant demographic changes in Mauritius is the rise in the elderly population. About 13% of Mauritians are now over 65 years old, and this figure is expected to grow in the coming years. The country's life expectancy is around 74 years for men and 78 years for women, thanks to improvements in healthcare, education, and living standards.

However, this demographic shift brings new challenges. A shrinking workforce and a rising number of retirees put pressure on the pension system and healthcare services. The government is exploring ways to address these issues, including increasing retirement ages and encouraging skilled Mauritians living abroad to return home.

#### **1.3.3.5 Migration and Workforce**

Mauritius has a long history of migration. Many young professionals seek better opportunities abroad, particularly in countries such as Australia, Canada, and France. This "brain drain" affects sectors such as healthcare, IT, and finance, prompting the government to introduce incentives for skilled workers to stay or return to the country.

At the same time, Mauritius also attracts migrant workers, particularly from Madagascar, India, and Bangladesh, to fill job openings in the construction, manufacturing, and tourism sectors. These foreign workers play a vital role in the economy, but their presence also raises discussions about labour rights, integration, and economic dependency on foreign labour.

#### **1.3.4 The Socioeconomic Landscape of Mauritius**

Mauritius has undergone a remarkable transformation from a monocrop economy based on sugarcane to a diversified, high-income economy. Despite its limited land area and natural resources, the country has leveraged its strategic location, stable governance, and strong institutional framework to achieve economic resilience and social progress. This section examines the economic structure, employment trends, income distribution, social welfare systems, and contemporary challenges shaping Mauritius's socioeconomic landscape.

#### 1.3.4.1 The Economic Transformation

Historically, Mauritius's economy was highly dependent on sugarcane production, which accounted for over 90% of exports at the time of independence in 1968. However, recognising the risks of economic vulnerability, the government pursued a strategy of diversification, leading to the emergence of several key sectors:

- **Tourism:** A major contributor to the GDP, accounting for 24% of the total employment and attracting 1.3 million visitors annually, per the pre-pandemic figures. Mauritius is known for its luxury resorts, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage tourism.
- **Financial Services:** With a robust regulatory framework, Mauritius has positioned itself as a global financial hub for offshore banking, investment funds, and international business.
- **Manufacturing and Textiles:** Although this sector has declined due to globalisation and rising production costs, it remains a significant employer.
- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO):** The ICT sector has experienced rapid growth, employing over 30,000 people and contributing to economic diversification.
- **Real Estate and Smart Cities:** Driven by the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS) and the Smart City Scheme, this sector has attracted foreign direct investment (FDI), boosting construction and high-end real estate.

#### 1.3.5 The Linguistic Situation in Mauritius

Mauritius presents a unique and complex linguistic landscape shaped by its colonial past, multicultural population, and ongoing sociolinguistic dynamics. As a multilingual society, Mauritius hosts a wide array of languages that coexist and interact in various social, educational, and institutional domains. This dynamic linguistic environment is the result of successive waves of colonisation and migration, particularly from Europe, Africa, India, and China. As a result, the country is home to a complex interplay of vernacular, official, and ancestral languages, all of which shape its people's linguistic behaviours and identities. The primary languages used are Mauritian Creole (also known as Creole Morisien), French, English, and several ancestral languages, including Bhojpuri, Hindi, Urdu, Mandarin, and Tamil.

The linguistic landscape of Mauritius, as illuminated by the 2022 Census<sup>4</sup>, reflects a dynamic interplay of languages within the sociocultural fabric of the island nation.

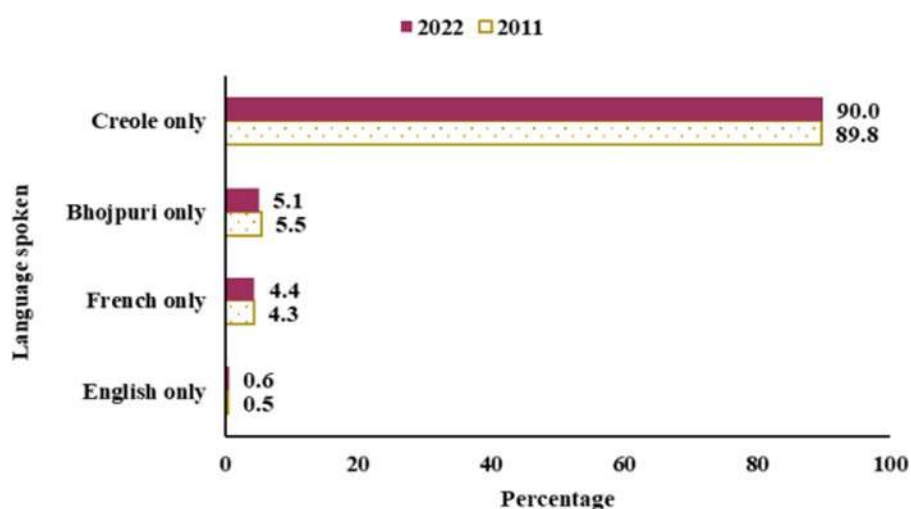


Figure 1.4: Proportion of the population by language most often spoken at home, Republic of Mauritius, 2011 and 2022 Population Censuses (Source: 2022 Census Mauritius)

Creole, a language born out of historical intermingling and cultural fusion, continues to assert its dominance in Mauritius. According to the 2022 Census, a remarkable 90.0% of the population reported speaking only Creole at home. This figure marks a slight increase from 89.8% in 2011, underlining the enduring prevalence and significance of Creole within domestic spheres. In contrast, the data reveal a notable shift in the linguistic landscape concerning Bhojpuri. The 2022 Census indicates a decrease in the number of Bhojpuri speakers, with 5.1% of the population reporting the use of Bhojpuri at home, compared to 5.5% in the 2011 Census. This shift raises intriguing questions about the factors that influence the trajectory of Bhojpuri within Mauritius' linguistic mosaic. French maintains its presence in Mauritius' linguistic repertoire. The 2022 Census reports that 4.4% of the population speaks only French at home, reflecting a marginal increase from 4.3% in 2011. The continued usage of French highlights its enduring role in certain linguistic domains despite the dominance of Creole in everyday communication.

<sup>4</sup> 2022 Population Census Mauritius. p.9

### **1.3.5.1 Mauritian Creole (Kreol Morisien)**

The most widely spoken language in Mauritius is Mauritian Creole, a French-based Creole language. Although the language was originally considered low status due to its association with slavery and lack of standardisation, Creole has gained increased recognition in recent years. It now functions as the de facto lingua franca, used in daily life across ethnic and class boundaries (Rajah-Carrim, 2005). Its recent introduction into the national curriculum has further elevated its status and expanded its reach among the younger generations (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2012).

### **1.3.5.2 English and French**

English is the official language of administration and education. It is used in government, legal contracts and as a medium of instruction in schools, although many teachers and students rely on Creole or French for practical communication.

French holds a strong socio-cultural influence in Mauritius. It dominates the media landscape, including newspapers, television, and radio. It is also widely used in business and education. It functions as a language of prestige and social mobility (Baker, 2014). The co-existence of English and French in institutional settings reflects the colonial legacy of both British and French regimes.

### **1.3.5.3 Ancestral languages**

In addition to English and French, Mauritius is also home to several ancestral languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Bhojpuri, Mandarin, Telugu, Marathi, and Tamil. These languages were brought to the island by indentured labourers and traders during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In Mauritius, ‘ancestral’ has traditionally been associated with ‘Asian’ or ‘Oriental’ languages (Bissoonauth, 2010; Harmon, 2014; Natchoo, 2020). The use of the ancestral language traces back to the British colonial era, when these languages played an essential role in preserving the ancestral heritage, cultural identity, and unique characteristics of the diverse diasporic communities which settled in Mauritius. Unlike colonial languages such as French or English, those languages were neither compulsory in schools nor utilised in official administrative capacities (Rajah-Carrim, 2005).

In Mauritius, ancestral languages like Bhojpuri, Hindi, Gujarati, Kutchi, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu are deeply intertwined with both ethnic identity and religious traditions (Baker, 1972; Eriksen, 1998; Rajah-Carrim, 2004; Stein, 1982). While a small portion of the population still speaks Bhojpuri at home, most Mauritians no longer use the languages of their ancestors in everyday life, except during religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, these languages hold symbolic value, with many people strongly identifying with them as part of their cultural and historical heritage. Population census data from 1983, 1990, and 2000 (Eriksen, 1998; Bissoonauth & Offord, 2001; Rajah-Carrim, 2005) highlight the close connection between ethnic identity and ancestral languages. Language affiliation can carry political weight in Mauritius, where voting patterns often follow ethnic lines and public funding is distributed based on the size of ethnic communities. Since 1955, the government has encouraged teaching ancestral languages in schools. While this initiative supports valuable educational goals, such as preserving linguistic diversity and helping children connect with their heritage, it also reflects political motivations (Sonck, 2005).

#### **1.3.5.4 Tamil**

Tamil indentured labourers were brought from South India during the 19th century. Even today, the language continues to be used in Hindu temples, Tamil schools, religious rituals, and community events. However, its functional use in day-to-day communication has diminished significantly over time. Among younger Tamil Mauritians, there is a noticeable shift toward using Creole, French, or English instead of Tamil in informal and even some formal contexts. Despite this trend, Tamil cultural and religious organisations, such as the Mauritius Tamil Temple Federation, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Trust, and the Tamil Speaking Union, are essential in preserving linguistic and cultural traditions. These are generally achieved through the celebration of festivals, such as the *Thaipusam Cavadee*, and by offering Tamil language instruction in community schools.

#### **1.3.6 Education System of Mauritius**

The education system in Mauritius reflects its colonial legacy, multicultural society, and commitment to equal access to education. The education system in Mauritius was primarily modelled after the British system, but has evolved to reflect the country's multilingual and multicultural context while emphasising academic achievement and

skill development. Education is free and compulsory up to the age of 16, and the government provides free transport and textbooks at the primary level to encourage enrollment and retention. The Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology oversee the education system.

#### **1.3.6.1 Education Policy Framework**

Mauritius has established a robust education system guided by policies aimed at providing equitable and quality education to all citizens. The key aspects of education policy include compulsory education, the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) program, and the National Policy Framework. Education is free and compulsory up to the age of 16, as mandated by the Education Act. In 2017, NYCBE was implemented. This policy restructured the education system to ensure a seamless nine-year basic education cycle, aiming to reduce dropout rates and promote holistic development. The National Policy Framework was developed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and serves as a strategic guide for attracting foreign direct investments in the tertiary education sector, thus emphasising the development of Mauritius as a knowledge hub.

#### **1.3.6.2 Educational Structure**

The following section discusses the education structure of Mauritius, from pre-primary to tertiary education.

##### **1.3.6.2.1 Pre-Primary Education**

The Mauritian education system is organised into several levels. The first level is Pre-Primary Education. The children are between the ages of 3 and 5, and the course duration is two years. The focus is on early childhood development. It prepares the children for primary school through fundamental learning in language, numeracy, and social interaction. Both private and public institutions offer pre-primary education.

It was observed that enrollment increased by 16.5% in March 2024. The figure below shows the number of enrolments in Pre-primary schools from March 2019 to March 2024.

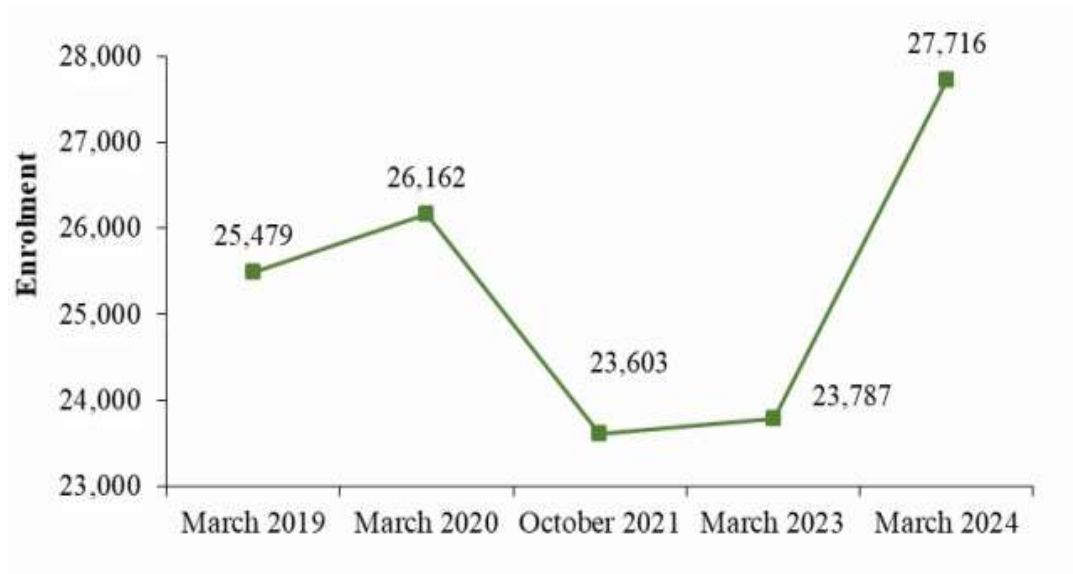


Figure 1.5 Enrolment in Pre-Primary schools, March 2019-2024 (Accessed

Source: [https://www.maurice-info.mu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Edu\\_Yr24\\_230924.pdf](https://www.maurice-info.mu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Edu_Yr24_230924.pdf) (Accessed on 26th March 2025)

### 1.3.6.2.2 Primary Education

The next level is the Primary Level. Children typically enter primary school at age five and complete six years of study, from Grade 1 to Grade 6. The curriculum includes English, French, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography, and Information Technology. Optional subjects include ancestral languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu, Mandarin, and Mauritian Creole. At the end of Grade 6, students sit for the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) examination, which determines their progression to secondary education.

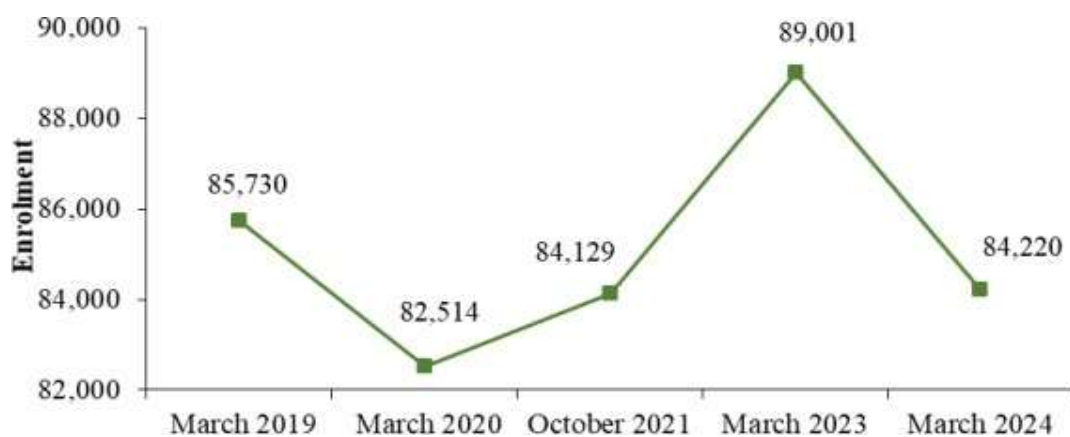


Figure 1.6 Enrolment in Primary Schools, March 2019-2024

Source: [https://www.maurice-info.mu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Edu\\_Yr24\\_230924.pdf](https://www.maurice-info.mu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Edu_Yr24_230924.pdf) (Accessed on 26th March 2025)

### **1.3.6.2.3 Secondary Education**

Secondary education spans seven years and is divided into:

- Lower Secondary (Grades 7–9): A general education phase forming part of the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) reform aimed to reduce dropout rates.
- Upper Secondary (Grades 10–11): Students sit for the School Certificate (SC), which is equivalent to the O-levels.
- Higher Secondary (Grades 12–13): Students prepare for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) equivalent to A-levels.

Students may specialise in academic streams such as Science, Economics, and Languages, or opt for vocational pathways offered by institutions like the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD).

### **1.3.6.2.4 Tertiary Education**

At the Tertiary Level, Mauritius has developed a growing higher education sector that includes both public and private institutions. Key universities include the University of Mauritius, the University of Technology, Mauritius, and the Open University of Mauritius. In addition, international campuses such as Curtin University and Middlesex University Mauritius contribute to the country's goal of becoming a regional hub of knowledge. The National Policy Framework for Tertiary Education (Ministry of Education, 2020) outlines strategic goals aimed at attracting foreign direct investment and promoting innovation and research.

### **1.3.7 Language in Education**

Although English is the official medium of instruction in Mauritian schools, in practice, many classroom interactions happen in French, particularly when teachers explain complex topics or engage students in discussion. Mauritian Creole, while not officially recognised as a medium of instruction, is often used informally in classrooms, especially at the primary level, to aid comprehension and build rapport with students. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of Creole's role in education, and some initiatives have introduced it into the curriculum to promote inclusivity and cultural relevance.

Ancestral languages such as Tamil are offered as optional subjects, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. These offerings reflect the state's official acknowledgement of Mauritius's multicultural heritage. However, several parents, teachers, and students have expressed that these languages are often treated as secondary or non-essential compared to core subjects like English, French, and Mathematics. In interviews conducted with Tamil-speaking families, some parents mentioned that while they enrol their children in Tamil classes to maintain a sense of identity, they are concerned about the limited opportunities to use Tamil outside of religious or ceremonial contexts. One parent from Vacoas remarked, "My son can read and write a bit of Tamil, but he doesn't really speak it with us unless it's for *Kavadi* or at the temple. In school, everything that counts is in English or French."

This reflects a broader challenge within Mauritius's multilingual educational framework. While policies support linguistic diversity in principle, the actual classroom dynamics and societal expectations often push students to prioritise languages perceived as more valuable for academic success and career advancement. As a result, languages like Tamil risk becoming confined to symbolic or ritual use unless more integrative and community-based revitalisation efforts are made.

### **1.3.8 Tamil Banknotes Controversy**

In 1998, a minor error with Mauritian banknotes sparked a significant debate about language and identity on the island. Traditionally, these notes display inscriptions that are orderly in English, Tamil, and Hindi. However, the new series printed that year accidentally placed the Tamil inscription after the Hindi one. The government explained this as a simple printing error without any deeper political meaning.

For many in the Tamil community, though, it was much more than a misprint. Local groups, such as the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation (MTTF) and the Tamil Council (TC), felt that their rights were being overlooked, and tensions began to rise. Tamil Minister Kadress Pillay even threatened to resign unless the banknotes were destroyed and reissued with the original language order.

At the heart of the matter was the belief that the original sequence honoured the Tamil community's long history on the island. Many Tamils argued that their ancestors were among the first settlers in Mauritius, and the proper ordering of languages on the

banknotes symbolised their enduring contributions to the island's development. This issue resonated widely, with numerous letters to the editor expressing the community's discontent. They felt that the change was driven by the dominant group, who were the Hindus, who attempted to assert their influence over minority communities.

Below are some extracts that appeared in the *Le Mauricien* newspaper.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam's advice to never touch the religion, tradition, and language of the people was part of the old mindset and is no longer valid. The present credo seems to be supremacy! Supremacy! The hegemonic attitude can be the only explanation to justify the relegation of the Tamil inscription to the last position on the new banknotes ( . ) There is a deliberate rape of history. The Tamils' contribution is just ignored, their dignity slighted, and their acquired rights snatched.

(B.Narsinghen, *Le Mauricien* 6 November 1998: 6)

No doubt, this unexpected but insidiously planned endeavour [change of language order] was welcomed with open arms by a certain section of the population and helped to boost their morale because they had always considered it an eyesore ( . ) [The Tamils] have won a battle and they must now win the war, their legitimate share of the national cake ( . ) They must keep going, for their own sake and that of their community, at any stage.

(A.Pouli, *Le Mauricien* 8 January 1999: 6)

These two extracts capture the deep sentiments within the Tamil community over the banknote's controversy. Many Tamils felt that relegating their language to the third position was not a simple oversight but a politically charged move. One they described as "deliberate" and "insidiously planned" by the influential Hindu majority. They saw this change as a clear effort by the dominant group to assert its power and suppress minority voices. As a minority community, Tamils often risk being subsumed by the larger Hindu culture, so they view language as a vital means of affirming their distinct identity. In much the same way that Telugus and Muslims champion their own languages as symbols of heritage, the Tamils are fighting for what they believe is their rightful share of the nation's identity and against the overwhelming influence of the Hindu community.

The reaction to the rearrangement of languages on the banknotes went beyond the Tamil community. The Hindu nationalist group Voice of the Hindus (VOH) argued that keeping Hindi in second place and Tamil third was essential because Hindus make up the majority of Mauritius's population (Le Mauricien, 5 December 1998). In their view, it was only natural for their language to come before Tamil, a change they "welcomed with open arms," as Pouli noted.

At the same time, the issue sparked debate among Muslims as well. The Muslim political party Hizbullah proposed that Urdu or Arabic should be added to the banknotes, adding another layer to what seemed at first a simple printing error. What began as a minor misprint quickly evolved into a heated discussion about ethnic identity and political power.

Ultimately, the controversy compelled the government to reissue the banknotes with the original language order, a costly decision that incurred millions of rupees. Despite the debates, Urdu and Arabic were not included in the new notes, and the matter was eventually silenced down as Hizbullah did not pursue it further.

This episode highlights the strong emotional ties Mauritians have to their cultural and religious languages. Although Tamil is rarely used in everyday conversation in Mauritius, its inclusion on the banknotes carries significant ethnic symbolism, much like Hindi and Urdu. It's a vivid reminder that language policies are deeply connected to ideas of power and identity, and even small changes can have far-reaching socio-political implications.

### **1.3.9 Tamil Diaspora in Mauritius**

The Tamil diaspora has a vibrant and diverse history, with its roots tracing back to the early days of the island's settlement. The Tamil settlements started during the French period. Muthusamy (2010:32) states that Tamil settlements in Mauritius began in 1719. During that period, the French were also controlling Pondicherry in India; therefore, they were able to bring in the Tamils, both as free slaves and as slaves, to work on the island. The Tamils that the French brought were primarily skilled craftsmen and construction workers. After the French, when the British conquered the island in December 1810, there were approximately 9,000 Tamil soldiers in the British army. Many of them settled in Mauritius. In 1834, when the Slavery Abolition Act was

enforced, the British brought in Indians as indentured labourers to work in their sugarcane plantations. During the French period, a greater number of Tamil immigrants migrated to Mauritius, whereas during British rule, a larger number of Indians from other parts of India arrived in Mauritius. However, working on the sugarcane plantation, Tamils were preferred.

The Tamils who arrived in Mauritius were primarily indentured labourers who endured challenging conditions on the sugarcane estates. They came under indenture contracts, which bound them to work for a specific period in exchange for meagre wages and basic amenities. Muthusamy (2010) cites that from 1874 to 1884, 33926 Tamils sailed from Chennai to Mauritius, mainly as indentured labourers. A study conducted by Mauritius Almanac in 1913 reveals that between 1834 and 1912, 346,145 men arrived as labourers from India, while 105,896 women arrived, with 133,716 men and 33,854 women returning to their home country during the same period. The Tamils who came during those periods were primarily labourers who played a crucial role in developing the sugarcane industry in Mauritius. During the colonial era, their hard work and expertise in agriculture significantly contributed to the island's economic growth.

Despite the challenging situations, Tamil immigrants maintained their cultural traditions and identity on the island. They continued to practice their language, religion, and cultural customs. Temples were established to serve the spiritual needs of the community. Even today, Tamil festivals like Diwali, *Pongal*, and Thaipusam Cavadee are celebrated enthusiastically in Mauritius.

#### **1.4 Research Problem**

In multilingual and postcolonial societies such as Mauritius, the preservation of minority languages presents both a challenge and a necessity. Although Tamil has historically played a vital role in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the Tamil community in Mauritius, its usage and transmission are increasingly threatened by the dominance of languages such as Mauritian Creole, English, and French. There is observable evidence that Tamil is being used less frequently in informal and familial settings and that fluency among younger generations is declining. Despite institutional efforts to preserve Tamil through religious bodies, schools, and cultural organisations, the effectiveness of these strategies remains uncertain.

The phenomenon of language shift among Mauritian Tamils raises important questions about linguistic identity, cultural preservation, and the sustainability of minority languages. The lack of comprehensive research on how, why, and to what extent the Tamil language is maintained or shifting in Mauritius creates a gap in sociolinguistic literature and policy-making. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for informing educational strategies, cultural initiatives, and community-driven efforts aimed at linguistic preservation.

## **1.5 Research Questions and Hypothesis**

### **1.5.1 Research Questions:**

1. To what extent is the Tamil language being maintained across generations within the Tamil community in Mauritius?
2. What are the primary sociocultural, educational, and institutional factors influencing language maintenance or shift?
3. How do language attitudes, identity, and intergenerational communication affect the use and transmission of Tamil?
4. What role do religion, education, and media play in sustaining or diminishing the use of Tamil among Mauritian Tamils?

### **1.5.2 Hypothesis:**

- **H1:** The use of Tamil is declining among younger generations of the Mauritian Tamil community due to increasing reliance on dominant languages in education, media, and daily life.
- **H2:** Positive language attitudes and institutional support significantly contribute to the maintenance of Tamil as a heritage language in Mauritius.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The major objective of this study is:

- To investigate the extent of language maintenance and shift among the Mauritius Tamil community and identify the key factors influencing these processes.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the current linguistic practices of the Tamil community across different age groups.
2. What are the different stages of language shift observed in Mauritius?
3. To identify sociolinguistic factors contributing to language maintenance or shift within the community.
4. To assess the role of family, religion, education, and media in the transmission and use of Tamil.
5. To evaluate language attitudes towards Tamil among different generations.
6. To propose recommendations for sustaining the Tamil language in Mauritius.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study holds both academic and practical significance. From an academic perspective, it contributes to the broader field of sociolinguistics, particularly in the domains of language maintenance, language shift, and multilingualism in postcolonial societies. By focusing on the Tamil community in Mauritius, the research provides context-specific insights into how heritage languages or ancestral languages survive or decline in environments dominated by more socially or economically powerful languages. It also adds to the relatively limited body of literature on minority language practices in the Indian Ocean region.

Practically, the study offers valuable implications for educators, policy-makers, community leaders, and cultural organisations. The findings can inform the development of more effective language planning and policy interventions aimed at preserving linguistic diversity. Religious institutions and Tamil language associations may also benefit from this research by adapting their strategies to engage younger generations. Furthermore, the study may contribute to raising awareness within the

Tamil community about the importance of intergenerational language transmission as a means of sustaining cultural identity.

In a broader sense, the study underscores the importance of linguistic heritage as a vital component of national identity and cultural diversity in Mauritius. At a time when globalisation and language homogenisation are accelerating, this research serves as a timely reminder of the need to actively support and preserve minority languages.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on the Tamil-speaking community in Mauritius, examining patterns of language maintenance and language shift across different generations. The research primarily targets families, educational institutions, religious bodies, and cultural associations within the Tamil community to understand how Tamil is used, transmitted, and perceived.

The scope encompasses an analysis of language use in various domains, including home, school, religious settings, and media consumption. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods will be employed to gain a holistic understanding of the linguistic practices and attitudes of participants. The research will consider generational differences by including respondents from older, middle-aged, and younger cohorts.

However, the study is subject to certain limitations. First, due to time and resource constraints, the sample size may not fully represent the entire Tamil population in Mauritius, particularly in less accessible areas. Second, social desirability bias may influence self-reported data on language use and attitudes. Third, while the study focuses on the Tamil community, it does not examine similar dynamics in other linguistic or ethnic communities in Mauritius, which could offer valuable comparative insights.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a meaningful and contextually grounded understanding of the processes influencing language maintenance and language shift among Mauritian Tamils.

## **1.9 Research Gap**

Despite an increasing amount of academic works, research and publications exploring language maintenance and cultural identity among Tamil communities in Mauritius, significant gaps remain in the academic understanding of how language shift unfolds in nuanced, generational, and ideological ways. Studies such as Muthusamy (2014) and Mooneegadoo (2018) have laid important groundwork by examining the symbolic function of Tamil and the sociocultural mechanisms of intergenerational transmission. However, these works are primarily qualitative and descriptive, relying on ethnographic or interview-based approaches with limited analytical generalisation.

First, there is a lack of systematic investigation into subjective viewpoints regarding the use of the Tamil language and identity, particularly among younger generations navigating complex multilingual realities. Second, previous research has not sufficiently explored the ideological underpinnings and competing value systems that drive decisions regarding language maintenance or abandonment. Third, the broader institutional and policy frameworks, such as educational language policy, media visibility, and cultural programming, remain under-theorised in the context of language shift. Finally, Mauritius is often treated in isolation, without sufficient comparative reference to regional Tamil diasporas in the Indian Ocean, such as those in Seychelles, Réunion, and South Africa, which could provide valuable contextual grounding.

This thesis addresses these gaps by integrating Q methodology, sociolinguistic discourse analysis, and comparative diaspora insights to investigate how language ideologies, institutional structures, and generational identity negotiations interact in shaping the future of Tamil in Mauritius.

## **1.10 Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis makes a multi-dimensional contribution to the field of sociolinguistics, diaspora studies, and language policy in postcolonial multilingual societies. It is the first study in the Mauritian context to systematically apply Q methodology to capture and cluster the subjective perspectives of Tamil speakers regarding language maintenance, identity, and utility. This methodological innovation bridges the gap between qualitative depth and quantitative structure, providing a new lens for studying language ideologies in postcolonial multilingual settings.

The research also extends theoretical discussions on Language Maintenance and Language Shift (LMLS) by incorporating institutional and structural variables such as educational policy, media representation, and cultural programming, which are often overlooked in micro-level studies. In doing so, it provides a more holistic understanding of language vitality beyond the home and religious domain.

Furthermore, by including youth voices, this thesis highlights a critical and often neglected demographic in LMLS research, offering empirically grounded insights into how identity is being renegotiated in a trilingual environment shaped by globalisation, cultural symbolism, and educational pressures.

Ultimately, the thesis contributes to comparative diaspora research by situating Mauritius within the broader Indian Ocean Tamil diaspora, facilitating cross-cultural comparisons and expanding the existing literature beyond traditionally studied geographies, including Malaysia, Singapore, and South Africa.

Together, these contributions provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and cultural organisations aiming to revitalise and sustain the Tamil language in Mauritius and comparable postcolonial multilingual societies.

## **CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## **2.0 Introduction**

The study of language Maintenance and Language Shift has emerged as a crucial field within sociolinguistics, particularly in examining how minority languages survive or decline within multilingual, diasporic, and postcolonial contexts. Language is not merely a means of communication; it embodies cultural identity, historical continuity, and social belonging. For diasporic communities, the ability to maintain their heritage language across generations reflects complex interactions between socio-political structures, educational systems, community dynamics, and political attitudes.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of theoretical models and empirical studies relevant to understanding language maintenance and shift, particularly in Tamil-speaking communities worldwide and within Mauritius. It first outlines foundational theories about language vitality, transmission, and attitudes. It also explores the key sociolinguistic phenomena such as functional bilingualism, code-mixing, and identity negotiation. Special attention is given to the historical, institutional, and intergenerational dynamics of Tamil in Mauritius, situating the local context within a broader global pattern. Building on these insights, the chapter establishes a conceptual framework for investigating the challenges and possibilities of sustaining Tamil language vitality in Mauritius today.

### **2.1 Language Maintenance**

Language maintenance refers to the efforts and processes that enable a language to continue being spoken across generations within a particular speech community despite external pressures from dominant or majority languages. It is a multifaceted phenomenon involving linguistic behaviours and social, cultural, economic, and psychological dynamics. In multilingual societies or among diasporic populations, language maintenance is often seen as a key indicator of group identity, resilience, and cultural continuity.

### 2.1.1 Theoretical Foundations

The foundational theoretical framework for language maintenance is rooted in the pioneering work of Joshua Fishman. In his early publications (Fishman, 1966), he framed language maintenance and language shift as interdependent processes within broader societal structures. He proposed that language maintenance preserves a linguistic system and safeguards a group's cultural autonomy and collective identity.

In his later and more influential work, *Reversing Language Shift* (1991), Fishman introduced the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), an eight-stage model that outlines the severity of language endangerment and the types of interventions necessary at each stage. At its core, the RLS model emphasises the intergenerational transmission of language in the home domain as the most critical foundation for language maintenance. Fishman argued that revitalisation efforts must begin at the family and community level before moving to more formal institutional domains such as education, media, and governance.

Complementing Fishman's work is the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory developed by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977). This theory suggests that the vitality of a language group, its capacity to behave as a collective entity, depends on three primary factors:

- Status: The economic, social, and symbolic prestige of the language.
- Demography: The number and distribution of speakers.
- Institutional Support: Representation in education, media, religious institutions, and government.

A community with high vitality is more likely to maintain its language, while one with low vitality typically leads to erosion. The theory provides a diagnostic framework for assessing language strength and designing policy interventions.

Additionally, Fishman's concept of Language Domains (1972) offers a useful analytical tool: family, religion, education, workplace, and media domains structure language use. A language is more likely to be maintained if used consistently in key domains, particularly those associated with early socialisation and identity formation.

These theoretical models collectively emphasise that language maintenance is symbolic and practical, requiring alignment between values, behaviours, and structures.

### **2.1.2 Sociocultural Drivers of Maintenance**

While theoretical models provide frameworks, real-world language maintenance is shaped by sociocultural, economic, and institutional factors. Among the most critical drivers are:

- **Religion**

Religious practices often serve as vital reservoirs for language maintenance. In many communities, the heritage language is used in sacred texts, prayers, chants, and rituals. For example, the Saivite temples among Tamil diasporic communities conduct services and teach religious values in Tamil, reinforcing the language's spiritual significance. Such contexts give the language symbolic sanctity, making it resistant to complete erosion even when conversational use declines.

- **Family Transmission**

Intergenerational family communication is universally acknowledged as the most crucial factor in language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2011). Transmission is more likely when parents consistently use the heritage language with their children and encourage responses in that language. Bilingual and trilingual families prioritising the minority language at home contribute significantly to its survival.

The home environment represents the foundational domain of language transmission, where beliefs, values, and everyday practices determine whether a heritage language will survive or decline. Spolsky's (2004) Family Language Policy (FLP) model offers a comprehensive framework for analysing how these processes operate at the micro-level of family interaction. FLP consists of three interrelated components: language ideology, language management, and language practice. Language ideology refers to parents' underlying beliefs about the value, difficulty, or utility of a language; language management encompasses deliberate decisions about which languages to use or teach; and language practice reflects actual linguistic behaviour within the household.

Spolsky emphasises that the success of language maintenance depends less on formal instruction and more on the consistency with which families manage their linguistic environment. When parents possess a strong ideological commitment to the heritage language and actively regulate its use at home, intergenerational transmission becomes sustainable even amid societal pressure from dominant languages. Conversely, when parents adopt laissez-faire policies or prioritise socially prestigious languages, the shift accelerates. In the Mauritian Tamil context, FLP explains why households that consciously promote Tamil in everyday communication, through storytelling, devotional recitation, and cultural discussions, tend to preserve higher levels of proficiency among children. The framework thus complements Fishman's focus on intergenerational transmission by providing a nuanced understanding of how individual family decisions collectively shape community-level language vitality.

- **Community Cohesion**

Cohesive communities that share values, cultural traditions, and linguistic goals create protected spaces for the use of their language. These may include community centres, markets, weddings, funerals, and other social events where the heritage language is normalised and expected.

- **Cultural Institutions**

Weekend language schools, cultural associations, and heritage clubs often provide structured learning environments. These settings may offer language classes, drama productions, folk dance, and literary competitions, all of which promote competence and pride in using the language.

### **2.1.3 Global Case Studies**

- **Bai in China (Duan, 2004)**

Duan's (2004) ethnographic research on the Bai ethnic community, primarily concentrated in Yunnan Province in China, provides valuable insights into language maintenance amidst modernisation pressures. Although facing intense competition from Mandarin Chinese, the national and educational language, the Bai language has demonstrated resilience, particularly due to strong community support. Duan's study

revealed that Bai speakers associate their language with cultural pride, ethnic identity, and historical continuity.

Despite rapid urbanisation and modernisation, the Bai community maintains vibrant use of their language in critical cultural domains such as festivals, traditional storytelling sessions, religious rituals, and local governance meetings. Cultural festivals offer structured environments for intergenerational language transmission, allowing older and younger generations to participate actively in cultural practices. This scenario illustrates how positive attitudes, when reinforced by cultural pride and strong community institutions, can significantly enhance the functional vitality of a minority language.

Duan concludes that language maintenance among the Bai is about preserving linguistic competence and sustaining a coherent and proud ethnic identity. Integrating language into culturally meaningful practices and community events exemplifies how effective language maintenance requires functional, emotional, and symbolic reinforcement.

• **Korean Immigrants in Montreal (Park & Sarkar, 2007)**

Park and Sarkar (2007) conducted an extensive study of language maintenance among Korean immigrant families residing in Montreal, Canada, a multicultural city where English and French are the dominant languages in public and institutional domains. Their research highlighted a particularly compelling model of heritage language maintenance, driven by cooperative efforts between family units and community religious institutions.

Korean families actively participated in church-organised weekend Korean language schools and cultural activities, demonstrating a shared commitment to preserving the Korean cultural identity. Parents, particularly mothers, played a pivotal role, as they consistently encouraged and even insisted on the exclusive use of Korean at home, positioning language as a core component of familial and ethnic identity.

Park and Sarkar found that successful language maintenance was most pronounced in households where Korean was the sole medium of communication among family members, and this was reinforced by involvement in community institutions. Religious institutions provided structured opportunities for language learning, cultural

participation, and social networking among Korean youth. The study concludes that language preservation strategies are most effective when parents perceive their heritage language as an indispensable marker of their ethnic identity and when supported by consistent institutional reinforcement.

• **Tamil in South Africa (Naidoo, 2009)**

Naidoo's (2009) analysis of Tamil language usage in South African Indian communities provides insights into the challenges Tamil speakers face in maintaining their language across generations. Historically, Tamil was robustly maintained among Indian communities, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, due to the strong presence of Tamil-speaking indentured labourers who established religious and cultural institutions upon settling in South Africa.

However, Naidoo notes a significant decline in the daily use of Tamil, primarily due to the dominance of English and local African languages in educational, professional, and social domains. Despite this linguistic erosion in everyday contexts, Tamil remains resilient in religious and ceremonial contexts. Tamil temples regularly conduct religious services, rituals, and cultural celebrations, such as Thai *Pongal*, Tamil New Year, and various Hindu festivals, all of which are held in the Tamil language. Classical music, chants, and recitations in Tamil remain central to temple rituals and cultural performances, providing a critical domain for the continued presence of these traditions.

Naidoo emphasises the importance of religious institutions as linguistic refuges where older generations preserve cultural identity. However, the younger generation's lack of conversational fluency underscores a critical vulnerability, highlighting the gap between ceremonial preservation and practical language use. This case indicates that while religious domains can slow language shift, they cannot ensure intergenerational transmission without additional measures in educational and familial contexts.

• **Gujarati in the UK (Sharma & Sankaran, 2011)**

Sharma and Sankaran (2011) examine language maintenance within the Gujarati-speaking diaspora community in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on second- and third-generation migrants. Despite substantial institutional support, such as weekend language schools, cultural and religious associations, and community-

driven linguistic events, the study found a notable decline in spoken fluency across generations.

Many younger Gujarati speakers could understand the language, especially in contexts involving grandparents or during cultural events, but preferred English for day-to-day communication. Sharma and Sankaran identified several critical reasons for this gap between institutional language support and actual home use: the dominance of English in educational settings, its perceived higher prestige and utility for social mobility, and peer pressure in favour of English use.

The research highlighted that, while essential, institutional support alone is insufficient unless it is deeply integrated into familial practices and daily communication. Sharma and Sankaran argued for a more comprehensive and integrated approach, combining institutional education with the active encouragement of home language use, to ensure that Gujarati remains a living language rather than a mere cultural emblem.

#### **2.1.4 Mauritius Context**

In Mauritius, language maintenance efforts for Tamil have been shaped by state recognition, religious institutions, and educational policies. Tamil is taught in schools as an optional subject, used in temples, and supported by cultural organisations like the Tamil Speaking Union and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. However, scholars such as Bissonauth (2011) and Chemen (2018) argue that Tamil's use is primarily confined to ceremonial, religious, and academic spaces.

Bissonauth found that many Tamil families in Mauritius use Creole or French as their primary language. Tamil is reserved for specific rituals and formal contexts, often disconnected from the everyday experiences of younger generations. Similarly, Chemen observed that while Tamil is institutionally protected, it lacks real-world relevance, leading to symbolic preservation rather than functional vitality.

Moreover, youth often perceive Tamil as a “school subject” or “temple language” rather than a living language. This perception hinders motivation for active learning and its use. Unless Tamil is repositioned as a language of creativity, media, and digital engagement, it risks becoming a heritage relic rather than a tool of intergenerational connection.

## 2.2 Language Shift

### 2.2.1 Theoretical Approaches to Language Shift

Language shift is the process by which a speech community gradually transitions from using one language to another, often under the influence of social, political, or economic pressures. It typically leads to the reduced use and eventual disappearance of a minority or heritage language, replaced by a more dominant or socially prestigious one.

Fishman's (1991) work on *Reversing Language Shift (RLS)* remains the cornerstone of language shift theory. He introduced the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to assess the stages of language decline, ranging from languages used robustly across all domains (Stage 1) to those spoken only by a few elderly individuals (Stage 8). Fishman emphasised that intergenerational transmission is the linchpin of language sustainability; once children cease learning and speaking a language, its vitality is severely compromised.

Fishman also presented the well-known three-generation model of language shift:

- First generation: Fully fluent in the heritage language, which they use in private and public settings.
- Second generation: Bilingual: fluent in heritage and dominant languages, but gradually shifting toward dominant language use.
- Third generation: Primarily monolingual in the dominant language, with limited passive knowledge or symbolic understanding of the heritage language.

Edwards (1992) and Romaine (2002) extend these theories by identifying external structural forces that hasten shift, such as urban migration, compulsory schooling in dominant languages, and globalisation. These forces create environments where the dominant language holds greater communicative and economic capital, relegating the heritage language to domains of nostalgia or identity.

## **2.2.2 Global Case Studies in Language Shift**

### **• Spanish in the United States (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004)**

Gibbons and Ramirez's (2004) study examines the language maintenance and language shift patterns among Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, particularly among Mexican-American families. The study identified a clear, generational pattern of language shift, driven primarily by the dominant presence and institutional support for English in education, media, and broader societal interactions.

Spanish typically remains strong among first-generation immigrants, who frequently use the language at home and within community contexts. By the second generation, bilingualism has become increasingly prevalent, although English has continued to dominate public and educational settings. The shift to English has nearly been completed by the third generation, especially in regions with weak institutional support for bilingual education and limited official recognition of Spanish in mainstream public life.

Gibbons and Ramirez emphasise the pivotal role of institutional structures and community attitudes in language maintenance. They argue that without robust bilingual education programs, media representation, and institutional recognition of Spanish's value, younger generations inevitably gravitate toward English, associating it with social prestige, economic opportunity, and integration into American society. This case illustrates the significant impact that institutional support and societal attitudes have on the vitality of minority languages.

### **• Telugu in New Zealand (Kuncha & Bathula, 2004)**

Kuncha and Bathula (2004) explored language attitudes and language maintenance among the Telugu-speaking immigrant community in New Zealand. Their research revealed a dramatic and rapid language shift driven primarily by attitudinal factors within the Telugu community.

The survey conducted among Telugu-speaking families revealed that more than half viewed the maintenance and transmission of Telugu as unnecessary, believing it to have limited practical benefit for their children's future academic, professional, and social

success in New Zealand. As a result, parents and families rapidly shifted towards English usage within the home, prioritising the dominant societal language to facilitate their children's successful integration and advancement.

Within two generations, English became the exclusive home language for most families, replacing Telugu almost entirely. Kuncha and Bathula's findings highlight the significance of community attitudes in shaping language outcomes. When parents and community leaders perceive a heritage language as lacking instrumental value or practical benefit, language shift accelerates rapidly, highlighting the essential role of positive language attitudes and community-driven initiatives in effective language maintenance.

- **Tamil in Fiji (Subramani, 2010)**

Subramani's (2010) examination of the Tamil-speaking community in Fiji highlights a classic case of rapid language shift among descendants of Tamil indentured labourers brought to Fiji in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Historically, Tamil immigrants to Fiji maintained their language through close-knit communities and religious institutions, particularly temples that served as linguistic and cultural centres.

However, Tamil faced significant erosion over successive generations due to the linguistic dominance of English and Fijian languages, which are crucial for social mobility, educational advancement, and integration into broader society. The research indicates that by the third generation, most descendants of Tamil indentured workers have adopted either English or Fijian as their primary language of communication in daily life.

Despite this shift, Tamil remains preserved in religious rituals, temple ceremonies, and cultural celebrations. Subramani emphasises that while older generations remain fluent and actively use Tamil in ceremonial contexts, the younger generation often has minimal conversational fluency, relying instead on rote memorisation of chants, prayers, and religious hymns. This phenomenon represents a scenario where the language persists in a highly specialised, symbolic form, devoid of practical communicative use, highlighting a typical trajectory for minority languages without robust institutional or educational support.

### • Gujarati in the UK (Sharma & Sankaran, 2011)

Sharma and Sankaran (2011) conducted an extensive sociolinguistic study on the Gujarati-speaking community in the United Kingdom, examining patterns of language maintenance and shift across generations. The study found that despite significant community-driven efforts, such as weekend Gujarati language schools, cultural organisations, and religious institutions, there has been a notable decline in everyday use of Gujarati among younger generations.

As the dominant language in schools, media, workplaces, and peer groups, English has increasingly become the preferred language among British-born Gujaratis. Sharma and Sankaran noted a significant gap between the symbolic institutional recognition of Gujarati and the actual use of Gujarati as a home language. Although second and third-generation youth typically retain passive bilingualism, understanding Gujarati but often unable or unwilling to speak or read fluently, the practical communicative dominance of English significantly diminishes their active use of Gujarati.

The study identifies several critical factors driving this shift, including perceptions of English as essential for educational success, social integration, and professional advancement. Sharma and Sankaran argue that effective language maintenance requires more than symbolic efforts; it necessitates integrated, consistent language use reinforcement within familial contexts and mainstream educational systems.

### 2.2.3 Language Shift in Mauritius

In Mauritius, language shift has affected all ancestral languages to varying degrees, including Tamil. Chemen (2018) and Bissonauth (2011) observe that Tamil is increasingly confined to formal education and ceremonial spaces. Creole is the primary language of informal interaction, while French and English dominate institutional and academic domains.

Mahadeo (2004) argues that for many young people, Tamil is perceived as a school subject or a language used in temples, rather than a medium of everyday conversation. As a result, children may recite Tamil prayers or learn basic vocabulary, but lack conversational fluency. This is consistent with Fishman's Stage 6 or 7 on the GIDS scale, where a language is taught or used in religious contexts but not spoken widely.

Factors contributing to the shift in Mauritius include:

- Low utility of Tamil in higher education and employment
- Minimal media presence, especially youth-oriented content
- Intermarriage within diverse Indo-Mauritian communities
- Lack of parental transmission due to prioritisation of Creole, English, and French

The result is a pattern where Tamil is increasingly treated as a symbolic marker of ethnic identity rather than a living, functional language. Unless this trend is reversed through renewed efforts in family transmission, community engagement, and digital relevance, Tamil in Mauritius may follow the same path of erosion observed in other diaspora communities.

## **2.3 Language Contact**

### **2.3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Language Contact**

Language contact refers to the interaction between speakers of different languages, often resulting in changes in linguistic structure, vocabulary, or even the emergence of new varieties. Weinreich (1974) is credited with pioneering the study of language contact, defining it as the use of more than one language in the same geographic or social space. He emphasised that contact-induced changes could be linguistic and sociolinguistic, affecting grammar, pronunciation, word choice, and speakers' attitudes.

Gumperz (1982) introduced the concept of "speech communities" and emphasised the role of social meaning in bilingual speech. His work highlighted how language contact situations are shaped by sociocultural dynamics, particularly how code-switching serves pragmatic and identity-related functions, rather than being simply random or chaotic.

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) further developed the field by classifying types of contact-induced change, ranging from code-switching to full-scale language shift. Their work distinguishes borrowing (lexical adoption with minimal structural impact) and interference through shift (where speakers move toward a new language but transfer features from the old language). These distinctions are crucial for understanding how

Tamil interacts with dominant languages, such as English, French, and Mauritian Creole, in diasporic settings.

### **2.3.2 Contact Phenomena in Diasporic Contexts**

Language contact in diasporic communities is particularly dynamic due to the sustained interaction between heritage and dominant societal languages. These interactions often lead to bilingualism or multilingualism, but over time, the dominance of the majority language may overshadow the heritage language.

#### **• Linguistic Indigenisation (Mesthrie, 1992)**

In his seminal work on linguistic indigenisation among South African Indian communities, Mesthrie (1992) documented how Tamil-speaking descendants of Indian indentured labourers creatively adapted their ancestral language by integrating elements from local languages such as Afrikaans, Zulu, and English.

This indigenisation involved incorporating new lexical items, adopting syntactic structures, and phonological features from local South African languages into Tamil, resulting in a distinctly local Tamil variety reflective of the diasporic community's complex multilingual environment. Mesthrie argued that this phenomenon is common among diasporic communities worldwide, where contact with host country languages inevitably reshapes heritage languages.

The indigenisation of Tamil in South Africa facilitated practical communication within a multilingual society and symbolised a localised Tamil identity that distinctly separated the community from Tamil speakers elsewhere. Mesthrie's study highlights that such linguistic adaptations are not simply a matter of borrowing or mixing; they reflect broader social processes, including identity negotiation, cultural integration, and pragmatic adaptation to new social environments. These localised Tamil varieties became markers of both adaptation and ethnic distinctiveness, exemplifying how diasporic languages evolve dynamically through ongoing linguistic and cultural contact.

### • **Hybrid Varieties and Code-Mixing (Das, 2008)**

Das (2008) conducted an insightful study of the Tamil diaspora community in Montreal, Canada, highlighting the development of hybrid linguistic varieties arising from sustained contact between Tamil, English, and French. Montreal's multilingual and multicultural environment provides a unique context where Tamil-speaking immigrants frequently interact with the dominant Canadian languages, creating fertile ground for linguistic innovation.

The study documented how younger Tamil speakers frequently employ hybrid language registers, creatively blending Tamil, English, and French vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatic norms. These hybrid varieties, referred to as "reformatted linguistic registers," do not merely reflect linguistic convenience or limited proficiency; they also serve as a means of communication. Instead, they represent deliberate linguistic innovation and identity negotiation within diasporic youth culture. Young Tamil Montrealers strategically code-mix and borrow elements from different languages, reflecting their multicultural experiences, dual or multiple identities, and complex socio-cultural negotiations.

For instance, Tamil vocabulary is interspersed with English and French terms, often resulting in novel phrases that capture unique cultural experiences or contexts not adequately represented by any single language. Das argues that these linguistic hybrids symbolise youth identity construction, simultaneously asserting their heritage roots and integration into Canadian society. Thus, language hybridisation in Montreal's Tamil community is not simply a linguistic erosion process but a sophisticated, culturally meaningful expression of diasporic identity and adaptation.

### • **Functional Bilingualism and Diglossia (Mesthrie, 2009)**

Mesthrie (2009) explores functional bilingualism and diglossia among Tamil-English bilingual communities in the United Kingdom. Diglossia refers to situations where two languages (or varieties of a language) coexist within a community, each serving distinct functions and domains.

This manifests clearly in the UK Tamil diaspora: Tamil predominantly occupies domestic, familial, religious, and community contexts, while English dominates formal

education, public life, employment, and broader societal interactions. Mesthrie's research highlighted that bilingual Tamil speakers actively maintain Tamil at home and within culturally defined spaces, temples, cultural festivals, and community gatherings, symbolising ethnic identity and communal cohesion. English, conversely, is associated with academic success, professional opportunities, and societal integration, which has led to its dominance in public and institutional spheres.

This functional separation demonstrates a stable bilingual equilibrium where each language has defined usage domains. Mesthrie emphasises that functional diglossia helps preserve Tamil as a heritage language, ensuring its continued transmission within family and religious contexts despite the overwhelming dominance of English in broader society. However, this equilibrium can be vulnerable if younger generations perceive Tamil as increasingly irrelevant outside the home, potentially leading to long-term language shift.

#### • **Identity-Marked Switching (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009)**

Bhatia and Ritchie (2012) examine the sociolinguistic significance of code-switching; specifically how multilingual individuals strategically alternate between languages to convey specific social meanings or assert their identities. Code-switching, in this context, is not simply a linguistic phenomenon but a socially meaningful practice, often embedded in complex cultural and familial interactions.

In multilingual families, for example, speakers might switch languages to express emotional closeness, signal cultural authority, indicate respect or formality, or highlight generational differences. Parents may use a heritage language to assert familial authority, preserve cultural norms, or reinforce identity. In contrast, younger family members might deliberately switch to dominant languages, such as English, to express independence, assert a separate generational identity, or subtly challenge traditional familial norms; a linguistic act interpreted as a cultural assertion or rebellion.

Bhatia and Ritchie highlight numerous scenarios wherein multilingual speakers consciously or subconsciously switch languages to navigate cultural boundaries, express solidarity, or manage social relationships. This phenomenon is particularly evident among younger generations within diaspora communities, for whom language choice is a symbolic tool to negotiate their complex, bicultural identities. Thus, identity-

marked switching is not merely linguistic convenience but a sophisticated mechanism for managing interpersonal dynamics, cultural identity, and generational hierarchies.

### **2.3.3 Language Contact and Creolisation in Mauritius**

Fishman (1991) observed that when dominant contact languages penetrate familial and religious domains, the heritage language is at risk of erosion. This scenario unfolds in Tamil-speaking Mauritian homes, where Creole or French increasingly serve as default languages, especially in mixed-ethnic or urban households.

Mauritius presents a unique linguistic ecology marked by high multilingualism. The interaction of Tamil with Mauritian Creole, French, and English creates a layered contact zone. According to Bissonauth (2011), the pressures of Creole and French dominance in domestic and public spheres have significantly reduced the functional domains of Tamil.

Bissonauth (2011) observed that Tamil is increasingly influenced by Creole's syntactic structures and lexicon, especially among younger speakers. In casual conversations, Tamil speakers often engage in code-mixing, using Tamil phrases interspersed with Creole or French, which suggests a linguistic shift in structure and fluency.

Mauritian Creole, originally a French-lexified Creole, has developed into a full-fledged lingua franca spoken by over 80% of the population. Goodchild (2013) explains that while Creole promotes inclusivity across ethnic groups, it also exerts a “linguistic gravitational pull,” drawing younger speakers away from ancestral languages such as Tamil, Bhojpuri, or Telugu.

### **2.3.4 Contact-Induced Structural Changes**

Language contact in Mauritius has led to tangible changes in Tamil usage. Scholars like Chemen (2005) note that Tamil syntax among younger speakers is increasingly reflecting Creole word order patterns, and code-mixing is common, even in religious or cultural ceremonies. This suggests a form of grammatical convergence, often an early marker of language shift.

Moreover, the influence of French and English, especially through education and media, has introduced loanwords and altered phonological patterns in everyday Tamil

speech in Mauritius. These changes are often subconscious but accumulate over generations, contributing to what linguists call “subtractive bilingualism,” where fluency in the dominant language leads to erosion of the minority one.

### **2.3.5 Identity, Symbolism, and Language Choice**

Language contact also influences how speakers perceive themselves and utilise language to express their identity. In many cases, Tamil becomes a symbolic resource, associated with ritual, nostalgia, or ethnic pride, rather than a practical tool for daily communication.

Bhatia and Ritchie (2012) argue that bilingual speakers develop strategic competence in selecting the appropriate language for a given context. For Tamil speakers in Mauritius, this often means:

- Creole for everyday communication
- French/English for formal domains
- Tamil for ceremonial and religious use

This compartmentalisation underscores the partial functional load of Tamil and the influence of language contact in narrowing its use domains.

## **2.4 Language Attitudes**

### **2.4.1 Understanding Language Attitudes**

Language attitudes refer to individuals’ beliefs, emotions, and behavioural tendencies toward particular languages and their speakers. These attitudes are not merely abstract opinions; they profoundly influence language behaviours such as learning, usage, transmission, and abandonment. Scholars such as Garrett (2010) describe language attitudes as multi-dimensional, encompassing:

- **Cognitive:** What people believe about a language (e.g., “Tamil is difficult to learn”).
- **Affective:** Emotional reactions to a language (e.g., pride, shame, nostalgia).
- **Behavioural:** How these beliefs and emotions translate into language use or avoidance.

Personal experiences, cultural norms, education, media, and perceived utility of language shape language attitudes. As such, they often reflect broader power structures, social hierarchies, and identity politics.

Baker (1992) emphasises that positive attitudes are strongly linked with language maintenance, while negative attitudes often accompany language shift. However, he also cautions that attitudes are not always consistent with behaviour. For instance, people may express support for a heritage language while not actively using it, a phenomenon described as symbolic allegiance.

#### **2.4.2 Positive Attitudes and Their Effects**

When communities hold favourable attitudes toward their language, they are more likely to invest in learning, teaching, and using it across generations. Such attitudes often correlate with cultural pride, collective identity, and emotional attachment.

##### **• Samoan Communities in New Zealand (Holmes et al., 2001)**

Holmes and colleagues (2001) explored language maintenance among Samoan immigrant communities in New Zealand, a context characterised by the widespread dominance of English in public life, education, and employment. Despite these pressures, Samoan communities exhibited resilient language maintenance strategies attributed mainly to positive language attitudes, cultural pride, and robust community practices.

The study highlighted the significant role of religious institutions and community rituals in sustaining the Samoan language. Churches functioned not merely as religious centres but as linguistic sanctuaries, facilitating regular use of Samoan during sermons, hymns, communal prayers, and social gatherings. This consistent, institutionally supported use created positive reinforcement, positioning the Samoan language as a symbol of spiritual identity and cultural unity.

Additionally, traditional storytelling practices and community rituals further reinforced language maintenance. Elders and community leaders actively transmitted cultural knowledge and heritage values to younger generations through oral narratives, proverbs, and cultural ceremonies conducted in the Samoan language. Young Samoans

thus learned the language as a vital part of their cultural and spiritual identity, rather than merely a means of communication. Holmes et al. concluded that the combination of church-based reinforcement, community-driven cultural rituals, and positive language attitudes collectively enabled robust and intergenerational language maintenance, despite the overwhelming presence of English in broader societal contexts.

• **Hebrew in Israel (Spolsky, 2003)**

Spolsky's (2003) seminal analysis of Hebrew language revival in Israel offers a paradigmatic example of successful language restoration driven by collective nationalist ideology and sustained institutional support. Hebrew's revival is one of the most significant cases of deliberate language revitalisation, transitioning from a primarily liturgical language used exclusively for religious texts and rituals to a thriving, spoken language used in daily life, media, education, and governance.

Spolsky identifies that central to this revival was the strong nationalist ideology of Zionism, which positioned Hebrew as the linguistic embodiment of Jewish cultural unity, national identity, and historical continuity. Public attitudes toward Hebrew were overwhelmingly positive, viewing its revival as a symbolic act of reclaiming and reconstructing national identity after centuries of dispersion and diaspora life.

Institutional support was equally crucial in transforming Hebrew into a vibrant modern language. Israeli institutions, including schools, the government, media, and cultural organisations, systematically promoted Hebrew usage across all domains of daily life. Educational policies mandated Hebrew as the primary language of instruction, supported by comprehensive language teaching resources and curricula. Mass media extensively employed Hebrew in newspapers, radio, television, and digital platforms, facilitating widespread exposure and normalisation.

Spolsky argues that the Hebrew revival succeeded precisely because positive attitudes toward Hebrew were not confined to private sentiment but collectively embraced and institutionally reinforced. The comprehensive integration of Hebrew into public and institutional domains made its usage socially meaningful, culturally celebrated, and practically indispensable. Consequently, Hebrew emerged as a rare example of language restoration where collective ideological commitment and sustained

institutional infrastructure transformed a liturgical heritage language into a dynamic national language.

• **Korean Communities in Canada (Park & Sarkar, 2007)**

Park and Sarkar's (2007) comprehensive study examined the efforts of Korean immigrant communities in Montreal, Canada, to maintain their heritage language in the face of the dominance of English and French. Central to their findings was the critical role of parental attitudes and the family domain in preserving Korean.

The research emphasised that Korean parents in Montreal displayed firm emotional and cultural commitment to maintaining Korean as an essential element of their children's moral and ethnic identity. Parents consistently used Korean at home, positioning language not merely as a means of communication but as a vital tool for transmitting cultural values, traditions, and family heritage. The emotional resonance of Korean was reinforced through stories, cultural rituals, and daily conversations that highlighted moral teachings, cultural practices, and historical identity.

In addition to consistent home usage, Korean parents actively engaged their children in structured weekend language schools, often run by Korean churches and community organisations. These schools provided formal language instruction, cultural education, and opportunities for socialisation within a Korean-speaking peer group, thus creating a linguistically supportive environment that reinforced children's use and appreciation of Korean. Park and Sarkar emphasised that this dual approach, combining home language policy with institutional reinforcement through community-based education, was highly effective, demonstrating the crucial link between positive parental attitudes, structured educational opportunities, and successful heritage language maintenance in immigrant contexts.

These case studies illustrate diverse approaches to successful language maintenance, highlighting the critical roles of parental and community attitudes, religious and cultural institutions, structured educational support, and nationalist ideologies. Integrating these comparative examples into your review enriches the analysis by providing practical insights into how different sociocultural and institutional strategies can effectively sustain language vitality within multilingual and diasporic communities, directly informing the strategies for Tamil language preservation in Mauritius.

### 2.4.3 Negative Attitudes and Language Decline

Conversely, negative language attitudes can accelerate language shift. These attitudes may stem from:

- Perceived lack of usefulness
- Associations with low prestige
- Fear of social exclusion or ridicule
- Internalised colonial or postcolonial ideologies

#### • **Telugu in New Zealand (Kuncha & Bathula, 2004)**

Kuncha and Bathula's (2004) sociolinguistic research among Telugu-speaking immigrants in New Zealand provides significant insights into how attitudes can profoundly influence language maintenance. Their comprehensive survey of Telugu families revealed that more than half of the parents and children viewed the maintenance and transmission of Telugu as unnecessary and of minimal practical benefit in their new social and linguistic context.

The study showed that many parents perceived English as the essential language for educational success, professional advancement, and effective integration into New Zealand society. Telugu was increasingly perceived as a language with limited utility, offering no tangible advantage for children's academic or professional futures. Consequently, parents and family members often consciously or subconsciously deprioritised Telugu, adopting English as the primary language of communication even within homes where parents remained fluent in Telugu.

Kuncha and Bathula noted a rapid intergenerational language shift, often occurring within two generations. This swift abandonment of Telugu was primarily driven by negative attitudinal factors, including perceptions that the heritage language lacked instrumental value and social prestige. These findings underscore the profound impact of attitudes on language maintenance, illustrating how perceptions of practical utility significantly shape linguistic behaviour and intergenerational transmission dynamics.

- **Ghanaian Children (Agyekum, 2010)**

Agyekum's (2010) research provides critical insights into the language attitudes of bilingual Ghanaian children, particularly their perceptions of local indigenous languages versus English. Conducted within urban Ghanaian contexts, the study uncovered a striking pattern of negative attitudes toward indigenous languages among younger generations.

Agyekum observed that many Ghanaian children, particularly those exposed to urban environments and formal schooling, associated indigenous languages (such as Akan, Ewe, Ga, and others) with social inferiority, backwardness, or a lack of modernity compared to English. English, the medium of instruction in schools and perceived as the language of social mobility, international communication, and professional advancement, was viewed positively and aspirationally.

This resulted in a profound sense of embarrassment among children when their parents spoke to them in indigenous languages in public settings, such as school environments, marketplaces, or social gatherings. The children's embarrassment stemmed from fear of being perceived as less educated or socially inferior by their peers and broader society. Consequently, children often deliberately avoid using indigenous languages, even actively resisting parental attempts to communicate in them. This avoidance behaviour significantly disrupted intergenerational language transmission, leading to accelerated language shift toward English.

Agyekum highlighted that these negative attitudes were deeply tied to broader societal perceptions linking English with power, social status, education, and economic opportunity, while marginalising indigenous languages as culturally valuable yet pragmatically limited. The study underscored that successful language maintenance must challenge and transform these deeply ingrained societal attitudes, emphasising the practical relevance and cultural pride of indigenous languages.

- **Spanish in the USA (Potowski, 2013)**

Potowski's (2013) comprehensive examination of Spanish-speaking communities in the United States sheds light on the complex relationships between language attitudes, identity politics, assimilation pressures, and institutional power dynamics. Her study

highlights how negative societal attitudes towards Spanish, often influenced by broader socio-political factors like anti-immigrant sentiment and assimilationist ideologies, significantly affect language maintenance decisions within Hispanic communities.

Many Hispanic parents expressed hesitation about speaking Spanish to their children due to prevailing negative stereotypes and perceptions of Spanish as a barrier to their children's academic achievement, social integration, and economic success. English was positioned as the indispensable language of educational success, professional opportunities, and societal acceptance, prompting parents, often reluctantly, to adopt English as the primary language in family interactions.

Potowski's research further identified how these negative societal attitudes toward Spanish were reinforced by its marginalisation in mainstream media, institutional education, and public discourse, further stigmatising the language and discouraging its active use and transmission. Parents feared that maintaining Spanish might hinder their children's opportunities, thus deliberately shifting linguistic behaviours in favour of English. The research demonstrates the intricate connections between language attitudes, societal power structures, identity politics, and assimilation pressures, highlighting how minority languages are often sidelined due to broader institutional, political, and societal marginalisation.

#### **2.4.4 Intergenerational Differences in Language Attitudes**

Language attitudes frequently vary between generations. Elders may view the heritage language as essential to cultural survival, while youth may see it as burdensome, outdated, or irrelevant to their aspirations.

- **Tamil in Fiji (Subramani, 2010)**

Subramani's (2010) detailed study of the Tamil-speaking community in Fiji provides a profound exploration of language attitudes and generational shifts within the community, which is largely descended from indentured Tamil labourers brought to Fiji during British colonial rule. The study highlights a notable divergence in language perceptions between older and younger generations, reflecting broader socioeconomic and cultural shifts.

For older Tamil speakers in Fiji, the Tamil language carries immense spiritual and cultural significance. They closely associate it with Hindu religious rituals, ceremonies, temple prayers, and traditional festivals such as Thai *Pongal*. This association with religious and cultural practices imbues Tamil with deep symbolic meaning, making its use in these domains obligatory and emotionally resonant. Consequently, elder community members actively maintain proficiency in Tamil to fulfil their religious duties and preserve cultural identity and continuity.

However, Subramani identified contrasting attitudes among younger generations. For many young Tamil speakers, particularly those raised in urban areas or influenced by English-medium education, Tamil has increasingly come to symbolise rurality, traditionalism, and social marginalisation, rather than cultural pride or religious importance. They often perceived Tamil usage as a sign of limited social mobility, associating the language with older, rural, or less educated community members.

This negative perception significantly undermined the younger generation's motivation to learn or maintain proficiency in the Tamil language. Subramani noted a rapid decline in fluency and active language use among youth, creating a significant intergenerational language gap. Younger Tamils often preferred English and the Fijian languages, associating them with modernity, educational success, employment opportunities, and urban identity. Thus, Subramani's study illustrates how shifting language attitudes within a community, driven by changing socioeconomic contexts and perceived practical utility, can profoundly influence language maintenance and contribute to rapid generational shifts in language.

- **Tamil in Mauritius (Bissonauth, 2011; Chemen, 2018)**

The studies by Chemen (2018) and Bissonauth (2011) provide crucial insights into language attitudes and generational shifts among the Tamil-speaking population in Mauritius, a community historically rooted in indentured labour migration similar to Fiji.

Both scholars noted a clear generational divergence in attitudes toward Tamil. The language retains significant symbolic and emotional importance among older Mauritian Tamils, closely linked to cultural identity, religious rituals, and ancestral continuity. Elders view Tamil as a critical medium for transmitting religious practices, cultural

heritage, and moral values, frequently using it within domestic, religious, and communal settings.

However, Chemen and Bissonauth identified a markedly different perspective among younger Mauritian Tamils. For many younger speakers, Tamil increasingly holds symbolic rather than practical value. While youth may acknowledge Tamil's cultural and historical significance, they perceive limited practical utility or socio-economic advantage in mastering the language beyond mandatory school instruction or ritualistic participation in cultural and religious ceremonies. English and French dominate the Mauritian educational system, economy, administration, and popular media, leading younger Tamils to prioritise these languages as vital for professional success, social integration, and upward mobility.

Consequently, many younger Tamils view learning Tamil as additional labour without clear practical benefits. This perception reduces their motivation to acquire fluency or actively use Tamil beyond minimal cultural or religious contexts. The studies emphasise that this attitudinal shift is not merely personal but deeply contextual, rooted in broader societal structures, educational policies, economic opportunities, and cultural valuation of languages within Mauritius.

Chemen further argues that this generational divergence is exacerbated by insufficient institutional support and limited practical applications for the Tamil daily, particularly within urban settings. Without clear incentives or tangible, practical contexts for language use, younger generations gravitate toward languages with higher prestige and economic relevance, thereby deepening the generational divide in language proficiency and transmission.

#### **2.4.5 Language Attitudes in the Mauritian Context**

Mauritius is officially multilingual, but a hierarchy of language prestige exists in practice. English and French dominate education, administration, and media. Creole functions as the common vernacular. Ancestral languages such as Tamil, Telugu, and Bhojpuri occupy a symbolic or ceremonial role.

**• Language Attitudes, Urban Identity, and Language Dissonance (Hookoomsingh, 1980)**

Hookoomsingh (1980) provided early foundational insights into attitudes toward Tamil within Mauritian society, noting the significant socio-cultural pressures Tamil-speaking youth face in urban or ethnically mixed environments. In many such contexts, Tamil was perceived negatively, often associated with rural traditions, conservatism, or limited social mobility. These perceptions stemmed from broader societal attitudes linking languages such as English, French, and Mauritian Creole with urban identity, modernity, education, and socio-economic progress.

As a result, many younger Tamil speakers in urban areas deliberately avoided using Tamil publicly or even privately, preferring to use French or Creole to facilitate social integration, peer acceptance, and perceived modernity. Hookoomsingh described this phenomenon as language dissonance, where external linguistic behaviours (preferring dominant languages) did not necessarily reflect internal cultural allegiance or identity pride. Youth may still privately value their Tamil heritage and cultural traditions but outwardly suppress this identity to avoid social marginalisation or peer ridicule in environments where Tamil holds a lower socio-economic or symbolic status.

Thus, language dissonance emerges as a critical sociolinguistic phenomenon, illustrating complex interactions between external linguistic choices, internal cultural identities, societal perceptions, and identity politics. Hookoomsingh's analysis underscores the necessity of reshaping broader societal attitudes and institutional frameworks to enhance Tamil's socio-economic and cultural prestige, thereby reducing dissonance and encouraging more authentic linguistic identity performances among younger generations.

**• The Role of Institutions: Support and Limitations (Mahadeo, 2004)**

Mahadeo's (2004) research critically assesses institutional efforts to support Tamil language maintenance in Mauritius, particularly through government bodies such as the Tamil Speaking Union (TSU) and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI). These institutions have historically played pivotal roles in promoting the Tamil language, literature, cultural arts, and education, contributing significantly to its symbolic preservation and academic recognition.

However, Mahadeo argues that institutional efforts often fail to deeply resonate with younger generations due to a lack of meaningful integration with youth culture, digital technology, and contemporary platforms. Tamil education in Mauritius, largely provided through formal schooling and community-based institutions, tends to focus on traditional literary forms, formal grammar instruction, and preparation for standardised examinations. As a result, students primarily encounter Tamil as an academic subject rather than a living language relevant to their everyday experiences or cultural identity.

Mahadeo emphasises that this approach inadvertently frames Tamil as a burdensome academic requirement rather than a culturally meaningful or practically useful language. Many students thus view learning Tamil as obligatory labour, necessary for passing exams but disconnected from genuine communication, creativity, or cultural pride. Consequently, while critical for preservation, institutional support risks perpetuating a scenario in which Tamil is formally recognised but functionally marginalised, failing to engage youth meaningfully or sustainably.

#### • **Emerging Attitudinal Shifts**

In recent years, there has been growing recognition among the Mauritius Tamil community leaders that traditional language maintenance approaches must adapt to contemporary youth culture and communication modes. Emerging community-led initiatives have sought to address these issues directly by recontextualising Tamil within modern, youth-oriented, and digitally engaged frameworks.

These initiatives include promoting Tamil through popular music, social media platforms, podcasts, digital content creation, and youth forums, leveraging technology and youth culture to reposition Tamil as a dynamic, modern, and culturally relevant language. By embedding Tamil language usage within platforms and contexts familiar and appealing to young people, these initiatives aim to reshape perceptions of Tamil, moving it from being purely traditional or ceremonial to being actively communicative and socially relevant.

However, scholars and community activists caution that while such contemporary approaches are promising, their long-term effectiveness depends heavily upon consistent intergenerational mentorship and engagement. Without sustained support

and active participation from older generations, including fluent Tamil speakers who can mentor youth linguistically and culturally, Tamil risks becoming merely a cultural emblem, symbolically celebrated but functionally inert.

Thus, achieving linguistic vitality for Tamil in Mauritius requires comprehensive approaches: integrating institutional efforts with youth culture, technological innovation, intergenerational mentorship, and reshaping broader societal perceptions to emphasise Tamil's cultural relevance, communicative practicality, and socio-economic prestige.

#### **2.4.6 Motivation in Language Learning: Gardner and Lambert's Socio-Educational Model**

An additional theoretical dimension crucial to understanding language maintenance and shift concerns motivation, particularly as conceptualised in Gardner and Lambert's (1972) socio-educational model of second-language learning. Their framework distinguishes two primary orientations that drive individuals to learn or sustain a language: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation.

Integrative motivation arises from a desire to identify with, or meaningfully participate in, the linguistic and cultural community associated with a language. Learners driven by integrative motives pursue language study as a means of expressing affiliation, belonging, and self-identity. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, stems from pragmatic considerations such as educational success, employment prospects, or social prestige. These orientations often coexist but in differing proportions depending on the social context.

Gardner and Lambert's theory provides a valuable lens for interpreting the attitudinal dynamics observed in multilingual and postcolonial societies, such as Mauritius. Among older Tamil speakers, the motivation to maintain the language tends to be integrative, rooted in cultural pride, spiritual practices, and a desire for community cohesion. For many younger Mauritian Tamils, however, the motivation to prioritise dominant languages such as English and French is largely instrumental, linked to academic advancement and socio-economic mobility. This divergence creates a motivational imbalance that accelerates language shift: when instrumental incentives

for heritage-language use are minimal, its maintenance relies solely on emotional or symbolic attachment.

Integrating Gardner and Lambert's model with Fishman's (1991) Reversing Language Shift framework highlights that attitudes and motivation are not merely individual traits, but also social forces that shape the intergenerational transmission of language. Positive integrative motivation strengthens both Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Family Language Policy by reinforcing the emotional and ideological foundations of heritage-language use within homes and communities. Conversely, weak or purely instrumental motivation diminishes these links, leading to reduced usage and eventual erosion. Within the Mauritian Tamil context, therefore, revitalisation strategies must enhance not only structural support (education and media) but also the motivational appeal of Tamil by connecting it with youth identity, digital creativity, and local cultural pride.

While motivation explains why speakers value or abandon a language, Q methodology offers a systematic approach to empirically studying these subjective perspectives.

#### **2.4.7 Q Methodology in Sociolinguistic and Language Attitude Research**

Q methodology, developed by William Stephenson (1953), provides a systematic and quantitative approach to studying human subjectivity, specifically individuals' viewpoints, beliefs, and attitudes toward a particular topic. It has been widely applied in the social sciences, including sociolinguistics, to explore how people perceive language use, policy, identity, and linguistic change (Brown, 1993; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Unlike conventional surveys that measure how many people hold an opinion, Q methodology focuses on how people think and why, emphasising shared patterns of perspective within a community.

In language-attitude research, Q methodology is particularly valuable because such attitudes are often complex, multi-dimensional, and context-dependent. Traditional Likert-scale questionnaires may overlook this nuance, whereas Q-sorts require participants to rank a set of statements according to personal salience. Factor analysis then identifies clusters of participants who share similar sorting patterns, revealing collective orientations rather than isolated opinions.

Several scholars have successfully employed Q methodology to explore sociolinguistic phenomena. Baker (1992) used it to examine bilingual attitudes among Welsh speakers; Garrett (2010) demonstrated its capacity to uncover belief systems about language and identity; and more recent work has applied it to language planning (Cruickshank, 2016), revitalisation (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015), and multilingualism in post-colonial settings (Rasinger, 2010). These studies illustrate the flexibility of Q methodology in addressing both attitudinal diversity and the sociocultural contexts that shape linguistic behaviour.

Applied to the Tamil community in Mauritius, Q methodology offers a novel lens for investigating language maintenance and shift. Attitudes toward Tamil, whether viewed as a cultural heritage, a religious symbol, or a practical means of communication, reflect generational change, education, and social interaction. By employing Q-sorts, this study identifies attitudinal factors such as cultural loyalty, pragmatic adaptation, and symbolic attachment, moving beyond binary notions of “maintenance versus shift” to a more holistic understanding of linguistic identity.

Moreover, Q methodology complements the qualitative components of this research by bridging quantitative rigour with interpretive depth. The Q-sort process engages participants with statements drawn from literature, interviews, and field observations, ensuring that data mirror lived community realities. The resulting factors, interpreted through statistical and ethnographic lenses, illuminate how different social groups conceptualise Tamil's role in modern Mauritian society.

Therefore, this study situates Q methodology within the broader framework of sociolinguistic inquiry, aligning it with theories of language attitudes and identity construction. Its inclusion provides an empirical foundation for examining subjective perspectives on Tamil language use and the dynamic interplay between individual agency and community-level practice.

## **2.5 Tamils in Diaspora**

### **2.5.1 Historical Trajectories and Global Settlement Patterns**

The Tamil diaspora is one of the most widespread ethnolinguistic diasporas globally. Tamil migration has occurred in multiple waves, across several centuries, and under varying political, economic, and social conditions.

- Colonial-era migrations: During the 19th and early 20th centuries, many Tamils were relocated from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka to work as indentured labourers in plantations across Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Malaysia, and the Caribbean. These migrants introduced the Tamil language, religion, and cultural practices, which became deeply embedded within local institutions and community networks.
- Post-independence and skilled migration: In the latter half of the 20th century, new Tamil diasporas emerged in Europe, North America, and Australia, often comprising professionals and students. This group maintained transnational ties through technology, remittances, and periodic visits, leading to complex, layered diasporic identities (Gambhir, 2022).

These migration streams created distinct linguistic environments shaped by local policies, host society attitudes, and community cohesion levels.

### **2.5.2 Patterns of Language Use and Transmission**

Language use among Tamil diaspora communities varies based on geography, generational depth, community size, and institutional support. A pattern emerges: the first generation tends to be fluent in Tamil, the second generation becomes bilingual, and the third generation often has only passive or symbolic knowledge of the language.

#### **• Tamil in South Africa (Mestrie, 1992; Naidoo, 2009)**

Both Naidoo (2009) and Mestrie (1992) provide rich historical and sociolinguistic accounts of Tamil's trajectory in South Africa, particularly among descendants of indentured labourers brought during British colonial times. Their studies highlight that Tamil has undergone a functional shift in South Africa.

Tamil is actively preserved in religious domains, particularly through Hindu temple rituals, community festivals, and traditional ceremonies. Temples continue to be spaces where Tamil prayers, bhajans, and classical music are performed, ensuring the symbolic survival of Tamil within specific spiritual contexts.

However, the younger generation's daily use of Tamil in conversation has drastically declined. English, the dominant language of education, media, and socio-economic advancement, has replaced Tamil in public and private domains. Additionally, contact with local African languages, such as Zulu, and colonial languages, like Afrikaans, has led to multilingualism, where Tamil holds minimal functional utility.

Mesthrie (1992) documents examples of linguistic convergence and loss of Tamil proficiency, emphasising that while Tamil remains part of the cultural consciousness, its spoken fluency is often limited to elder generations. Thus, community cohesion and temple rituals sustain Tamil as a cultural marker, not an everyday communicative language.

- **Tamil in Montreal, Canada (Das, 2008)**

Das (2008) provides a compelling account of how Tamil-speaking youth in Montreal creatively adapt their linguistic repertoire. Montreal's Tamil youth engage in hybrid language practices in a city dominated by English and French, blending Tamil with English and French vocabulary, structures, and pragmatic norms.

Das calls these hybrid forms “reformatted linguistic registers”, viewing them not as signs of language decay but as innovations reflecting cultural negotiation. Through code-mixing and lexical borrowing, Tamil youth maintain a connection to their heritage while simultaneously adapting to their bilingual (or trilingual) environment.

The study highlights that digital platforms, diaspora media, and cultural festivals (such as Tamil cultural shows, dance competitions, and New Year celebrations) help reinforce Tamil identity, even when traditional language fluency varies among individuals. Thus, in Montreal, Tamil evolves dynamically, preserving cultural affiliation while transforming linguistically to fit the local sociolinguistic context.

- **Tamil in Fiji (Subramani, 2010)**

Subramani (2010) documented the severe decline of Tamil fluency among Fiji's Tamil community, descended from 19th-century indentured labourers. Today, Tamil's use is confined mainly to Hindu religious settings, including temple prayers, ceremonies, and religious festivals like Thai *Pongal* and Navaratri.

Tamil has almost disappeared as a living spoken language outside these ceremonial contexts among the younger generations. English and Fijian dominate daily life, including education, business, and peer interaction, thereby making Tamil increasingly irrelevant for functional communication.

Subramani's findings show that, although the symbolic importance of Tamil rituals remains strong, the language's practical usage has eroded to the point where very few second- or third-generation Tamils in Fiji can hold conversations in Tamil. The community thus reflects a pattern of ceremonial preservation without conversational fluency, a trend similar to that observed in other diaspora communities facing intense linguistic assimilation pressures.

- **Tamil in the United Kingdom (Sharma & Sankaran, 2011)**

Sharma and Sankaran (2011) examined Tamil-speaking communities in the UK, where maintenance strategies include community-run supplementary schools, weekend Tamil language classes, and temple-based religious instruction. These efforts aim to teach literacy skills, cultural traditions, and basic spoken Tamil.

Nonetheless, English overwhelmingly dominates daily life in education, peer interactions, work environments, and media consumption. Tamil is often relegated to domestic conversations with older generations or religious events.

While attitudes toward Tamil among youth remain largely positive, viewing it as a symbol of heritage and identity, their actual fluency and functional usage are limited. Many second- and third-generation youth can understand Tamil but struggle to speak or write fluently due to a lack of consistent practice. This underscores a familiar trend: institutional efforts, without everyday functional use, struggle to maintain robust fluency across generations.

### • **Tamil in Malaysia (Muthusamy, 2014)**

Muthusamy (2014) examines Tamil's status in Malaysia, where it enjoys a relatively stronger institutional presence than in other diasporic locations. Tamil is one of the languages of instruction in Tamil vernacular primary schools, supported by religious organisations, cultural bodies, and Tamil-language media, including television channels, newspapers, and radio broadcasts.

Despite these institutional supports, Tamil faces significant challenges. English and Malay (the national language) increasingly dominate education, commerce, governance, and inter-ethnic communication. The pressure to succeed academically and professionally incentivises Tamil families to prioritise English and Malay, particularly from secondary schooling onwards.

Muthusamy notes the emergence of functional bilingualism: Tamil is preserved within homes, religious settings, and community functions, but its use is confined to intimate or ceremonial domains. In broader public and professional life, Malay and English are the predominant languages. Over time, without expanded domains for functional use, Tamil risks being marginalised to symbolic functions despite formal educational support.

### • **Tamil in Singapore**

Singapore's linguistic policies offer a relatively unique case where Tamil is recognised as one of the four official languages alongside English, Mandarin, and Malay. Tamil has formal support through:

- State-sponsored Tamil language schools
- Tamil-language newspapers and media programs
- Mandated Tamil instruction for Tamil-speaking students

However, even with institutional backing, Tamil faces significant pressure from English, which dominates the educational system, business environment, and professional sectors. English is positioned as the language of upward mobility and socio-economic success, leading many families to emphasise English proficiency over Tamil at home.

Studies show that while older generations maintain fluency in Tamil, younger Singaporean Tamils increasingly demonstrate declining proficiency, using Tamil mainly during religious events or with older relatives. Despite robust media and educational initiatives, functional bilingualism skews heavily toward English, and the intergenerational transmission of the Tamil language is weakening, reflecting broader global patterns of heritage language shift.

### **2.5.3 Intergenerational Challenges**

The intergenerational transmission of Tamil remains a significant challenge across diasporic communities. The following patterns are commonly observed:

- **First-generation immigrants:** Tend to speak Tamil fluently and view it as central to identity.
- **Second-generation children** often understand Tamil but prefer to speak the dominant language of the host country.
- **Third generation and beyond:** Language knowledge is often reduced to symbolic understanding, used in rituals, names, or cultural phrases.

### **Diaspora Youth Learning Tamil as a ‘Foreign’ Language (Muthusamy, 2014)**

Muthusamy’s (2014) study critically examines the dynamics of Tamil language transmission among diaspora communities, particularly in Malaysia. One of the most significant findings in his research is that diaspora youth often perceive Tamil not as a mother tongue, passed down naturally from parent to child, but rather as a 'foreign' language, a language learned in a classroom or formal setting, detached from intimate, everyday communication.

This perception arises because many Tamil-speaking parents in the diaspora prioritise dominant national or global languages (such as English or Malay) at home, relegating Tamil to a symbolic, educational, or religious domain. As a result, Tamil is no longer the primary language of socialisation within the home. Instead, it is encountered primarily through formal language classes, religious services, or cultural performances, often devoid of spontaneous, natural interaction.

Muthusamy emphasises that when Tamil is learned primarily through schooling or formal instruction rather than daily conversational practice, it loses its emotional and cultural immediacy. The language feels abstract, academic, and disconnected from the lived experiences of diaspora youth. Consequently, many young Tamil speakers in Malaysia, as well as in similar diaspora settings, demonstrate limited fluency, reduced emotional attachment, and minimal motivation to use Tamil beyond ritualistic or educational contexts.

This trend reflects a broader global pattern observed among heritage languages. When home language transmission weakens, and functional daily use is replaced by classroom learning, the heritage language increasingly becomes categorised alongside genuinely foreign languages in the minds of younger speakers.

### **Women's Role in Language Transmission and Its Weakening (Moonegadoo, 2018)**

Moonegadoo (2018) emphasises that women traditionally play a central role in the intergenerational transmission of heritage languages within Mauritian households. In many communities, especially among Indo-Mauritians, mothers and grandmothers have historically served as the primary caregivers and early language models for children. They were often responsible for teaching cultural norms, religious practices, and everyday communication in the ancestral language. However, Moonegadoo argues that this role has weakened over time due to several socio-economic and cultural changes. Increased female participation in the workforce, greater exposure to English and French through schooling and media, and shifting aspirations for upward mobility have reduced the amount of time and motivation mothers invest in speaking heritage languages at home. As a result, children receive less consistent input in their ancestral language, leading to reduced fluency and weaker intergenerational transmission. Moonegadoo's findings highlight how changes in gender roles intersect with broader social pressures, contributing to language shift in Mauritius.

## **2.6 Tamils in Mauritius**

### **2.6.1 Historical Background and Demographics**

Tamil migration to Mauritius began during the 19th century under the British indentured labour system, which brought large numbers of South Indians to work on sugar plantations. Among them were Tamil speakers who, over time, established religious institutions, schools, and socio-cultural associations that continue to serve as anchors for Tamil identity (Hookoomsingh, 1980).

According to census data and sociolinguistic surveys (Sambasiva Rao & Sharma, 1989), Tamils constitute a significant portion of the Indo-Mauritian population. Although Tamil is not the dominant language in everyday life, it holds symbolic value within the community and is used in religious practices, especially in Saivite temples.

### **2.6.2 Language Use Across Domains**

Bittoo (2004) observed that many Tamil households speak Creole or French at home, even if older generations are fluent in Tamil. The language is often reserved for chanting, religious discourse, or cultural performances during festivals such as Thaipusam or Cavadee. This compartmentalisation reflects Tamil's functional load shift from a communicative tool to a cultural symbol.

Tamil in Mauritius functions primarily as a heritage and ceremonial language. Bissonauth (2011) found that while Tamil is used in religious settings and occasionally in formal education, it is rarely spoken as a mother tongue at home. Creole is the predominant language of informal communication, while English and French are the languages that dominate education and administration.

### **2.6.3 Education and Institutional Support**

The Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the Tamil Speaking Union (TSU) have played a central role in preserving and promoting Tamil through publications, cultural events, and training programs. Yet, scholars like Mahadeo (2004) argue that these initiatives tend to operate in silos and lack integration into mainstream education and media.

Tamil is offered as an optional subject in primary and secondary schools in Mauritius. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Tamil cultural organisations, oversees

the development of the curriculum and teacher training. However, enrollment in Tamil language classes remains low. Chemen (2005) notes that students often choose Tamil due to cultural or parental pressure rather than intrinsic interest or practical use.

Moreover, while including Tamil in national examinations offers some institutional validation, its relevance to students' academic and career aspirations remains limited. Without more widespread use in media, technology, and higher education, Tamil risks becoming confined to ritual and identity domains.

#### **2.6.4 Media, Technology, and Youth Engagement**

Language vitality in contemporary settings often hinges on visibility and usability in media and digital platforms. In Mauritius, Tamil programming is available on national TV and radio, but it is minimal compared to the content in French and Creole. Goodchild (2013) found that Tamil youth in the diaspora, including those in Mauritius, often prefer online entertainment in the dominant languages, leading to a decline in exposure to their ancestral tongue.

Social media, YouTube, and mobile apps present potential avenues for revitalisation. However, as Mooneegadoo (2018) notes, youth-centred Tamil content is scarce, and existing digital materials often cater to first-generation speakers or are imported from India, failing to reflect the local Mauritian Tamil context.

#### **2.6.5 Intergenerational Challenges and Identity**

The generational divide is pronounced in Mauritius. Older generations often have some fluency and literacy in Tamil, having learned it in temple schools or through community activities. In contrast, younger generations may possess only a passive understanding or none at all. Bissonauth (1998) emphasises that this generational rupture is not simply due to a lack of access but also reflects changing identity dynamics. Being "Tamil" is more cultural than linguistic for many young Tamils. Participation in festivals, dance, or cuisine may serve as a substitute for language use in identity performance. Chemen (2018) characterises this as a transition from a second language to a foreign language status.

### **2.6.6 Policy and Cultural Implications**

Language policy in Mauritius officially supports linguistic diversity, but in practice tends to prioritise English, French, and Creole. Ancestral languages like Tamil receive symbolic recognition, yet lack the systemic support necessary for revitalisation. Hookoomsingh (1980) argues that its decline will continue unless Tamil is repositioned as a functional language in society, beyond ritual use.

To this end, several scholars advocate for integrated language planning that includes:

- Inclusion of Tamil in mainstream media with youth-oriented programming
- Incorporation of Tamil into early childhood education
- Incentives for Tamil language apps, games, and interactive platforms
- Intergenerational mentorship programs linking elders and youth

Therefore, the future of Tamil in Mauritius depends on preserving its cultural significance and adapting its usage to the realities of modern Mauritian society.

## **CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology used to examine the phenomenon of language maintenance and language shift among the Tamil people in Mauritius. As a linguistic minority in a diverse, multilingual, and polyglot society, Tamils in Mauritius face the ongoing challenge of preserving their ancestral and heritage language while adapting to the sociolinguistic realities of everyday life.

This study is rooted in an empirical framework that relies on interactions with Tamil people in person (face-to-face) across age and social class. It examines behaviours, practices, and attitudes toward language vitality as people engage in them in the ordinary course of everyday life. This study will also provide the researcher with an understanding that captures how language functions from the dual standpoints of using it as a communicative tool in both "language" and "culture," as well as something socially used to mark cultural identity.

The chapter explains research design, population and sample, data collection instruments, and procedures used in the study. This study employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and Q methodology, which enables the identification of measurable patterns in language use while acknowledging the subjective nature of participant perspectives. The study design presents a comprehensive, yet nuanced account of the Tamil language, identity, and inter-generational language transmission.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The research employs a convergence parallel mixed-methods research design, utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches in this case, to enable the identification of patterns of use and the socio-cultural ideas that define them. The design enables the researcher to collect and analyse narrative and numerical data simultaneously.

The quantitative approach involved utilising a sociolinguistic questionnaire that featured data on proficiency in language and domains of language use, as well as a language attitude questionnaire that obtained data on attitudes towards language and preservation among different age groups. This method is useful for providing a measurable and generalizable overview of the linguistic situation of Tamil speakers in Mauritius, as it allowed for the identification of patterns of change in communicative

preferences, bilingual or multilingual competencies, and trends in language transmission.

The qualitative approaches used include two main components: semi-structured interviews and Q methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected community members, including parents, educators, religious leaders, and youth, to explore deeper narratives and contextual factors, such as their language practices. This can provide descriptions of the emotional and ideological attachments to the Tamil language.

Q methodology was integrated to capture the subjectivity of participants in a structured and interpretable manner. Participants were asked to rank a set of statements that reflected various beliefs about the use, identity, and transmission of the Tamil language. Through factor analysis of Q-sorts, shared viewpoints were identified and interpreted, offering an advanced perspective for comprehending collective ideologies within the Tamil community.

This multi-method strategy ensures methodological triangulation, thus improving the study's validity and reliability. It also aligns with the complex nature of sociolinguistic research, where both macro-level patterns and micro-level perceptions are crucial in understanding the dynamics of language shift. The convergent design ensures that the quantitative findings are reinforced and enriched by qualitative insights, producing a well-rounded and empirically grounded account of language maintenance and language shift.

### **3.3 Population and Sample of the Study**

The target population consists of Tamil-speaking individuals residing in Mauritius. The study focuses on Tamil-speaking individuals residing in the island's urban and rural regions, specifically areas where Tamil linguistic and cultural institutions are actively present. These places include Triolet, Flacq, Vacoas-Phoenix, Rose-Belle, Quatres-Bornes, and Port-Louis. These locations were selected due to their demographic significance and accessibility, as well as the presence of Tamil temples, language schools, and cultural associations that play a vital role in language maintenance.

A total of 210 participants were included in the quantitative phase of the study, selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The purposive

sampling ensured the inclusion of individuals from key demographic categories necessary for comparative analysis, while snowball sampling allowed access to networks within intertwined community spaces that may be less accessible through formal channels.

For the intergenerational dimensions of language use and transmission, participants were stratified into three generational cohorts:

- First generation: This refers to individuals aged 60 and above. Elders are often fluent Tamil speakers, typically educated in Tamil-medium religious settings and deeply embedded in temple-based linguistic rituals.
- Second generation: This comprises adults aged from 35 to 59 years. Adults who are often bilingual or trilingual may have acquired Tamil informally and are also engaged in decisions about their children's linguistic upbringing.
- Third generation: This comprises youths between 16 and 34 years old. Youth and young adults grow in increasingly globalised, digitally influenced environments, with varying degrees of Tamil language exposure and use.

Gender balance, educational diversity, and occupational variety were carefully maintained within each cohort to enable a comprehensive analysis of how sociolinguistic variables intersect with language maintenance, including male and female participants across different professions, which adds depth and social representativeness to the sample.

For the qualitative components, a subset of 25 participants was selected for semi-structured interviews and Q methodology based on their active engagement in language or cultural transmission activities. These included:

- Tamil school teachers and tutors
- Temple priests and religious volunteers
- Parents who are consciously promoting Tamil at home
- Elders who still use the Tamil language in different domains
- Youth who either resist or embrace Tamil as a part of their identity
- Representatives from Tamil cultural or religious associations.

From the above list, five people each were selected for the survey.

Participants were approached through gathering at Tamil temples, community events, social media groups, and educational settings, ensuring access to both formal and informal language users. Informed consent and voluntary participation were emphasised throughout, and participants were free to decline or withdraw at any stage of the study.

### **3.4 Instruments of the Study**

Different research instruments were used to effectively investigate the patterns of language maintenance and language shift within the Tamil-speaking community in Mauritius. The selected tools were specifically designed to align with the study's mixed-methods approach, ensuring both the collection of measurable data and the elicitation of rich and qualitative insights.

#### **3.4.1 Semi-structured Interview Guide**

The semi-structured interview guide was a flexible but focused tool for engaging with key informants, including Tamil language teachers, parents, temple leaders, members of the cultural associations, and youth. The questions were open-ended and invited participants to respond regarding the main themes of personal and family language history, language usage in different domains, the use of Tamil in identity and community life, and the challenges and opportunities of transmitting the Tamil language.

This format ensured some consistency between interviews. The follow-up questions were adjusted in the moment based on the responder and to maintain a conversational tone.

#### **3.4.2 Sociolinguistic Questionnaire**

The sociolinguistic questionnaire was one of the primary tools used in this study, which aimed to collect quantitative data on demographic information, languages used, proficiency in those languages, intergenerational transmission, and language attitudes among members of the Tamil community in Mauritius. It was designed to capture broad trends in linguistic behaviour, helping to quantify the extent to which Tamil is being maintained or gradually replaced in daily communication and family life.

In a multilingual country like Mauritius, which has Tamil alongside the dominant languages of Creole, English, French, and Hindi, it was essential to gather structured data on which languages are used, in what settings, and by whom.

The questionnaire was developed using a sociolinguistic research methodology model, with adaptations for the Mauritian Tamil context. It was pilot-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity, relevance, and flow; subsequently, the necessary changes were made based on the feedback.

### **3.4.2.1 Structure of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was divided into five key sections:

1. Demographic information:

This section captured the variables such as age, gender, region, educational level, occupation, and linguistic background of participants.

2. Language Proficiency

In this section, participants were asked to self-assess their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities in Tamil, English, French, Creole, Hindi, or any other languages they know, at different levels, such as Basic, Intermediate, or Proficient.

3. Language Use in Different Domains

This section examined the language(s) used by participants at home, school, work, in religious settings, at social events, and in the media, including television, newspapers, and social media. Participants were instructed to select the dominant language(s) they use in each domain.

4. Intergenerational Language Transmission

This section focused on whether Tamil is used with children or younger family members, the language(s) spoken by parents and grandparents, and attitudes toward learning, teaching Tamil to the next generation.

5. Language Attitude

The section on language attitude is described separately in section 3.5.3. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items, focusing on the participants' emotional, cultural, and practical associations with Tamil.

The sociolinguistic questionnaire was administered to 210 participants, thereby providing a broad dataset for statistical analysis and facilitating comparisons between generations and across regions. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity across generations and genders. Participants could choose to complete the questionnaire either in English or Mauritian Creole. Assistance was provided wherever necessary for individuals with low literacy or who were elderly. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small sample of fifty people to ensure clarity, relevance, and flow. Several items were revised based on pilot feedback to improve comprehension, and duplication was removed.

The sociolinguistic questionnaire could make a significant contribution to the study. First, it would provide quantitative data to support the patterns across generations and regions, a foundation for comparative analysis with interview and Q-sort data. Second, it would provide pathways into the community's lived experiences with the sociolinguistic pressures that either support or undermine the maintenance of the Tamil language in everyday life.

### **3.4.3 Language Attitude Questionnaire**

The Language Attitude Questionnaire was designed to assess participants' beliefs, feelings, and tendencies toward the Tamil language within the broader multilingual context of Mauritius. Understanding language attitudes is crucial, as they often influence language behaviour, intergenerational transmission, and, eventually, the vitality or decline of a language within a community.

This questionnaire is specifically designed to explore how members of the Tamil community value their ancestral language, their perception of its relevance in modern Mauritian society, and whether they believe that Tamil should be preserved, promoted, or replaced. These attitudes are not just passive views; they also influence the choice of language use at home, language learning preferences, and support for Tamil education and media.

The findings from the language attitude questionnaire provided key insights into the motivations behind language maintenance or shift. Positive attitudes towards Tamil were often correlated with the active use of language at home and in religious contexts. In contrast, more neutral or negative attitudes were typically linked to language shifts among younger generations.

### **3.4.3.1 Structure of the Language Attitude Questionnaire**

As part of the broader sociolinguistic questionnaire, a dedicated Language Attitude section was included, using primarily Likert-scale items. Participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements reflecting their views on Tamil. These covered a range of topics, including the emotional and cultural significance of the language, its practical relevance in education and employment, and its perceived role in religion, identity, and daily community life. Particular attention was paid to the positioning of Tamil in relation to other languages spoken in Mauritius.

In this section, the respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of attitude statements. Several themes were covered in these statements. These themes include the perceived cultural and emotional value of Tamil, the practicality and usefulness of Tamil in education and employment, attitudes toward Tamil language education in schools, perceptions of Tamil's role in religion, identity, and community life, and comparisons between Tamil and other languages spoken in Mauritius. These statements were developed based on existing language attitude frameworks in sociolinguistics and adapted to reflect the specific linguistic and cultural realities of the Tamil community in Mauritius. The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

### **3.4.4 Community Profile Metadata**

A community profile was needed to understand the sociocultural and geographic settings in which language behaviours occur. This instrument documented the demographic indicators and linguistic resources in the selected localities. The information recorded included population density and ethnic composition, as well as the presence of Tamil temples, language schools, and cultural associations. Additionally, it covered the availability of Tamil language media and educational resources, and community events promoting Tamil culture.

All instruments were originally developed in English and then translated into Mauritian Creole by the researcher (who is a native speaker of Mauritian Creole), to ensure accessibility and participant comprehension. Experts in Mauritian Creole were employed to maintain accuracy and cultural relevance. During fieldwork, participants were given the choice of language for interaction, respecting their comfort and ensuring the authenticity of responses.

### **3.5 The Community Profile**

One of the main components of this research involved developing detailed community profiles to understand the socio-demographic, cultural, and linguistic landscapes of the selected localities. Since the study focuses on language maintenance and language shift, it was crucial to consider the places where Tamil speakers live, interact, and transmit their language across generations. These profiles served as contextual lenses. They helped the researcher interpret the linguistic behaviours within the specific social, educational, religious and institutional contexts, which shape them rather than in isolation. Understanding factors such as who speaks Tamil, where they speak the language, and when they speak it is closely related to each region's larger sociocultural composition.

### **3.6 Q Methodology**

Q methodology<sup>5</sup> is a research method used to study people's subjectivity. This methodology played a crucial role in this study. It was mainly used to explore the subjective viewpoints of the people. Q methodology is particularly suited for examining attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives. This methodology is designed to map various perspectives that exist within a group. It focuses not only on how many people think in a certain way, but also on the shared patterns of thought that emerge when individuals are asked to rank statements according to their viewpoints.

Q methodology brought a unique analytical depth to this study. It was possible to see the patterns of thought that might not emerge in interviews or surveys alone. This method allowed not just the expression of complex or even contradictory beliefs, but it also captures the speaker's emotional and ideological layers. This methodology also helped in revealing how language is used and why individuals think the way they do about preserving their ancestral language.

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<sup>5</sup> Q methodology is a research approach developed by psychologist William Stephenson (1935) to systematically study subjective viewpoints. It combines qualitative and quantitative techniques by asking participants to rank a set of statements (Q-sorts) according to their level of agreement, followed by factor analysis to identify shared perspectives or patterns of thought.

### **3.6.1 Development of the Q Sample**

For the Q sample, thirty-two (32) statements were carefully handpicked. They were developed to reflect many of the beliefs about the use of the Tamil language, its cultural importance, relevance in modern Mauritius, and its role in identity and religion. These statements were derived from literature on language attitudes and maintenance, preliminary interviews conducted during fieldwork, and observations of community discourse, as well as informal conversations. They were then balanced in terms of positive, negative, and neutral perspectives.

### **3.6.2 Q-Sorting Procedure**

In this survey, each participant was presented with the same set of 32 statements and asked to rank them on a forced-choice quasi-normal distribution. This distribution is a specific type of distribution used in the Q methodology, where participants must place a set of statements in a pre-described grid layout. The shape of the layout resembles a normal distribution, but with a forced limit on the number of elements that can be placed in a position. The range of the grid was +4 (strongly agree), 0 (neutral or no opinion), and -4 (strongly disagree). Therefore, the participants were asked to use the forced-choice quasi-normal distribution as a ranking tool, where they sorted a set of statements according to how much they agreed or disagreed with each one from their personal viewpoint.

### **3.6.3 Analysis of Q-Sorts**

The Q sorts, which were collected from the participants, were analysed using the PQMethod<sup>6</sup> software. The latter applies a person-by-person factor analysis, which helps in identifying groups of individuals who ranked the statements similarly. These groupings represent the shared perspectives of the Tamil community. Each factor was then interpreted based on the arrangement of the statements and was supported by the insights from the post-sort interviews.

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<sup>6</sup> PQMethod is an open-source software developed by Schmolck (2002) for Q methodology data analysis. It facilitates centroid factor extraction, varimax rotation, and factor interpretation. The software is freely available at <http://schmolck.org/qmethod/>

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire**

It was essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the sociolinguistic questionnaire to maintain the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the data collected. Validity refers to the extent to which a questionnaire accurately measures the constructs it was intended to assess. In the case of this questionnaire, the questions were about language proficiency, domain-specific language use, and language attitudes. To ensure the content's validity, the questionnaire was developed after an extensive and careful review of existing sociolinguistic literature on language maintenance and language shift. Changes were made accordingly based on the insights gained from the preliminary fieldwork and pilot interviews with Tamil community members in Mauritius. Reliability, on the other hand, is concerned with the internal consistency and stability of the questionnaire, that is, whether it would yield similar results if administered under the same conditions. The Likert scale was used to assess the internal consistency in the questionnaire. This section was subjected to statistical testing using Cronbach's Alpha, a coefficient that measures the degree to which a set of items is related as a group.

### **3.8 Data Collection and Statistical Analysis**

The data collection and analysis process of this study was carefully planned to balance between structure and flexibility. Given the complexity of the language maintenance and language shift within a multilingual setting, it was important to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data provided a general picture of language use patterns, while the qualitative insights, drawn from interviews and observations, helped capture the social and emotional layers that are often missed by numbers alone. This mixed-methods approach enabled a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the linguistic dynamics within the Tamil community.

#### **3.8.1 Data Collection**

Data was collected using the sociolinguistic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and Q methodology. All methods have been explicitly explained in Section 3.4, which outlines the study's instruments.

### 3.8.2 Statistical and Qualitative Analysis

#### ❖ Quantitative Analysis (SPSS)

The quantitative data from the sociolinguistic questionnaires were systematically entered, coded and analysed using SPSS<sup>7</sup>. The analytical procedures included:

- Descriptive statistics include frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages to summarise general language use patterns, proficiency ratings, and attitudes.
- Cross-tabulations to examine the relationships between variables such as age group, educational level, gender, region, and language choice in various domains.
- Chi-square tests identify statistically significant associations among categorical variables such as age group and language preference.
- Reliability Testing (Cronbach's alpha) to ensure internal consistency of attitude scales, particularly the Likert-scale items.

This analysis provided a clear and measurable understanding of general trends in Tamil language maintenance and shifts across generations and contexts.

#### ❖ Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

Interview transcripts underwent a rigorous thematic analysis, which involved the following steps:

1. Data Familiarisation: Repeated listening and reading of the interview transcripts
2. Theme Identification: Grouping of codes into meaningful themes such as “intergenerational language shifts,” “identity and heritage,” and “institutional influences on language maintenance.”
3. Theme Review and Refinement: Ensuring coherence, distinction, and representativeness of each theme, with thematic maps created to visualise interconnections.

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<sup>7</sup> SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a widely used software suite for statistical analysis in social science research. Developed initially in the late 1960s, it provides tools for data management, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and advanced analytics.

### ❖ Q Methodology Analysis (PQMethod)

Data from the Q-sorts were entered into the specialised PQMethod software for by-person factor analysis. The analytical steps included:

- Correlation Analysis: Identifying how similarly participants sorted the statements.
- Factor Extraction: Employing centroid factor analysis to extract key underlying viewpoints.
- Factor Rotation: Clarifying factor structures by maximising differences among identified viewpoints.
- Factor Interpretation: Analysing distinctive statements associated with each factor, integrated with qualitative insights from post-sort discussions.

The result was the identification of several factors representing distinct ways community members conceptualised the role and value of the Tamil language.

### 3.8.3 Triangulation and Integration

Finally, findings from the three methodological strands were integrated through methodological triangulation, thus allowing the researcher to:

- Validate findings by cross-checking results across methods.
- Identify patterns that emerged consistently across qualitative narratives, quantitative trends, and subjective Q-method factors.
- Reveal divergences or contradictions, enriching the analysis and interpretations.

This triangulated approach provided a multidimensional understanding of the factors influencing language maintenance and language shift among Tamils in Mauritius, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the study's conclusions.

Table 3.1 is a Data Collection and Analysis Summary Chart, which shows a clear breakdown of the methods, participants, tools, and analysis techniques used in the study.

Table 3.1: Data Collection and Analysis Summary Chart

	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Types of Data</b>	<b>Collection Tools</b>	<b>Analysis Techniques</b>
1.	Sociolinguistic Questionnaire	150 (diverse across age, gender, and region)	Quantitative (language use, proficiency, attitudes)	Structured Questionnaire (English/Mauritian Creole)	SPSS: Descriptive stats, chi-square, Cronbach's alpha)
2.	Semi-structured Interviews	15-20 Key informants	Qualitative (narratives, beliefs, experiences)	An interview guide with open-ended questions	Thematic analysis
3.	Q-Methodology	10 participants (from the interview group)	Mixed (subjective viewpoints through ranking)	32 Q-statements sorted on a distribution grid	Factor Analysis (PQMethod software)

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is fundamental to this research, as it involves human participants and explores cultural identity. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Hyderabad Research Ethics Committee (attached in Annexure 1). All participants were informed of the study's purpose, methods, and rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without any explanation. Before participating, the participants signed an informed consent form available in both English and Mauritian Creole (sample attached in Annexure 2). The consent form was read aloud to participants with limited literacy, and verbal consent was obtained before the survey began. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Audio files and transcripts were stored in password-protected folders on encrypted drives and were accessible only to the researcher. During the analysis and the publication, no identifiable personal data were shared.

### 3.10 Procedures of the Study

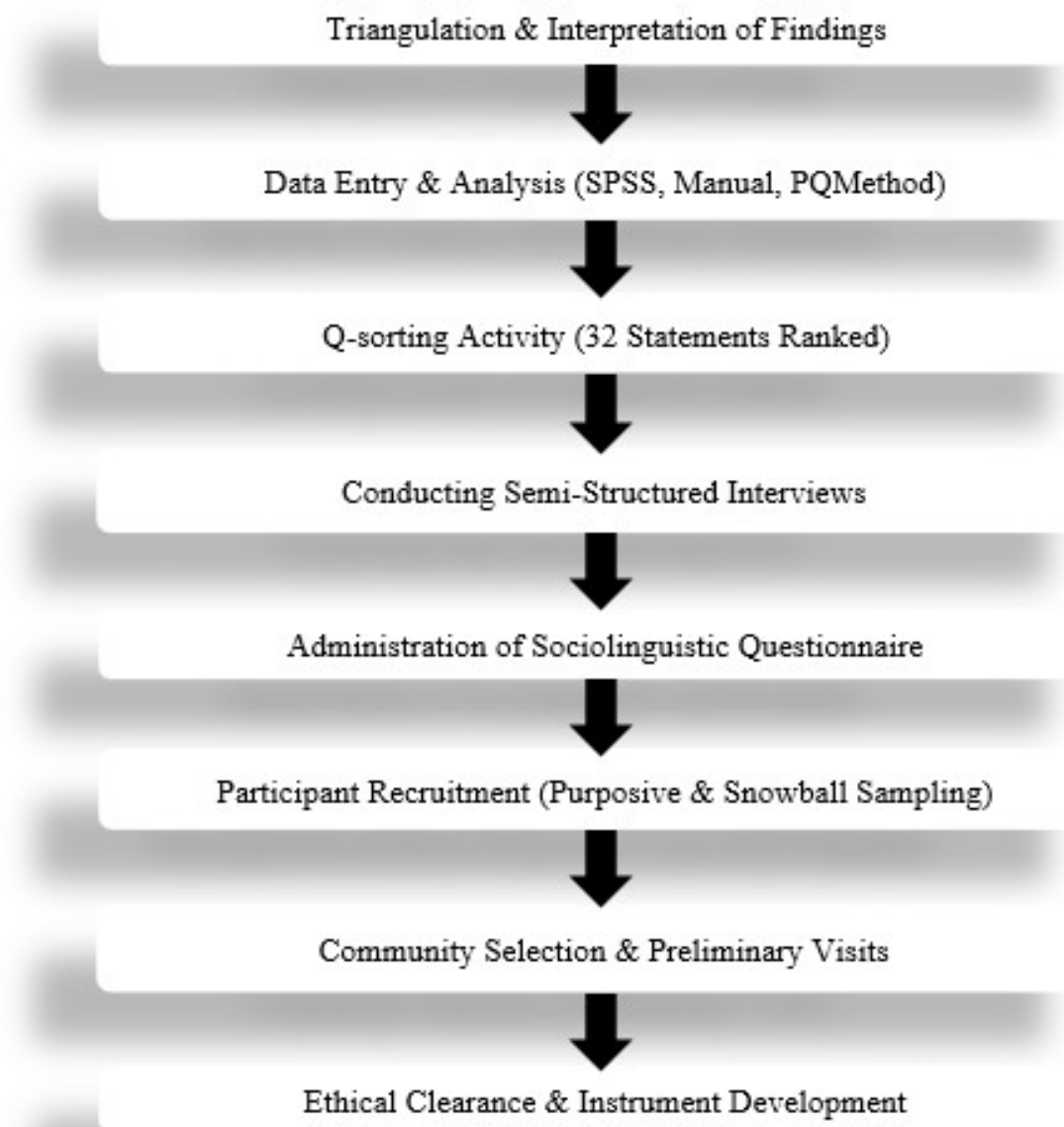


Figure 3.1: Flowchart showing the procedures of the study

## **CHAPTER IV – DATA ANALYSIS**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of data gathered for this study, which investigates the dynamics of language maintenance and language shift among the Tamil-speaking community in Mauritius. The analysis follows a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data gathered by the researcher through a structured questionnaire are analysed to reveal patterns in language use, proficiency, and attitudes across the demographic groups. This part is complemented by the qualitative insights derived from open-ended responses, where applicable. The Q methodology offered a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations and beliefs related to language practices.

The research questions which will be addressed in this chapter are:

1. To examine the current linguistic practices of the Tamil community across different age groups.
2. What are the different stages of language shift observed in Mauritius?
3. To identify sociolinguistic factors contributing to language maintenance or language shift within the community.
4. To assess the role of family, religion, education, and media in transmitting and using Tamil.
5. To evaluate language attitudes towards Tamil among different generations.
6. To propose recommendations for sustaining the Tamil language in Mauritius.

This chapter is structured thematically to address both the research questions and the research objectives. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive view of the current sociolinguistic landscape of Tamil in Mauritius. They suggest the complex interplay between identity, language policy, and social changes, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

## **4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents**

This section focuses on the demographic section of the sociolinguistic questionnaire. It provides a detailed overview of the demographic characteristics of 210 participants in the study on language maintenance and language shift among Tamils in Mauritius. These data were very crucial for interpreting the patterns in language use, attitudes, and maintenance practices.

### 4.2.1 Gender and Age

The sample consisted of participants from both genders across various age groups. However, the gender distribution leaned slightly towards females, thus reflecting broader demographic trends in language-related survey participation. The participants spanned five key age ranges: 16-25, 26-35, 36-45, 45-55, and 56 and above. The majority of the participants fell within the 26 to 35 and 56 and above age brackets. A minority of the responses were from the 16 to 25-year age bracket. This distribution offers a generational perspective on language maintenance and language shift.

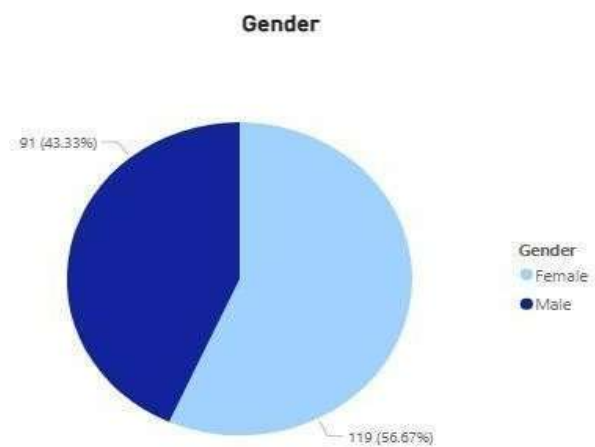


Figure 4.1 Gender distribution of participants

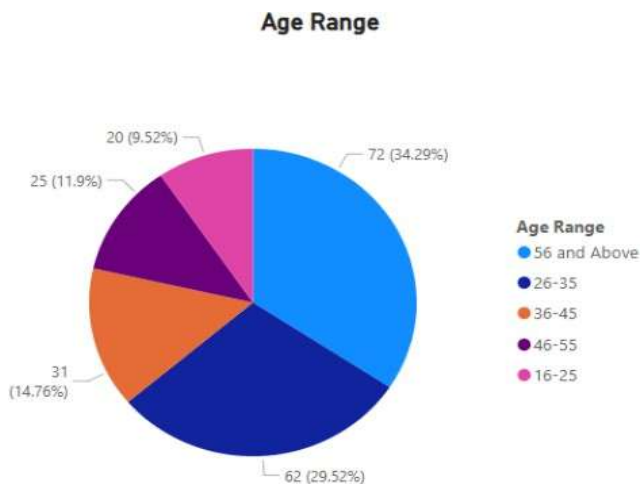


Figure 4.2 Age distribution of participants

#### 4.2.2 Marital status

Marital status was included in the demographic profile to explore potential correlations between family structure and language practices, particularly the transmission and use of Tamil within domestic environments. The majority of respondents in this study identified themselves as married, followed by those who were single, and a smaller group of divorced individuals. This demographic trend likely reflects the relatively young age profile of the participant pool, with many falling into the 16–35 age range. While marital status is not a direct determinant of language maintenance, it provides insight into potential pathways for language transmission. Although no strong patterns emerged between marital status and Tamil proficiency or use, the data suggest that language shift may accelerate when Tamil is not actively passed on within nuclear families.

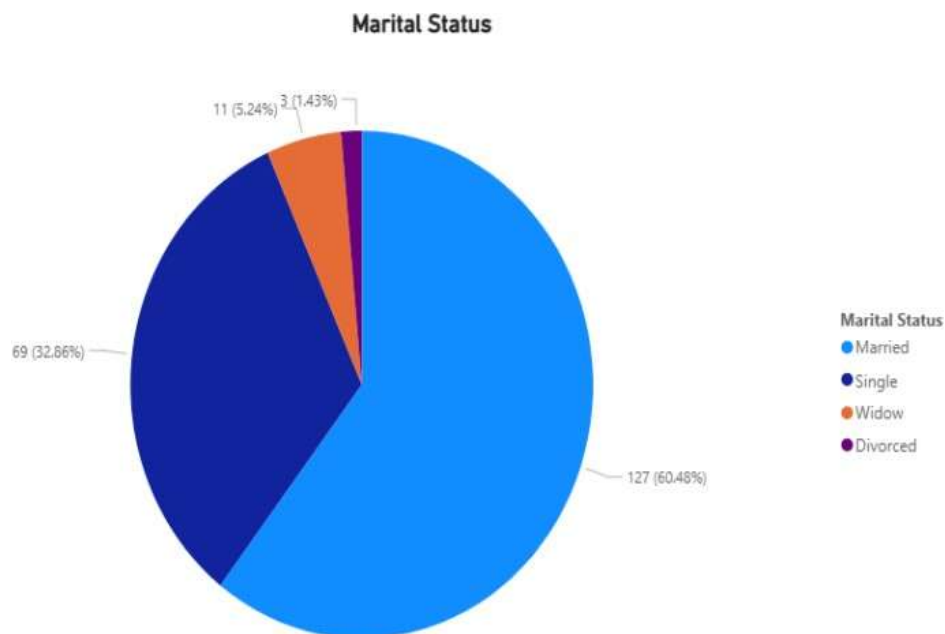


Figure 4.3 Marital status distribution of participants

### 4.2.3 Educational Background

The respondents held a range of educational qualifications, from primary to doctoral degrees. A considerable portion of the sample had attained bachelor's and master's degrees, thus indicating a relatively educated group. While a large number of the sample were educated, there were also about 5.24% of the sample who were uneducated. Education level is a significant factor in language ideologies and access to language resources, which can influence language maintenance efforts.

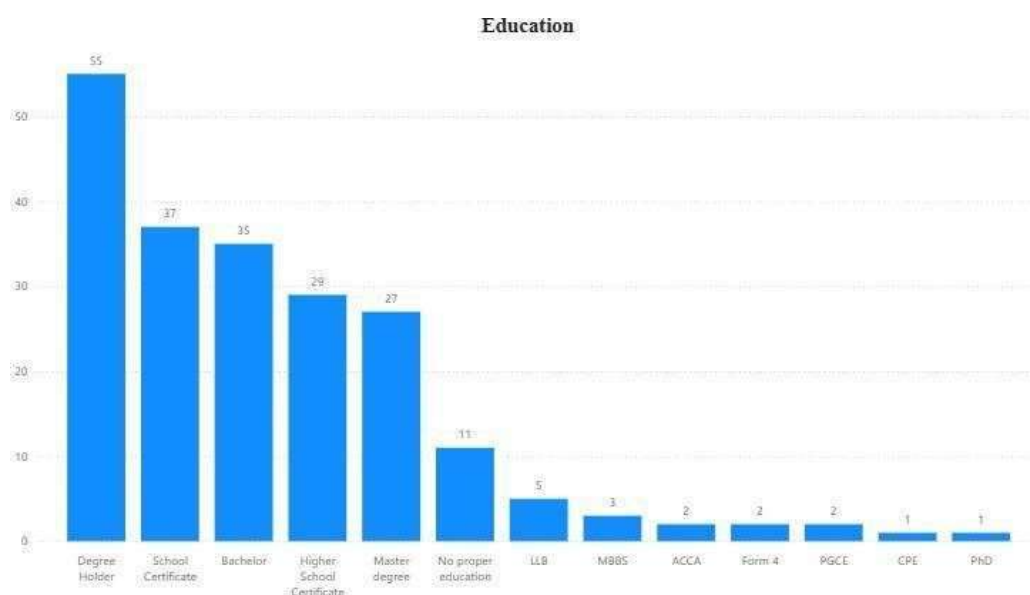


Figure 4.4 Distribution of participants according to educational background

### 4.2.4 Ethnicity

Mauritius is a multiethnic society shaped by centuries of migration, colonialism, and cultural interaction. Its population is composed of several major ethnic groups, including Indo-Mauritians, Creoles, Sino-Mauritians, and Franco-Mauritians, each with distinct historical backgrounds, religious affiliations, and cultural practices.

In one section of the demographic profile questions, participants were asked about their ethnicity; the majority identified as Tamil, while the others identified themselves as Mauritian. No participants identified as belonging to any other Indian-origin category. Below is a visual representation of the survey responses.

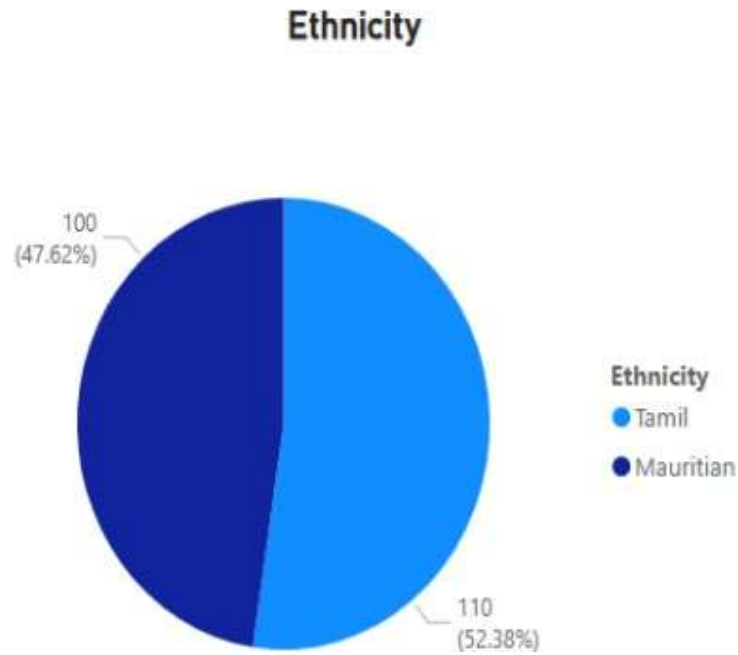


Figure 4.5 Ethnic affiliation of participants

#### 4.2.5 Geographical Location

Mauritius has five major official urban areas and 130 rural villages. Therefore, the residential context was split between urban and rural areas, allowing a comparative analysis of how spatial context influences language use. As shown in the chart below, the majority of the participants were from rural areas.

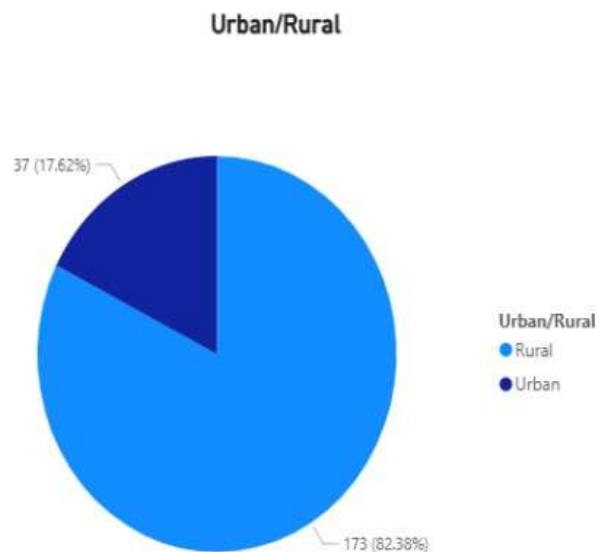


Figure 4.6 Geographical distribution of participants

#### 4.2.6 Mother tongue and Ancestral Language

In the survey conducted, a significant number of the participants listed Creole as their mother tongue. Almost 96.19% of the participants chose Creole as their mother language, while five (5) participants identified Tamil as their mother tongue. However, almost everyone identified Tamil as their ancestral language. The participants had an emotional connection with their ancestral language. This highlights the distinction between the home language and the ancestral language.

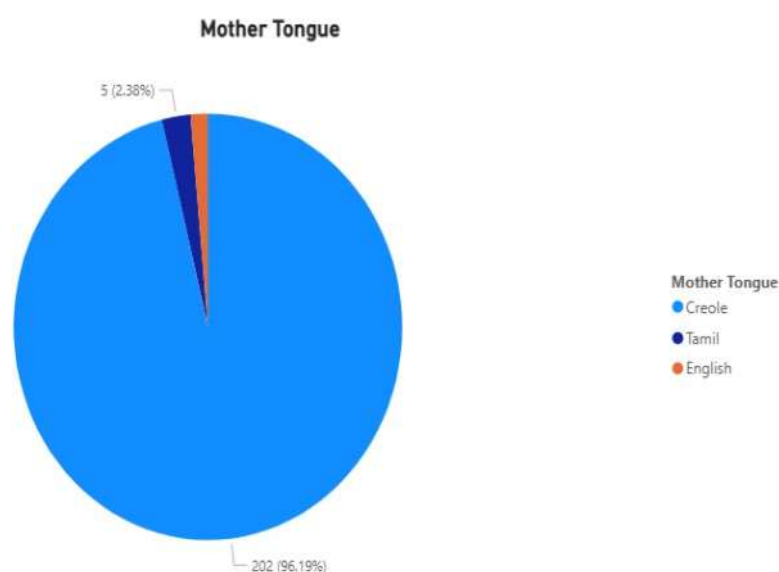


Figure 4.7 Distribution of participants reported by mother tongue

#### 4.3 Language Use

This section examines how Tamil is situated within the linguistic repertoires and sociocultural identities of the respondents. By examining the dominant languages used in everyday life, the first language acquired and the methods through which Tamil is learned, this section will give insights into the lived realities of language maintenance among the Tamil community in Mauritius.

##### 4.3.1 Dominant Language and First Language Acquired

Understanding which language an individual acquires first and which language they use most often currently offers insight into both historical transmission and present linguistic realities. This subsection examines the respondents' self-reported first language and dominant language, revealing clear patterns of language shift from Tamil to Creole, English, and French. These findings suggest a shift in the linguistic identity of the Tamil community in Mauritius, particularly among younger generations.

### 4.3.1.1 Dominant Language

The analysis reveals that English and French are the most frequently cited dominant languages, either independently or in combination with other languages. Many respondents identified bilingual or even trilingual dominance, such as "English and French" or "Creole, French and English", reflecting Mauritius's multilingual reality. Creole, the lingua franca of the island, often appeared as a co-dominant language, especially in informal settings and among younger participants.

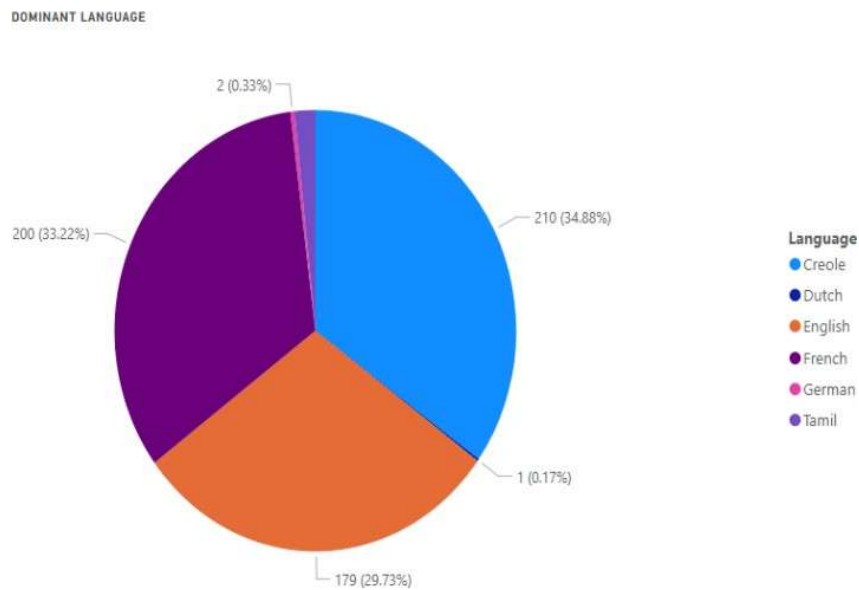


Figure 4.8 Distribution of participants according to the dominant language

### 4.3.1.2 First Language Acquired

The data shows a varied set of responses, with Creole, Tamil, English, and French emerging as the most common first languages. As mentioned earlier, the mother tongue of the majority of participants is Creole; however, not everyone acquired Creole as their first language. According to the data collected, some individuals acquired French, English, or even Tamil first, as shown in Figure 4.9. Below is a visual representation of the gathered data.

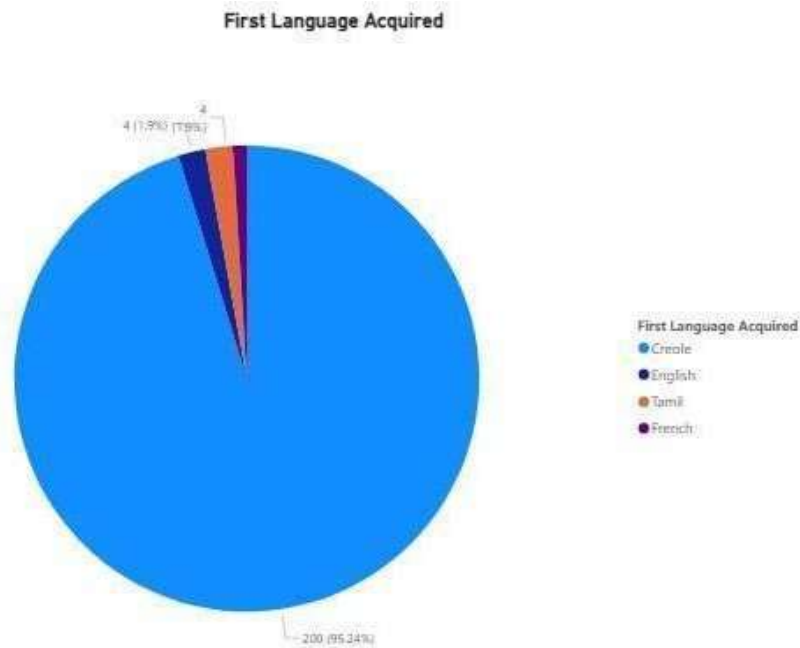


Figure 4.9 Distribution of participants according to first language acquired

#### 4.4 Language Learning Methods

The manner in which Tamil is learned plays a critical role in determining the depth and durability of language competence. This subsection examines the various learning methods which were reported by the participants. These methods range from family transmission and religious schooling to formal education and self-study. The findings suggest that Tamil learning is largely informal, oral, and community-driven, with limited institutional reinforcement, which may explain the disparity between oral and literacy skills in the language.

##### 4.4.1 Learning Methods

Participants were asked to describe the methods through which they acquired Tamil or other languages. This question aimed to uncover the social and institutional mechanisms of language transmission, thereby offering insight into how Tamil is learned in modern Mauritian contexts.

A significant number of participants indicated that they learnt Tamil during their childhood at home, often through interaction with parents or grandparents (the exact numbers are listed in Chart 4.10). This implies that the family plays a primary role in language transmission, especially when institutional support is lacking. Several participants cited school instruction as an essential method of acquisition. However,

Tamil instruction in schools is limited to optional programs. Some participants learnt Tamil through religious instructions at the temple (*kovil*) or during cultural events. A smaller group noted learning Tamil by books, television or language programs. This demonstrates an autonomous effort to reinforce Tamil proficiency. Many participants mentioned a combination of childhood exposure, school environment and self-study. This suggests that learning a language is not a linear process and is often reinforced across multiple life stages.

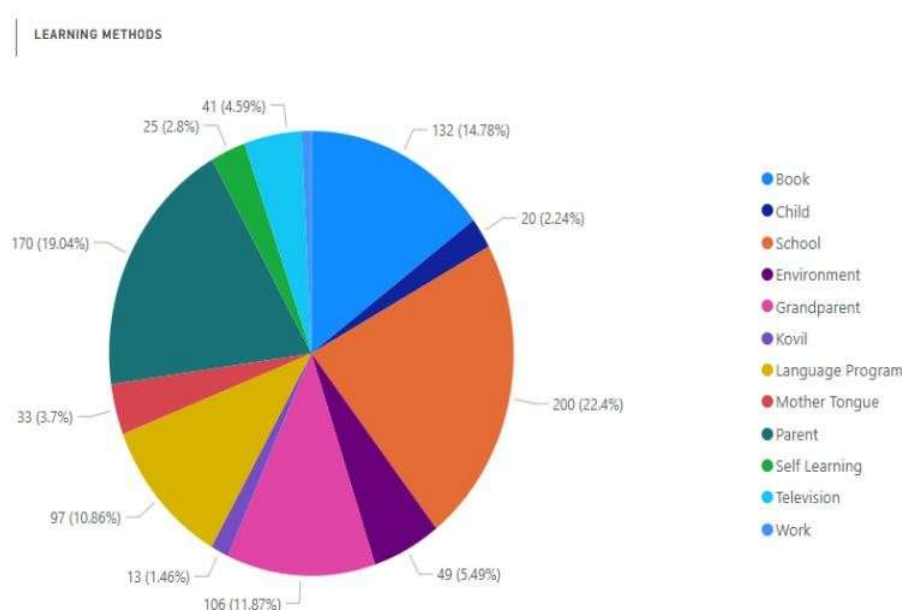


Figure 4.10 Distribution of participants according to the learning method of Tamil

#### 4.5 Ancestral Language Proficiency Across Demographic Factors

This study focuses specifically on proficiency in Tamil as the respondents' ancestral language. Analysing proficiency across demographic variables provides important sociolinguistic insights into the degree of language maintenance within the Tamil-speaking community in Mauritius. Proficiency in this study encompasses speaking, listening comprehension, reading, and writing, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of linguistic ability. Comparing proficiency across age groups, sex, education level, residence type, and mother tongue reveals how different social categories influence exposure to and use of the Tamil language. Such demographic analysis is consistent with theoretical frameworks such as Fishman's (1991) emphasis on intergenerational transmission, Romaine's work on bilingual contexts, and Spolsky's (2004) model of home-school-community language influences. Given the

dominance of English, French, and Mauritian Creole in education, employment, and everyday communication, demographic factors significantly shape Tamil proficiency outcomes in Mauritius. This section, therefore, lays the foundation for identifying community segments that demonstrate linguistic resilience, as well as those exhibiting signs of weakening maintenance. The following subsections present comparative tables and charts to illustrate these trends across demographic categories.

#### **4.5.1 Tamil Proficiency by Sex**

While the overall distribution of proficiency levels between male and female respondents is relatively balanced, the data shows some noteworthy trends. Male respondents are slightly more likely to report basic proficiency, with nearly half falling into this category. In contrast, female respondents display a more even distribution across all three proficiency levels.

Notably, the intermediate proficiency level is highest among females, suggesting greater engagement with Tamil beyond ritual or symbolic contexts. Male respondents, on the other hand, record significantly fewer cases of fluent proficiency, indicating more limited sustained exposure or practice. This may reflect gendered patterns of language socialisation in Mauritian Tamil households, where women are traditionally the primary caregivers and cultural transmitters may have retained slightly stronger connections to heritage language practices (Moonegadoo, 2018). Cultural participation also plays a role: women tend to be more involved in temple activities, Tamil classes, and community events, which may contribute to better retention of intermediate proficiency.

Within the Mauritian context, where Tamil is used heavily in religious and ceremonial settings, female involvement in such domains may help sustain slightly higher proficiency levels.

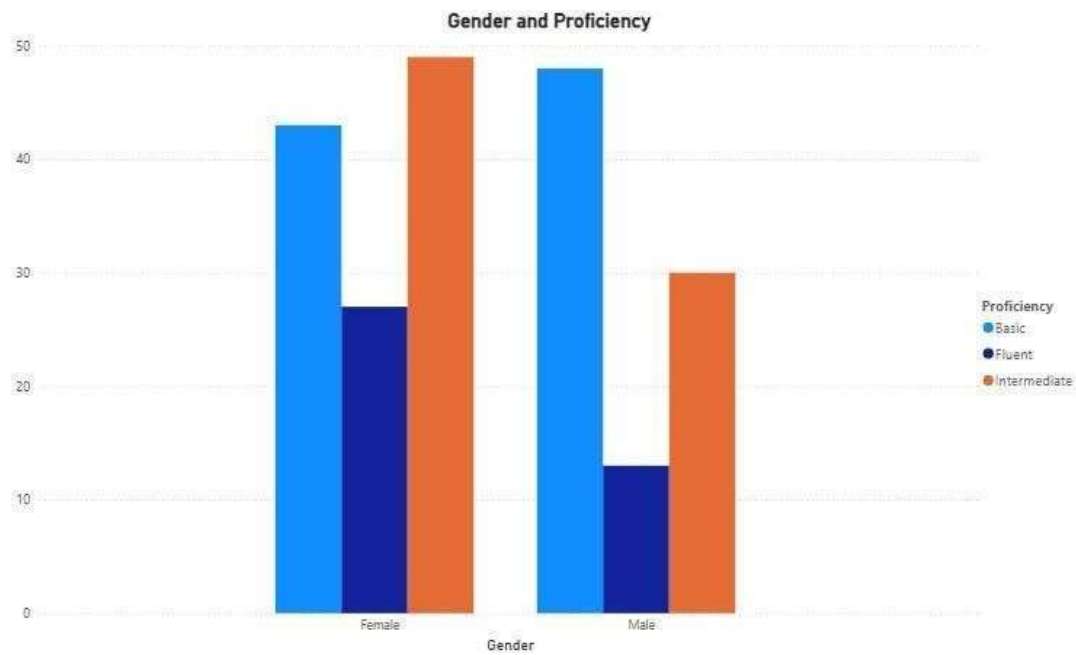


Figure 4.11 Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across gender groups

#### 4.5.2 Tamil Proficiency by Age Range

Age has emerged as a key factor influencing language proficiency, particularly among Tamils. It was observed that the younger respondents tended to be less fluent in Tamil as compared to the older respondents. The high intermediate level in the 16 to 25-year age range is primarily due to the limited exposure in schooling rather than other domains. Their learning appears to be primarily restricted to ritual or cultural contexts rather than continuous home transmission. The proficiency level of the older respondents was reported to be higher in understanding and speaking than that of the younger age group. This shows that the older generations have stronger Tamil comprehension and oral proficiency.

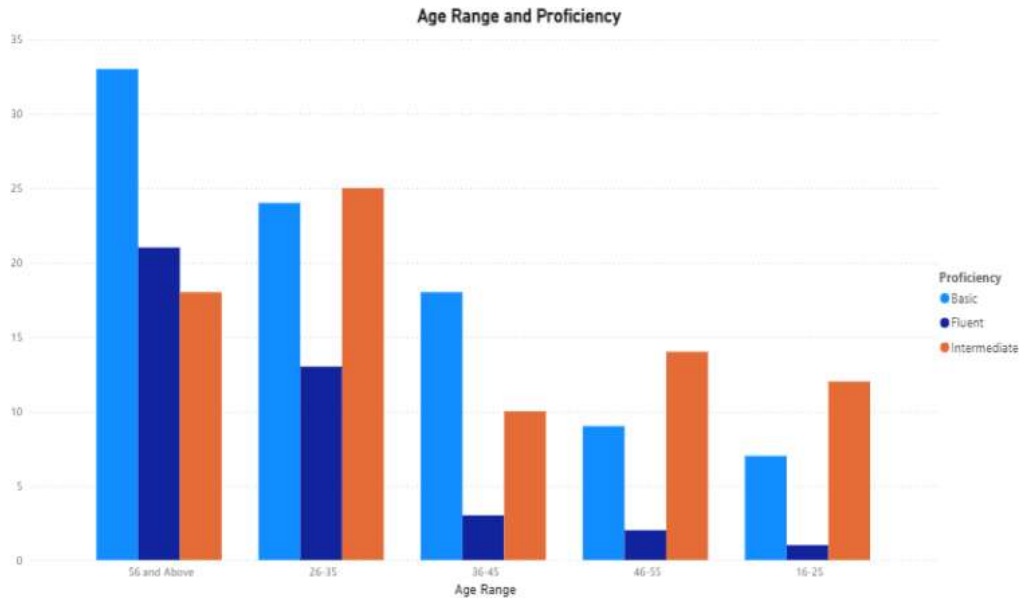


Figure 4.12 Comparison of Tamil language proficiency across age groups

The visual distribution, as shown above, clearly indicates a decline in fluency across generations. The 56 and above age bracket reports both basic and fluent skills, thus suggesting the need for intense early exposure. In contrast, younger participants exhibit mostly intermediate proficiency, particularly in the 16- to 25-year-old age bracket. This indicates a symbolic retention without complete fluency. The data strongly support the interpretation that Tamil is no longer transmitted as a first language among younger Mauritians, reflecting an ongoing intergenerational language shift. Overall, age-based comparisons confirm that the youngest generation is experiencing a gradual shift away from Tamil, both in fluency and functional usage.

#### 4.5.3 Tamil Proficiency by Marital Status

While marital status may not appear to directly influence language proficiency, it can have implications for language use and transmission within households. The chart reveals some differences which were worth noting.

Married participants appear to maintain higher levels of Tamil proficiency across all domains. This could be attributed to their potential role as language transmitters within the family, especially if Tamil is spoken with children or elders. Married individuals may also participate more in cultural or religious life, where Tamil is symbolically reinforced.

The single respondents, who are mostly younger individuals, showed patterns but lower fluency. This aligns with the earlier findings that younger age groups are experiencing a partial language shift. As shown in Figure 4.13, widowed and divorced respondents were fewer in number, limiting generalisation. However, their proficiency tends toward basic or fluent, suggesting these individuals may have grown up during a period when Tamil was more actively used.

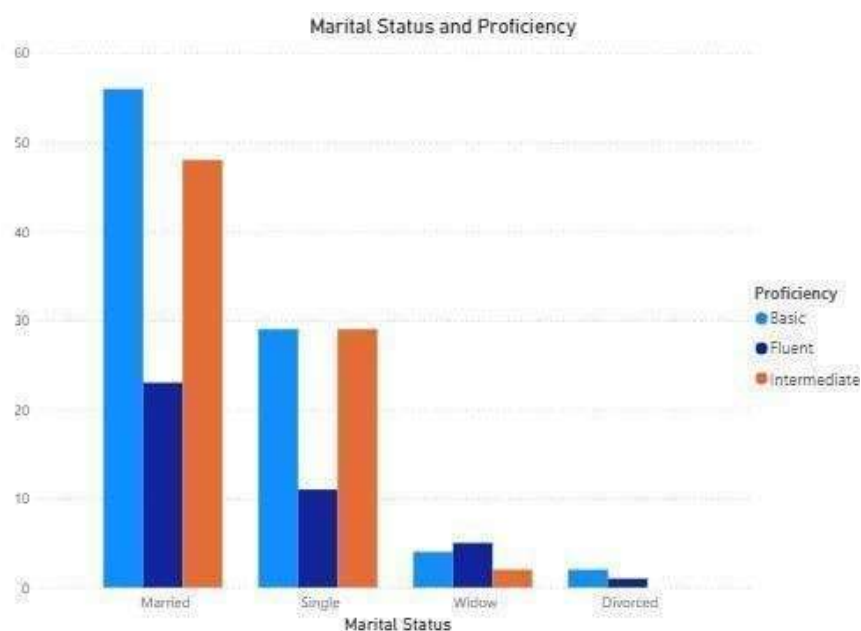


Figure 4.13 Comparison of Tamil proficiency among participants based on marital status

Overall, while marital status is not a strong independent predictor of Tamil proficiency, it interacts with other factors, such as age, family dynamics, and household language practices, and thus merits consideration in discussions on intergenerational language maintenance.

#### 4.5.4 Tamil Proficiency by Educational Background

The relationship between educational attainment and Tamil language proficiency presents an intriguing paradox. The chart indicates that higher education does not necessarily correlate with higher proficiency in the Tamil language. This is a trend which is commonly observed in postcolonial multilingual societies. These findings demonstrate that Tamil proficiency is not strongly supported through formal education, especially in higher academic or professional tracks where English and French

dominate. Instead, basic or intermediate skills in Tamil are often retained through informal learning environments, such as religious schooling, family use, or early life exposure.

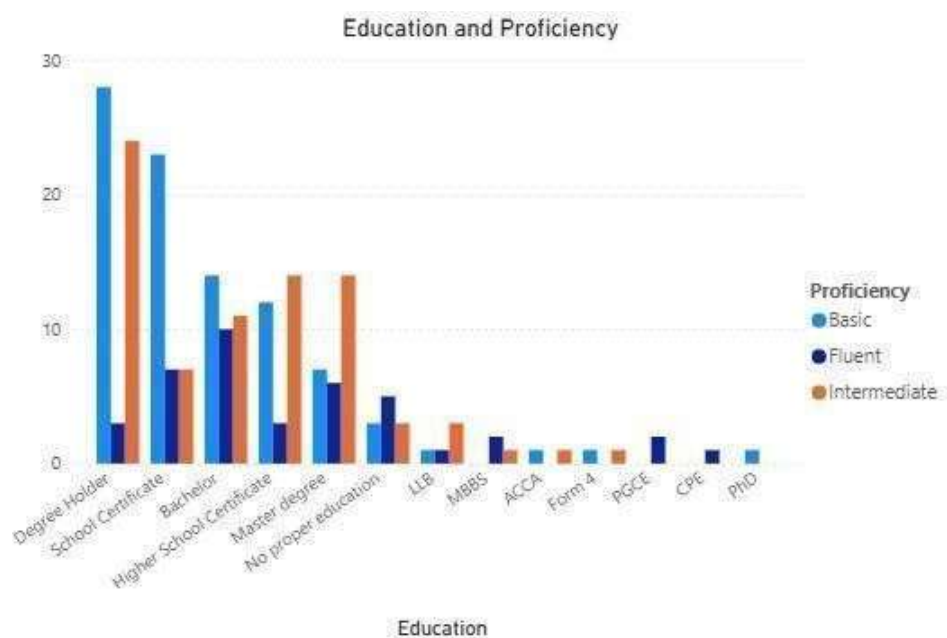


Figure 4.14 Comparison of Tamil proficiency among participants with different educational backgrounds

The low number of fluent Tamil users across all educational levels highlights a structural challenge: the absence of Tamil as a sustained medium of instruction or academic pursuit. For Tamil to thrive as a living language, it must be integrated into formal education policies, adult learning programs, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

#### 4.5.5 Tamil Proficiency by Ethnicity

Ethnicity often correlates with cultural and linguistic identity. In this study, participants were categorised as either Tamil or Mauritian, enabling a comparison of Tamil proficiency based on self-reported ethnic identity.

As shown below, Tamil respondents, as expected, reported a higher fluency in Tamil, reflecting greater cultural and familial connection to the language. However, the fact that not all Tamil-identified individuals are fluent indicates a gradual weakening of the ancestral language, even within the ethnic group traditionally associated with it. Mauritian-identified respondents exhibited mostly basic Tamil skills, which are

possibly acquired through school, community events or passive exposure. Their lower fluency reinforces the notion that ethnic identification influences, but does not guarantee, language maintenance.

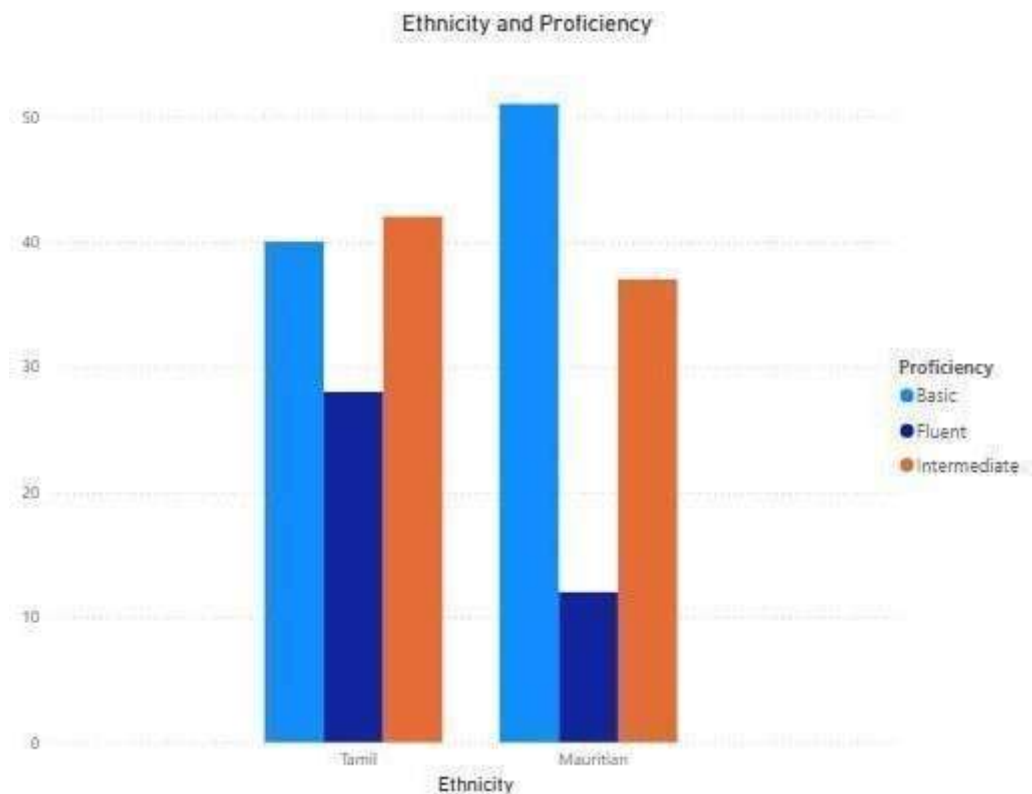


Figure 4.15 Comparison of Tamil proficiency across different ethnic groups

This finding supports broader sociolinguistic evidence that language shift can occur even within communities, and that ethnic identity alone is insufficient to preserve linguistic fluency. Active use of transmission and institutional support is essential to sustain Tamil in multicultural settings, such as Mauritius.

#### 4.5.6 Tamil Proficiency by Geographical Location

Tamil proficiency shows clear geographical variation, with rural respondents demonstrating significantly stronger abilities across all three proficiency categories. As illustrated in Figure 4.14, rural participants reported the highest levels of basic, intermediate, and fluent proficiency, indicating that Tamil remains more functionally embedded within rural households and community life. In these areas, Tamil is used in everyday interactions, religious participation, and cultural practices, contributing to stronger intergenerational transmission.

In contrast, urban respondents exhibit lower overall proficiency, particularly in fluency. The urban group displays moderate intermediate proficiency but very limited fluency, suggesting a shift towards symbolic knowledge rather than active use. This pattern is typical of multilingual, urbanised settings where dominant languages such as English, French, and Mauritian Creole are prioritised for education, employment, and social mobility. Urban youth, in particular, may encounter fewer opportunities to speak Tamil at home or in community networks, resulting in reduced exposure and weaker oral competence.

Despite these differences, both rural and urban regions are home to active cultural and religious organisations that support Tamil learning and identity. For example, the Tamil Federation in Quatre-Bornes, along with similar associations across rural districts, plays an important role in promoting Tamil through festivals, cultural events, and language classes. However, the impact of these institutions appears more pronounced in rural settings, where family structures and community cohesion tend to be stronger.

Overall, the rural–urban comparison reinforces the broader finding of this study: Tamil proficiency is more robust in settings where the language is embedded in family, community, and cultural practices, and weaker in environments shaped by linguistic competition and modern lifestyle pressures. These results align with Fishman’s (1991) model, which emphasises community-based transmission as the core of language maintenance.

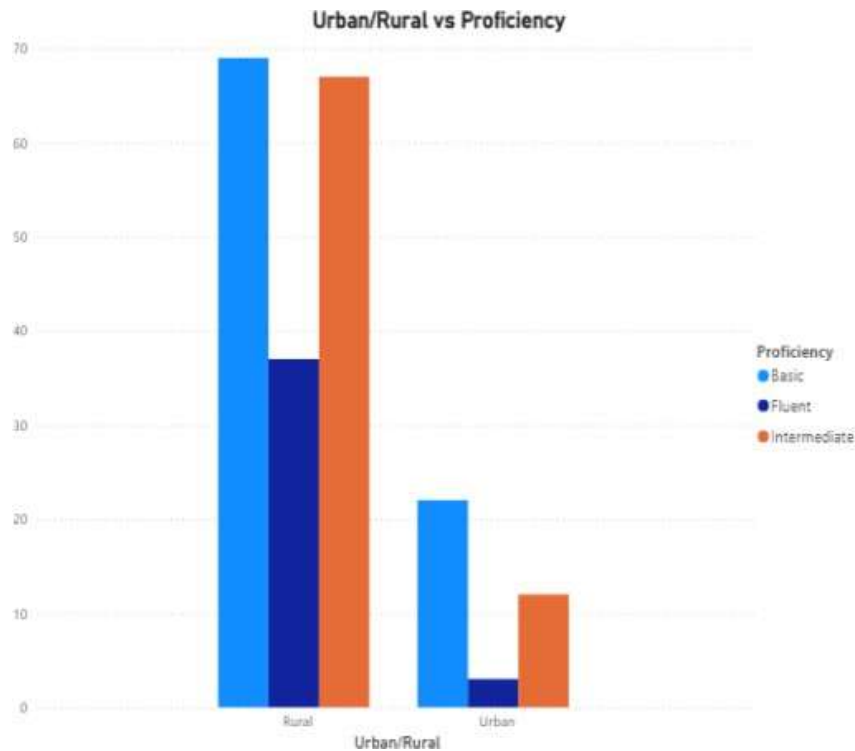


Figure 4.16 Comparison of Tamil proficiency among participants living in Urban v/s Rural areas.

#### 4.5.7 Tamil Proficiency by Mother Tongue

The relationship between a respondent’s declared mother tongue and their proficiency in Tamil is a crucial indicator of intergenerational language transmission and linguistic identity. The chart, as described above, reveals a concerning pattern: most participants identified Creole as their mother tongue, while very few listed Tamil, and even fewer listed English.

It was observed that Creole speakers make up the vast majority of the sample. While many have basic or intermediate Tamil proficiency, only a modest number are fluent. This suggests that Creole has replaced Tamil as the first language in many households. Tamil as a mother tongue is rarely reported. Among those who do, fluency is slightly higher, thus validating the importance of early-life language exposure. English speakers were very minimal, and the Tamil proficiency in this group is extremely low across all levels.

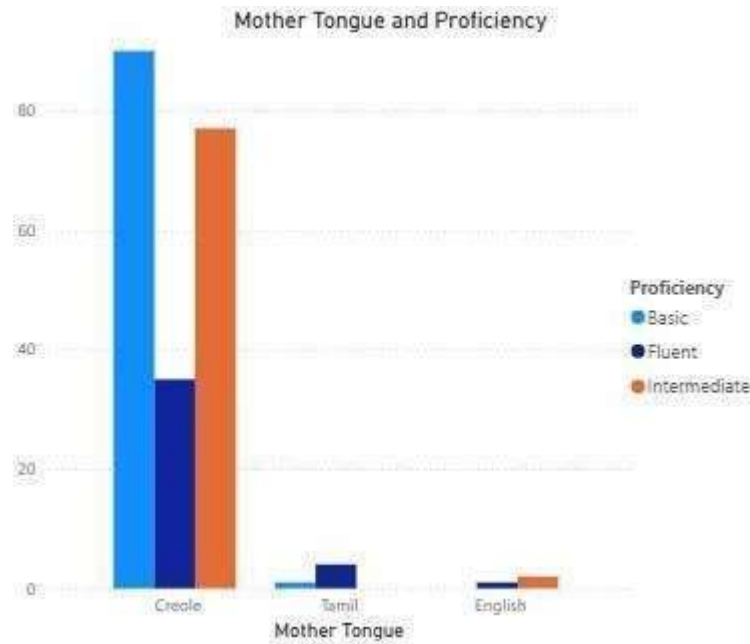


Figure 4.17 Comparison of Tamil proficiency across participants with different reported mother tongues

As shown above, this data confirms a significant shift in language identity, where Creole has overtaken Tamil as the primary home language, even in Tamil families. This shift has a direct impact on Tamil language proficiency. Individuals who grow up with Creole as their first language are far less likely to achieve fluency in Tamil; they often acquire it later through either symbolic or educational means. However, the few participants who reported Tamil as their mother tongue exhibited a relatively stronger fluency. This shows that early exposure is the strongest predictor of active language maintenance.

#### 4.6 Language Proficiency by Age Group (LSRW)

This section examines variations in language proficiency across different age groups, with a focus on the four core skills: Listening (Understanding), Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW). Rather than treating these skills in isolation, they are considered together to provide a more complete picture of language competence. The focus on age allows us to explore possible generational contrasts in the use of Tamil among Mauritian speakers. Such contrasts may point to broader patterns of language maintenance or shift, particularly in relation to literacy practices and intergenerational transmission. While the data cannot capture every aspect of functional language use, it

does offer valuable indications of how proficiency in Tamil is distributed across different cohorts.

#### 4.6.1 Understanding Vs Age Group

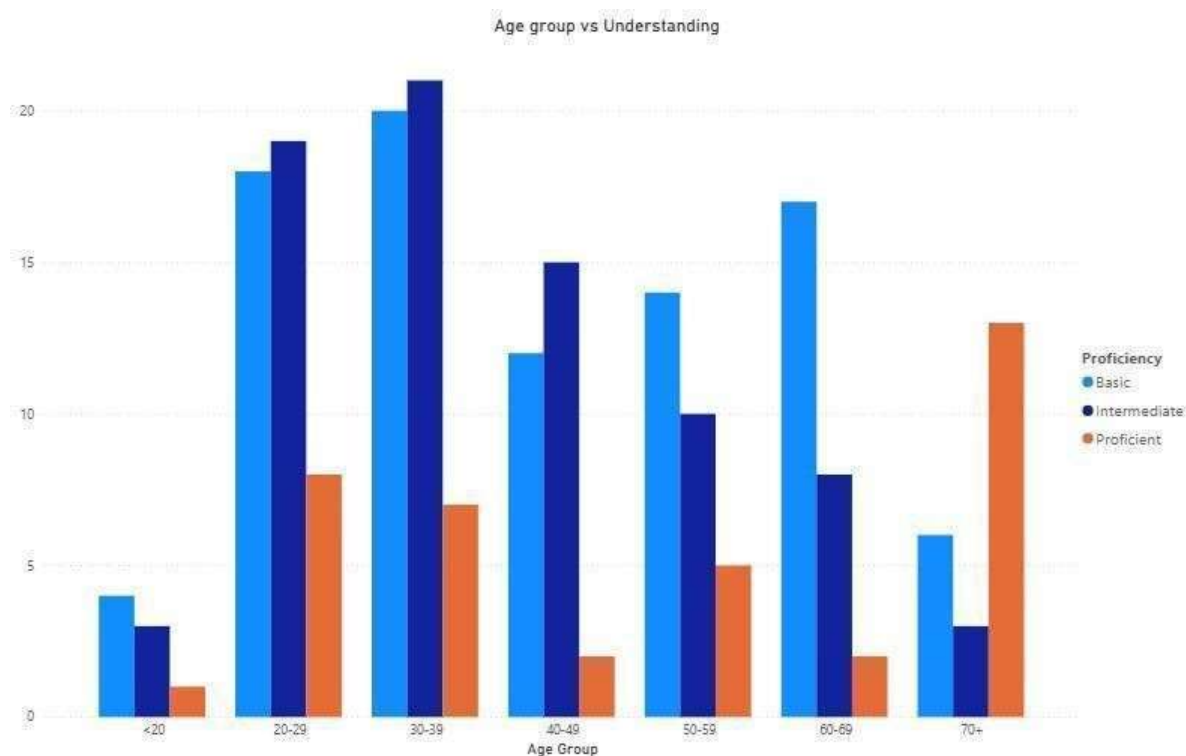


Figure 4.18 Age-based differences in understanding Tamil, reflecting generational variation in ancestral language maintenance

The chart above provides an overview of self-reported proficiency in understanding Tamil across different age groups. Among respondents, those in the 20-29 and 30-39 age brackets reported the highest number in both basic and intermediate proficiency. This may indicate a regular exposure to the language in cultural or family contexts, even if that exposure does not always translate into advanced skills. Intermediate proficiency appears to be the most common level among the 30- to 39-year-old age group, with just over 20 respondents placing themselves at this level, followed closely by basic users.

In contrast, proficient understanding is more visible in the older cohorts, particularly among respondents aged 70 and above. Here, the number of individuals who reported proficiency is higher than in any of the younger groups. One possible explanation is that older speakers were more likely to have encountered Tamil in formal educational settings or through stronger community networks that supported its use.

At the other end of the scale, the under-20 group shows a very low level of proficient understanding, with most respondents identifying at the basic level. This points to a potential decline in deep comprehension skills among younger speakers. While this does not necessarily mean Tamil is disappearing, it does suggest a generational shift in how the language is used and valued, with English, French, or Creole playing more dominant roles in everyday communication.

#### **4.6.2 Speaking vs Age Group**

The data on spoken proficiency in Tamil suggests a clear generational divide. Respondents in the 20–29 and 30–39 age groups reported the highest numbers at the intermediate level, with just over 20 individuals in the latter category. However, fluent speakers are rare in these younger cohorts, which may suggest that while many younger adults can understand Tamil, their ability to use it actively in conversation is more limited.

Across all groups, the basic speaking category is dominant, peaking in the 60–69 and 30–39 cohorts. This indicates that for many speakers, Tamil is retained at a minimal level of spoken competence rather than as a language of everyday fluency.

The 70+ group exhibits the strongest presence of proficient speakers, reflecting a period when Tamil was more commonly spoken at home or reinforced through cultural and religious practices. By contrast, the under-20 respondents reported very little speaking ability, with none identifying as fluent.

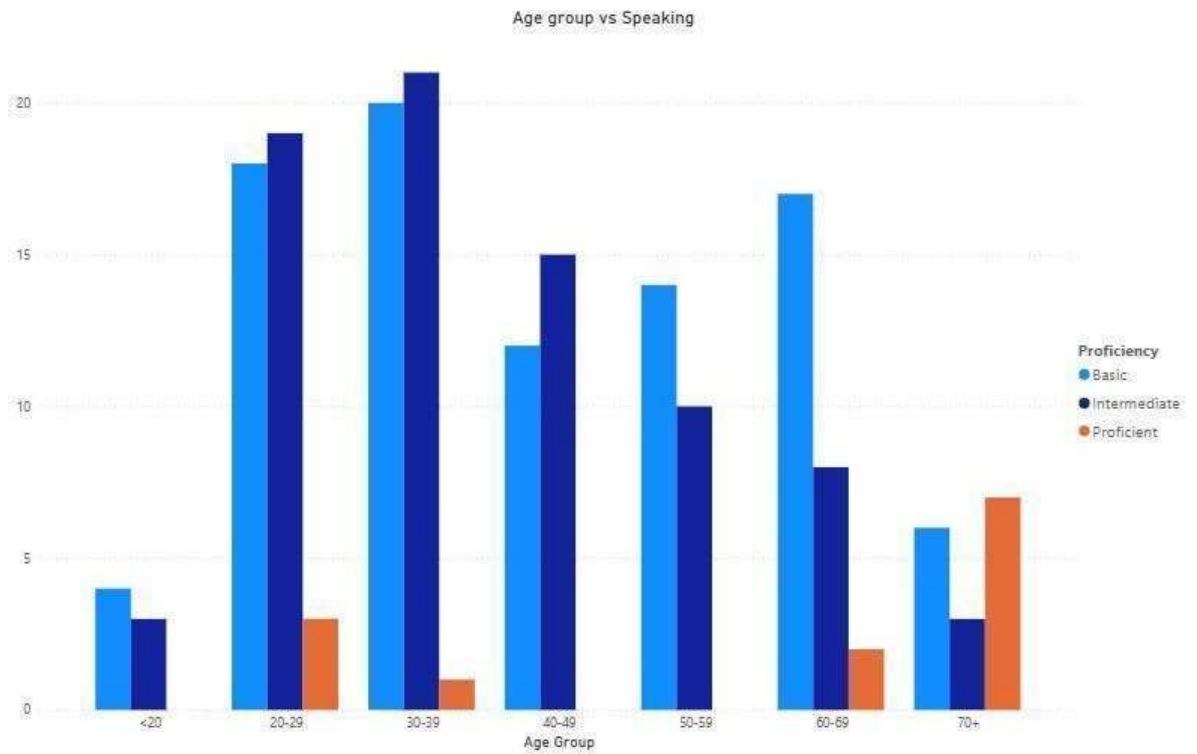


Figure 4.19 Comparison of Tamil speaking proficiency among participants by age group

Taken together, the results suggest a gradual decline in the use of spoken Tamil in daily communication, with younger speakers increasingly relying on Creole, English, or French as their primary languages. Tamil appears to be maintained more as a marker of cultural identity than as an actively used spoken language.

### 4.6.3 Reading vs Age Group

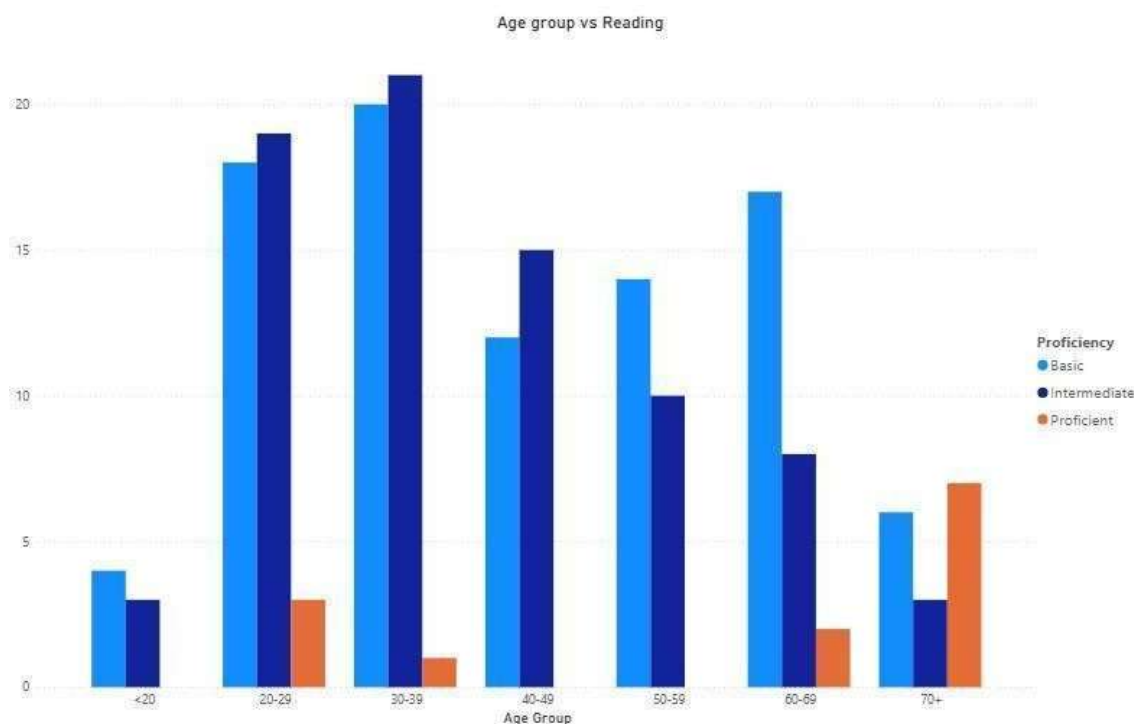


Figure 4.20 Comparison of Tamil reading proficiency among participants by age group

Patterns in reading proficiency show a gradual decline across younger generations. Proficient readers are most common among respondents aged 70 and above, many of whom likely benefited from earlier educational or religious instruction in Tamil.

By contrast, the 20–29 and 30–39 groups report higher numbers at the basic and intermediate levels, with very few identifying as proficient. This suggests that while exposure to Tamil script exists, particularly through limited school subjects or religious texts, opportunities for sustained literacy development are lacking.

The 40–59 age groups occupy a middle position, with moderate numbers at the intermediate level. These respondents may represent a transitional generation, where Tamil reading was still taught or valued, though not consistently practised in daily life.

Among the under-20s, proficiency in reading Tamil is virtually absent. This reflects the dominance of English and French in the education system and digital media, where the Tamil script plays a relatively minor role. Overall, the results suggest that Tamil literacy is being eroded across generations, with the language maintained more through oral practices and symbolic use than through reading.

#### 4.6.4 Writing vs Age Group

Writing ability is often considered the weakest of the four language skills. Proficient writers are almost absent across all age groups, with only a small number of older respondents (those aged 70 and above) reporting higher proficiency. This may reflect the role of traditional schooling or religious instruction in sustaining Tamil writing among earlier generations.

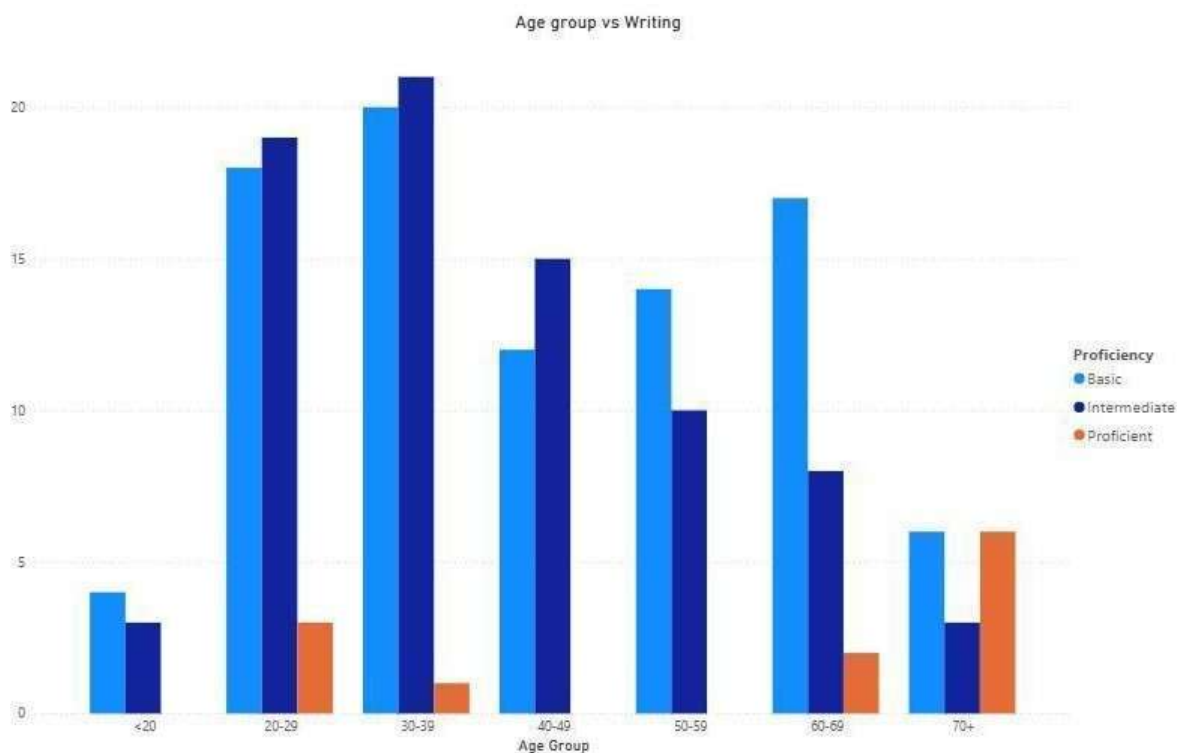


Figure 4.21 Comparison of Tamil writing proficiency among participants by age group

Respondents in the 20–39 range mostly reported basic or intermediate skills, but not full proficiency. This suggests limited exposure to the Tamil script, perhaps in optional classes or religious contexts, without the sustained practice necessary to develop writing competence.

The 40–69 cohorts also show mostly intermediate skills, with little evidence of advanced proficiency. These results may indicate a generation that was exposed to Tamil writing but did not regularly use it in functional settings such as correspondence, education, or professional life.

For the under-20 group, proficiency in writing Tamil is entirely absent. Only a handful of respondents reported having basic or intermediate skills, highlighting that Tamil

writing is not being effectively transmitted to younger speakers. This aligns with broader trends of language shift, where Tamil is increasingly absent from formal and digital spaces, limiting opportunities for developing written competence.

#### **4.7 Language Use Across Domains**

This section helps in understanding how Tamil is being maintained or shifted in everyday life. This section examines its use in relation to other languages commonly used in Mauritius, namely Creole, English, and French. The analysis is organised around various social domains, which include home, education, workplace, religious and cultural spaces, and informal peer interactions. Examining these domains allows us to see more clearly where Tamil continues to serve as a medium of communication and where it may be giving way to more dominant languages.

Tamil is not used in the same way across all situations, and examining it through the lens of specific domains helps to reveal those variations. A domain-based approach enables the observation of how the language functions differently in various contexts. While in some contexts, Tamil remains the primary communicative resource, in others it appears to function more symbolically, often associated with heritage or ritual rather than daily conversation. This perspective offers a means of tracing both the strengths and vulnerabilities of Tamil maintenance in Mauritius.

##### **4.7.1 Language Use in the Home Domain**

The home domain serves as a critical space for intergenerational language transmission and everyday communication. In the context of Mauritius, where linguistic diversity intersects with colonial history and contemporary media exposure, language choice at home reflects both practicality and cultural heritage.

The data revealed that Creole is the dominant language which is spoken across all household interactions. Regardless of age, social class, or education level, respondents consistently reported using Creole as the main language with family members. This finding aligns with national linguistic trends where Mauritian Creole serves as the most accessible and widely understood language across ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

With parents and children, Creole remains the primary medium of communication. A small number of respondents indicated using French or English, particularly in families where children attend private schools or where there is a stronger emphasis on perceived social prestige and education. In such cases, French and English are associated with upward mobility and educational advantage.

With siblings, informal and playful interactions are also dominated by Creole. However, some respondents, especially those in urban or bilingual households, reported occasionally using English or French, particularly when code-switching during conversations involving media, education, or technology.

The communication involving the grandparents reflected a generational linguistic shift. While Creole remains the primary language, several respondents noted that Tamil words or phrases are occasionally incorporated into conversations, particularly during discussions on religion or culture. However, Tamil was rarely in full sentences, suggesting a symbolic rather than functional role in intergenerational exchanges.

Interestingly, language use with pets or livestock offers further insight into the linguistic comfort zones. Respondents overwhelmingly reported using Creole with animals, which shows that Creole is the most natural and emotionally resonant language in the private sphere.

Some participants reflected on how language choice at home is subtly shaped by media exposure and parental attitudes. For instance, one young adult respondent shared, “*We watch Tamil movies during festivals, but I still talk to my parents and siblings in Creole; it just feels natural.*” Another respondent noted that although Tamil prayers are recited during home prayers, they are often memorised phonetically and not always fully understood. These insights show a pattern of symbolic retention, where Tamil holds cultural or spiritual significance, but Creole dominates functional and emotional exchanges. This suggests that while Tamil may persist in ritual or symbolic forms, its everyday use is gradually diminishing in the domestic sphere, especially among younger generations.

## 4.7.2 Language Use in the Education Domain

Language practices within the Mauritian education system reflect both institutional policy and sociolinguistic reality. The main media of instruction are English and French, as mandated by the national curriculum. However, Creole is commonly used as a lingua franca among students and as an explanatory language by teachers, particularly in public schools.

Respondents in this study consistently reported that English is used in class, especially in science and literature subjects; however, teachers frequently switched to Creole to ensure student comprehension. This practice was particularly common in government schools. One respondent noted, *“Even in English class, the teacher explains everything in Creole because it is easier for every student to understand the concept.”* Another respondent observed that *“French is spoken more in private schools, especially the Catholic ones, even among peers.”*

In contrast to government schools, private institutions, especially those with international or religious affiliations, were more likely to enforce the use of English or French, both in the classroom and in peer interactions. Yet, even in these settings, some teachers reported using Creole when the students struggled. However, this is a very rare case scenario.

### 4.7.2.1 Ancestral Language Instruction: Gaps between Policy and Practice

While Tamil is offered as an ancestral language in both primary and secondary government schools, its practical implementation is often limited. According to respondents who have studied Tamil, they observed that the instruction is focused primarily on grammar, translation, and exam preparation, with very little emphasis on speaking or listening. One student even stated that *“We memorised the Thevaram, but I do not know what it means or how to say it properly.”* Another shared, *“I got a credit in Tamil, but cannot speak it fluently.”*

These qualitative findings are consistent with research by Rejendran (2024), who found that ancestral language curricula in Mauritius often prioritise written proficiency and examination performance over communicative competence. The Journal of Tamil Peraivu similarly highlights that the implementation of communication skills in Tamil

classrooms remains a significant challenge, with teachers lacking sufficient pedagogical training to promote oral fluency (JTP, 2024).

Although the Ministry of Education has included communication skills as a formal component of the Tamil curriculum (Le Mauricien, 2023), many teachers continue to use Creole as the main language of instruction, even within Tamil classes. This practice, according to the respondent's feedback, *“makes it easier to pass exams, but harder to actually speak the language.”*

#### **4.7.2.2 Institutional Support and Digital Initiatives**

Despite these classroom-level issues, there have been notable efforts by local institutions to modernise and support Tamil instruction. The Primary School Teachers' Union (PSTTU) launched Online Learning with video tutorials, interactive activities, and multilingual support (PSTTU, 2024). These digital resources are aligned with national textbooks and are accessible beyond school hours, aiming to enhance retention and accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

Additionally, the Language Resource Centre (LRC) at Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) has partnered with India's Central Institute of Indian Languages to develop techno-pedagogical tools, including self-learning Tamil modules, online dictionaries, and multimedia content. (MGI, 2023).

#### **4.7.2.3 Conferences and Teacher Training**

At a more macro level, Mauritius hosted the 14th World Tamil Teachers' Conference in 2023. Its aim was to bring together scholars and practitioners to explore the innovations in Tamil pedagogy, with a specific focus on spoken Tamil in the classroom (NewsInvasion24, 2023). The event emphasised the need to shift from rote learning to communicative competence, thus aligning closely with the issues raised by the participants in this study.

During the survey, some teachers even raised concerns about how, even during their training, they are more focused on pedagogy and strategies, but not on communication skills. They also mentioned that they have oral exams, but no specific time is allotted during the training for them.

While the educational domain theoretically supports multilingualism and includes Tamil in its curriculum, actual language use reflects diglossia and often undermines ancestral language transmission. Creole remains the de facto classroom language for many learners. Tamil, although institutionalised, is often reduced to symbolic or exam-based functions. This dissonance between policy-level support and practical constraints highlights the need for pedagogical reforms, enhanced teacher training, and a greater emphasis on oral fluency if Tamil is to be revitalised in educational settings.

#### 4.7.3 Language Use in the Cultural Domain

The cultural domain remains one of the most active spaces for the symbolic and ritualistic use of Tamil among the Mauritian Tamil community. Based on field observations and participant responses, this domain appears to preserve the ancestral language more vigorously than others, such as home or education.

Tamil is deeply embedded in religious ceremonies. Prayers, chants, and hymns such as *thevaram*<sup>8</sup>, *thiruppugazh*<sup>9</sup>, and *thiruvembavai*<sup>10</sup> are typically recited in Tamil during temple rituals. In cases where the temple priest is from India, Sanskrit may dominate the proceedings; however, Tamil chants are still commonly heard, especially during major religious events like *Thaipusam Cavadee*, *Thimidhi*, and *Pongal*. While Creole is the primary medium of formal communication among devotees, Tamil remains the language of religious expression, especially when addressing deities and naming temple rituals and objects, such as *kumbham*, *theertham*, *kungumam*, and others.

Temples in Mauritius serve as both spiritual centres and cultural institutions. Many temples (*kovils*) have cultural committees that conduct Tamil language classes, Carnatic music lessons, and Bharatanatyam dance training for children and youth. These activities aim to instil cultural pride and sustain Tamil usage among younger

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<sup>8</sup> *Thevaram* refers to a collection of early medieval Tamil Shaivite devotional hymns composed by the Nayanmars (Saivite saints) between the 7th and 9th centuries CE. These hymns are dedicated to Lord Shiva and form a significant part of Tamil bhakti literature.

<sup>9</sup> *Thiruppugazh* is a collection of devotional hymns to Lord Murugan composed by the Tamil saint Arunagirinathar in the 15th century CE. It plays a vital role in the preservation of Tamil musical and religious traditions dedicated to Lord Murugan.

<sup>10</sup> *Thiruvembavai* is a devotional hymn composed by the Tamil saint Manikkavacakar in the 9th century CE, forming part of the *Tiruvācakam*, a central text in Taserve as both spiritual centres andmil Shaiva devotional literature.

generations. Several respondents mentioned that they learned devotional songs or basic Tamil words through such programs.

Additionally, temples collaborate with larger federations such as the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation (MTTF) to host island-wide initiatives that promote Tamil. For example, MTTF has launched publications such as *Thiruppugazh Maalai* (2023), held youth leadership workshops, and coordinated events like Thiruvalluvar Day, which includes Tamil *Thirukkural*<sup>11</sup> recitation and debate competitions (MTTF, 2023). These efforts reinforce language maintenance in symbolic and performative ways, even if not in daily conversational use.

Despite the vibrant activities, a disconnection remains between ritual Tamil and conversational Tamil. As reported by several interviewees, even those who sing or chant Tamil hymns often do not understand them fully or speak Tamil fluently. This reflects a pattern of symbolic language retention, where Tamil holds cultural and religious value, but not necessarily functional communicative utility.

Table 4.1 Languages in cultural practices, illustrating how Tamil is maintained symbolically through rituals and festivals while its communicative role declines, with observed impacts on cultural identity

<b>Cultural Practice</b>	<b>Language Usage</b>	<b>Observed Impact</b>
Temple rituals, hymns, and religious chanting	Tamil (ceremonial, classical)	Preserves formal Tamil vocabulary and ritual structure
Devotee communication	Creole, with Tamil lexical insertions	Reflects symbolic but passive knowledge of Tamil
Temple cultural classes (language, dance, music)	Tamil and Creole are used as an instructional bridge.	Transmits cultural knowledge to children and youth
MTTF publications, competitions, and workshops	Tamil-focused initiatives across age groups	Promotes cultural identity and symbolic language practice

<sup>11</sup> Thirukkural is a classical Tamil text composed by the poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar, estimated between the 1st century BCE and 5th century CE. It consists of 1,330 couplets (kurals) that expound on virtue (*aram*), wealth (*porul*), and love (*inbam*), reflecting universal moral and ethical values.

These practices demonstrate that the cultural domain functions as a semi-institutional mechanism for language maintenance. While the functional communicative use of Tamil remains minimal, its role in identity formation, religious practice, and cultural continuity remains robust.

#### **4.7.4 Language Use in the Work Domain**

The workplace in Mauritius is a multilingual environment where language use is shaped by professional roles, institutional settings, and interpersonal dynamics. Based on the field data that was collected, Creole emerges as the most widely used language for day-to-day interpersonal communication, particularly in informal conversations among colleagues. In certain formal contexts, French is also used, especially in private sector offices, customer service roles, and clerical settings. English, while being less commonly used for verbal communication, remains the dominant language for documentation, official communication, and interactions with foreign clients or expatriates.

Among Tamil language educators and academic professionals, the data reflect a more complex linguistic repertoire. Tamil teachers in schools often use Tamil for teaching, but they code-switch to English or French depending on the students' linguistic competence. However, outside the classroom, these same teachers frequently switch to Creole when interacting with colleagues and students, especially in casual or administrative settings.

However, a notable exception is observed within institutions like the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI). Several lecturers and professors reported using Tamil as a medium of explanation at the tertiary level. This practice is not limited to instruction, but also applies in professional communication with colleagues. This indicates a context-specific domain of Tamil use in professional academic settings, where both formal instruction and exchange between colleagues can occur in Tamil, thus reinforcing its continued presence in specialised professional environments.

Table 4.2 Language use in the work domain, highlighting the dominance of English and French in professional contexts compared to Tamil's limited symbolic or supportive role

<b>Work Context</b>	<b>Language Used</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
General offices (public/private)	Creole, French	Creole for daily talk, French for customer service or formal tone
Documentation/ admin tasks	English	For reports, contracts, and international communication
Tamil teachers (school level)	Tamil (teaching), Creole/French/English	Tamil for class, other languages depending on student fluency
University lecturers (e.g. MGI)	Tamil, English, Creole	Tamil is used for lecturing and professional discussions among colleagues

The data from the work domain suggest a clear functional hierarchy of languages shaped by both occupational needs and everyday familiarity. Creole is used most often for interpersonal exchanges. This occurs mainly because it is widely understood and carries a sense of ease and emotional closeness. English and French, on the other hand, tend to appear in more formal situations, particularly where official documents, institutional protocols, or international communication is involved.

Tamil use in the workplace is far more limited and appears in a very specific context. It is occasionally heard in public schools, usually when teachers need to explain concepts to Tamil-speaking students. However, its presence remains minimal there. At the tertiary level, particularly at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), Tamil is more visible, with some lecturers and staff making deliberate use of it in both teaching and interactions among colleagues.

These findings collectively point to a contrast: Tamil retains a symbolic and professional niche within education, yet it does not extend much beyond that into the wider workforce. This pattern reflects broader sociolinguistic trends in Mauritius,

where heritage languages are preserved in certain institutional spaces but are marginal in day-to-day professional communication.

#### **4.8 Attitudes and Perspectives Toward Tamil**

Language attitude plays an important role in shaping the patterns of language maintenance or language shift. In the context of Tamil in Mauritius, attitudes toward the language offer insight into whether it continues to be seen as an integral part of personal and community identity, or a heritage symbol with diminishing practical value. This section examines the participants' emotional and ideological attitudes toward the Tamil language. It also encompasses their sense of pride, perceived usefulness, and willingness to pass the language on to future generations. The findings highlight a complex interplay between symbolic attachment and declining functional relevance, as indicated by both the Likert scale responses and the interview data. These attitudes vary significantly across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and institutional affiliations, thus revealing the generational tensions and conceptual factors that shape how Tamil is valued and practised today.

##### **4.8.1 Perceived Importance of Tamil**

The perceived importance of Tamil among participants emerges as a significant factor influencing the language maintenance within the Mauritian Tamil community. While a majority of the respondents expressed a strong emotional attachment to the language, this attachment tends to operate more symbolically than functionally. This aligns with Fishman's (1991) theory of language domains, wherein heritage languages are often retained for ritual, religious, or identity-related functions, while their presence in everyday communication gradually declines. Similarly, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation is instructive in this context. The respondents displayed a stronger integrative motivation, thus valuing Tamil as a cultural inheritance rather than an instrumental motivation linked to academic or professional utility.

To assess these perspectives, a Likert scale was used to record the respondents' agreement with the statement: "*It is important to preserve the Tamil language in Mauritius.*"

The results were overwhelmingly affirmative (as shown in Table 4.3 below).

Table 4.3 Participants' perceptions of the importance of Tamil, illustrating strong symbolic value despite reduced everyday functional use

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	63	30%
Agree	88	42%
Neutral	48	23%
Disagree	11	5%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	210	100%

This high level of perceived importance, which is 72% (n=151) in agreement, suggests a strong symbolic capital associated with Tamil. However, when asked about the actual use of Tamil in daily life, only 26% (n = 55) reported using it regularly. The qualitative data helps to explain this gap between perceived importance and actual use. One 24-year-old respondent remarked: *“Even if I do not speak Tamil every day, it is still part of who I am.”* While another respondent shared: *“It connects me to my grandparents and our temple rituals.”*

Such sentiments demonstrate that Tamil continues to serve as a marker of identity and belonging, especially in the cultural and religious contexts. However, the data also reveals a widening gap between emotional and practical use, especially among the younger participants. While older respondents (45 and above) reported using Tamil more actively in childhood and community settings, the younger participants associated the language primarily with ritual spaces, such as temples, festivals, or ceremonial functions, rather than with education or peer interaction. While the emotional connection remains strong, the language's functional role in education, employment, and digital communication appears limited.

This pattern echoes concerns raised by Eisenlohr (2006) and Rajah-Carrim (2007), who observed that Tamil in Mauritius often functions in a symbolic register rather than as a medium of daily interaction. The findings here, therefore, suggest that while Tamil

continues to serve as a marker of identity and heritage, its practical value in everyday contexts is steadily diminishing, particularly among younger speakers.

#### **4.8.2 Emotional Attachment v/s Practical Use**

One of the main themes emerging from both the survey results and the interviews is the contrast between respondents' emotional connection to Tamil and the relatively limited ways they use it in daily life. Many respondents described Tamil as central to their sense of identity, often referring to it as "*our heritage*," "*a sacred language*," or even "*the voice of our ancestors*." This symbolic value was strongly expressed by older participants, who associated the language with cultural continuity, temple practices, and moral teachings that are passed down within the community.

As a 62-year-old respondent explained: "*Tamil is not just a language, it carries our prayers, our songs, and our memories*." Yet, when asked about practical use, Tamil appeared far less present in everyday routines, especially for the younger speakers. For most respondents, it was tied to religious ceremonies, prayers, or cultural events, while Creole, French, and English were the dominant languages in education, employment, and casual interactions.

This pattern was also reflected in the quantitative data. Table 4.4 below shows that while the average score for emotional connection was high (4.2 out of 5), the mean scores for practical aspects were noticeably lower. Tamil was not often seen as useful in everyday life (mean = 2.8), relevant for studies or a career (mean = 2.4), or even as a regular language of emotional expression (mean = 2.6).

Table 4.4 Emotional attachments and practical use of Tamil, showing mean scores, medians and standard deviations for participant responses

Statement	Mean (1-5)	Median	SD
I feel a strong emotional connection to the Tamil language.	4.2	~4	~0.7
Tamil is useful in everyday life.	2.8	~3	~0.9
Tamil is important for my career or education.	2.4	~2	~1.0
I use Tamil to express my feelings or thoughts.	2.6	~3	~0.8

One 21-year-old university student noted that *“We know Tamil is part of who we are, but it doesn’t really help us with our studies or career.”*

These findings reflect what Fishman (1991) describes as a symbolic retention, where a heritage language is preserved for its emotional or ritual value but is not maintained as a medium of daily communication. They also align with Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) theory of integrative vs. instrumental motivation in language learning. In this case, the community shows integrative motivation, valuing Tamil for cultural belonging, but only weak instrumental motivation, given the limited practical rewards of speaking Tamil in contemporary Mauritius.

Several respondents even referred to Tamil as *“something we only use at the temples”* or *“a language we hear during festivals, but not in daily conversations.”* Such views suggest that while Tamil continues to carry emotional and cultural weight, its role in everyday communication has been significantly reduced.

This emotional-practical gap highlights a challenge for long-term maintenance. Without opportunities to reinforce Tamil as a language of daily use, symbolic attachment alone may not be sufficient to ensure its transmission to future generations.

### 4.8.3 Generational Differences in Attitude

The data that was collected showed a clear generational contrast in how Tamil is viewed and valued within the Mauritian Tamil community. The older respondents (50 years and above) generally expressed a strong emotional and cultural connection to the language, whereas younger respondents (under 35) showed a more ambivalent attitude, often associating Tamil with limited practical value in academic, professional, or everyday social contexts.

The older respondents frequently framed Tamil as a core component of identity and heritage. Many also noted that they learned Tamil informally through religious practices, temple visits, or parental storytelling or from their grandparents. As one older respondent recalled: *“Even if we didn’t go to Tamil schools, we heard stories, the prayers, the songs. Tamil lived in the home.”*

On the other hand, younger respondents, even those with formal exposure to Tamil through school, reported a weaker connection to the language. A common sentiment among them was that Tamil felt “distant”, “difficult”, or “only useful for passing exams.” One respondent who is in their 20s commented: *“I studied Tamil until form 3, but I don’t use it. I can’t speak a proper sentence now.”* While another one said, *“I did Tamil because it was an easy-scoring subject, and it was easier to become a laureate from the technical side. However, I cannot even have a conversation in Tamil.”*

The survey data, which was collected from the Likert scale, showed a clear generational gap. As shown in Table 4.5, older respondents consistently gave higher ratings across items linked to identity, daily use, and pride, while younger respondents scored lower.

Table 4.5 Comparison of attitudes toward Tamil between older (50+ years) and younger (18-35 years) participants, based on mean scores across statements

Statement	Mean Score: 50+ years	Mean Score: 18-35 years
Tamil is important for preserving my identity.	4.5	3.2
I use Tamil often in my daily life.	3.9	2.1
I feel proud to be able to speak Tamil.	4.6	3.4
I would like my children to learn the Tamil language.	4.8	3.7

Even among younger respondents who acknowledged Tamil as important for cultural continuity, many expressed doubt about its practical usefulness. The issue, therefore, seems less about rejecting the language and more about a lack of meaningful opportunities to use it in everyday domains, such as schooling, peer interaction, or professional life.

This pattern resonates with Hornberger's (2003) *continuum of biliteracy* model, which notes that language shift can accelerate when schools and institutions fail to reinforce home languages. It also reflects Fishman's (1991) warning that heritage languages cannot survive if they are confined mainly to symbolic or ritual functions without intergenerational transmission in daily contexts.

Overall, the results suggest that while older generations act as carriers of Tamil heritage, younger speakers are caught in a transitional position. Tamil is still respected, but for many, it is not actively maintained in everyday practice. This generational gap may have long-term implications for the vitality of the language in Mauritius if practical reinforcement does not accompany symbolic attachment.

## 4.9 Q Methodology

Q methodology was first introduced by William Stephenson (1953) and was later formalised by Brown (1980). It is a systematic approach for studying subjectivity, such as individuals' viewpoints, beliefs, and attitudes. Unlike the traditional surveys that aggregate responses across a population, Q methodology focuses on uncovering patterns in how participants rank a set of statements according to their personal perspectives. This makes it useful for topics that are complex or contested, such as language maintenance, where emotional, symbolic, and practical dimensions often overlap.

In this study, Q methodology was used to explore attitudes toward the Tamil language among members of the Mauritian Tamil community. A set of 32 statements (Q-sample) was prepared using the material drawn from earlier interviews, the literature, and themes emerging from the survey. These statements touched on issues such as identity, cultural attachment, practical use, generational differences, and symbolic value.

Eighteen participants were asked to complete the Q-sort. Each person sorted the 32 statements on a quasi-normal grid from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree). This forced distribution required them to make choices about which statements mattered most to them, rather than treating all as equally important.

Initially, the plan was to use PQMethod (Schmolck, 2002) to run the analysis. However, the software did not generate the expected outputs for the factor extraction in this case. As a result, Python was used instead. The analysis was conducted using the scikit-learn and pandas libraries, employing Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to identify underlying factors. Python also allowed for greater flexibility in generating visual outputs, such as idealised Q-sort tables, bar graphs of factor loadings, and correlation heatmaps, which were produced using Matplotlib and Seaborn.

The following subsections present the factor-analytic results, describe the three main perspectives that emerged, and discuss their significance for understanding language ideologies within the Tamil-speaking population in Mauritius.

### 4.9.1 Factor Extraction and Explained Variance

Following the Q-sort procedure with 18 participants across a 32-statement set, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied to identify patterns of shared viewpoints. The analysis was conducted in Python, which allowed more flexibility for statistical testing and the generation of visuals.

### 4.9.2 Factor Extraction Criteria

To determine the number of factors, the Kaiser-Guttman rule (eigenvalues greater than 1.0) was applied, along with a visual inspection of the scree plot. On this basis, three factors were retained. These were then rotated using Varimax rotation to improve clarity of interpretation. Together, they accounted for just over 60% of the total variance in the dataset.

Table 4.6 Factor extraction results, showing eigenvalues and variance explained for the underlying attitudinal dimensions toward Tamil

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Eigenvalue</b>	<b>% Variance Explained</b>
Factor A	5.43	30.2%
Factor B	2.89	18.4%
Factor C	2.33	12.1%
Total	-	60.7%

This suggests that the three-factor solution captures a substantial share of the variation in the participant responses and reflects distinct patterns of attitude within the sample.

### 4.9.3 Factor Loading and Participant Distribution

Each participant's Q-sort was correlated with the extracted factors to see where their views aligned most closely. Participants were said to "load" onto a factor if their correlation passed the significance threshold ( $p < 0.01$ ) and if their loadings did not overlap strongly across factors.

From the 18 participants:

- 7 loaded significantly on Factor A
- 6 loaded on Factor B
- 3 loaded on Factor C
- 2 were either confounded or did not load significantly on any single factor

A correlation heat map was also produced (Figure 4.22), which illustrated the clustering of participants around the three factor centroids. The patterns in the heatmap give additional support to the robustness of the factor structure.

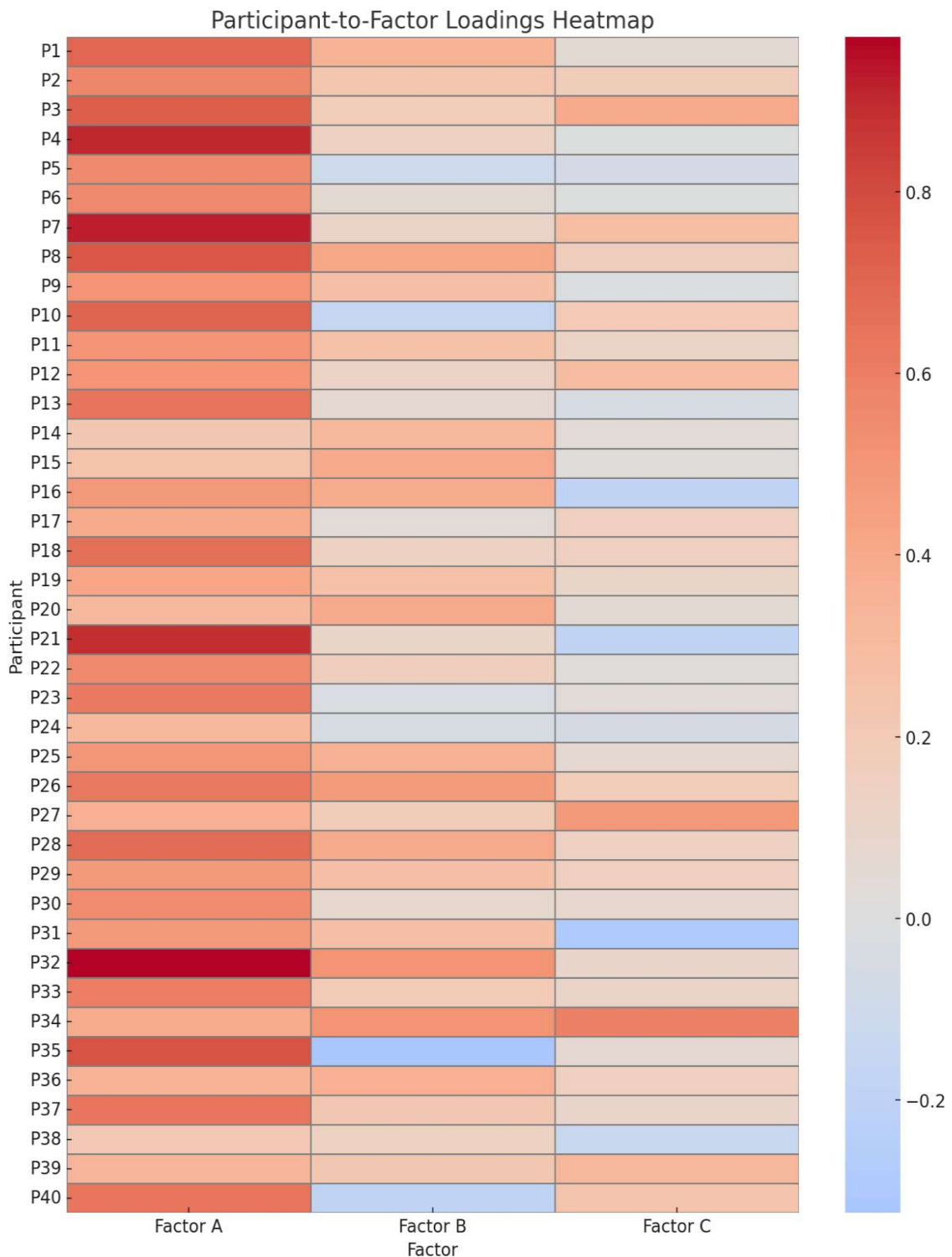


Figure 4.22 Participant-to-Factor Loadings Heatmap

This heatmap displays the strength of association between individual participants (P1–P40) and the three extracted factors. Warmer colours indicate stronger alignment with the factor. The data show a clear dominance of Factor A (Traditionalists), with smaller clusters aligning with Factors B (Symbolic Users) and C (Pragmatic Learners), respectively.

The three factors were interpreted by looking at the defining statements (from +4 to -4) in each idealised Q-sort. On this basis, they were given the following descriptive labels:

- Factor A - **Traditionalists**: Participants in this group strongly emphasise the emotional, spiritual, and identity-based importance of Tamil. They see Tamil as central to heritage, family ties, and intergenerational transmission, regardless of its use in modern domains.
- Factor B - **Symbolic Users**: This group values Tamil primarily in ceremonial, religious, and symbolic contexts. They feel proud of their Tamil heritage but do not consider the language essential in their daily or professional life.
- Factor C - **Pragmatic Learners**: These participants adopt a more instrumental view of Tamil. They recognise its cultural significance but focus on its potential relevance in education and everyday use, particularly when adapted to contemporary contexts.

The Q analysis suggests that Tamil is approached in three distinct ways: as a tradition to be upheld, as a symbol of cultural belonging, or as one resource within a wider multilingual repertoire. These perspectives will be examined more closely in the next section through idealised Q-sort tables and supporting participant quotes.

#### **4.9.4 Interpretative Naming of Patterns**

After the factor extraction and loading analysis, the three factors were interpreted qualitatively and given descriptive names. This step involved looking closely at the highest-ranked (+4, +3) and lowest-ranked (-4, -3) statements within each factor, following the practice outlined in Q methodology literature (Brown, 1980). The naming is not meant to be definitive, but rather a way of capturing the main orientation of each group of participants toward the Tamil language, identity, and relevance.

##### **4.9.4.1 Factor A: Traditionalist**

Participants loading on Factor A consistently emphasised the emotional, spiritual, and intergenerational significance of the Tamil language. They ranked as the highest, mostly statements which were associated with cultural identity, ancestral pride, and language transmission to future generations. For example, statements such as “Tamil is important for preserving my identity” and “I would like my children to learn Tamil”

received top rankings. At the same time, statements suggesting Tamil is only useful during religious events or is not helpful in everyday life were strongly disagreed with. This group reflects an integrative motivational orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), where Tamil is cherished as a core part of one's self-concept and heritage, regardless of its perceived utility in modern domains. Their attitude also mirrors Fishman's (1991) concept of "family-to-community language retention," where intergenerational commitment sustains the use of heritage languages.

As one 60-year-old participant put it:

*"Tamil is not just a language. It's part of our soul. It carries our prayers, our songs, our memories."*

#### **4.9.4.2 Factor B: Symbolic Users**

Factor B participants valued Tamil primarily in ritual or symbolic ways, rather than in their daily lives. They mostly associate it with religious rituals, cultural pride, and heritage, but not as a tool for daily or professional communication. They agreed most with the statements like *"I feel proud to be able to speak Tamil, but did not associate it strongly with professional or educational utility."* The statements which linked Tamil to temple festivals and traditions were rated highly. However, statements such as *"Tamil is useful in my daily/professional life"* were rated low.

This perspective reveals a heritage-based but passive form of language maintenance, where Tamil holds a symbolic weight but is not regularly used in functional domains. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital helps explain this pattern, as Tamil is used in cultural display and identity affirmation, even if its communicative function is limited.

One university student explained:

*"We keep Tamil alive in our prayers and festivals, but it's not something we use every day."*

#### 4.9.4.3 Factor C: Pragmatic Learners

The participants who were associated with factor C took a more practical view of Tamil. While still recognising the language’s cultural value, this group emphasised on the practical relevance, especially in the context of education, media, and professional use. They positively ranked statements such as *“Tamil is useful in everyday/professional life”* and *“Tamil should be adapted for modern use.”* However, they gave lower rankings to statements that portrayed Tamil mainly as ceremonial or nostalgic.

This group reflects what Gardner and Lambert (1972) would describe as an instrumental motivation. For them, the survival of the Tamil language depends on its relevance to education, work, and digital platforms. Participants in this group often suggested that revitalisation efforts should focus on schools, youth-oriented platforms, and technology-enhanced learning.

As a 28-year-old respondent commented:

*“If Tamil is to survive, we have to make it useful, not just sacred.”*

Table 4.7 Factor structure from Q Methodology, showing extracted factors, interpretative labels, and their main orientations toward Tamil language maintenance and shift

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Main Orientation</b>
A	Traditionalist	Identity, heritage, intergenerational pride
B	Symbolic Users	Ritual/ceremonial value, passive retention
C	Pragmatic Learners	Practical utility, modern adaptation, education/digital use

These names should be seen as interpretative tools rather than fixed categories. They capture broad orientations toward Tamil but inevitably simplify the diversity of individual perspectives. The next section examines each factor in greater detail, drawing on the ideal Q-sort tables and additional participant quotes.

## 4.9.5 Ideal Q-sort Table and Interpretation of Each Factor

This section presents the idealised Q-sort for each of the factors extracted in Section 4.9.4. Each table displays the highest (+4) to lowest (-4) ranked statements for each factor. The interpretation then explains how these rankings reflect the distinctive viewpoints of the participants who loaded on each factor.

### 4.9.5.1 Factor A - Traditionalist

Participants who aligned with Factor A demonstrated a deep-rooted emotional, spiritual, and cultural connection to the Tamil language. For them, language is more than a tool for communication; it is closely tied to family, ancestry, and identity.

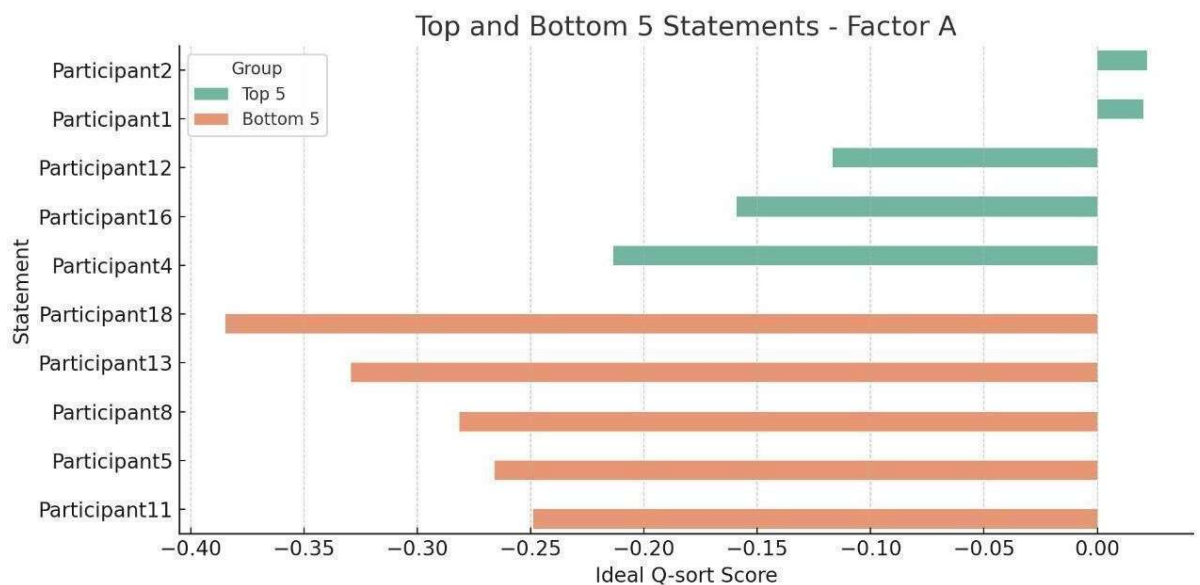


Figure 4.23 Top and Bottom 5 Ideal Q-sort Scores for Factor A (Traditionalist)

The top 5 most agreed-upon statements are:

- “I always speak Tamil with my parents and grandparents.”
- “Tamil is important for preserving my identity.”
- “I always feel proud to be able to speak Tamil.”
- “I would like my children to learn Tamil.”
- “Tamil connects me to my spiritual and cultural values.”

These points emphasise the importance of intergenerational use and the role of Tamil in preserving cultural pride. For many in this group, Tamil seems to carry everyday relevance within the home, not just during rituals or festivals.

The bottom 5 most disagreed statements are:

- “Tamil is used only during special ceremonies or festivals”
- “Young people today are not interested in Tamil.”
- “Watching Tamil movies is outdated and irrelevant.”
- “Tamil should be removed from school curricula.”
- “Tamil is not necessary in the modern world.”

The strong disagreement with these statements suggests that the participants reject the idea that Tamil is outdated or limited to ceremonial roles. Instead, they position it as both valuable and necessary.

As one participant explained:

*“My grandparents spoke Tamil to me, and now I speak it to my children. It is a chain we must not break.”* - Participant 4, Factor A.

Another participant noted:

*“Even if others use Creole, I maintain Tamil at home. It is a duty”* - Participant 12, Factor A

### **Interpretation:**

Overall, this factor highlights a group that views itself as responsible for safeguarding Tamil across generations. Their perspective suggests an active effort to maintain Tamil, particularly, within family and home domains. While their stance is strongly affirmative, it also reflects an underlying concern that without deliberate commitment, the chain of intergenerational transmission could weaken.

#### 4.9.5.2 Factor B - Symbolic Users

Participants associated with Factor B tend to view Tamil more as a symbolic and ceremonial language rather than a daily linguistic practice. For them, Tamil appears to serve as a marker of pride and heritage, conveying meaning in cultural or religious contexts rather than in everyday communication.

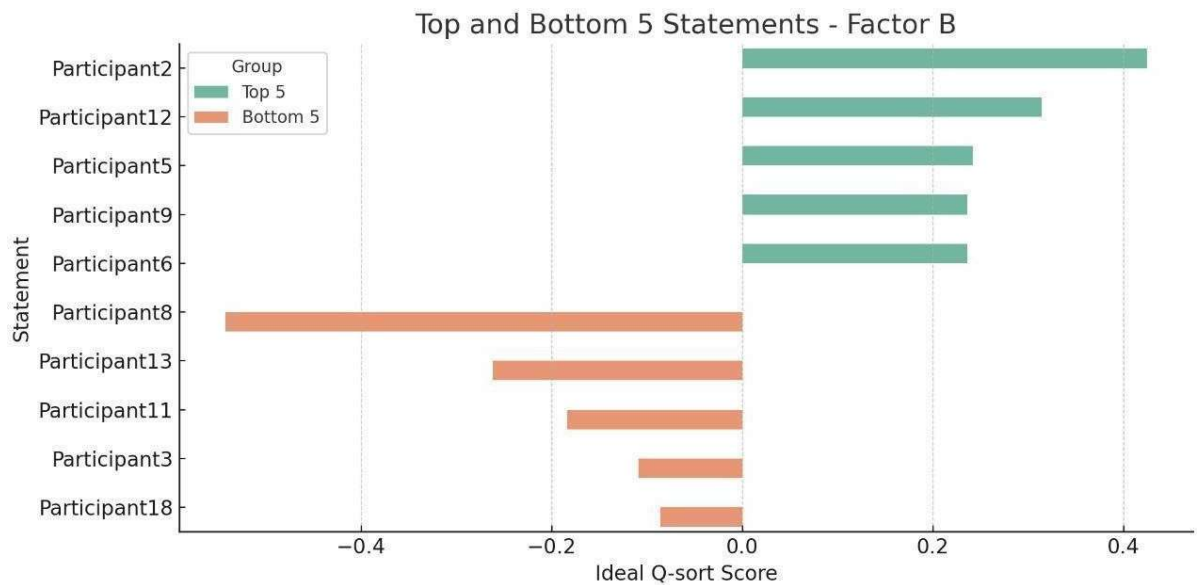


Figure 4.24 Top and Bottom 5 Ideal Q-sort Scores for Factor B (Symbolic Users)

The top 5 most agreed-upon statements are:

- “I feel proud to be able to speak Tamil.”
- “Tamil is important for preserving my identity.”
- “I would like my children to learn Tamil.”
- “I use Tamil during religious or cultural events.”
- “Hearing Tamil spoken connects me to my roots.”

These responses suggest that Tamil is highly valued during prayers, festivals, or family occasions, even if its practical use is limited in work or school settings. The emphasis here appears to be on dignity and symbolic belonging rather than fluency or daily practice.

The bottom 5 most disagreed statements are:

- “Tamil is only useful during religious events.”
- “I feel embarrassed to speak Tamil in public.”
- “Tamil is outdated and relevant in modern Mauritius.”
- “Tamil should be removed from the school curriculum.”
- “I never use Tamil in my home or workplace.”

The disagreement with these statements indicates that, although participants do not use Tamil frequently, they strongly resist narratives that dismiss it as outdated and unworthy of institutional support.

As one participant explained:

*“Even if we don’t speak it fluently, Tamil gives us dignity. We belong to something larger”* - Participant 9 Factor B

Another reflected:

*“At the temple or during Thaipusam, Tamil is sacred. It is not just a language, it is a feeling.”* - Participant 2, Factor B

### **Interpretation:**

Overall, Factor B reflects a group that attaches pride and emotional significance to Tamil, using it primarily in ritual or symbolic settings. They appear to act less as everyday speakers and more as cultural participants, ensuring that Tamil continues to hold a visible place in community identity. Their motivation is rooted in pride and heritage, though their practical engagement may be episodic.

### **4.9.5.3 Factor C - Pragmatic Learners**

Factor C includes participants who take a practical and future-oriented approach to Tamil. They value the language instrumentally, considering its relevance in education, communication, and cultural adaptability in modern contexts.

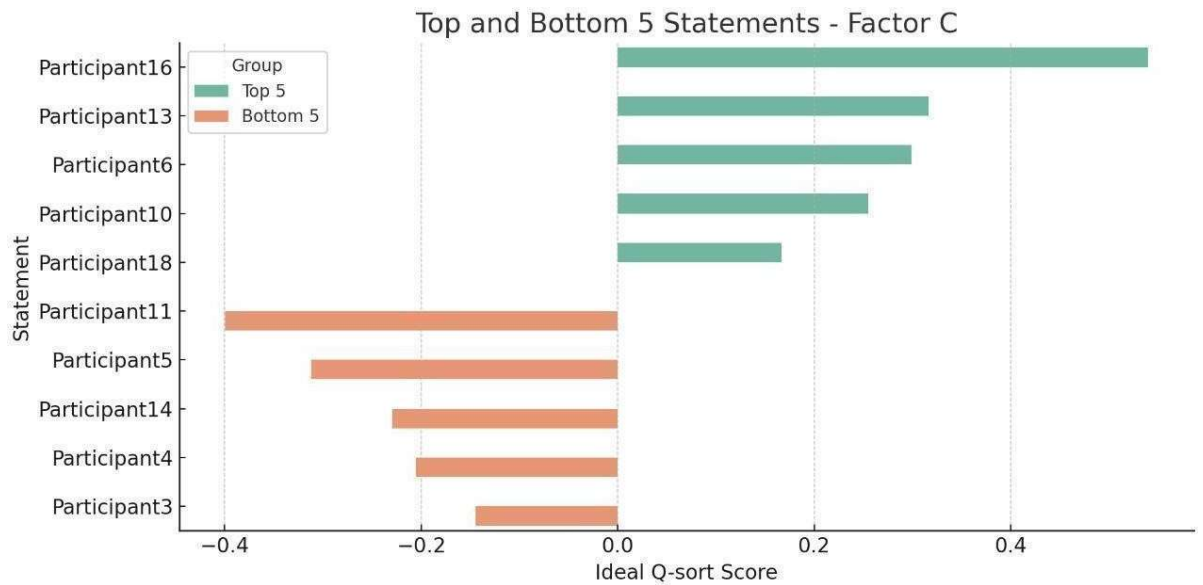


Figure 4.25 Top and Bottom Ideal Q-sort Scores for Factor C (Pragmatic Learners)

The top 5 most agreed-upon statements are:

- “Tamil should be taught in ways that make it relevant to modern life.”
- “Learning Tamil can benefit me academically or professionally.”
- “Using Tamil in School makes it more practical.”
- “I use Tamil sometimes in daily life.”
- “Tamil can evolve while preserving its roots.”

These responses suggest that participants view Tamil’s survival as dependent on its integration into everyday, future-oriented domains, rather than solely on traditional spaces. For them, language maintenance appears to be linked to opportunities for functional use.

The bottom 5 most disagreed statements are:

- “Tamil is only used during special ceremonies or festivals.”
- “Tamil is too difficult and should not be mandatory.”
- “Tamil is outdated and belongs in the past.”
- “No one uses Tamil in schools anymore.”
- “I see no reason to learn Tamil.”

The low rankings for these statements show that participants reject narrow or dismissive views of Tamil. Instead, they argue for expanding its role in ways that connect with contemporary life.

### **Interpretation:**

Factor C highlights a group that supports Tamil, but with a forward-looking and pragmatic mindset. Their orientation suggests that symbolic attachment alone may not be enough to secure intergenerational transmission; Tamil needs to be integrated into schools, digital platforms, and possibly workplaces to maintain vitality. Compared to Factors A and B, this group seems less focused on heritage alone and more on adaptation to modern demands.

### **4.9.6 Visualisation of Factor Profile**

To visually compare how each factor interprets key statements about the Tamil language, a bar chart was generated (see Figure 4.25). This graph displays the ideal Q-sort rankings for selected statements across the three attitudinal factors. Namely: Traditionalists (Factor A), Symbolic Users (Factor B), and Pragmatic Learners (Factor C).

The chosen statements reflect core themes of identity, daily use, symbolic value, intergenerational transmission, and contemporary relevance. As seen in the chart:

- Factor A (Traditionalists) shows strong agreement with statements tied to identity, family transmission, and cultural pride, while rejecting the view that Tamil is only useful in ceremonies.
- Factor B (Symbolic Users) expresses moderate pride but low emphasis on daily utility, aligning with Tamil's ritualistic or heritage-based functions.
- Factor C (Pragmatic Learners) emphasises the functional use of Tamil in modern contexts, including education and professional life, and supports teaching Tamil to children.

These visual distinctions reinforce the thematic classification of respondents into culturally grounded, symbolically aligned, and pragmatically motivated language users.

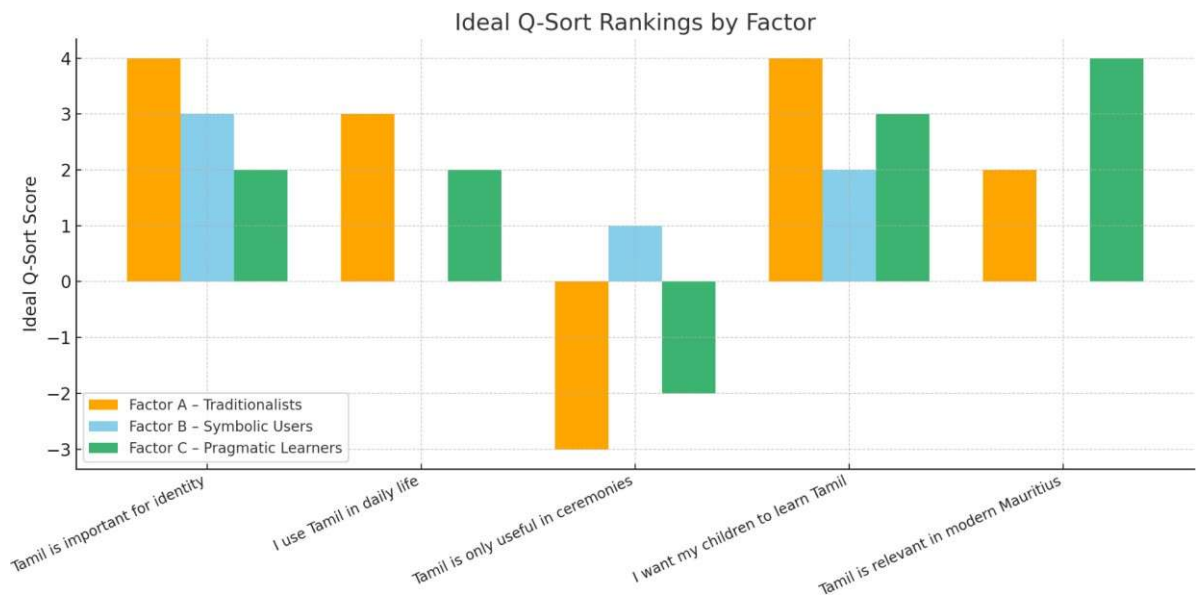


Figure 4.26: Ideal Q-sort ranking by factor

#### 4.9.7 Summary of Q Methodology Findings

The application of Q methodology provided another layer of understanding of subjective attitudes that the participants hold toward the Tamil language in Mauritius. Unlike survey results, which revealed overall trends, the Q-sorts helped uncover clusters of viewpoints that may not be apparent in the overall survey responses. Three broad profiles emerged that is, Traditionalists (Factor A), Symbolic Users (Factor B), and Pragmatic Learners (Factor C). Each represents a unique perspective on language maintenance, use, and value.

**Factor A:** The traditionalists view Tamil as deeply rooted in identity, familial legacy, and spiritual life. For them, the language is strongly tied to ancestry and rituals. They resisted the idea that Tamil is outdated or relevant only for ceremonies, seeing it instead as something that should continue across generations.

**Factor B:** Symbolic Users uphold Tamil as a symbolic and heritage language, most relevant during religious festivals, temple rituals, or cultural ceremonies. While they express pride in their linguistic heritage, they do not feel the need to incorporate Tamil into their daily or professional lives. Their attachment is largely passive and commemorative rather than practical.

Factor C: Pragmatic Learners adopt a more functional and forward-looking stance. They advocate for the use of Tamil in education, communication, and youth engagement. They support in making Tamil more accessible and contextually relevant, especially for younger generations, while still respecting its cultural depth.

In terms of language shift, the factors may be placed along a continuum. Traditionalists push back against the shift by emphasising identity-based commitments. Symbolic Users, by limiting Tamil mainly to ritual contexts, may unintentionally contribute to the gradual decline. Pragmatic Learners point toward revitalisation, but only if Tamil is adapted to contemporary needs.

Taken together, the Likert data, interview quotes, and Q analysis offer a more layered view of how Tamil is positioned in Mauritius. Rather than a single community stance, the results suggest competing ways of valuing Tamil as a heritage, an identity, and a resource for the future.

#### **4.10 Thematic Insights from Community Perspectives**

This section synthesises qualitative insights gathered from open-ended responses in interviews and from the questionnaires. These reflections provide a community-based perspective on Tamil language maintenance, building upon the patterns identified in quantitative and Q-methodology results.

##### **4.10.1 Intergenerational Responsibility and the Role of Parents**

Many participants emphasised that language preservation must begin at home. Parents were described as the central agents in nurturing Tamil from an early childhood.

Several respondents noted that:

*“Education starts at home. It’s the duty and responsibility of each and every parent to encourage their child to learn the language...”*

Another person added:

*“Parents should not fall into the weakness of their children, who, with one bad experience, wish to quit Tamil.”*

At the same time, some participants expressed concern that parents often place greater value on English or French, which can weaken the children's exposure to Tamil within the household.

#### **4.10.2 Educator Motivation and Curriculum Reform**

The role of teachers was also seen as important. Participants made a clear distinction between teachers who approach the subject with passion and those who treat it as a job.

One respondent noted:

*“Even educators are in the profession because of the salary. Very few are there because they love the language.”*

Others pointed to a need for younger, digitally skilled lecturers who could create new and engaging resources:

*“Fresh lecturers who are computer literate are needed... to create inspiring resources for age learners.”*

Although Tamil has a place in the formal curriculum, many felt that the teaching methods that are used are too traditional. There were repeated calls for more interactive and innovative approaches, including drama storytelling and the use of digital tools.

#### **4.10.3 Community Engagement and Cultural Organisations**

Several respondents emphasised that promoting the Tamil language should not be limited to temples or religious rituals. Some expressed frustration at the focus on cultural shows and entertainment events rather than sustained language learning and practice.

One participant stated:

*“Socio-cultural organisations... should make it a point to work for the language, not just the religion and culture.”*

Another one critically said:

*“The Tamil community has taken a direction where they are only concerned with Tamil night, celebrating and having fun.”*

There were, however, examples of positive initiatives, such as groups running spoken Tamil workshops or storytelling sessions. Still, participants suggested these activities reached only a small audience.

#### **4.10.4 Digital Resources and Informal Learning Opportunities**

Several participants viewed technology as an underutilised tool for language learning. They suggested developing e-books, apps, and online resources to make Tamil more accessible.

One respondent said:

*“There should be more books and e-learning tools to practice Tamil.”*

Another even expressed willingness to contribute:

*“I would love to volunteer in language workshops... help create Tamil learning resources for children and beginners.”*

Social media was often mentioned as a potential space for youth engagement with Tamil, provided the content was made more appealing.

#### **4.10.5 Institutional Support and Limitations**

The views received on institutional backing were mixed. While Tamil remains part of the school curriculum, and some efforts have been noted, such as television programs and seminars, many respondents felt that little has changed over the past two decades.

As one expressed:

*“The issue has been the same for ages. Nothing has changed for the past 20-25 years.”*

Others acknowledged ongoing initiatives but questioned their impact:

*“Yes, Tamil is taught in schools... but more must be done to make it a living language.”*

The overall impression was that while some structures exist, they are not always consistent, innovative or strongly connected to grassroots needs. The positive institutional efforts include televised Tamil shows, tertiary-level education, and cultural seminars, but there was a strong sense that these measures need to be more consistent, relevant, and forward-looking.

#### **4.10.6 Personal Commitments and Future Contributions**

Several participants outlined how they personally contribute or would like to contribute to Tamil language maintenance in practical ways.

One said:

*“I am passionate about education and community work... I would love to volunteer in workshops and share Tamil content online.”*

Another emphasised the importance of support structures:

*“Motivation, promotion, and facilities should be provided to make Tamil progress among the younger generation.”*

These thematic insights highlight that while there is a strong symbolic and emotional attachment to Tamil, its active maintenance requires collaboration among families, education, institutions, and cultural organisations. The challenges span attitudinal shifts, resource limitations, and lack of motivation. However, the responses also show a readiness to act, provided there is systemic support and community-wide commitment.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis of the data collected on the maintenance and shift of the Tamil language in Mauritius. The study began with an overview of the demographic profile of respondents, providing insights into their gender, age, marital status, educational background, ethnicity, and geographical distribution. This profile helped contextualise subsequent findings by situating participants’ linguistic attitudes and practices within broader social structures.

The analysis then focused on language use and acquisition patterns, highlighting Creole as the dominant medium of communication in both the home and public spheres, while Tamil emerged as a minority first language, primarily linked to symbolic, religious, and cultural functions. Language learning methods were shown to be fragmented, with Tamil often acquired informally through family or temple networks, and formal instruction remaining largely exam-oriented.

The proficiency analysis (LSRW) revealed a stark contrast between receptive and productive skills. While basic understanding of Tamil persists, particularly through exposure in cultural or ritual contexts, speaking, reading, and writing abilities are in sharp decline. Proficiency was also found to vary across demographic factors such as age and education, with younger generations exhibiting weaker competence than older participants.

In the analysis of language use across various domains, including home, education, culture, and work, patterns of diglossia and symbolic retention became evident. Creole, English, and French dominate functional domains, whereas Tamil is largely relegated to ritual and cultural spaces, especially within temples and religious festivals. This aligns with the broader literature on heritage languages, where symbolic capital is retained even as everyday usage diminishes.

The attitudinal analysis highlighted the duality between emotional attachment and practical utility. Likert-scale responses revealed strong symbolic attachment to Tamil, but limited perceptions of its usefulness in education, career, or daily life. The Q Methodology further refined these insights, identifying three distinct attitudinal groups: Traditionalists, who view Tamil as integral to heritage and intergenerational identity; Symbolic Users, who value Tamil in ceremonial contexts but not in daily communication; and Pragmatic Learners, who advocate for Tamil's functional revitalisation in modern contexts.

Finally, thematic insights from open-ended responses highlighted community-driven concerns and solutions, ranging from the central role of parents in transmission to the need for teacher motivation, curricular reform, digital resources, and greater involvement of socio-cultural organisations and state institutions. These qualitative

voices reinforced the symbolic-functional divide but also pointed to concrete avenues for revitalisation.

Taken together, the findings from Chapter 4 provide a multidimensional picture of Tamil in Mauritius: a language that remains highly valued symbolically but is struggling in functional domains. This chapter's analysis establishes the empirical foundation for the next stage of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER V - DISCUSSION**

## 5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses on the use, proficiency, and attitudes towards the Tamil language within the Mauritian context. The findings highlighted a complex interplay between the symbolic attachment to Tamil and its limited functional utility across key domains, including home, education, culture, and work. While Creole, English, and French dominate daily communicative practices, Tamil continues to hold a symbolic place in religious and cultural spheres. It is consistent with the broader patterns of heritage language retention.

This chapter will provide a critical interpretation of the results. The aim is to situate the empirical findings within the broader theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are outlined in Chapter 2. These are particularly aligned with Fishman's (2006) theory of language maintenance and shift, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivational framework, and Eisenlohr's (2006) sociolinguistic perspectives on heritage languages in Mauritius.

This chapter will specifically:

- Examine how demographic factors, such as age, gender, education, and ethnicity, influence the proficiency in and use of the Tamil language.
- Discuss the problems between the symbolic value and practical utility, and their implications for long-term language survival.
- Interpret the distinct attitudinal perspectives revealed through Q methodology, which are the Traditionalist, Symbolic Users, and Pragmatic Learners and link them to processes of language maintenance and shift.
- Explore the role of institutions, educators, and socio-cultural organisations in supporting or constraining Tamil's vitality.
- Highlight the community's own perspectives on challenges and strategies, as revealed in open-ended responses.

In doing so, the discussion aims to bridge the gap between empirical findings and theoretical insights. It will also identify the broader socio-political, educational, and cultural implications of the study. This sets the groundwork for the recommendations and conclusion presented in Chapter 6.

## **5.2 Thematic Discussion**

This section will critically interpret the findings presented in Chapter 4, with reference to existing theoretical models of language maintenance, shift, and identity. It is organised around the major themes that emerged from the analysis.

### **5.2.1 Demographic Influence on Language Proficiency**

The analysis of Tamil language proficiency across demographic variables revealed clear generational differences. The older participants consistently demonstrated stronger receptive skills in Tamil, particularly in understanding and speaking, when compared to the younger generations. The latter often reported only basic or symbolic familiarity with the language. These findings align with Fishman's (1991) generational transmission model, which posits that language decline is most pronounced among younger cohorts when intergenerational transfer is weakened. In the Mauritian context, this suggests that Tamil has been retained more effectively among the older speakers through family and cultural practices, but is progressively less embedded in the linguistic repertoire of younger individuals.

Educational background did not necessarily enhance Tamil proficiency. In fact, higher levels of formal education were more often associated with a stronger competence in English and French. This reflects their centrality as languages of instruction, career advancement, and social mobility. This observation echoes Rajah-Carrim's (2007) findings on language shift in Mauritius, which highlighted the prioritisation of dominant languages at the expense of ancestral ones. Thus, rather than reinforcing the Tamil skills, formal education appears to indirectly contribute to language shift by privileging the language of wider communication.

Gender differences were minimal in overall proficiency levels, but subtle trends suggest that women were more likely to emphasise Tamil in terms of heritage continuity and cultural identity. While this difference was not pronounced in functional use, it reflects broader sociolinguistic research that often positions women as the central agents of cultural and linguistic transmission within families and communities (cf. Holmes 2013). In the Mauritian Tamil community, this could indicate that the women are more likely to value Tamil symbolically, even if its practical application remains limited.

Taken together, these demographic patterns suggest the fragility of Tamil maintenance across generations. The decline in youth proficiency, coupled with the dominance of English, French and Creole in educational and professional domains, places Tamil at risk of further marginalisation. At the same time, the role of women as symbolic custodians of heritage suggests an avenue for community-led revitalisation, provided such efforts are supported by institutional and pedagogical reforms.

### **5.2.2 Symbolic Attachment vs. Practical Utility**

From both the Likert scale and Q methodology results, a clear division was observed between the emotional attachment to Tamil and its perceived practical utility. Participants consistently expressed high levels of pride and identity investment in Tamil, as reflected in a mean score of 4.2/5 for the statement *“I feel emotionally connected to the Tamil language.”* This suggests that Tamil continues to serve as a symbolic marker of cultural identity, anchoring individuals to their heritage and traditions, even in the absence of active daily use. Such findings align with Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of symbolic capital, where languages may retain value as identity resources even when they no longer serve as functional tools of communication.

On the other hand, when participants were asked to evaluate the usefulness of Tamil in their everyday or professional life, the mean score dropped substantially to 2.8/5 and 2.4/5, respectively. This disparity illustrates a weakening of instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) to learn or use Tamil. For many younger respondents, English and French were viewed as the languages of upward mobility, education, and economic success, while Tamil remained associated with temples, rituals, and family heritage. This reflects what Fishman (1991) describes as “domain shrinkage,” where heritage languages become increasingly restricted to ceremonial or symbolic contexts.

The Q methodology results strengthened this symbolic-functional divide through the emergence of distinct factors. Traditionalists (Factor A) placed strong emphasis on Tamil as identity and intergenerational resource, while Symbolic Users (Factor B) confined its relevance to religious and cultural ceremonies. However, Pragmatic Learners (Factor C) represented a minority who emphasised the need to revitalise Tamil’s everyday relevance through education and modern adaptations. These diverging perspectives suggest that while symbolic attachment is widely shared across

the community, the degree of commitment to expanding Tamil's functional value varies significantly.

The persistence of symbolic attachment, even in the absence of practical utility, is a double-edged phenomenon. On one hand, it ensures that Tamil remains culturally prestigious and remains visible in rituals, festivals, and identity practices. On the other hand, it risks relegating the language to a heritage artefact, disconnected from the communicative realities of everyday life. Unless symbolic pride is translated into functional practice through education, media, and digital spaces, Tamil survival in Mauritius will remain precarious.

### **5.2.3 Language Use Across Domains**

The analysis of Tamil language use across different social domains revealed patterns of diglossia and functional restriction that are characteristic of minority and heritage languages in Mauritius' multilingual societies. While Tamil continues to hold symbolic prestige, its communicative use is largely confined to ritual, cultural, and academic contexts, with limited access into daily interactional spaces.

In the home domain, Creole emerged as the dominant language across generations, reflecting its status as the lingua franca of Mauritius. Respondents reported using Tamil rarely in family interactions, except for interspersed words during religious or cultural discussions with grandparents. This suggests that intergenerational transmission of Tamil in the home is weakening, in line with Fishman's (1991) argument that the family is the most critical domain for sustaining heritage languages. The displacement of Tamil by Creole at home accelerates its retreat from functional to symbolic roles.

Within the education domain, English and French are the dominant media of instruction, with Creole serving as an informal explanatory language. Tamil is available as an ancestral language subject from primary to tertiary levels, but classroom practices remain largely exam-oriented, with teachers often relying on Creole to explain concepts. Students themselves reported that they could pass examinations in Tamil even though they were unable to converse fluently. This disconnect highlights the limited communicative competence fostered through formal education, a finding consistent with Rajah-Carrim's (2007) critique of ancestral language education in Mauritius.

The cultural and religious domain represents the strongest site of Tamil use and retention. Rituals, devotional songs, and temple festivals are still conducted in Tamil, preserving liturgical and symbolic registers. However, participants admitted that they often chant or recite without fully understanding the meaning, reflecting Eisenlohr's (2006) observation that Tamil in Mauritius often functions as a "performative" language tied to ritual authority rather than everyday communication. Cultural organisations and temples thus play a vital role in sustaining Tamil, but their focus remains on ritual and symbolic domains rather than expanding Tamil into modern communicative contexts.

In the work domain, Creole and French were the primary languages of communication, with English used for formal and administrative purposes. Tamil had almost no role except in specialised contexts such as teaching Tamil at schools or higher education institutions. Even Tamil teachers reported code-switching into Creole or French to explain material to students. This absence of Tamil in professional and economic spheres reinforces its marginalisation, as language vitality is closely tied to its perceived utility in domains of power and opportunity (Fishman, 1991).

These domain-based findings illustrate that Tamil in Mauritius is caught in a symbolic-functional divide: highly visible in cultural and ritual spaces, weak in family and peer interaction, and virtually absent in education and work as a language of communication. Without deliberate intervention to expand Tamil's presence into everyday domains, particularly the home and digital spaces, the language risks becoming increasingly ceremonial and losing relevance as a living communicative system.

#### **5.2.4 Attitudes and Perspectives**

Attitudes toward Tamil play a crucial role in shaping both its maintenance and potential decline. Evidence from the Likert-scale survey and the Q-methodology analysis suggests a common pattern: participants expressed a strong emotional attachment to Tamil, but they were far less certain about its practical usefulness in everyday life. This tension between symbolic pride and functional application is not unique to Mauritius; it mirrors patterns observed in many heritage language contexts, where the value of identity is often maintained even as daily use diminishes.

The survey data made this contrast clear. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) agreed that “it is important to preserve the Tamil language in Mauritius,” describing it as a connection to ancestry, temple practices, and cultural pride. Yet when asked about education, work, or daily communication, ratings dropped significantly, with mean scores ranging from 2.4 to 2.8 on a five-point scale. This difference reflects Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) framework: integrative motivation (valuing Tamil as part of one’s identity) appears strong, while instrumental motivation (using Tamil for practical gain) is comparatively weak.

The Q-sort exercise added more nuance by clustering participants into three broad perspectives:

❖ **Factor A – Traditionalists**

This group strongly affirmed Tamil as essential to identity, family life, and cultural continuity. They consistently rejected the notion that Tamil is confined to ritual spaces. One older participant explained, “*Even if others use Creole, I still keep Tamil at home, it’s a duty.*” Their stance reflects Fishman’s (1991) concept of resistant maintenance, where language is maintained through intergenerational loyalty.

❖ **Factor B – Symbolic Users**

These participants associated Tamil mainly with ceremonies, temple prayers, and festivals. They expressed pride in the language but did not feel it was necessary for daily communication or professional life. Their view echoes Eisenlohr’s (2006) description of Tamil in Mauritius as functioning in a largely “symbolic register” meaningful for identity and ritual, but less so for modern domains.

❖ **Factor C – Pragmatic Learners**

This group adopted a more practical approach. While acknowledging Tamil’s cultural role, they also wanted it adapted for schools, media, and digital spaces. One younger respondent suggested, “*If Tamil is to survive, it has to be made useful, not just sacred.*” Their outlook points to the possibility of revitalisation if symbolic attachment can be combined with functional relevance.

These perspectives suggest that attitudes toward Tamil are varied rather than uniform. At one end of the spectrum, Traditionalists emphasise heritage and continuity; at the other, Symbolic Users view Tamil as important, but mostly in ceremonial contexts. Pragmatic Learners occupy a middle ground, showing that revitalisation is possible if Tamil is modernised and made more accessible.

These profiles also reinforce what was seen in earlier sections of this chapter: emotional attachment to Tamil remains high, but this alone cannot guarantee its survival. Unless positive attitudes are paired with opportunities for everyday use in education, technology, and work, Tamil's position in Mauritius will remain fragile. As Fishman (1991) reminds us, strong feelings of pride must eventually be matched by active transmission and use across domains if a heritage language is to endure.

### **5.2.5 Role of Institutions and Community Organisations**

The role of institutions, encompassing educational, cultural, and governmental ones, has emerged as a critical factor in shaping the trajectory of Tamil language maintenance in Mauritius. While Tamil enjoys recognition within the national curriculum and is supported by socio-cultural organisations, participants frequently highlighted shortcomings in how these structures translate symbolic recognition into functional vitality.

In the education system, Tamil is offered from primary through tertiary levels, with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) serving as a key hub for advanced Tamil studies. However, as Chapter 4 revealed, instruction remains largely exam-oriented. Teachers often rely on Creole to explain Tamil grammar or literature, and students can pass examinations without attaining conversational fluency. This disconnect highlights a structural weakness in curriculum design, where Tamil is taught as an academic subject rather than a means of communication and expression. Similar concerns have been raised by Rajah-Carrim (2007), who observed that ancestral language instruction in Mauritius is frequently symbolic, with little emphasis on everyday applicability.

Socio-cultural organisations, including temple committees and federations such as the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation (MTTF), play a crucial role in preserving Tamil culture through festivals, devotional practices, and cultural classes such as Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, and spoken Tamil workshops. While these initiatives

reinforce Tamil's symbolic and ritual presence, respondents noted that they often prioritise religion and festival celebrations over systematic language development. As one participant put it, "*The Tamil community has taken a direction where they are only concerned with Tamil night, celebrating and having fun. No one is concerned about the language.*" This observation highlights a gap between cultural visibility and linguistic revitalisation.

Government support is evident in policies such as the Primary Oriental Languages programme, financial subsidies to Tamil organisations, and the integration of Tamil in public education. However, participants expressed frustration that such policies have remained unchanged for decades, with little innovation in pedagogy or digital adaptation. This perception of stagnation resonates with Cooper's (1989) framework on language planning, which emphasises the need for both status planning (recognising a language) and corpus planning (developing resources, pedagogy, and modern usage). In Mauritius, while Tamil's status is secure, corpus development remains limited.

At the same time, there were examples of institutional innovation. Initiatives such as the Primary School Tamil Teachers' Union's online learning programmes and the MGI's Language Resource Centre show the potential of digital platforms to expand Tamil's reach, especially among younger generations. These align with calls from respondents for more e-learning tools, storytelling resources, and Tamil media content. Such initiatives point to possible pathways for revitalisation if institutional efforts align more closely with community needs. Overall, the findings suggest that while Tamil has institutional recognition and cultural support, these structures currently reinforce its symbolic role more than its functional use. For Tamil to thrive as a living language, both schools and socio-cultural organisations must shift their emphasis from preservation as a heritage to promotion as a practice, embedding Tamil into contemporary educational, technological, and social spaces.

### 5.2.6 Community Voices and Agency

Beyond institutional structures, the maintenance of Tamil in Mauritius is also shaped by the community members. The qualitative responses gathered in this study highlight a strong awareness within the community. The challenges faced by Tamil and the need for grassroots action to sustain it. These perspectives emphasise that language survival cannot be left solely to schools or socio-cultural organisations but requires collective responsibility and proactive engagement.

One recurring statement concerned the role of parents as primary language transmitters. Several participants emphasised that education should begin at home, with parents encouraging their children to learn Tamil despite potential challenges.

As one respondent noted, *“Education starts at home. It’s the duty and responsibility of each and every parent to encourage their child to learn the language.”* Another added that parents often “give in” when children resist learning Tamil, weakening intergenerational transfer. This echoes Fishman’s (1991) assertion that the home domain is the cornerstone of language maintenance and that parental commitment is decisive in preventing language shift.

Participants also pointed to the need for motivated educators and innovative teaching methods, while acknowledging the limitations of current approaches. Some highlighted that many teachers are in the profession “because of the salary” rather than a genuine passion for the language. Others called for younger, digitally literate educators capable of integrating technology, interactive resources, and culturally relevant content into the classroom. This perspective resonates with Hornberger’s (2006) “ecological approach” to language planning, which recognises the interplay of pedagogy, resources, and learner engagement in sustaining minority languages.

Grassroots initiatives were also seen as central to Tamil’s vitality. Respondents suggested organising cultural events such as storytelling sessions, Tamil poetry nights, music and dance performances, and public speaking competitions, all conducted in Tamil. Digital spaces were particularly emphasised: *“There should be more books and e-learning tools to practice Tamil,”* one participant argued, while another envisioned using social media to make Tamil content “fun, educational, and accessible to a wider audience.” These proposals align with bottom-up revitalisation strategies observed in

other diaspora communities, where community members leverage both traditional and modern platforms to sustain heritage languages.

At the same time, several participants expressed frustration at the community's current orientation, which was perceived as overly focused on festivals and symbolic displays at the expense of everyday language use. As one respondent lamented, "*The Tamil community has taken a direction where they are only concerned with Tamil nite, celebrating and having fun. No one is concerned about the language.*" Such critiques reflect a recognition that symbolic pride, while important, must be complemented by functional engagement if Tamil is to remain a living language. In sum, the voices of community members underscore the importance of agency and shared responsibility. Parents, educators, and cultural organisers must work together to embed Tamil in both formal and informal domains, while harnessing digital tools and youth participation to ensure its relevance in a globalised environment. These findings support the view that successful heritage language maintenance depends not only on top-down policy but also on bottom-up initiative and cultural activism within the community itself.

### **5.2.7 Summary of the Thematic Discussion**

The thematic analysis presented in this chapter highlights the complex and multilayered dynamics of Tamil language maintenance in Mauritius. Several key insights emerge from the findings:

1. Demographic influences indicate that generational transmission is weakening, with older participants retaining stronger receptive Tamil skills, while younger cohorts are shifting toward English, French, and Creole for education, work, and social mobility.
2. Language proficiency (LSRW) patterns reveal a clear imbalance: understanding is relatively well-preserved, but speaking, reading, and writing skills are in decline. This supports Fishman's (1991) model of shift, where receptive competence often outlasts productive use.
3. Domain-specific practices further reinforce this divide. Tamil thrives in cultural and religious spaces but is largely absent in home, education, and work domains, where Creole, English, and French dominate.

4. Attitudes and perceptions demonstrate that Tamil retains high symbolic and emotional capital, with participants affirming its importance for identity, ancestry, and spirituality. However, its instrumental and practical value is perceived as low, particularly among younger participants seeking educational and career advancement.
5. Q methodology findings identified three distinct attitudinal groups:
  - Traditionalists, who view Tamil as integral to heritage and spirituality.
  - Symbolic Users, who value Tamil in ceremonial and cultural contexts but not in daily life.
  - Pragmatic Learners, who emphasise modern relevance and potential functional use. These perspectives mirror the broader identity–utility tension found in heritage language communities worldwide.
6. Community voices underscore the need for greater agency, particularly from parents, educators, and socio-cultural organisations. While symbolic pride remains strong, there is recognition that Tamil’s future depends on shifting from ritual retention to functional revitalisation, leveraging both traditional cultural practices and modern digital tools.

These findings collectively illustrate a paradox of vitality: Tamil remains emotionally and symbolically significant within the Mauritian Tamil community, yet its functional use continues to decline in everyday contexts. This duality raises urgent questions about the long-term sustainability of Tamil as a living language in Mauritius, setting the stage for the recommendations that follow in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This study has examined the maintenance and shift of the Tamil language in Mauritius, with particular attention to how proficiency, domains of use, attitudes, and institutional support intersect to shape its future trajectory. While Tamil continues to hold deep symbolic and cultural significance for the Mauritian Tamil community, its functional presence in everyday communication is increasingly fragile. Building on the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4 and the interpretive discussions in Chapter 5, this chapter synthesises the major outcomes of the study, outlines their theoretical and practical implications, identifies its contributions and limitations, and suggests directions for future research. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the prospects for Tamil in Mauritius and the collective responsibility for its preservation.

## **6.2 Summary of Key Findings**

The demographic analysis revealed age as a decisive factor: older participants reported stronger receptive skills (particularly in listening and understanding) than younger generations, who showed greater alignment with English and French due to educational and professional priorities. Gender differences were minimal, though women demonstrated a somewhat greater emphasis on Tamil as part of cultural continuity. Educational background correlated more strongly with competence in English and French than with proficiency in Tamil, reinforcing the dominance of global and national lingua francas over heritage languages.

Across the four core skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, Tamil proficiency showed a steep decline from receptive to productive abilities. While passive understanding was relatively preserved, especially through exposure in religious and cultural contexts, speaking ability was significantly weaker among younger participants, and literacy skills in Tamil were limited across all generations. These findings suggest that there is insufficient institutional support for literacy development and confirm Fishman's observation that ritual familiarity without communicative practice is unsustainable (1991).

The domain analysis revealed a functional stratification of languages. Creole dominates home interactions, while Tamil appears only in symbolic lexical insertions or when conversing with grandparents. In education, English and French remain the official

media of instruction, while Tamil is taught largely in an exam-oriented fashion that neglects oral competence. At workplaces, Creole and French are the dominant languages, with English used in formal contexts and Tamil largely absent, except among teachers and scholars. In cultural and religious spaces, Tamil retains its strongest foothold, but comprehension remains limited and its use is largely ritualistic.

Attitudinal data indicated strong emotional and symbolic attachment to Tamil, with survey participants overwhelmingly agreeing that it is important to preserve. However, when asked about its practical utility in education or careers, ratings were substantially lower. This gap highlights a symbolic–functional divide: Tamil as an identity, heritage, and spirituality, versus Creole, English, and French as practical tools for social mobility.

Q methodology analysis identified three distinct attitudinal orientations: Traditionalists, who emphasised Tamil as heritage, family identity, and spirituality; Symbolic Users, who valued Tamil in rituals and culture but did not see it as useful in daily life; and Pragmatic Learners, who recognised Tamil’s cultural value but stressed the need for modern, practical learning approaches. These factors reveal that while pride in Tamil is widespread, the depth and mode of engagement vary, shaping multiple possible trajectories for language maintenance.

### **6.3 Theoretical Implications**

The findings reinforce Fishman’s (1991) model of Reversing Language Shift, which identifies intergenerational transmission as the critical determinant of linguistic survival. Tamil in Mauritius appears situated between Stages 6 and 7 of Fishman’s framework: it remains maintained in ritual and cultural spaces but is eroding as a daily communicative medium. Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) theory of motivation further illuminates the situation. Integrative motivation for learning Tamil, which aims to connect with cultural and spiritual heritage, remains strong, while instrumental motivation for learning Tamil for practical utility in education, employment, or social advancement is relatively weak. This explains the persistence of symbolic pride despite declining daily use. Finally, Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of linguistic capital highlights the structural imbalance. Tamil possesses symbolic capital in religious and cultural domains, but lacks the social and economic capital associated with Creole, English, and

French. The result is a hierarchy of languages where Tamil functions as heritage capital rather than as a resource for mobility.

#### **6.4 Practical Implications**

For policymakers, educators, and community leaders, the study's findings highlight the need to convert Tamil's symbolic strength into functional vitality. In education, this requires a shift away from exam-driven curricula towards communicative, interactive, and digital learning strategies. In the community, temples and socio-cultural organisations must expand their role from ritual preservation to conversational practice, particularly by engaging youth. At the policy level, structural reforms are necessary to integrate Tamil more visibly into public media, digital platforms, and national identity initiatives, thereby enhancing both its prestige and accessibility.

#### **6.5 Contribution of the Study**

This study makes three key contributions.

First, at the empirical level, it provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence of Tamil's current status in Mauritius, filling a gap in sociolinguistic research on Indian Ocean diasporas. The combination of survey data, interviews, and Q methodology offers a nuanced picture of language use and attitudes across generations.

Second, at the methodological level, the study introduces Q methodology into the analysis of heritage language maintenance. By mapping the attitudinal diversity, it complements more traditional surveys and interviews, offering a richer understanding of community perspectives.

Third, at the practical level, the research generates community-driven and policy-oriented recommendations for revitalising Tamil. These recommendations are not only relevant to Mauritius but also applicable to other diasporic Tamil contexts, such as South Africa, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom, where similar identity-utility divides have been observed.

## **6.6 Limitations**

The study's limitations must also be acknowledged. The sample size, while sufficient for meaningful analysis, may not capture all subgroup variations across geographic regions or socio-economic classes. The Tamil-Christians were underrepresented. Furthermore, by focusing exclusively on Tamil, the study does not provide comparative insights into other ancestral languages in Mauritius, such as Bhojpuri, Hindi, or Telugu.

Methodologically, Q methodology proved effective for mapping attitudes but offers only a snapshot rather than a longitudinal perspective on language shift. Long-term tracking of intergenerational practices would provide further insight into ongoing trends.

While the study considered schools, socio-cultural organisations, and government policies, it may not have captured the full extent of informal community practices, such as workplace Tamil networks and digital peer-to-peer groups. The policy analysis was based on available documents and participant views, but not supplemented with detailed insider perspectives from policymakers or government officials.

The study acknowledges but does not comprehensively examine the role of social media, apps, or online learning platforms in Tamil maintenance, which is increasingly important for youth.

The duration of fieldwork and resource limitations have restricted the scope of data collection, and a larger-scale study with more participants across diverse regions, or longitudinal observation, would provide a fuller picture.

## **6.7 Directions for Future Research**

Future research should explore Tamil's role in digital spaces, including social media, online communities, and mobile applications, where younger generations increasingly interact. Comparative studies between Tamil and other heritage languages in Mauritius could provide a broader understanding of patterns of maintenance and shift. Longitudinal research tracking language transmission across generations would add depth to the findings presented here. Ultimately, evaluating the outcomes of policy

initiatives, such as the integration of communicative Tamil modules in schools, can provide empirical evidence of which strategies are most effective in practice.

## **CHAPTER VII - RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 7.1 Introduction

The findings of this study demonstrate a paradoxical situation for Tamils in Mauritius. While the language retains symbolic, emotional, and cultural significance, its functional use in everyday communication is steadily declining. Chapter 5 highlighted how demographic shifts, domain-specific practices, and differing community attitudes contribute to this tension between heritage preservation and language shift.

This chapter builds upon those insights to propose a multi-level framework of recommendations aimed at revitalising Tamil as both a cultural symbol and a functional medium of communication.

The proposed strategies are structured across three interrelated levels: (i) educational interventions, (ii) community and institutional engagement, and (iii) policy and technological integration. These recommendations are aligned with theoretical frameworks such as Fishman's (1991) model of Reversing Language Shift, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) theory of motivation in second language learning, and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, while also grounded in the sociolinguistic realities of Mauritius.

By connecting the symbolic attachment to Tamil with strategies for enhancing its functional vitality, this chapter outlines a roadmap for both academic and policy audiences, as well as for community stakeholders.

## 7.2 Educational Interventions

Education emerged as the most critical domain for revitalising Tamil in Mauritius. Although the language is institutionally supported through the national curriculum, findings in Chapter 4 revealed that Tamil is often taught in an exam-oriented, text-heavy manner, with minimal attention to spoken fluency. Several participants noted that students could “*pass Tamil exams without being able to speak the language.*” This disjuncture highlights the gap between symbolic knowledge and communicative competence, echoing Fishman's argument that intergenerational transmission and everyday functionality are essential for language survival.

### **7.2.1 Strengthening Primary and Secondary Education**

To address these challenges, Tamil education at the school level must shift from rote memorisation to communicative pedagogy. Interactive methods, such as task-based learning, role-playing, storytelling, and debates conducted in Tamil, would encourage oral practice and support the development of communicative competence. Studies in applied linguistics confirm that communicative pedagogy enhances both learner motivation and retention (Littlewood, 2004:23).

The findings also revealed that teachers often rely on Creole or French to explain Tamil concepts. While bilingual scaffolding may be useful initially, a gradual immersion model in which Tamil becomes increasingly prioritised is necessary. Such an approach aligns with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation, whereby integrative motivation for cultural identification can be harnessed to strengthen communicative fluency.

Furthermore, curriculum reform is essential. Examination structures should incorporate oral assessments, project-based tasks, and digital presentations in Tamil, thereby rewarding practical communication skills in addition to written grammar and literary analysis. Early exposure to Tamil as a medium for morning prayers, songs, and cultural activities at the primary level could also normalise everyday use, supporting findings in Chapter 4 that highlighted symbolic retention without functional transmission.

### **7.2.2 Higher Education and Teacher Training**

At the tertiary level, courses at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the University of Mauritius currently emphasise literary and textual analysis. While academically rigorous, they risk producing graduates proficient in literary interpretation but not in spoken Tamil. The findings underscore the need to balance literary focus with linguistic practice, ensuring that graduates emerge as both cultural scholars and competent communicators.

Teacher training is also central. Continuous professional development workshops should prioritise spoken Tamil pedagogy, digital teaching tools, and modern classroom strategies. The World Tamil Teachers' Conference (2023) has already demonstrated the

value of such international forums, and Mauritius could benefit from systematically integrating these practices into national teacher development.

Ultimately, attracting young, digitally literate teachers to Tamil education is crucial. Scholarships and grants could incentivise this new generation of educators, addressing concerns voiced by participants who felt that some current teachers lacked motivation or innovative strategies.

### **7.2.3 Informal Learning and Digital Resources**

Beyond formal education, informal learning environments play a crucial role in sustaining the Tamil language. Evening schools and temple-based Tamil classes have long provided such opportunities. As Chapter 4 revealed, however, these often remain limited in scope and disconnected from mainstream education. Expanding after-school programmes, in collaboration with socio-cultural organisations and temples, could reinforce intergenerational transmission.

Digital resources are another promising avenue. Initiatives such as the Primary School Tamil Teachers' Union's online programmes have shown potential but require scaling up. Gamified mobile apps, YouTube lessons, and interactive e-books could engage youth in their digital spaces, echoing trends observed in other diasporic contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2008:211). Community-driven content, including podcasts, storybooks, and online dictionaries rooted in Mauritian Tamil contexts, would further enhance accessibility. These resources should be made available through school libraries and Ministry of Education portals to ensure integration with formal systems.

### **7.3 Community and Institutional Engagement**

While schools provide structured learning opportunities, the vitality of Tamil ultimately depends on its embedding in community life. The findings of this study revealed that participants often associated Tamil with temples, cultural festivals, and symbolic rituals, but not with daily communication. This symbolic-functional divide underscores Fishman's (1991) observation that ritual retention without functional extension is insufficient for long-term maintenance.

### **7.3.1 Role of Temples and Religious Institutions**

Temples remain one of the strongest cultural spaces where Tamil is consistently used in hymns, prayers, and devotional songs such as *Thevaram* and *Thiruppugazh*. However, this use is largely symbolic, with limited spill-over into conversational practice. Expanding temple activities to include spoken Tamil classes, youth camps, and workshops could bridge this gap.

The Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation (MTTF) has already organised initiatives such as *Thirukkural* recitation competitions and the publication of *Thiruppugazh Maalai* (2023). Scaling up such efforts could foster intergenerational engagement and encourage the use of Tamil in informal contexts. Festivals such as *Cavadee* and *Thaipusam* could incorporate Tamil announcements, signage, and interactive programmes, reinforcing Tamil as a living language of community interaction rather than only ritual recitation.

### **7.3.2 Socio-Cultural Organisations and NGOs**

Tamil associations, youth federations, and NGOs play a crucial role in elevating the prestige of Tamil in public spaces. Literary circles, drama competitions, and Tamil poetry nights can provide visibility and normalisation of the language. Local radio, television, and digital platforms should be leveraged to increase Tamil broadcasts, a recommendation that aligns with findings showing a limited presence of Tamil outside ritual contexts.

Furthermore, NGOs could lead digital archiving of oral histories, folk songs, and community narratives, making them accessible to younger generations. Such initiatives would not only preserve linguistic heritage but also align with Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic capital, giving Tamil greater visibility and legitimacy in cultural markets.

### **7.3.3 Family and Home Domain**

The findings repeatedly highlighted the home as a weak domain for Tamil use. Parents were described as “gatekeepers” of language transmission, but many admitted prioritising Creole, English, or French at home. Awareness programmes should

therefore target families directly, countering perceptions that Tamil is “less useful” than other languages.

Practical strategies could include integrating Tamil into bedtime storytelling, family prayers, and greetings. These small rituals can naturalise transmission and foster early familiarity. Fishman (1991) stresses that the home domain is the cornerstone of language survival, making parental responsibility indispensable.

### **7.3.4 Collaboration Between State and Community**

Stronger coordination between state policy and grassroots initiatives is necessary to bridge the gap between symbolic retention and functional usage. Government subsidies already support Tamil education through the Ministry of Education and the MTTTF, but these efforts often lack consistency. National campaigns across TV, social media, and billboards could promote Tamil as a living heritage, appealing especially to youth pride and digital engagement.

Cross-sector partnerships involving schools, temples, and cultural NGOs would ensure children encounter Tamil across multiple domains, thereby transforming symbolic attachment into functional competence.

## **7.4 Policy and Structural Supports**

Although family, schools, and temples are crucial for transmission, policy-level intervention provides the structural backbone for Tamil’s survival. Without sustained institutional support, grassroots efforts remain fragmented and ineffective.

### **7.4.1 Government Language Policy**

The Primary–Oriental Language Policy has ensured the inclusion of Tamil in the national curriculum. However, classroom practice reveals a disconnect between policy and communicative use, as teachers often revert to Creole for explanation. Furthermore, the exam-driven culture entrenches rote memorisation at the expense of communicative practice. As findings in Chapter 4 indicated, this approach fosters symbolic recognition but fails to create active speakers.

Policy reform should therefore shift toward communicative assessments, oral examinations, and cultural immersion activities. Such reforms would align Tamil education with Fishman's (1991) emphasis on functional vitality.

#### **7.4.2 Institutional Frameworks**

Institutions such as the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the Tamil Examination Syndicate are central to Tamil education. While MGI offers rigorous academic programmes, integrating spoken Tamil modules and internships in cultural organisations could improve functional fluency. Similarly, the Examination Syndicate and Inspectorates should broaden their mandate to include teacher mentoring, curriculum review, and pedagogical innovation.

The Language Resource Centre (LRC), jointly developed with the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), already creates digital resources for Tamil. Scaling these resources nationally, particularly for rural students, could democratise access.

#### **7.4.3 Teacher Training and Professional Development**

Teacher capacity is a recurring issue. Many instructors appear more comfortable teaching in Creole, reflecting gaps in their own Tamil fluency. Institutionalising refresher courses, spoken Tamil certification, and digital pedagogy workshops would address this. International collaboration through forums such as the World Tamil Teachers' Conference should be systematically incorporated into professional development.

#### **7.4.4 Media and Technology Integration**

Media visibility remains a weak point. Although Tamil programmes exist on radio and television, their reach is limited. Allocating prime-time slots, producing youth-oriented shows, and creating bilingual Tamil–Creole media would enhance prestige.

State-backed investment in mobile apps, digital dictionaries, and Tamil e-books could extend learning beyond classrooms. Findings in Chapter 5 showed that young participants were more responsive to digital modes of engagement, underscoring the urgency of such initiatives.

#### **7.4.5 Cultural and Financial Support**

Finally, cultural and financial support structures must be expanded and made accountable. Grants provided through the MTTF already sustain cultural events, but funding should also support youth Tamil camps, language clubs, and literary competitions. Accountability mechanisms should tie subsidies to measurable outcomes, such as increased enrolment in Tamil classes or participation in Tamil-language cultural events.

#### **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter outlines a multi-level strategy for sustaining and revitalising Tamil in Mauritius, drawing on the empirical findings in Chapter 4 and the interpretive discussions in Chapter 5. At the educational level, reforms must prioritise communicative competence, interactive pedagogy, and digital innovation, ensuring that Tamil is not reduced to an exam subject but becomes actively spoken by students. Within the community sphere, temples, socio-cultural organisations, and families must reinforce intergenerational transmission, transforming Tamil from a ceremonial language into one of daily interaction. Finally, at the policy level, stronger alignment is needed between government frameworks and institutional bodies, such as MGI and PSTTU. Cultural organisations like MTTF are crucial for integrating Tamil across broader domains, including media, technology, and public discourse.

These recommendations align with Fishman's (1991) model of reversing language shift, which emphasises that no single domain (home, school, or community) can sustain a language alone. Tamil's vitality depends on coordinated action across all levels of society, supported by both grassroots participation and top-down policy reform.

Ultimately, Tamil in Mauritius is at a crossroads: while its symbolic resonance remains strong, its everyday use is fragile. The challenge ahead is to transform symbolic capital into functional capital, ensuring that future generations inherit not just the ritual memory of Tamil but its living voice in homes, schools, workplaces, and digital spaces.

## **7.6 Final Reflection**

Tamil in Mauritius stands at a critical juncture. The language remains deeply valued as a marker of identity, heritage, and spirituality, yet its functional erosion in homes, schools, and workplaces raises concerns about its long-term vitality. If the identity-utility divide persists, Tamil risks being confined to ritual and ceremonial spaces, remembered with pride but not lived as a language of daily communication.

The findings of this study suggest that Tamil's future depends on the community's capacity to translate symbolic pride into practical engagement. This requires collective responsibility across generations, domains, and institutions. As Fishman (1991) reminds us, no single sphere can sustain a language alone; it is only through coordinated action in the home, school, community, and state that genuine revitalisation can occur.

Preserving Tamil in Mauritius is therefore not merely about sustaining a language. It is about safeguarding a cultural memory and identity that links the Mauritian Tamil community to its past while enabling it to thrive in the future. The challenge and the opportunity lie in ensuring that Tamil continues to resonate as both a sacred inheritance and a living voice in the everyday lives of Mauritians.

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# Annexure 1

## Ethics Clearance



### UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE DECISION LETTER



DHR: EC / NEW / INST / 2023 / 3825

<b>IEC No.</b>	UH/IEC/2023/543	<b>Date of review</b>	31-08-2023
<b>Application No:</b>			
<b>Project Title:</b>	Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Ancestral Tamil Speakers in Mauritius		
<b>Principal Investigator/ Co-PI:</b>	PI: Dahini Ponnen CI: Prof. S. Arulmozi		
<b>Participating Institutes if any</b>	----	Approval from Participating Institute	---
<b>Documents received and reviewed</b>	Protocol & ICF		
<b>In case of renewal submission of update</b>	----		
<b>Decision of the IEC:</b>	Approved Duration: One year from date of approval		
<b>Any other Comments Requirements for conditional Approval</b>	<b>Exempted from full review and Approved. Local Permissions may be secured before initiating data collection.</b>		
<b>Members Present</b>	Dr. A.S. Sreedhar, Sri. A. Madhava Rao, Prof. B.R. Shamanna, Dr. M. Varalakshmi, Dr. Deepa Srinivas, and Dr. M.K. Arunasree		

**Please note:**

- Any amendments in the protocol must be informed to the Ethics committee and fresh approval taken.
- Any serious adverse event must be reported to the Ethics Committee within 48 hours in writing (mentioning the protocol No. or the study ID)
- Any advertisement placed in the newspapers, magazines must be submitted for approval.
- If the conduct of the study is to be continued beyond the approved period, an application for the same must be forwarded to the Ethics Committee.
- It is hereby confirmed that neither you nor any of the members of the study team participated in the decision making/voting procedures and declared conflict of interest.

*A S Sreedhar*  
31/8/2023

**Chairman**

(Dr. A S Sreedhar)

*B.R. Shamanna*  
31/8/23

**Member Secretary**

(Prof. B.R. Shamanna)

*M. Varalakshmi*  
31/08/2023

**Convenor**

(Dr. M. Varalakshmi)

Address: School of Medical Sciences, University of Hyderabad, C. R. Rao Road, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-5000046  
Tel (O): +91-040-23135470/23135471 Email: iec\_uoh@uohyd.ernet.in, deanmd@uohyd.ernet.in

## **Annexure 2**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Tamils in Mauritius

#### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Name: Dahini Ponnen

Department: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies

University: University of Hyderabad

Permanent Address: Blue Shark Lane, Le Hochet, Terre-Rouge (Mauritius)

Phone: +23058337928/2492318

Email: [22haph01@uohyd.ac.in](mailto:22haph01@uohyd.ac.in)

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if anything is unclear or if you need any additional information.

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the Mauritian Population has retained their mother tongue (ancestral language) and whether it continues to be actively spoken. Additionally, the research aims to identify effective strategies for safeguarding and nurturing the ancestral language for the benefit of future generations.

#### **BENEFITS**

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study will help preserve the language in a better way, and new ways of promoting it can be found. Moreover, it is a contribution to the community and society in terms of preserving the language.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your response to this research will be anonymous. Please do not write any identifying information on your questionnaire. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- Code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents will be assigned.
- The notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher or an encrypted form on the computer system.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

If you have any questions about this study at any time, or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in it, please contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign the consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. Withdrawing from this study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

## **CONSENT**

I have read and understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to be part of this study.

Participant's Signature ..... Date: .....

Investigator's Signature ..... Date: .....

## **Akord Enformé**

### **TIT DAN LETID**

Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Tamils in Mauritius

### **RECHERCHER PRINCIPAL**

Nom: Dahini Ponnén

Departman: Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies

Liniversite: University of Hyderabad

Ladres permanan: Blue Shark Lane, Le Hochet, Terre-Rouge (Maurice)

Telefonn: +23058337928 / 2492318

Imel: 22haph01@uohyd.ac.in

### **BIENFE KI LETID POU AMENE**

Ou pe ganny demande pou partisip dan enn letid. Avan ou aksepte partisip, li inportan ki ou konpran kifer sa letid-la pe fer ek ki sa pou implike. Silvouple lir sa bann linformasyon-la bien. Si ena kit zafer ki pa kler, ouswa si ou bizin plis linformasyon, pa ezite poz kestyon.

Bi sa letid-la se pou determinn ziska ki degre popilasyon Moris pe gard zot langaz mama (lang anestréal) vivan ek si li ankor pe servi aktivman. Letid-la osi rod bann stratezi efikas pou protez ek valoriz sa langaz-la pou zenerasion fitir.

### **BENEFIS**

Pa ena benefis direk pou ou partisipasion dan sa letid-la. Me, nou espere ki bann linformasyon ki pou ramase dan sa letid-la pou ed pou gard sa langaz-la pli vivan, ek pou trouv bann nouvo fason pou promouvwar li. Sa pou enn kontribision pou kominote ek sosiete pou protez langaz.

### **KONFIDANSYALITE**

Tou bann repons ki ou pou donn dan sa letid-la pou reste anonin. Silvouple pa ekrir okenn linformasyon ki kapav idantifie ou lor formiler. Recherch la pou pran tou prekasyon pou gard ou linformasyon sekre:

- Tou dokiman ek not rechens pou servi kod ouswa nimero pou idantifie partisipan.
- Tou bann not, transkripsion interview ek lezot linformasyon idantifian pou garde dan enn tirwar ki kle ouswa dan enn form kripte dan sistem ordiner.

## **KONTAK**

Si ou ena okenn kestyon ou problem pandan letid-la, ou kapav kontakte rechercher avek bann detay lor premie paz.

## **PARTISIPASION VOLONTER**

Ou partisipasion dan sa letid-la depann lor ou volonte. Ou lib pou dir wi ouswa non. Si ou aksepte pou partisip, ou pou bizin sign sa form-la. Me ou osi lib pou aret partisip nenport kan, san donn okenn rezon. Si ou retir ou partisipasion avan ramas done fini, ou done pou retourne ou ou bien detrir.

## **AKORD**

Mo finn lir ek konpran linformasyon ki finn fourni. Mo finn gagn loportinite pou poz bann kestyon. Mo konpran ki mo partisipasion volontair ek mo lib pou retir mo partisipasion nenport kan, san okenn kou ni rezon. Mo konpran ki mo pou gagn enn kopi sa form-la. Mo dakor pou partisip dan sa letid-la.

Sinatir Partisipan: .....

Dat: .....

Sinatir Recherch: .....

Dat: .....

## Annexure 3

### Questionnaire

Respected Participants,

I am Dahini Ponnen, a Research Scholar at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India. My doctoral research, titled Language Maintenance and Language Shift of the Tamils in Mauritius focuses on determining how Tamils settled in Mauritius preserve their ancestral language, Tamil. In this connection, the researcher has prepared a set of questions related to language use, language attitude and language maintenance.

Your insightful responses will considerably influence the study and enable the researcher to comprehend people's attitudes toward language on a deeper level.

**The questionnaire is intended for people whose ancestral language is Tamil.**

The questionnaire will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete, and all your answers will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Your participation in this study is **entirely voluntary**, and **you are free to withdraw at any point in time** without giving a reason.

1. Name:
2. Sex:
  - Male
  - Female
3. Age:
  - 16-25
  - 26-35
  - 36-45
  - 46-55
  - 56 and above
4. Ethnicity:
5. Marital status:
6. Educational Background:
7. Occupation:
8. Current Country of Residence:
9. Address:
10. Mother tongue:

11. How many languages can you speak fluently?

Language Name	Understanding			Speaking		
	Basic	Intermediate	Proficiency	Basic	Intermediate	Proficiency

12. What languages do you know?

Language Name	Reading			Writing		
	Basic	Intermediate	Proficiency	Basic	Intermediate	Proficiency

13. How did you learn to speak those language(s) so well?

- Mother tongue
- School Education
- Language classes
- Living in a country where the language is spoken or being fully immersed
- Self-study
- Other (please specify)

14. Level of Proficiency in Ancestral Language:

- Native speaker
- Fluent
- Intermediate
- Basic
- No knowledge

15. When and how did you learn this ancestral language? (Select all that apply)

- As a child
- As an adult
- From my parents
- From my grandparents
- On my own
- In School
- Through a language program
- From books
- On television
- Other (please specify)

16. What was the first language you learned as a child?

17. What is the language you speak most often now?

18. How do you identify yourself:

- a. By Language
- b. By Religion
- c. By tradition

**Language Use:**

1. How often do you use your ancestral language in the following domains:

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Always</b>
Home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work/	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gatherings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What language(s) do you speak at home?

<b>Domain (home)</b>	<b>Language(s)</b>
Myself	
With parents	
With siblings	
With children	
With grandparents	
With grandchildren	
With spouse	
With pets and livestock	

3. What language(s) do you speak at school?

<b>Domain (school)</b>	<b>Language(s)</b>
With the teacher in the classroom	
With the teacher outside the classroom	
With friends speaking the same ancestral language in the classroom	
With friends speaking different ancestral languages in the classroom	

With friends speaking the same ancestral language outside the classroom	
With friends speaking different ancestral languages outside the classroom	

4. What language(s) do you speak at a place of worship?

<b>Domain (religious place)</b>	<b>Language(s)</b>
While praying to God	
While reciting or performing rituals	
While singing religious songs	
While talking with other worshippers at the worship place	
For religious discussions at the place of worship with the priest: If the priest is a native resident of the country:	
If the priest is a foreigner	

5. Is your language used in mass media?

- a. Radio
- b. TV
- c. Newspapers,
- d. Magazines
- e. Others (specify)

6. What are the main reasons which influence you to use your ancestral language?

(Select all that apply)

- a) Cultural preservation

- b) Interaction within the family
  - c) Sense of identity
  - d) Emotional expression
  - e) Other (please specify)
7. Are there any specific situations or contexts where you feel more inclined to use your ancestral language?
  8. Are you concerned about the younger generations' declining use of your ancestral language?
    - Very concerned
    - Somewhat concerned
    - Neutral
    - Not concerned

### **Attitudes Towards Ancestral Language**

1. Is your ancestral language easy?
  - To learn
  - To speak
2. Can you speak your ancestral language?
3. When given opportunities, will you learn to write in your ancestral language?
4. How essential must you to maintain and pass on your ancestral language to future generations?
  - Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Neutral
  - Not important
5. To what extent do you feel emotionally connected to your ancestral language?
  - Strongly connected
  - Moderately connected
  - Slightly connected
  - Not connected
6. Will you encourage your kids or future generations to learn the language?
7. Will you encourage your kids or future generations to speak the language?
8. Have you personally taken any initiatives to preserve your ancestral language?
  - Attending language classes

- Participating in cultural events
  - Using language-learning apps or resources
  - Others (please specify)
  - None
9. Do you think more television programs should be broadcast in your ancestral language?
  10. Should there be more radio programs in your ancestral language?
  11. Would you be happy to have more books or newspapers in your ancestral language?
  12. What are your main challenges or barriers in retaining or using your ancestral language?
  13. What effects do you think language has on culture and identity?
  14. Do you think it is essential to preserve your ancestral language? Why or why not?
  15. What are the main reasons or obstacles preventing someone from learning the ancestral language?
  16. Is there anything else you want to contribute regarding your attitudes towards your ancestral language?
  17. How have the media and education influenced your language attitude toward your ancestral language?
  18. Do you believe there is a connection between cultural identity and the preservation of ancestral languages? How so?
  19. How does the attitude toward ancestral languages differ between older and younger generations in your community?
  20. In what ways do you think the attitudes towards ancestral languages have changed over the generations in your community?
  21. Is passing on your ancestral language to future generations essential?
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Unsure
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

## **Attitudes Towards Ancestral Language Preservation**

1. How important do you think it is to preserve and maintain your ancestral language?
  - Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Neutral
  - Not important
2. What are your main reasons for preserving your ancestral language?
  - Cultural heritage
  - Family ties and communication
  - Sense of identity
  - Connection to ancestors
  - Personal Enrichment
  - Other (please specify)
3. How will future generations benefit from the maintenance of the ancestral language?
4. What do you think are the potential consequences of losing your ancestral language?
5. To what extent are you actively involved in preserving your ancestral language?
  - Actively involved in community language programs/initiatives
  - Supportive of language preservation but not actively involved
  - Not involved but is interested in supporting preservation efforts
  - Not interested in preservation efforts
6. What are the obstacles or barriers you perceive in preserving your ancestral language? (You can select more than one)
  - Lack of resources (books, materials, etc.)
  - Limited access to language classes or programs
  - Decreased intergenerational transmission
  - Social stigma or discrimination
  - Lack of interest or motivation among community members
  - Other (please specify)
  - No challenges or barriers
7. How do you feel about using your ancestral language in your country?

- Supportive and encouraging
  - Neutral
  - Indifferent
  - Disapproving or sceptical
8. Do you think the authorities are promoting your ancestral language effectively?
    - If yes, how?
    - If not, what do you think should be done?
  9. Do you have any further information or opinions regarding your desire to preserve your ancestral language?
  10. Is there enough awareness in your community about the importance of preserving ancestral languages?
  11. How can educational institutions contribute to preserving ancestral languages, and what changes do you think are necessary in this regard?
  12. What obstacles prevent you from participating in a traditional language activity (please tick all that apply)?

Scheduled at the wrong time	I am too busy
Childcare	Not available in my area. Transportation – it's hard to get there
I prefer to learn the language another way	Afraid, scared, or shy
Too expensive	I am not interested in learning my traditional language
I'm already fluent in my traditional language	I don't like formal classes
Not happy with the people who are delivering the activity	Other (please specify below)

## **Annexure 4**

### **Q Methodology Statements**

#### **1. Cultural Identity & Symbolism**

1. Being Tamil means speaking Tamil.
2. Tamil is just one part of our identity; it is not essential.
3. Our culture can be preserved even if we stop using the language.
4. Losing Tamil means losing our heritage.

#### **2. Family and Home Language Use**

5. I always speak Tamil with my parents and grandparents.
6. My family uses a mix of Kreol and Tamil at home.
7. It is difficult to maintain Tamil when no one at home insists on using it.
8. Parents should prioritise Tamil at home to keep it alive.

#### **3. Education and Learning**

9. Tamil should be a compulsory subject in all schools.
10. There is no future in learning Tamil.
11. Tamil classes are too focused on religion rather than on daily use.
12. Learning Tamil helps children feel proud of their identity.

#### **4. Generational Perspectives**

13. Young people today are not interested in Tamil.
14. The older generation failed to pass on Tamil effectively.
15. The youth are reclaiming Tamil in new ways.
16. Elders must make Tamil more appealing, not just scared.

## **5. Media, Technology, and Exposure**

17. We need more Tamil-language programs for youth.
18. Social media is making it easier to learn Tamil.
19. There is not enough digital content in Tamil for younger generations.
20. Watching Tamil movies helps me stay connected to the language.

## **6. Government and Institutional Support**

21. The Mauritian government neglects Tamil in public policy.
22. Tamil is adequately supported through cultural and religious events.
23. The Tamil language deserves more institutional support.
24. Government support does not influence whether people use Tamil.

## **7. Practical Use and Daily Relevance**

25. Tamil is not useful in everyday life.
26. English and French are more important for jobs and success.
27. I still use Tamil when talking to elders or at religious events.
28. Tamil is only used during special ceremonies or festivals.

## **8. Community and Peer Influence**

29. My friends influence how much Tamil I speak.
30. The Tamil community in Mauritius is actively promoting the language.
31. It is embarrassing to speak Tamil in public.
32. I feel proud when I hear others speaking Tamil.

## Annexure 5

### Achievements – ICCR Scholarship



**ADMISSION 2 ALUMNI (A2A)**  
INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

Ref. No.VQ4042350996137  
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#### Indian Council For Cultural Relations (ICCR)

High Commission of India: Port Louis  
Mauritius

Subject:- Offer of Provisional admission with award of ICCR Scholarship for A.Y 2022-23

Dear :Mr./Ms. DAHINI PONNEN

- 1) We are pleased to inform you that you have been provisionally selected to pursue Course Applied Linguistics at under University of Hyderabad Africa Scholarship Scheme - MEA (G0179) for the Academic Year 2022-2023. You are requested to report Regional Office along with all original certificate and testimonials latest by 06/20/2022
- 2) Hostel accommodation will be provided to you subject to its availability by University authorities. You are required to report at the nearest Foreign Regional Registration Office within fourteen days of arrival in India.
- 3) You are advised to contact the Education Wing of this Mission immediately along with your passport for grant of visa and finalization of your date of departure. You are also hereby directed to obtain your final departure letter from the Mission before joining the concerned Institution in India failing which this offer letter stands cancelled. Furthermore no request of change of course and University will be entertained.
- 4) You are advised to carry with you joining report form and a Minimum of INR 50,000/- equivalent to 700 \$) to meet incidental expenses on arrival in India.
- 5) Please complete all pre-departure formalities such as preparation of passport and getting the student/research visa.
- 6) Please carry original documents for confirming the provisional admission at the time of reporting at University. Please note that admission is granted provisionally and needs to be confirmed on the basis of submission of original documents at the time of first reporting at the University. In case of discrepancies in documentation, University reserves the right to cancel provisional admission offered to student. ICCR/Mission will not be responsible for cancellation of provisional admission on the above grounds and will not be liable to pay scholarship or expenses incurred on return air-tickets by the student.

NOTE :- ) Due to ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, students will take up online classes and once the situation is better students will be invited to India as and when University allows to report and join physical classes. For any update, please be in touch with University and Mission.

Yours Sincerely

Ankush Kapoor

# Achievements – Paper Publication

AFRICAN IDENTITIES  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2025.2556876>



RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Tamil identity in Mauritius: linguistic and cultural preservation amidst multilingualism

Dahini Ponnen and S. Arulmozi

Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies (CALTS), University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

### ABSTRACT

Mauritius is a multicultural nation where diverse communities have coexisted for centuries, shaping a complex linguistic and cultural landscape. Among these, the Tamil community has maintained a distinct identity rooted in ancestral language, religious practices, and cultural traditions. This paper explores how Tamil identity is preserved and negotiated amidst the island's multilingual environment, characterised by Creole, French, and English dominance. Drawing on sociolinguistic theories of language maintenance and shift, and supported by educational statistics and cultural observations, the study examines how Tamil festivals, temple rituals, and community-led initiatives serve as key domains for symbolic language use and cultural continuity. The study highlights the paradox of high ritual visibility versus low academic uptake of Tamil among youth. By situating Tamil preservation within the broader context of African postcolonial identity formation, the paper argues that the Tamil community's efforts represent both resilience and adaptation in a creolised, multilingual society. These findings contribute to discussions on diaspora, heritage language sustainability, and minority identity in African multicultural states.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 March 2025  
Accepted 17 August 2025

### KEYWORDS

Tamil identity; Mauritius; language maintenance and shift; cultural preservation; multilingualism; diaspora

## 1. Introduction

Mauritius is a vibrant and multicultural country where people of diverse linguistic backgrounds live harmoniously. This small island, located in the Indian Ocean, has a rich history of cultural convergence that reflects its colonial past and diverse population. With its population comprising descendants of Indians, Africans, Chinese, and Europeans, Mauritius offers a unique and rich blend of traditions, languages, and customs that shape its national identity.

The story of Mauritius' migration is closely tied to its colonial past, which has shaped the island's unique identity. Originally uninhabited, the island was first claimed by the Dutch in the 1600s, then fell under French rule in the 1700s, and finally came under British control in the 1800s. These colonial powers deeply impacted the island's population and culture.

During French rule, Africans were brought to the island as enslaved people, working in the harsh conditions of the sugarcane fields. When the British took over, they brought in thousands of Indian labourers as indentured workers to replace the formerly enslaved

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## Intergenerational Transmission of Tamil in Mauritius: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

Dahini Ponnen<sup>1</sup> & S. Arulmozi  
University of Hyderabad, Telangana

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*  
Received 23/09/2025  
Accepted 13/10/2025

*Keywords:*  
intergenerational transmission, Mauritius, Heritage language, sociolinguistics, language Shift, multilingualism

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intergenerational transmission of Tamil in Mauritius, focusing on how the language is passed down within Tamil-speaking families and supported by community institutions such as temples and Tamil schools. Despite Tamil's cultural and religious significance, its role in everyday communication is diminishing, particularly among younger generations. Using a qualitative sociolinguistic approach, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with three generations across twelve Tamil-speaking families, supplemented by observations in temples and educational settings. Thematic analysis reveals a complex interplay between emotional attachment to Tamil and decreased functional use. Parental ideologies, academic practices, and the dominance of Creole, English, and French in public life shape it. Findings suggest that while elders often retain fluency and use Tamil actively, parents exhibit partial transmission practices, and youth maintain only symbolic connections to the language. The study highlights the significance of family language policies, maternal influence, and institutional support in maintaining the Tamil language. It concludes by offering recommendations for community-based language planning that align with the realities of a multilingual, postcolonial society.

### Introduction

Tamil is one of the longest-surviving classical languages and plays a significant role in shaping the identity of Tamil-speaking communities worldwide. Mauritius has been preserved primarily through religious practices and cultural traditions brought by indentured labourers from South India during the 19th century (Benedict, 2011). Over time, however, changes in the linguistic landscape, particularly the dominance of Creole as the national lingua franca and the institutional prominence of English and French, have undermined Tamil's everyday relevance (Rajah-Carrim, 2005).

Intergenerational language transmission is a critical determinant of linguistic vitality (Fishman, 1991). It encompasses the frequency of language use within families and the attitudes and beliefs that influence language choices. In multilingual and postcolonial societies like Mauritius, the pressure to conform to dominant linguistic norms often shifts from heritage languages to more socially and economically dominant ones (De Korne & Leonard, 2017).

This paper examines how Tamil is being transmitted across three generations in Mauritius. It examines the sociolinguistic dynamics that facilitate or hinder the transmission

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## Annexure 6

### Achievements – Paper Presentation

 <b>தமிழ்ப் பல்கலைக்கழகம், தஞ்சாவூர்</b> இந்திய திராவிட மொழியியல் சங்கம் & பன்னாட்டுத் திராவிட மொழியியலாளர் பள்ளி, திருவனந்தபுரம் இந்திய மொழிகளின் எதிவன் சிறுவனம், மைசூர் <i>திராவிட மொழியியல்</i> <b>51-வது அகில இந்திய திராவிட மொழியியலாளர் மாநாடு (AICDL)</b> மொழியியல், இலக்கியம், ஒப்பிடுக்தியம், மொழிபெயர்ப்பு தவற்றின் சமகால ஆய்வுப் போக்குகள் <b>பன்னாட்டு மாநாடு</b> <b>சான்றிதழ்</b>	 <b>TAMIL UNIVERSITY, THANJAVUR</b> DLA of India & ISDL, Thiruvananthapuram Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysuru <i>Socially Organized</i> <b>51<sup>st</sup> ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTS (AICDL)</b> Recent Trends in Linguistics, Literature, Comparative Literature studies and Translation <b>INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE</b> <b>Certificate</b>			
திரு/திருமதி/செல்வி/முனைவர்..... .....அவர்கள் 27.06.2024 முதல் 29.06.2024 வரை தமிழ்ப் பல்கலைக்கழகத்தில் நடைபெற்ற 51 - வது அகில இந்திய திராவிட மொழியியலாளர் மாநாட்டில் (AICDL) கலந்து கொண்டு..... .....என்றும் தலைப்பில் ஆய்வுரை வழங்கினார்/ பங்கேற்றார் எனச் சான்றளிக்கப்படுகிறது.	This is to Certify that <b>Mr./Ms/ Dr. Dahini Ponnen</b> .....participated / presented a paper entitled ..... <b>"Exploring Linguistic Diversity in Mauritius"</b> in the <b>51<sup>st</sup> All India Conference of Dravidian Linguists</b> from 27 <sup>th</sup> to 29 <sup>th</sup> June, 2024, held at the Tamil University, Thanjavur.			
 <b>Prof. R. Kurinjivendan</b> Organizing Secretary, Dean, Faculty of Developing Tamil, Tamil University, Thanjavur.	 <b>Prof. S. Kavitha</b> Organizing Secretary, Dean, Faculty of Language, Tamil University, Thanjavur.	 <b>Prof. P.R. Dharmesh Fernandez</b> Deputy Director, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysuru.	 <b>Prof. G.K. Panikkar</b> Director, ISDL, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.	 <b>Prof. V. Thiruvalluvan</b> Vice - Chancellor, Tamil University, Thanjavur.



தமிழ்நாடு அரசு  
அந்து சமய அறங்காவலத்துறை



**சான்றிதழ்**

**அனைத்துலக முத்தமிழ் முருகன் மாநாடு - 2024, பழனி**

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# Certificate

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### **Certificate**

This is to certify that Mr./Ms./Dr./Prof. Dahini Ponnen has attended an International Conference on **Indian Linguistic Tradition and Indigenous Knowledge System**, organized by the Department of Linguistics, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya-793022, India from **27-28 February - 01 March 2025** and delivered a theme paper/presented a research paper titled -

Tamil Identity in Mauritius: Linguistic and Cultural Preservation Amidst Multilingualism

His/her academic contribution and active participation in the Conference is highly appreciated.

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Conference Chair

**Department of Linguistics, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya-793022, India**

# Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Tamils in Mauritius

*by* Dahini Ponnen

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