Title	Bilingual children's language choices and language preferences
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Source	*NIECER Research Bulletin, 4*(1), 9
Published by	National Institute of Education Centre for the Educational Research, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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Citation: Vanithamani Saravanan. (1999). Bilingual children's language choices and language preferences. *NIECER Research Bulletin*, *4*(1), 9.

Bilingual Children's Language Choices and Language Preferences

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This study is part of a larger survey of patterns of language use among three-generation families in Singapore. The role of parents in supporting children's language development was surveyed by examining patterns of language use when parents interacted with their children. Children from a total of 20 Chinese, 17 Malay and 17 Indian families were surveyed and their language choice patterns were categorised into three groups: English used all the time; more English used than community language; and more community language used than English. The three community languages were Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. The contexts of language use included doing homework, reading books, playing games, during shopping trips, worship, visiting relatives, and use of media/entertainment.

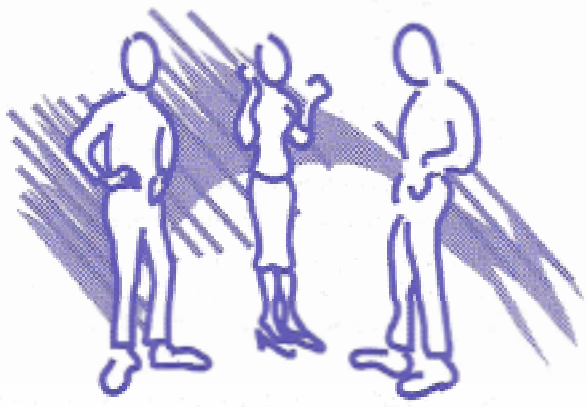
Table: Children's language choice patterns

Ethnicity/ Pattern	English all the time	More English	More community language
Chinese	8	8	4
Malay	1	10	6
Indian	7	7	3

The following results were inferred from the above Table:

i The majority of Chinese children either used English all the time or more English than Chinese at home;

ii The majority of Malay children either used more English at home *or* more community language; and

iii The Indian children had a similar pattern of language use as the Chinese children.

As home language use forms the basis of language maintenance of community languages, parents need to be made aware of the benefits of encouraging more interaction in more than one language. Parents need assistance in identifying appropriate reading materials in languages apart from English. The task is made difficult with the dominance of English language materials, reading and media in Singapore. Children's literature materials in languages other than English are inadequate. This situation has made it easier for parents to choose English reading materials. While parents generally use English for a wide range of interactive activities, they also play a supportive role in interacting in both languages. Use of community languages was common in communicating with older family members for Chinese and Malay ethnic groups, and in religious ceremonies, especially for the Malay and Indian families.